

Engage



Quarterly comment from the **Jubilee** Centre

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The Good Samaritan, Vincent Van Gogh 1890

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The Samaritan strategy

Jonathan Tame

Never discuss religion or politics with those who hold opinions opposite to yours; they are subjects that heat in handling, until they burn your fingers,' wrote Thomas Haliburton in 1840.

Discussing politics is all the more incendiary today, because so much of that debate now takes place online, where the rules of etiquette have yet to be established. Arguments are often shallow and strident, opposing views are dismissed outright, and those who hold them are mocked, ridiculed and insulted. Unfortunately these attitudes easily spill over into the face-to-face world, and we're losing our capacity for civil discourse in the public square. Civility relies on the ability to listen as well as speak, to consider opposing views on their own merits, to cultivate empathy for people on the other side

of an argument, and to look intentionally for common ground and shared concerns.

These qualities are crucial for democracy to keep working, and are nourished by a biblical perspective of what it is to be human. That's one reason why we believe that religion and politics should sit naturally together, and our research and training initiatives help people apply the Christian faith thoughtfully to their attitudes and discussions about contemporary issues.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) provides us with a wonderful example of how faith and politics can connect. Jesus told this story to illustrate how the commandment to love your neighbour as yourself should be worked out in practice.

When a legal expert asked, 'And who is my neighbour?', Jesus' answer showed that the

man was asking the wrong question. Instead of offering criteria for deciding who is worthy of charitable help, Jesus says what counts is an inner attitude of neighbourliness – of seeing others as fellow human beings whatever their circumstances, and acting compassionately towards them. This is echoed in the description of 'true religion' in James 1:27.

In what ways is this political? Firstly, the person commended by Jesus as a true neighbour wasn't the respectable priest or the teacher of the law; the unexpected hero, who crossed religious and cultural divides to do what pleased God, was an immigrant and an outsider!

Secondly, the story took place in a public context: the characters used the same infrastructure (a public road), they would have been concerned about the same threat (of being mugged), and the Samaritan used a local service provider (an inn) to help him take care of the injured man. The exemplary act of individual compassion was set in a public space with shared social goods, which community or political leaders had the responsibility to maintain.

Jesus challenged the assumptions and attitudes of his listeners; in the post-Brexit world, how can this story inspire us with more respect and civility towards the 'other' –

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Weighing up Libra

Guy Brandon

Facebook's plans to launch its own digital currency should intrigue, excite and terrify you. But how will ZuckBucks measure up to the biblical gold standard?

'...a homer of barley seed shall be valued at fifty shekels of silver' (Leviticus 27:16)

In announcing Libra, Facebook's digital currency, CEO Mark Zuckerberg has put the cat among the monetary and regulatory pigeons. US lawmakers have reacted with dismay, scrambling to find out all they can about the new technologies proposed for use and trying to figure out exactly what the implications of the move might be.

Concerns about the digital currency being used to facilitate money laundering, drug purchases and terrorist financing are high on the list. At the time of writing, it looks like objections might prevent Congress from ever approving Libra. But there's more to it than that. What's at stake is more than facilitating organised crime (the US dollar has, in any case, been the global vehicle of choice for that for decades). This is about who gets the keys to the printing press. It's about the soul of money.

Biblical money

A quick recap here is in order, though since this was covered in the recent Brexit-related *Engage* article, *Worth its weight in what?*, and more extensively in *Crumbling Foundations*, we'll keep it brief:

- Biblical money, at different times and in different circumstances, took the form of gold and cattle, and more commonly silver and barley
- Its creation and management was independent of the state, or any other centralised power
- The Levites played a key role in maintaining honest weights and the integrity of the money supply
- Money was a form of social 'glue', intended to strengthen relationships
- Interest was banned as inherently abusive, since it entrenched poverty and increased inequality

Going against the grain

Measured against the Bible's ideals, our central and commercial banks have not

acquitted themselves well. Biblical silver proved an excellent store of value; for everyday transactions, barley was popularly used (or both, as in Hosea 3:2). Barley, while not quite growing on trees, was accessible to all with the growing space, also being scarce enough and useful enough to be valuable. By contrast, our debt-backed money has proven a terrible long-term store of value and is controlled by a handful of elite gatekeepers, whose collective failures contributed directly to the Global Financial Crisis.

Unfortunately, they're not keen on giving up the keys to the magic money tree. Way back in 1984, the Austrian economist and author of *The Denationalization of Money* Friedrich Hayek commented, 'I don't believe that we can ever have good money again before we take the thing out of the hands of government. And since we can't take it violently out of the hands of government, all we can do is by some sly, roundabout way introduce something they can't stop.'

Facebook may have just tried to take the thing out of the hands of government; their error was not being sneaky enough. They may yet succeed by dint of judiciously ignoring US regulators – and if they don't, someone else will. Unfortunately, though, Libra is far from a panacea.

The pros and cons of ZuckBucks

There are a number of reasons to be encouraged by Libra – and equally, a few that should be deeply worrying. The centralisation of the monetary system has resulted in injustices, as it almost inevitably must. In biblical terms, unnecessary centralisation is always considered a bad thing, resulting in the concentration of power and therefore the irresistible opportunity to misuse it. Deuteronomy 17 contains plenty of such warnings for Israel's king (the monarchy in any case being a

concession, see 1 Samuel 8). So greater monetary choice – a plurality of options and competition between currencies, much like in biblical times – is a good thing. There's the democratising potential of Libra, too: the ability to bank a proportion of the world's 1.7 billion unbanked people, two-thirds of whom own a mobile phone, offering access to financial services in a way our current banking system finds uneconomical.

Quid custodet ipsos custodes?

But on the flipside of the Libra, you have the following problem. Companies are not answerable to citizens, like governments are (and, in a roundabout way, central banks). They're answerable to shareholders. A democratically-elected government can also be voted out. There are checks and balances around the government and its handling of the economy. Quite apart from anything else, a state has a moral purpose, even if it doesn't always do a brilliant job of executing it.

That's hardly the case with a corporation. Its ultimate purpose is to make money for shareholders, and it's far less accountable than government is.

So here we have Facebook: a supra-national entity, with 10 times more monthly active users than the US has voters, a shady past on protecting its users' rights and keeping their data safe, potentially becoming the unaccountable and profit-driven central bank of its own global currency.

What could possibly go wrong?

Not small change?

This marks the point at which everything changes for money. Whether or not Libra succeeds, someone else – social media platform Telegram, retail giant Walmart, digital currency exchange Binance or any one of a dozen other multi-billion-dollar

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Thoughtful Eating resources

Charlee New

Plant-based diet can fight climate change' was one recent BBC headline, following the publication of a new report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on 'Climate Change and Land.' Meanwhile, in August, Goldsmiths, University of London, banned meat from their campus cafés and restaurants in a move towards greener eating. And in the USA, Beyond Meat Inc. (a meat-substitute producer) saw their shares soar in June this year, up 646% from their initial public offering price. The question of diet and the environment is increasingly front and centre in the public debate today.

In some respects, it's very easy to jump right in with current environmental activism; who isn't moved by the images of the great plastic mass in the Pacific Ocean, the threat to bees and other pollinators, or the scars of deforestation for cattle grazing in the Amazon? However, without critical reflection and solid biblical foundations, we can too easily adopt the language or terms of an environmentalism based in different ideologies or worldviews. But what if the Bible gave us a richer story and perspective about all creation as theocentric (God-centred), where humans have a profound responsibility to the land and fellow-creatures? What if the Bible actually gave us a story about food as a graced gift of provision and feasting as a sign of the messianic banquet?

Ten months ago, we started a new research focus on food and the environment. Led by our 2018-9 SAGE graduates, the project sought to understand the key environmental and social impacts of our food systems, provide a rich, biblical reflection on food, relationships and the environment, and offer applications for individuals, organisations and policy makers. In this edition of Engage, we're introducing a set of resources on Thoughtful Eating—the 'fruit' of this research (if you'll pardon the pun.) This includes a short book, a four-part podcast series, and our annual lecture, 'Eating and the Common Good.' The ideas presented here have deeply challenged all of us here at the Jubilee Centre over the past year, and we're delighted to share them with you.



Thoughtful Eating: A biblical perspective on food, relationships and the environment

'This book is widely and carefully-researched, biblically-rooted, judiciously balanced and yet will challenge you to re-evaluate what and how you eat. Food is not just fuel, but spiritually, socially and ecologically laden with meaning. A renewed relationship with food can transform our relationships with ourselves, our neighbours, the wider creation and even with God. Reading this will show you how.'

Dave Bookless, Director of Theology, A Rocha International

'This report gives an excellent summary of the key issues surrounding the production and consumption of food from a Christian perspective. Easy and clear to read, and full of relevant quotes and statistics, it provides a timely challenge to thoughtful Christians about the huge potential for good and harm which comes from the simple, necessary act of eating our "daily bread".'

Caroline Pomeroy, Director, Climate Stewards

You can order the book using the response form, or via our website.



Eating Thoughtfully: A four-part podcast series

This podcast series explores the intersection between food, the Bible, relationships and the environment. It features interviews with some of the leading Christian thinkers and activists on food and the environment, including **Ruth Valerio** (Director of Global Advocacy, Tearfund), **Professor Norman Wirzba** (author of 'Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating') and **Caroline Pomeroy** (Director, Climate Stewards).

Here's a short extract from our conversation with food theologian Norman Wirzba.

How did you come to think and write about the intersection between food and faith?

'The question of food has long interested

me – partly because I love to eat. I grew up in a farming community and so I was daily and intimately involved in how food is produced for our population. What I discovered when I entered academic circles is that not too many people have that experience of agriculture, which I found a bit disconcerting. For so long, and across the history of the world, agriculture has been one of the dominant modes of life that people have participated in – directly or indirectly. So, when I looked at how conversations about food and faith were happening in Christian circles, they seemed to focus mostly on vegetarianism and food hunger. There was so much left out of the conversation that is reflected on deeply by the people who work in agriculture. I thought that maybe I could expand the conversation a little bit by thinking about larger questions, such as how food is grown, and how life and death are revealed in the growing and consuming of food. There's so much still to be explored about food and faith in Christian tradition. Eating has always been one of humanity's most important and most intimate actions, and so not to think about food philosophically and theologically in a rigorous and deep manner seemed a mistake to me.'

Wirzba recommends the simple act of growing just one plant, as a way to reconsider our relationship with food, encourage respect for farmers and understand our dependency on God.

The four episodes are available on our website. They're also available on Apple Podcast and Google Play, (just search 'Jubilee Centre').

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people of profoundly different views?

Let us start building relationships by focusing on the human experiences that are common to all of us, like being a parent, coping with a disability, or bereavement. It's all too easy to reduce other people to their ideology or political affiliation, calling out, 'Right-wing bigots' or 'Illiberal lefties!' But people are always bigger than their caricatures. Jesus' subtle twist in his answer opened the imaginations of his hearers to see the humanity they shared with the Good Samaritan. We also must exercise our imaginations to see the common humanity of those that some (in politics, the media, or simply the crowd) deem as less-than-human. From a commitment to shared humanity, we can begin to talk to each other across divides – even, eventually, about politics and religion!

Secondly, we can build relationships around a shared cultural narrative. I remember how the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics told the cultural story of the United Kingdom so richly. As it introduced Brunel and The Beatles, the national anthem and the NHS, I found myself deeply moved by this wonderful narrative of my country – one which surely inspires Christians and non-Christians, Brexiteers and Remainers. It showed how much more there is that unites us in Britain than divides; so let's talk about it!

As we head towards the Brexit deadline, and political events heat up more and more, let's resist being caught up in polarising narratives and instead see others through God's eyes, building relationships of compassion, friendship and support as we love our neighbour – the Jesus way.

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corporations – certainly will. One way or another, this is when – in a 'sly, roundabout way' or by means rather less subtle – money moves progressively out of the hands of government. In theory, that could be a good thing, resulting in decreased centralisation and abuse of the system we all use.

But we need to be careful we don't swap an imperfect system for an even more flawed one. The history of money is one of progressive centralisation. The history of technology is much the same. Giving unaccountable, global and arguably amoral tech giants the ability to issue our currency may nudge us in a direction that makes us reminisce about our days in the monetary frying pan from our new vantage point in the fire.

Annual Lecture: Eating and the common good

This year's Social Reformers Summer School had the theme, 'Food, relationships and the environment' and it ended with our first annual lecture by David Nussbaum on 'Eating and the common good.' David is CEO of The Elders (an independent group of global leaders working together for peace, justice and human rights, founded by Nelson Mandela) and formerly CEO at WWF-UK and at Transparency International. His inspiring lecture raised and answered the question, is there a way to eat that is good for me, good for others and good for the planet?



You can listen to, watch or read the Annual Lecture. All links are available on the Thoughtful Eating resource page on our website: jubilee-centre.org/thoughtful-eating

Are Christianity and society in conflict? The case of freedom

Philip Powell



In our latest Cambridge Paper, Dr. Chris Watkin explores the relationship between Christian faith and society, and how the wisdom of Scripture can inform how we engage with our society's quest for freedom.

In the past, Christianity was pitched as antithetical to scientific knowledge, but the new conflict we are dealing with is that Christianity and social progress are antithetical. The dominant discourse in society is that religious sensibilities, and Christian faith in particular, stand as the main obstacles to promoting equality and tackling climate change. The conflict thesis seeks to isolate Christianity from mainstream values such as justice, freedom, fairness and equality. While Christians know this conflict thesis is untrue, how do we deal with the perception that Christianity is irrelevant and redundant for a modern society that believes in freedom? One temptation is to overplay the continuity between Christianity and our contemporary values, and deny the real and important distinction between a biblical view of society and the secular ideologies that shape our world.

Using an 'emplotted' Biblical approach, Watkin turns to the writings of the Apostle Paul to understand the relationship between Christianity and society (1 Corin. 1). Paul writes that Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom. Paul does not deny or question the validity of their respective quests for signs and wisdom. In fact, there is an implicit affirmation here. But in response, Paul says 'we preach Christ crucified'. For the Jews it becomes a stumbling block in their quest for a sign and for the Greeks this is utter folly. The combined judgement of Jews and Greeks is that the cross of Christ is offensively stupid. It has nothing to do with power and wisdom. But Paul goes on to say 'the foolishness of God is wiser than men,

and the weakness of God is stronger than men'. According to Paul it is at the cross, the least likely of all places on earth, that the cultural values of power and wisdom find their ultimate expression and fulfilment. What Paul demands of the Greeks and Jews is that they transform their existing, inadequate understanding of wisdom and power into richer concepts shaped around the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

We can learn from this encounter between the cultural values of the Jews and the Greeks and the cruciform values of Paul's message as we seek to engage with contemporary society. The dominant value of our times is personal freedom above all else. Ironically, freedom is also a central theme in the Bible. But a biblical understanding of freedom doesn't make sense in our current culture. Christianity has made a huge contribution to the development and progress of civic freedoms in the West, but all freedoms have concomitant restrictions and limitations. My freedom to buy cheap goods might mean somebody is being exploited on the other side of the world. Absolute freedom is a myth. According to the Bible, the gospel of freedom is understood as slavery to Christ. The freedom of the cross is freer than man's vision for freedom. People enslaved to false understandings of freedom need to hear the good news of freedom in Christ. Finally, all visions of freedom bring with them a vision of the good life. Freedom *from*, but also freedom *for*.

This passage in 1 Corinthians provides us with a powerful and subtle tool of cultural critique. There is antithesis between Christianity and our contemporary cultural values, but there is more than antithesis. Freedom is affirmed, but not without a radical transfiguration of what freedom means in the light of the cross of Christ.

Jubilee blog highlights

The worker deserves his wages

The subject of work and workers is given great consideration in the scriptures. In this blog, Charlee New explores some of the ideas from our most recent publication on the Bible and remuneration. This means confronting staggering realities in our society today, such as a 300:1 pay ratio between CEO and employee. The search for holistic answers means addressing not only these symptoms of a fundamentally misaligned system, but also building a biblical perspective on why and how workers should be remunerated. This will include dignity that fosters dynamic engagement between people in different levels of positional power, reward that cultivates a responsible and generous spirit in employees and justice that highlights and considers the case of the poorest.

Public leaders and the slow formation of character

Politics today is full of paradox and our leaders are often lacking in the solid character that is wrought through experiencing challenges with perseverance and humility. In this blog, Mercedes McGuire argues that the election of leaders such as Trump, Trudeau, Zelensky and (to a certain extent) Johnson begs questions about the health of our voting process and the assignment of trust to leadership candidates. We must not forget the importance of the unglamorous role of character in leadership, and in turn, in our own lives. As followers of Christ, there are three ways that we can respond to the puzzling political climate of today: 1. Choose steadfast prayer, 2. Know that our prayers for 'God's kingdom come' will first be answered in us, and therefore embrace the formation of Christ-likeness in our own lives, 3. Be salt and light in the world, especially in the long term.

Every week, we post a new blog exploring current issues from a biblical perspective. You can read the above posts in full, along with other recent blogs, at jubilee-centre.org/category/blogs

Lessons from SAGE

Philip Powell

In July we had the graduation ceremony for the first ever participants of the SAGE Graduate Programme. It was a time to celebrate and give thanks to God for everything he had done in and through the lives of Andrew Phillips, Peter Redmayne, Hannah Eves and Katherine Martin during their year with the Jubilee Centre. Our Chair of Trustees, Ralph Lee, shared a message on how a small group of committed people can make a big difference in the world. Leading the SAGE programme was a new experience for me, and I want to share some of the lessons I've learnt.

Firstly, the centrality of the Bible is key to training Christian leaders. I've become more convinced that if we are going to train emerging leaders to make a difference in the world, cultivating and deepening their knowledge and love for Scripture is indispensable. Without biblical foundations, Christian leaders will crumble under the pressures of public office or be swept along with the culture. This is why during the ten months of SAGE we began each morning with an in-depth Bible study.

Secondly, education is different from training. Education is primarily about acquiring knowledge, but training leaders goes beyond that. We need a good knowledge of how things in the world operate, but training is about growing people in wisdom. That involves the whole person – imagination, will and the heart.

An important aspect of training is learning by doing. The SAGE Graduates had to work as a team to do a group research project on



Peter, Hannah, Katherine, Andrew and our training manager, Philip

food, relationships and the environment. This was, at times, challenging for them as they had to learn to work as a team, compromise and collaborate. Learning to do something new can be daunting and mistakes are often made, but this is a vital aspect of growth.

Finally, the SAGE programme was about working and living together. And living in community is challenging. One of the risks we took when planning for SAGE was that the participants on the programme would live in a shared house. Community often means dealing with things we don't like, but so often God uses the dynamics of community living to deepen our growth in Christian maturity.

The fruits of the SAGE Graduate Programme include the book and podcast we have published, but more significant is the difference that Andrew, Peter, Hannah and Katherine will make for God in the years and decades to come.

At the Jubilee Centre we have a vision for training leaders who can think biblically and apply biblical wisdom to the most challenging issues of our times. **The next SAGE Graduate Programme begins in October 2020, applications are now open, so please spread the word!**

Visit: jubilee-centre.org/SAGE



Katherine presents the SAGE research in Northern Ireland

About Jubilee Centre

The Jubilee Centre is a research and policy think tank that offers a biblical perspective on social, economic and political issues. Through our research, publications, events and training we equip Christians to be salt and light in the public square.

Jubilee Centre is based in the centre of Cambridge, which is ideal for collaborating with local churches, like-minded charities, students and academics in the two universities and our sister organisations Relationships Foundation and Relational Research.

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Online course starts January 2020

It unpacks the biblical social vision, and introduces the idea of thinking relationally in different areas of society. Through the programme, participants will grow in understanding and confidence as to how the Bible can influence and shape public life for the common good.