Political Christians in a Plural Society

A new strategy for a biblical contribution

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FORWARD

'The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full…
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar …'

Thus Matthew Arnold in his poem 'Dover Beach' a century and a quarter ago. As the tide ebbed further, many Christians held on to twin certainties: certainties about theological doctrines and certainties about personal ethics. But over the last quarter of a century, we have witnessed the recovery of what was temporarily lost, a sense of social responsibility in the name of the Lord, who created and claims the earth in its fullness. With every stage we reach another looms before us. For social responsibility means concern for justice, love and peace but justice, love and peace operate not by abstraction but by particular words, particular deeds, particular institutions and particular policies. How do we translate the grand themes of social responsibility into particular recommendations? This is the challenge meeting many of us at this stage and to which this document responds.

If there is no mistaking the importance of the challenge, there is no mistaking its perplexity either. If we press beyond general principles of social concern we run two related risks. We first risk dividing the witness of Christians, and the church will just add its assorted clamourings to the cacophonies we already hear in the political arena. We then risk identifying Christianity with allegiance to a set of political opinions advanced in the name of the faith.

These fears are justified and not fabricated. Nevertheless, they must not paralyse action. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, while Christian maturity means learning to live with Christian differences, it also means increasing concern for the very detail of discipleship in thought and action as we become fired by a vision of the comprehensive lordship of Christ. Secondly, we dare not set limits to what God by the guidance of His Spirit can do to bring about increasing, if not total, agreement amongst His people engaged in a common task. Thirdly, even in a radically fragmented pluralistic society with no fundamental consensus at all, the values of someone or some group will be enshrined in institutions, laws and public policy.

Let me add one more triad and commend this document on three grounds. Firstly, it is deadly serious. It is not interested in new ideas for their own sake, concerning the market in novelty and trumpeting discoveries. It is concerned for human well-being in God's world,

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especially in the social dimension where life is inescapably lived. Secondly, it is suitably cautious. Although it advances the notion of 'relationism' and expresses the conviction that this can be deployed in a fruitful and novel way, it is not captive to a non-negotiable idea. It is concerned to test this both as an appropriate use of Scripture and as a viable concept in the public sphere. It is exploration at its best, with a definite direction in mind but aware of the many paths. Thirdly, it is manifestly plausible. Christianity (though the report does not put it this way) is 'true humanism', maintaining that we are created for God but created as relational beings for God and by God for each other. If denial of God seems all too plausible today, denial of the fundamental nature of human relationships is perverse. And if relationships are fundamental, they are also a fundamental criterion for sound public policy.

Two worlds meet in this document, alien as that may initially seem: the world of the Bible, with its rich Old Testament detail in social ethics, and the world of the late second millennium, with its frequently vast spiritual and structural distance from the biblical world. They meet, however, not by a desperate design to bring them together but as the fruit of pondering what is provided by the one world and what is needed by the other. By understanding, relating and commending the divine provision for society, we not only persuade others about a social order, we re-establish the credibility of belief. And so we press on in the longing that the tide of the sea of faith will turn and the assurance that one day the earth will be full of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea.

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October 1994

PREFACE

For ten years the Jubilee Centre has engaged as a Christian organization in research, debate and political involvement on a range of public issues. Best known for its co-ordination of the Keep Sunday Special Campaign, its initiatives have also addressed family policy, penal reform, the national lottery and the contours of a post-apartheid South Africa. During this period, the Jubilee Centre has sought to combine faithfulness to the biblical text and relevance to the modern world. The questions this report addresses arise, in considerable measure, from this experience.

We assume for the purposes of this report that there will be Christians who wish individually or collectively to participate in public debate on government policy as an expression of their Christian discipleship and responsibility to the world in which God has placed them. We also believe that the Bible has a significant role to play in any authentically Christian contribution to such debate. We are aware that these are not wholly uncontroversial views. While we offer some remarks in support of these beliefs, we do not provide a full justification for them. We treat them for the purposes of this project essentially as given.

Our main focus is instead on the problems that arise when one seeks in some way to base a contribution to public policy debate on biblical reflection. These are the problems of discerning *what* the Bible has to say of practical relevance to the subject of public policy in a modern society and *how* to communicate this to an often sceptical world. The report seeks to assess the potential of 'Relationism' as a proposed 'solution' to some of these problems.

Relationism is an evolving package of ideas and proposals canvassed in *The R Factor* by Michael Schluter and David Lee. The question of whether Relationism, in the form promulgated in *The R Factor*, could helpfully influence public policy debate is important. However, equally important is whether an approach which emphasises the relational aspects of life, whether an adapted version of Relationism or one developed in some other way, is an appropriate strategy for seeking to release biblical principles and values into the public arena. A crucial issue is whether or not the development and promulgation of Relationism would enhance the role of the Bible in public policy debate.

This report emerges from a one-year project entitled 'The Use of the Bible in Public Policy Debate – An Assessment of the Potential of Relationism'. The project was made possible by a grant from the London Bible House Research Fund, a trust established and administered by the Bible Society. We are most grateful for their substantial contribution to

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the costs of the project. The Bible Society, always concerned with the use and application of the Bible, is at present deeply exercised with the question of how the Bible can and does function as authoritative Scripture in twentieth century secular society. We hope that this report will enrich discussion of some aspects of that vital question.

Our work has been assisted by a panel of theologians and ethicists who commented on working papers prepared during the first half of the project and an early draft of this report. The panel members were: Dr Markus Bockmuehl (Faculty of Divinity, Cambridge), Dr David Cook (The Whitefield Institute, Oxford), Professor Duncan Forrester (Centre for Theology and Public Issues, Edinburgh), Professor Colin Gunton (King's College, London), Dr Richard Higginson (Ridley Hall, Cambridge) and Dr Christopher Wright (All Nations Christian College). We wish to express our thanks to the panel for generously giving of their time and for supporting our endeavours not least by their candid criticism of ideas and arguments in need of improvement. We wish to express our thanks as well to Dr Stephen Williams of the Whitefield Institute, Oxford for chairing the meeting of the theological panel held at the half-way point of this project. Naturally, responsibility for the views expressed in and the shortcomings of this report rests with us.

As authors of this report, we have been given editorial freedom by Michael Schluter, the director of the Jubilee Centre. It must be stressed that he does not necessarily share all of the views expressed in this report.

We would like to emphasise that one of our hopes in preparing and circulating this report is that it will stimulate debate. The task of seeking to bring biblical insights to bear on the policy making process, carried out by the Jubilee Centre and in different ways by others, raises theological and practical issues of some importance and certainly some difficulty. Debate might focus on how best to develop and apply Relationism, on its strengths and weaknesses, on whether other approaches should be favoured, and on underlying questions concerning the nature and role of the Bible and the church in the political arena.

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October 1994

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SUMMARY

Part I: Public Policy Debate and the Bible

There is a growing sense across the political spectrum that new ideas and new answers are needed. Christians committed to human well-being and concerned for society's values, have good grounds to be involved in the search for new solutions. Such involvement might take many forms. There are, however, substantial difficulties in seeking to use the Bible in the context of public policy debate.

When *formulating* a biblical perspective on public policy issues, hermeneutical problems exist. Views differ over whether the Bible should have a minimal, a limited and indirect, or a substantial and formative role in assisting Christians to develop perspectives on public policy issues. The Christian contribution to public policy debate is often a 'scattered voice'.

When *communicating* a biblical perspective on public policy issues, there are practical difficulties arising from the nature of political 'debate' and the policy making process. There are, however, more fundamental challenges arising from the cultural context of secularism and pluralism.

Part II: A New Response: Relationism

The development of Relationism represents an attempt to negotiate the problems of formulating and communicating a biblical perspective on public policy issues.

A number of primary convictions lay behind the development of Relationism:

(i)   *the importance of a social vision* - to harness the energies of a society and guide policy decisions on specific issues;

(ii)   *the benefits of close attention to the Bible* - when seeking to develop a Christian perspective on public policy issues;

(iii)   *the centrality of relationships* - in Christian theology, and as a vital ingredient of human welfare. But relationships tend to be neglected by prevailing ideological and technical frameworks used to assess and develop public policy options;

(iv)   *the scope for a 'translation' strategy* - enabling biblical concerns and priorities for the life of society in a significant measure to be articulated in 'secular' language.

By 'Relationism' is meant the collection of ideas emanating from the Jubilee Centre under that name and described most fully to date in *The R Factor*. Relationism is not a 'finished product'. Its overarching aims are to promote human wellbeing and enable Christians to offer an effective contribution in the political arena and in public debate which is rooted in biblical reflection.

Some of the biblical roots of Relationism as presented in *The R Factor* lie in Old Testament material. The laws, institutions, history and traditions of Israel serve as a pattern, or paradigm, from which other societies may draw practical and ethical guidance. The paradigm has an integrating focus in the idea of love to God and neighbour. The key which helps unlock the purpose of Old Testament Israel's laws is the question of how a particular law fostered better relationships between the people and God and among the people of Israel.

Relationism addresses in a broad brush way culture, morality, lifestyle choices and social philosophy. Relationism may seek to influence society in several arenas: public policy, public practice, lifestyle choices and voluntary service. This project focuses on public policy debate. Here *The R Factor* focuses on the impact of social, economic and political institutions, structures and arrangements on the capacity of people to develop and maintain their relationships. Relationships should become an issue of public policy and we should aim 'to confront the social and economic forces that make relationships hard to sustain.'

Three key concepts in *The R Factor* are:
- 'choice' (my freedom to do as I wish)
- 'obligation' (my responsibility to others)
- 'relational proximity' - a measure of the quantity and quality of contact between parties to a relationship and therefore a factor influencing the ease or difficulty of developing and maintaining relationships.

The R Factor argues that modern Western society has for too long stressed 'choice' at the expense of 'obligation' thereby undermining social cohesion. Public policy measures to enhance 'relational proximity' should be implemented both to help enhance the quality of relationships in society and nurture society's reserves of 'obligation'.

Relationism was developed as an attempt to offer the 'big new idea' to the political debate but at present it operates more effectively as a perspective, or reforming dynamic, that can adjust, even transform, approaches to particular areas of the life of society. Particular attention has been paid to issues of criminal justice and family policy in a project on Relational Justice and a Family Policy Initiative. These projects have illustrated the capacity of relational language to help establish common ground between Christians and non-Christians. Some indications of the Christian roots of relational thinking were given without jeopardising the impact of the projects.   The relational policy goals that have emerged after sustained involvement in these particular policy areas have differed from, or gone beyond, promoting relational proximity.

Part III: An Assessment of the Potential of Relationism

The strategy of Relationism involves:

- •   offering a vision for society
- •   translation
- •   compromise.

These are legitimate, indeed important features of Christian engagement in public policy debate. Nonetheless, it is vital that such an approach is complemented by other contributions: nurturing, values, revealing the Lordship of Christ and the significance of the transcendent, and articulating Christian ideals.

The content of Relationism involves a particular approach to the selection, use and application of biblical material. Relationism cannot claim to have captured the full range, detail, depth or moral intensity of biblical teaching. This does not, however, prevent it from being an important and versatile tool.

Relationism as presented in *The R Factor* has a number of limitations at present, including an absence of political philosophy, a limited treatment of values, the need for closer attention to the details of different kinds of relationships, gaps in the analysis of modern society and an optimistic analysis of pluralism.

However Relationism in *The R Factor* has a number of key strengths:

- •   its essential conviction that we are not autonomous individuals nor an undifferentiated collective but persons-in-relationship
- •   its focus on the excessive importance attached to freedom, choice and rights in Western society and the importance of restoring 'obligation'
- •   its focus on the interface between relationships and social, economic and political structures
- •   its identification of the significance of 'place' for the formation of community
- •   its radical edge demonstrating a willingness to challenge prevailing systems of economic, social and political thought
- •   its insight in diagnosing causes of social fragmentation and fruitfulness in generating alternative policy proposals.

One reason why relational ideas have the potential to play a significant role is that there are few, if any, public policy issues in which relationships are not involved and not affected. There is always a relational dimension to issues.

Relationism makes some contributions both to resolving the problems of formulating and communicating a biblical perspective on public policy issues.

The future shape of Relationism or, to use a less specific expression, the relational approach to public policy issues is difficult to predict. Both its content and its role are likely to evolve in the light of ongoing research into biblical and contemporary issues and practical experience of engagement in public policy debate. While *The Relationships Foundation* will, no doubt, play a significant role in the task of developing the potential of Relationism in the immediate future, it is hoped that a wide debate within and beyond Christian circles will be stimulated. The development and application of relational ideas will depend on constructive partnerships of many kinds being initiated and sustained.

PART I

PUBLIC POLICY DEBATE AND THE BIBLE

Part I surveys briefly the emerging search for a new social vision and explores aspects of Christian involvement in public debate on government policy. This sets the context for a discussion of the use of the Bible in relation to public policy debate. In material which covers ground likely to be familiar to some readers, we rehearse some of the difficulties encountered in seeking to formulate and communicate a biblical perspective on public policy issues.

This report is about the impact of the Bible in the modern world. The Bible is widely perceived as having a waning authority and influence. For Christians who believe - no doubt in differing ways - that the Bible has something vital and irreplaceable to contribute to a true understanding of human well-being that is a matter for serious concern. Meanwhile, the needs of the world for ethical guidance, insight into truth and liberation from so many forces which dehumanise people are all too evident.

We focus in this report on the world of public policy, the world of legislation, government action and political debate. Some Christians regard that world as one to be avoided; for these and others it is a largely alien world; however, growing numbers of Christians are seeking to contribute a Christian voice to the 'public square'. This report seeks to contribute to the debate on how the Bible may be used in relation to that task. Thus, we address not only the role of the Bible in the modern world but also the influence of Christians in public life. If Christians find themselves unsure of what to say in this context and doubtful whether their voice is heard, they are not alone. The complexities of modern life, rapid changes in technology and geo-politics, and the perennial problems arising from human nature sometimes leave politicians, academics and spokespersons for other communities searching for answers and seemingly swept along by events.

The report falls into three parts. Part I introduces the search for social vision underway at present and explores aspects of Christian involvement in public debate. This sets the context before we focus on the use of the Bible and, in particular, rehearse some of the challenges and uncertainties in seeking to formulate and communicate to others a biblical perspective on public policy issues. Some readers may be familiar with much of the ground covered here. Part II presents Relationism, an evolving set of ideas emerging from The Jubilee Centre, summarising its biblical roots, its aims, key ideas and practical expression to date. Part III attempts to assess the potential of Relationism for enhancing the influence of the Bible in the public policy arena by scrutinising its strategy and content. By the end of the report we believe it will be apparent that Relationism has many strengths and yet, at the same time, a long way to go in in its future development. This is perhaps not surprising. The problem it seeks, at least in part, to answer is a deeply perplexing one: how can the Bible be used in public policy debate?

NEW DIRECTIONS IN POLITICAL DEBATE?

Public policy debate needs the injection of fresh thinking. Modern societies, for all their merits and advantages, are disfigured by enduring, and by newly emerging, social, economic and political problems. Public policy plays a prominent role in society's collective response to these concerns. However, much of the thinking which has guided government action at various stages in the post-war period is now discredited. What remains is often pursued with little confidence in its ability to deliver results and the ensuing policies often appear incoherent and inadequate. This description fits, to a greater or lesser extent, the present situation in Britain, Europe and North America. If one looks to Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, for different reasons and in different ways, there is often a keen awareness of the need for fresh thinking to guide future government policy.

If we focus on Britain in the 1990s we find that some of its social problems are tangible, persistent and widespread. Despite unprecedented levels of material prosperity in terms of GNP *per capita* Britain suffers from:

- high levels of long-term unemployment: approximately one million people have been seeking, but unable to obtain, work for over a year;[1]
- homelessness: under the Housing Act 1985, local authorities in Great Britain accepted a responsibility to find accommodation for 167,000 homeless households in 1992.[2] Meanwhile estimates by organisations such as Shelter indicate that thousands are sleeping on the streets or in shelters, hostels, squats each night;
- family breakdown: for every two marriages in the UK in 1991 there was one divorce;[3]
- poverty and inequality: the real income of the bottom decile of the UK population fell by 6% between 1979 and 1989 despite a growth of 30% in average real incomes over the same period.[4]

Some of the sources of disquiet cannot readily be measured with statistics but are no less serious for that. The balance of political decision-making power has shifted from local communities to Whitehall and from Westminster to Brussels. This trend, among others, led Anthony Sampson to give his book *The Essential Anatomy of Britain*[5] the sub-title 'Democracy in Crisis'. In his words, 'The gap between government and governed looms wider than ever, and Britain is run by one of the most centralised and least accountable systems

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[1]   Central Statistical Office, *Labour Market Statistics Summary Statistics* (London: Department of Employment, May 1994), p.8.

[2]   Ibid., p.113.

[3]   Central Statistical Office, S*ocial Trends 24* (London: HMSO, 1994), Tables 2.11 and 2.13, pp.37-8.

[4]   C. Giles & S. Webb, *Poverty Statistics: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Institute for Fiscal Studies, IFS Commentary No. 34, 1993), p.40.

[5]   A. Sampson, *The Essential Anatomy of Britain. Democracy in Crisis* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992).

in the industrial world.'[6] The murder of Jamie Bulger, committed by children after abducting their victim in a shopping mall, provoked intense concern. This tragic incident was seen as emblematic of moral decay (how could children do such a thing?) and the dissolution of community into privatised existence (why did no-one intervene?).

Throughout the developed countries the post-war shift from scarcity to affluence has had a mixed impact. Living standards have risen for the majority but aspirations and values have changed. Key changes, according to *After the Gold Rush*,[7] have been the rise of 'consumer capitalism' and 'competitive individualism', putting increasing strains on social cohesion and co-operative action. The same period, argues David Selbourne in *The Principle of Duty*,[8] a process of 'civic disaggregation' has been promoted by a public ethos which stresses 'dutiless rights'. People in liberal democracies have been encouraged to demand certain entitlements but not to fulfil corresponding obligations.

While some observers would differ in their analysis of the nature and seriousness of these phenomena, problems undoubtedly exist and worrying trends may be discerned.

Nevertheless some commentators looking at the global scene have spoken more of triumph than intractable problems. The collapse of communism was heralded by some as the triumph of capitalism by Michael Novak,[9] or as the end of history by Fukuyama.[10] Commenting on the debate on his book Fukuyama noted:

> One of the most striking facts about the original debate on 'The End of History?' was that not one single critic put forward the vision of a society fundamentally different from contemporary liberal democracy and at the same time better.[11]

However, growing disenchantment with the social and environmental costs of capitalism may prove declarations of triumph premature.

More modest claims are made by others on behalf of liberal democracy and free market capitalism. There is an emerging consensus in domestic politics that some form of free-market is the best way to run the economic life of a nation. Few advocates of widespread nationalisation can be found, even in the Labour Party. Among Christians both Ronald Preston in *Christianity and the Ambiguities of Capitalism*[12] and Richard Harries in *Is There a Gospel for the Rich?*[13] argue that whatever its imperfections, some form of market system is the

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6 Ibid., p.154

7 S. Lansley, *After the Gold Rush* (London: Century Books, 1994). This book was published under the auspices of The Henley Centre for Forecasting.

8 D. Selbourne, *The Principle of Duty* (Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994).

9 M. Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982).

10 F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992).

11 F. Fukuyama, 'The end of history is still nigh', *The Independent,* 3 February 1992.

12 R. Preston, *Christianity and the Ambiguities of Capitalism* (London: SCM Press, 1991).

13 R. Harries, *Is There a Gospel for the Rich*? (London: Mowbray, 1992).

best option open to us. This is in part because they see no better alternative available, and are hopeful that persistent problems such as unemployment are not, in fact, insoluble.

Notwithstanding these expressions of strident or muted confidence, comments made last year illustrate considerable concern at the lack of vision in the world of politics:

> In politics everyone is apparently waiting for Big New Idea, but there is no sign of it from the present leadership of any political party, or if it is there, they cannot find fit music for their visions.[14]

> Every left-wing party in the Western world has run out of ideas, and the Right continues to serve warmed-up Thatcherism. No wonder that undergraduates are depressed.[15]

Demos, a new think tank set up 'to encourage radical thinking and solutions to the long-term problems facing the UK and other advanced industrial societies', sees the problem as partly the result of sterile bipartisan debate.

> Everywhere the parties lack the knowledge and self-confidence to offer believable strategies or compelling visions. Governments appear before their peoples, at least in Britain, like the emperor with no clothes. Inspiring national models no longer exist: Swedish social-democracy and Thatcherism alike have bitten the dust.... Parliaments and parties are locked into tactics and short-termism, working with antiquated language and structures.[16]

The inadequacy of existing socio-political visions, and the lack of convincing alternatives, is not just a Western problem. In Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union there is considerable reluctance to embrace fully Western capitalist models, yet neither is a return to communism an attractive option. Many African countries are moving away from their brand of Socialism, yet the way forward for them is far from clear. Even in Japan, a success story for decades, new tensions and an intermittent debate about the kind of society the Japanese want is emerging.

In Britain at least there have been signs this year of a growing recognition of the need for a new political agenda or vision, and even some suggestion that an initial consensus may be emerging. Recent public debate illustrates this. Bryan Appleyard has identified a 'bull-market for big ideas'.

> Big ideas, having been an acute embarrassment to the British for at least 30 years, now litter the socio-political landscape. Citizenship versus individualism, rights versus duties, free markets versus institutional continuity, global culture versus the family, and other potent polarities, have taken over from reshuffles and interest rates as the primary content of political debate.[17]

Andrew Marr goes a little further suggesting that:

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14   R. Skidelsky, *The Independent*, 28 June 1993.
15   J. Steinberg, *The Telegraph,* 26 July 1993.
16   Demos Brochure.
17   B. Appleyard, 'Big ideas are back again', *The Independent,* 23 June 1994.

From right to left, politicians and thinkers are agreeing on the new agenda. This agenda is not startling, but it is relevant to our times. It is the agreement that we need a richer civic culture and a kinder, more neighbourly society if we are to live decently as a nation within the fast-moving global economy.[18]

So, the situation we have sketched is one characterised by persistent problems and emerging challenges, and one in which a new debate is getting underway. Contributions are already being made by politicians, moral philosophers and social analysts. The issue confronting Christians seeking to make a contribution to that debate is how best to do so.

CHRISTIAN INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC POLICY DEBATE

Many organisations representing different interest groups and political traditions seek to contribute to public debate on government policy. Why should Christians add their voice to this clamour?

It is important to recognise that Christians can and should express their concern for the welfare of people, communities and society in several ways. Not a few, for various reasons, place a low priority on political involvement. Stanley Hauerwas, with an American context uppermost in his mind, writes:

The temptation is to assume that the task for the church is to find a political alternative or ways to qualify some of the excesses of liberalism. But such a strategy is both theologically and ethically problematic ... Rather the church must recognise that her first social task in any society is to be herself.[19]

In the context of a discussion on the renewal of social vision, Lesslie Newbigin quoted with approval the remark that 'It is not the primary business of the Church to advocate a new social order; it is our primary business to be a new social order.'[20]

Michael Hill points out that direct social service at the local level may be a more effective vehicle in the service of the gospel than involvement in public policy debate.[21] Such service, practical and personal, can build relationships which provide opportunities for speaking of Christ. It may help to authenticate the claim that God loves people; often actions speak louder than words. The lives and service of Christian communities may communicate alternative values more effectively than contributions to public policy debate, however articulate.

Nevertheless, while contributing to public policy debate will only be part of Christian involvement in society, there is a strong case for such participation. The basic point is that many of the biblical foundations

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[18]   A. Marr, 'Civilisers, the bunch of them', *The Independent*, 21 June 1994.

[19]   S. Hauerwas, *A Community of Character. Towards a Contructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p.83.

[20]   L. Newbigin, 'Vision for the City', in A.J. Elliott, and J. Swanson, eds., *The Renewal of Social Vision*, (Edinburgh: Centre for Theology and Public Issues, Occasional Paper No.17, 1989).

[21]   M. Hill 'Paul and Social Ethics' in Explorations 3, *Christians in Society (*Sydney: Moore Theological College, 1988).

which underpin Christian social concern and compassionate service also in principle underpin socio-political involvement. To distinguish between the two and regard the former as a virtue but the latter a vice is artificial. The table below identifies the difference between 'social service' and 'social action' but also begins to illustrate the connections:

Social Service	*Social Action*
Relieving human need	Removing the causes of human need
Philanthropic activity	Political & economic activity
Seeking to minister to individuals and families	Seeking to transform the structures of society
Works of mercy	The quest for justice.[22]

Often the former ameliorates suffering after it has occurred, while the latter seeks to lessen the likelihood of its occurrence in the first place. Often the former can only give rise to local, partial and piecemeal initiatives while the latter allows a national, integrated and concerted effort to tackle a problem.

The pragmatic argument for participation in public policy debate is reinforced in many countries by the sheer size of government and its wide-ranging influence over human life. Nearly half of the Gross National Product of the UK passes through government hands. Legislation affects people from before the moment of birth (through laws regulating abortion) until after the moment of death (through laws on inheritance and intestacy). Legislation affects people in work (through laws on industrial relations and employers' responsibility) and people out of work (through social security provision), people yet to work (through laws governing education) and people who have finished working (through laws governing pension provision). In Philip Wogaman's words, politics is 'terribly important. For good or ill, its effect upon human life and conduct and well-being can scarcely be exaggerated'.[23] Public policy, at worst, exacerbates social problems; at best, while it will never eradicate them, it can ease them. Less obviously, public policy and the debate surrounding it, influences social and cultural trends.

The pragmatic argument is undergirded by theological arguments rooted in a biblical understanding of God, humanity and salvation. A key point is that the adage that religion and politics don't mix overlooks the fact that God, who created all things and is sovereign over all arenas, is concerned with the whole of human life and not merely that part commonly referred to as 'religious'. For Christians to divorce themselves from the political world is to acquiesce in the view, popularised since the Enlightenment, that Christianity is a personal opinion operating in the private realm.

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[22]   This table is drawn from J.R.W. Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Basingstoke: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1984) which in turn drew it from *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment* published after the 'Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsiblity' held at Grand Rapids in June 1982 under the joint sponsorship of the Lausanne Committee and the World Evangelical Fellowship.

[23]   J.P. Wogaman, *Christian Perspectives on Politics* (London: SCM Press, 1988), p. 7.

The motivation and objectives of any Christian involvement in public policy debate, and the priority placed upon it, are decisively influenced by understandings of Christian mission. 'Mission' here means the full range of tasks and responsibilities which God has entrusted to the church. This report does not delve into the range of theological issues involved in reaching such understanding. Different Christians identify the proper relationship between the believing community and society at large in different ways as Niebuhr's classic study *Christ and Culture*[24] illustrates. The starting point for this report is the assumption that there will be Christians who wish individual or collectively to participate in public debate on government policy as an expression of their Christian discipleship and responsibility to the world in which God has placed them.

We have hinted at the diversity of theological views which influence the extent to which Christians engage in public policy debate and the objectives pursued when doing so. Nonetheless, two basic concerns which command widespread acceptance motivate involvement in public policy debate: a concern for human well-being and a concern for values in society. From this basis Christians seeking to influence public policy may have various priorities including: speaking up on behalf of the poor, oppressed and voiceless; affirming particular standards of private and public morality; helping the public and policy makers to a better understanding of human flourishing; encouraging respect for the Christian world-view. One possible analysis of the objectives of Christian engagement in public policy debate is to identify three primary aims: filling gaps, whether in vision, hope or policy perspectives; supporting wholesome aspects of public life and policy; and confronting harmful public life and policy.

Options for Involvement

For Christians who decide, individually or collectively, to participate in public policy debate with particular aims in mind there are various strategic and tactical options from which to choose. The options surveyed below all have a legitimate place and, we must add, do not exhaust the possibilities.

First, the basic approach to policy debate, whether on a particular issue or an over-arching ideology, may be to seek consensus, to engage in conflict or to promote a paradigm shift. The work of the Jubilee Centre has involved all three in recent years. An example of the 'consensus' approach occurred in the Family Policy Initiative, a joint project by CARE[25] and the Jubilee Policy Group. The aim has been to build a consensus around which Christian and non-Christian organisations can combine. Support has been sought from as wide a range of groups as possible for the view that long-term, stable, committed relationships are desirable both for the partners and the children involved. This does not say all that Christians would seek to uphold but it may allow many voices together to say something constructive - and something more influential in the immediate context of Parliamentary debate than an isolated and more 'extreme' view.[26]

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24   H.R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York and London: Harper & Row, 1951).
25   CARE stands for 'Christian Action Research and Education'.
26   The Family Policy Initiative is discussed in more detail on pp. [ ].

The 'conflict' approach was used when the National Lottery Bill, a government bill, was published. The Jubilee Policy Group prepared a 20-page report entitled 'All in a Good Cause? The Case Against the Lottery' and a one-page summary of its arguments. The report was circulated to many MPs and peers; the summary was circulated still more widely in Parliament. The report expressed outright opposition to a national lottery.

An attempt to promote a paradigm shift encourages people to look at old problems in new ways. This may lead, ultimately, to a new consensus. In a time of political uncertainty - such as our own - it is perhaps more important to be actively involved in shaping the new political agenda rather than responding on an *ad hoc* basis to temporary political skirmishes. The development of Relationism, examined later in this report is, in ambition at least, an attempt to contribute towards a paradigm shift.

Secondly, it is possible to focus on the short term, the medium term or the long term. A short-term focus might concentrate on lobbying on draft legislation passing through Parliament in a particular year or responding to requests for comments on a White Paper. A medium-term focus might involve lobbying (e.g. for a phased increase in the proportion of GDP given by the UK as foreign aid) or participation in ongoing reflection on public policy (e.g. commenting on a Green Paper). A long-term focus seeks to grapple now with the issues which will, or may be, prominent in twenty years time, for example the nature and extent of welfare provision, the balance of power between locality, region, nation, and supra-national entities. Such a focus aims to get a head start in tackling tomorrow's problems and thereby to influence the thinking of others when they too address them. It can involve seeking to develop a vision of how things could be.

Thirdly, it is possible to focus on single issues, salient values and/or articulating a social vision. It is probably fair to say that the dominant forms of Church participation in public policy debate address single issues (e.g. Sunday trading, abortion, VAT on fuel) and salient values (e.g. encouraging integrity, compassion). The development and promulgation of social vision is linked most naturally to a strategy of seeking a paradigm shift and focusing on the long term. A social vision may, explicitly or implicitly, embody certain salient values and it is likely to have implications for individual issues. However, to the extent that the social vision embodies novel or unfamiliar thinking, it may not provide immediately persuasive arguments for the cut and thrust of today's debate on a specific policy issue.

Different Organisations, Different Objectives

So far we have spoken of Christians contributing, individually or collectively, to public policy debate. This obscures the fact different people and different corporate entities vary significantly in their skills, opportunities, priorities and constraints. A Christian individual might be an ordinary citizen, an academic or practitioner with relevant expertise, a civil servant unable to make 'political' statements, a church leader or an MP with privileged access to Ministers of State. Christian organisations include denominations, Boards for Social Responsibility, para-church organisations and local churches. The comments that follow focus on denominations and para-

church organisations. These are Christian organisations with the potential to make a prominent contribution in public debate.

Denominations

The official representatives, whether individual leaders or Boards for Social Responsibility, of church denominations need to be cautious about involvement in the detail of policy issues where there is legitimate scope for disagreement among Christians. The Church, as an institution, has no special expertise in many of the technical issues which are an important aspect of policy making. Even when the churches' members or advisers have such skills it may be inappropriate for the Church to put its authority behind such statements. This is particularly so when technical 'experts' may disagree, and when the Church's commitment to a particular position may alienate those who, perhaps rightly, hold different views.

It has been argued, for example by Edward Norman[27], that churches as corporate bodies are most effective when they concentrate on their central message about the relation of people to God and leave social involvement to church members. This is true, it is argued, even in contributing to the transformation of society because people using their diverse gifts in the areas of life which they understand are more likely to apply the message effectively than official church bodies.

However, against this, Michael Fogarty[28] has suggested that the churches are in fact most effective even in convincing and holding people with the basic message about the relation of individuals to God, let alone in transforming society, when in their corporate capacity they engage rather closely with practical affairs and put the weight of the Church behind the solution of day to day problems and the transformation of the conditions in which people live. He cites as examples the history of the Welsh chapels in the nineteenth century, the first decades of the European Christian democratic movements, and more recently the churches in Latin America.

Tawney's observation that 'to state a principle without its application is irresponsible and unintelligible'[29] poses a dilemma for the Church. It may be accused of coming up with pious generalities which could generate a host of contradictory policy proposals *or* naive and ill-considered specific proposals which undermine the credibility of the Church and unnecessarily alienate those who disagree *or* the partisan adopting of policies which are more a reflection of political presuppositions than theological foundations.

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[27]   E. Norman, *Christianity and the World Order* (Oxford: OUP, 1979).
[28]   These are comments drawn from a paper delivered by M. Fogarty to the Scripture, Theology and Society Group.
[29]   R. H. Tawney, *The Attack and Other Papers* (London: 1953), p.178 quoted in D.B. Forrester, *Beliefs, Values and Policies*. *Conviction Politics in a Secular Age* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), p.33.

Para-church Christian Organisations

There are para-church organisations which regard contributing to public policy debate as one of their central goals. Moreover, Christian aid and welfare organisations, along with other voluntary agencies, are increasingly concerned with addressing the causes of problems, rather than just relieving the symptoms. This leads to greater concern for public policy, and the need to wrestle with the question of how their Christian foundations should inform their contributions to the debate.

Such organisations may appear to have an easier task. They are not to the same extent regarded as representative of the Christian community and so may have greater freedom to be more specific in their responses. Although some of them are church agencies they do not tend to draw upon the authority of the Church, but rather on their practical involvement in their particular area of concern, as their 'right' to speak. Many of them are situated within specific sections of the Christian community and may therefore be able to operate within a more clearly defined theological framework.

Christian organisations are also likely to have more tightly defined aims. These may be to address specific social issues such as homelessness or overseas development, or to support particular sections of the Christian community in social action on a wide range of issues. They also have a dual identity. Typically, they may share many of the views and ways of working of their secular counterparts working in the same field. Thus, for example, the Children's Society, Barnardos, NSPCC, Save the Children Fund and National Childrens Homes may often adopt similar policy positions. But Christian organisations might also be expected to have something distinctive to say.

Such Christian organisations may perceive their theological task as limited. Yet, in almost any area of social concern, understandings of good practice and the proper goals of such work have changed considerably over time. The debate continually moves on: if Christian organisations have no biblical or theological reference points by which to evaluate and challenge both the professional and public policy debate, then they will be condemned to follow where others lead.

Problems and Criticisms

Many of the issues currently high on the political agenda such as welfare provision, penal reform and European integration illustrate the problems of Christian involvement in public policy debate. There is disagreement on what should be said: not just with regard to specific policies, but also on the values, principles and policy frameworks which should underlie them. This reflects, in part, doubts and disagreements about how political involvement should be carried out in a modern plural society. Questions continue as to what extent the gospel can act as 'public truth', whether a consensus based, however loosely, on 'Christian' values is still possible, or whether the Christian community is just one combatant in the sectarian conflict of modern politics.

Then there are the disagreements about the basis of any contribution - both the sources for formulating a response (Scripture, reason, tradition, empirical observation) and the ways in which they are to be used.

Faced with these difficulties it is not surprising that the effectiveness and competence of Christian contributions, as well as their theological credentials, have often been criticised. The 1980s was a turbulent period for Christian involvement in public policy debate. This reflected in part the political context at the time. Conviction politics tended to promote conflictual rather than consensual responses. The perceived lack of effective parliamentary opposition resulted in pressures from both within the church and without to take on part of this role. The following criticisms which emerged illustrate the problems of Christian involvement in public policy debate:

- reports were inadequately theologically grounded, or the link between theology and policy was unclear;

- reports were either confined to vague principles, or rushed to hasty and ill-thought out specific policy recommendations;

- reports lacked technical competence (e.g. in economics), practicality and astuteness as how best to be involved in the policy making process;

- the authority of the Church to address particular issues which were regarded by some as beyond its remit, or to commit itself to specific policy proposals when there was disagreement within the Christian community, was also questioned.

In highlighting problems facing Christian involvement in public policy debate, and criticisms levelled against it, we would not wish to overlook the valuable often made. The Bishop of Guildford, for example, was recently commended for his part (together with other Bishops) in helping to tidy up the Education Act 1993 and the multitude of amendments during its passage through the Lords. The report *Faith in the City*,[30] though criticised, was undoubtedly influential in focusing attention on urban issues. Christian organisations have lobbied and been consulted on a wide range of issues, and without necessarily attracting much publicity, have, at times, influenced policy decisions. Nevertheless, the criticisms continue and are at times justified.

Our general discussion has hinted at an underlying issue and central concern of this report. Whenever Christians contribute to public policy debate and seek in that context to use the Bible two basic problems are encountered:

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[30] The Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, *Faith in the City. A Call for Action by Church and Nation* (London: Church House, 1985).

(a)   the problem of formulating a biblical perspective; and

(b)   the problem of communicating this perspective in a plural society.

Modern biblical criticism has thrown up a range of hermeneutical problems, raising doubts as to whether agreed objective meanings can be reliably gained from biblical texts. Different views exist about the kind of contribution the Bible can make. The question of how to move from biblical text to policy response is problematic. The wide diversity of contradictory policies for which biblical support has been claimed is ample testimony to the difficulties encountered. Even if agreement is reached about the content of a biblical perspective and its policy implications, there remains the problem of how this can be communicated effectively in a plural society in which the Bible is not perceived as having intrinsic or universal authority. The experience of the Jubilee Policy Group of involvement in public policy debate has led to questions of communication being a primary concern of this report.

FORMULATING A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Many of the difficulties in and disagreements about formulating biblical perspective on public policy issues are rehearsed in the following pages. Not all Christians accept that all of the difficulties identified below have real substance. Nonetheless, a perceived difficulty can hamper action as much as a real difficulty. Moreover, different views on the role and interpretation of the Bible create tensions within Christian circles that can jeopardize collective action. Our discussion examines, briefly, differing views about the nature, scope and potential contribution of the Bible.

The Nature of the Bible

A basic issue which divides Christians is the manner and degree to which the Bible is regarded as an epistemological authority. The view that the Bible is 'God-breathed' and, correctly understood, an infallible guide not only in matters pertaining to salvation but in all matters of which it speaks is not widely held. The belief that the Bible contains elements which are, at least partly and perhaps entirely, a record of human religious reflection and experience can have a variety of consequences. It leads some to conclude that the Bible is unlikely to prove authoritative in tackling modern day issues. It provides others with a justification for selective use of the biblical traditions. For others it allows biblical texts to act as the launch pad for political reflection but with no obligation to ensure that the final conclusions are 'shaped' by the text(s).

There is a widespread view that the Bible contains a diversity of material characterised not by complementarity and an underlying unity but by confusion and contradiction. From this perspective it is fruitless to try to develop a biblical perspective on any issue - if by 'biblical perspective' is meant a coherent viewpoint reflecting a supposed organic unity in the Bible's teaching. All one can attempt is, for example, a perspective drawn from the Pauline corpus or from Luke-Acts.

A more fundamental challenge comes with the belief that the search for original meaning is not just difficult, but impossible, as the relationship between word and meaning is deconstructed. This can go beyond scepticism about discovering the objective meaning of a text, to the belief that all responses to the text, and the meanings that they draw from it, are equally valid. This leads to theological pluralism. (Ironically, the validity of such interpretations while not assessed by reference to the text may be critiqued on the basis of value-judgments drawn from elsewhere.) 'Reader-response' theories have shaped strands within, perhaps even led to, the proliferation of what may be called 'interest-group theologies' such as 'feminist theology' and 'black theology'. Such approaches use the Bible as an ingredient in and inspiration for their reflection on political and cultural issues. While such theologies can highlight the influence of prejudices in mainstream Western theology and pave the way for helpful reformulation, their content is ultimately determined by the reader and not the text.

The kernel of truth in reader response theories is that every interpreter is at risk of manipulating, consciously or unconsciously, texts to support preconceived attitudes. It is difficult to be self-critical about our own attitudes: the nineteenth century saw some eminent theologians seeking to justify slavery on biblical grounds and saw tracts written opposing female suffrage. There is no complete antidote to this problem. However, a disciplined effort to listen to each text in its original context, to give due weight to all texts and to pay careful attention to the interpretation of others, particularly those whose circumstances are very different from our own such as theologians from the Second and Third Worlds, are all important aids.

Although the fundamentals of the human situation have not changed since biblical times, the conditions and forms of human society have changed enormously. Bauckham writes:

> The adaptations needed to transfer biblical teaching on personal morality from its cultural situation to ours are comparatively easily made, but a more imaginative and creative hermeneutic is necessary for the Bible to speak to modern political life.[31]

Indeed, he suggests that this might be part of the explanation for the 'relatively modern tendency for Christians to disengage from political and social reality'. It has been argued, notably by D.E. Nineham,[32] that the culture gap cannot be bridged. The writings of a previous era are all but unintelligible, we cannot by imagination put ourselves in the shoes of the author or his original audience, we cannot really enter into what the biblical writers are expressing. In our view Nineham is mistaken. While he is right to caution against too easy an assumption that we can understand the original meaning of a text, and that any reading of a text is liable to involve some distortion of meaning, it is unnecessary to be as pessimistic as Nineham. Moreover while certain biblical perspectives seem strange to us, we have to countenance the possibility that among them are challenges to our own culture's presuppositions.

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31   Ibid., p.12.
32   D.E. Nineham, *The Use and Abuse of the Bible* (London: Macmillan, 1976).

This brief discussion leaves a number of issues concerning Scripture and hermeneutics inviting a lengthier and more sophisticated discussion. To a considerable extent, the issues lie outside the primary focus of this project. Nonetheless, we would want to affirm the view that Scripture contains objective truth of divine origin expressed, in part at least, through original authorial intent. This is not to say that 'reader-response' theories do not helpfully remind us that biblical interpretation has a subjective element; nor is it to say that there is a golden key to immunity from the danger of allowing texts to say what the reader wants to find. This conviction that the Bible is the bearer of divine truth leads to the view that it is at least possible that the Bible is capable of generating norms for today's world. There remains room for debate on the nature, extent and content of such norms and how far, once accurately identified, they are prescriptive. A differing view of Scripture would not rule out the use of biblical material for ethical inspiration. The Old Testament, for example, tells the story of the people of Yahweh grappling with many of the social and ethical problems that recur in every society and their experience can, at the very least, be illuminating. Moreover, in the field of ethics (as opposed to soteriology) part of what may be discerned from the biblical material may be learnt from intuition, experience, reason, conscience. Thus, conclusions based on study of the Bible, understood as a book of divine inspiration and authority, may be consonant with views reached by other means.

The Scope of the Bible

Any attempt to formulate a biblical perspective involves judgements about the kind of contribution of the Bible can make: to whom, and about what, does the Bible speak?

A radical distinction between the ethical principles which apply to personal behaviour and those which apply to political institutions and activities is sometimes advocated. Luther's famous example was of the judge, who in his private capacity must forgive harms done to him, but who, in his official capacity, must pass sentence on wrongdoers and ensure that they are punished. It may be that love of neighbour is the fundamental ethical principle in both public and private spheres but love must take different forms in these two different contexts. This, however, is the rub.   Considerable care is needed to discern whether and, if so, how biblical material which deals with situations in the private sphere is relevant to the public domain.

Most of the Bible's ethical teaching is addressed to the people of God. This raises several questions. Do differing ethical principles apply to Christians and others? Even if in some ultimate sense the ideal is the same for both Christians and others, in the world of *realpolitik* how does one respond to the 'hardness' of men's hearts (cf. Matt.19:10)?

There is a case for focusing on Christian ideals. Consider, in the New Testament, Jesus' revolutionary principle of authority as service (Mark 10:35-45), Paul's principle of equal status in Christ irrespective of gender or race (Gal. 3:28), his implicit undermining of the institution of slavery (Philemon), the urging of material equality among the churches (2 Cor. 8). These principles lived out and spelt out by Christians have

had a profound influence on Western culture. However, the permeation of gospel principles into the culture at large may be dependent on several factors: widespread public respect for and acceptance of the Christian religion, a cultural influence spanning centuries, sacrificial and determined leadership by men or women of vision (e.g. Wilberforce's campaign against slavery). This stratagy does not, however, face up to reality that non-Christians lack the motivation and spiritual resources to order their own lives or their common life according to gospel ideals (though may, in some cases, pursue similar goals for different reasons).

An alternative stratagy is to pursue an approach which reflects God's concerns but *ab initio* accommodates man's sinfulness in a significant measure: 'creation ethics' drawn from biblical material which speaks to all humanity not just God's covenant people and incorporates the impact of the fall is one such approach. Attention to Old Testament material may be founded on the recognition that to a greater extent than in New Testament ethical teaching these two concerns (God's standards and man's sinfulness) inform Israel's laws (consider, for example, its provision for divorce certificates and its penal code).

The Contribution of the Bible

Any attempt to formulate a biblical perspective must recognise the limits of any contribution to be made by the Bible. Michael Taylor, for example, in commenting on the gospel's contribution to the substance of decisions on development suggests that expectations are at times too high, and at others too low.[33] A policy goal always embodies values, and the gospel challenges these. But Taylor suggests that:

> … there will be long stretches of the conversation where the moralist will have nothing to say. Deciding between one sort of seed and another, or between different methods of planting trees and crops, or designing schemes to conserve the soil are matters for scientists and agriculturalists.[34]

The Bible, like Taylor's moralist, does not contribute to every part of public policy debate. However, there remain very different views on the role that the Bible should play in the formulation of a Christian contribution. Our aim here is not to explore a sample of those different approaches: creation ethics, liberation theology, middle axioms and natural law. Our aim rather is to delineate what can be thought of as three different *levels* of involvement: minimal, indirect and formative.

(i)   A Minimal Role

A minimal role can be adopted for several reasons: doubts about the possibility of using the Bible more; the belief that the Bible cannot provide the foundation for a public ethic in a plural society; or the view that much of what needs to be said is either technical or discoverable by reason. One example is a 'natural law' approach to social ethics in which the Bible serves only to confirm what reason has already discovered. An influential exponent in the Protestant tradition of the view that the Bible has little to say to guide the decisions of those

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[33]   M. Taylor, *Good for the Poor. Christian Ethics and World Development* (London: Mowbray, 1990), p.23.
[34]   Ibid., p.53.

responsible for public life is, in fact, Luther. God is sovereign over the political arena but does not rule here through his Word. The motto *sola Scriptura* is replaced by an emphasis on reason:

> God made the secular government subject to reason because it is to have no jurisdiction over the welfare of souls or things of eternal value, but only over bodily and temporal goods, which God places under man's dominion. For this reason, nothing is taught in the Gospel about how it is to be maintained and regulated, except that the Gospel bids people honour it and not oppose it. Therefore the heathen can speak and teach about this very well, as they have done. And, to tell the truth, they are far more skilful in such matters than the Christians. ....Whoever wants to learn and become wise in secular government, let him read the heathen books and writings.[35]

However, the Bible reveals - some would prefer to say illuminates - key truths about the nature of humanity, morality, the goal of history and the fundamental realities lying behind the tangible world. Some of these cannot be discerned with the same clarity or completeness from other sources. For this reason alone, some role exists for the Bible in formulating a Christian contribution to public policy debate.

(ii) An Indirect Role

The basic notion here is that the Bible is an important determinant of Christian doctrine and that our socio-ethical teaching should be built on one or more of these doctrines or what may be called the broad themes of biblical revelation. Doctrines such as the Trinity, the incarnation and the resurrection have all served as the centre-piece for a Christian social ethic.[36]

This 'indirect role' for the Bible may amount to providing areas of concern for churches (e.g. the plight of the poor) or overall directions for para-church organisations (e.g. aid and development to Third World countries). The Bible thus underpins a basic orientation when approaching public policy but affords little or no guidance on the specific elements of *policy* formulation which would be governed by pragmatic and technical considerations. It can therefore result in the uncritical adoption of secular policy frameworks without challenging the values that they embody.

However, an 'indirect role' for the Bible might be adopted to assist at the level of broad principle in the formulation of views on policy content. Professor Ronald Preston adopts such an approach. First, for him, the Bible illuminates for us not so much morality but reality. Thus 'the Bible presupposes ...the reality of God. Then, within its drama of creation, fall, the people of God (elected and then recreated in Christ) and the last things, it presupposes the creation ordinances of family, work, political (state) authority and culture.'[37]

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[35]   J. Pelikan and T.H. Lehman, eds., *American Edition of Luther's Works* (St Louis: Muhlenberg Press), vol. XIII, p.198. Quoted in D.B. Forrester, *Theology and Politics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p.31. Luther in other places draws freely on biblical material in commenting on issues such as trade and usury.

[36]   The outline of a social ethic based on a conception of the Trinity is provided in J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981). Incarnational ethics formed the basis of 'religionless Christianity' in Liberal Protestant circles; an evangelical whose writing stresses the incarnation (though not to the exclusion of other doctrines) is J. Gladwin, *God's People in God's World. Biblical Motives for Social Involvement* (Leicester: IVP, 1979). The resurrection was the linchpin of O. O'Donovan *Resurrection and Moral Order. An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Leicester: IVP, 1986).

[37]   R.H. Preston, *Religion and the Ambiguities of Capitalism* (London: SCM Press, 1991), p.101.

Secondly, the Bible through its 'varied forms of literature, particularly its narratives and parables, stir the imagination and inform the judgement by deepening our powers of discrimination.'[38] To expect the Bible to do more than this is to misunderstand the Bible. Professor Preston is critical not only of proof-texting but also of the view that principles can be derived directly from the Bible and then applied to the contemporary socio-political context.[39] The Bible 'does not set out to be a textbook of sociological or political theory.'[40]

Thus, the report *Not Just for the Poor: Christian Perspectives on the Welfare State*[41] has as its basis for reflection three general theological principles: first, the interdependence in human life; second, our duty to the poor and disadvantaged; and third, the fact of human sin, social disintegration and the need for justice in society.

From these can be developed three somewhat more specific principles: the concept of *citizenship*, the importance of enabling all to *participate* in society (which results in an emphasis on relative rather than absolute poverty) and *justice to the poor*. On the basis of these principles Preston argues for a welfare system in which the state has a predominant (though not exclusive) role.

The problem with this method is that the principles which are developed are broad concepts and lack the precision necessary to engage effectively with many of the practical issues which public policy must address.[42] For example, 'citizenship is not a simple concept, once one gets beyond a definition in terms of belonging to a community with well-defined rights and responsibilities: it is precisely the question of what rights and what responsibilities make up "the belonging" which need elucidation.'[43] This lack of precision, which is intrinsic to this approach, means that a wide and diverse range of policy options may be developed each claiming the support of the biblical themes enunciated earlier.

(iii)   A Formative Role

The basic orientation provided by the key doctrines and general themes of the Bible is vital to any biblically-rooted contribution to public debate. The question is whether the Bible can provide more specific guidance. Some hold that it cannot. However, others such as Donald Hay and Nigel Biggar believe that a closer study of the biblical material can bring to light principles operating at a somewhat more detailed level.

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38   Ibid., p.101.
39   Ibid., p.101.
40   Ibid., pp.96ff.
41   Board for Social Responsibility of the General Synod of the Church of England, *Not Just for the Poor: Christian Perspectives on the Welfare State* (London: Church House, 1986). We are indebted to Nigel Biggar and Donald Hay for their analysis in 'The Bible, Christian Ethics & the Provision of Social Security', in *Journal of the Association of Christian Economists*, 15 (February 1993), pp. 8 ff. The article is to appear, in a slightly revised form, in *Studies in Christian Ethics*, vol.VII, no.2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994).
42   Biggar and Hay identify seven issues that the design of a social security system must resolve. The broad concepts and principles described above, in their view, failed to provide any way of resolving three of these.
43   N. Biggar and D. Hay, 'The Bible, Christian Ethics & the Provision of Social Security', op. cit., p.15.

Biggar and Hay in their article 'The Bible, Christian Ethics and the Provision of Social Security'[44] stress that it 'should be evident that there should be no attempt to apply Biblical systems <u>directly</u> to current policy debates, because of both spiritual distance and cultural distance'[45] between God's people in biblical times and a multi-faith society today. There is a need to find 'timeless' principles and putting them into practice may involve a measure of coercion to achieve what voluntary action would produce among God's people.

The article goes on to review the 'social security systems' of Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church. The Old Testament arrangements begin with the provision of land to every family group and the expectation that family members will work to support themselves but provides a safety net through land redemption, work as a hired labourer, gleaning privileges, interest-free loans and debt release all supervised by decentralised administration through community elders. The New Testament provisions see material support as a practical expression of *koinonia* (Acts 4:32-37, 2 Cor. 8,9), suggest that benefits should be targeted towards those most in need of help (1 Tim. 5), underline the importance of working to support oneself if possible (2 Thess. 3:10-12) and address the character and quality of administration (Acts 6).

These two biblical 'social security systems' reflect the general principles of interdependence, obligation to the poor, and the need for justice. However, Biggar and Hay conclude that additional principles which do not appear to be culture specific emerge:

(i)   *Work*: the 'primary defence against poverty is productive work, either with our own resources, or if that fails in employment'. Thus, social security provision should be 'designed to minimise disincentives to work', should ideally 'be linked to schemes to get people back into work', and if stigma and exploitation can be avoided, should involve an 'obligation to do work in the community' if receiving financial support;

(ii)   *Decentralisation*: the 'administration of social security systems should be devolved as far as possible', giving 'recipients a voice in the administration'. This suggests a 'greater role for mediating institutions - the family, voluntary agencies, local community bodies - even if the state remains the primary funder';

(iii)   *Selectivity*: 'some element of selectivity <u>is</u> appropriate to prevent free-riding..... to ensure that personal responsibilities are not ducked.... to avoid work disincentives.' The difficulty, as Biggar and Hay recognise, is to design systems that are not insensitive and intrusive in personal lives.[46]

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44   Ibid.
45   Ibid., p.16.
46   Ibid., pp.18-9.

Conclusion

Our discussion has hinted at the great diversity of approaches to the task of formulating a biblical perspective on public policy issues. That diversity is both a reflection of, and a factor resulting in, uncertainty among Christians as to how the task should be carried out. It is little wonder that a recent book on the contribution of Christians to public debate was called *The Scattered Voice.*[47]

Nonetheless, this brief survey has begun to illustrate the possibility and benefits of a substantial and formative role being given to the Bible when developing a Christian perspective on public policy issues. However, even with this emphasis on biblical insights, the interaction of several disciplines is vital. A Christian perspective on public policy issues will draw on Scripture, theology, church history, and Christian experience. It will also involve corroborating and expanding insights from political theory, sociology, economics, history and anthropology. Hearing the Bible and observing human society must interact creating what is often referred to as a hermeneutical spiral. Further, Stephen Mott is right to warn that 'In using the Bible, however, one must be as much aware of where it does not apply as of where it does.'[48]

COMMUNICATING A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Even if agreement is reached on what a biblical perspective on a particular issue is, and on its policy implications, there remain considerable difficulties in communicating this perspective. There are practical problems: the nature of public debate and the policy-making process may have little time or room for what the churches have to say. Then there is the issue of how meaningful or convincing a biblical perspective is in an increasingly secular and plural society. Different understandings of the mission of the Christian community in this context result in differences regarding what it is most important to communicate and how this should be done: should Christians concentrate on their distinctive and transcendent message, or should they also be involved in the more technical aspects of policy debate? If so to what extent should there be willingness to compromise to ensure that at least part of the message is heard and responded to?

Practical Difficulties

The Nature of Political Debate

So far it has been assumed that there is some debate surrounding the policy making process to which Christians can contribute. Cynical commentators might suggest that 'policy' is a generous description of government decisions and that 'debate' flatters the nature of what goes on in Parliament and the media.

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[47]   J.W. Skillen, *The Scattered Voice. Christians at Odds in the Public Square* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990). The book deals with Christian contributions to political debate in the United States.
[48]   S.C. Mott, *A Christian Perspective on Political Thought* (Oxford: OUP, 1993), p.7.

Recent criticisms of the political debate have included the accusation that too much policy is made 'on the hoof' giving little opportunity for comment; that opinion polls have become too important so that popularity rather than values or coherence become the basis of any 'debate'; that there is deep-rooted disillusionment with politics and politicians which undermines public interest in debate; that the growth in single-issue politics squeezes out wider concerns; and that the huge growth in the volume of legislation with little time given for consultation allows room for debate on only a few key issues.

Public debate and public policy debate are not quite the same thing. Naturally, there is the distinction that public debate may focus on matters other than government policy. Even then it often has, or could have, implications for future policy change. The differences are differences of degree rather than marked distinctions. Logic might suggest that public debate should precede policy proposals, and policy debate should precede new legislation or executive action. Reality is rarely as tidy as this. In any event, sometimes policy ideas are a feature of public debate since concrete suggestions can be easier to grasp than abstract concepts. Nonetheless, often policy debate will occur either at a point in time nearer to policy change *or* in a forum or manner having more obvious associations with Westminster and Whitehall.

Certain consequences flow from these features of policy debate. Typically, people are already too committed to particular views and policy approaches to engage in an open-ended discussion. Decisions are made in the context of a clash of views. In the hurly-burly of seeking compromises and concessions, the importance of longer-term issues is diminished. Sometimes it is easier to influence the bargaining process by reminding those in power not of values but of electoral implications and of their obligations to particular groups.

In public debate the agenda is wider, the timescale longer. There is greater opportunity to challenge values and assumptions. and to engage in pioneering analysis and research on issues. Indeed it is worth noting that 'think tanks' rarely respond to current legislation but seek to influence the debate surrounding issues long before they reach Parliament. Public debate is the context within which to 'think the unthinkable'. If a conflictual stance is often vital in the closing stages of policy debate; by contrast public debate offers far more opportunity for and benefits from seeking constructive dialogue.

The Policy-Making Process

The formation and implementation of public policy in a high-income economy and variegated society is a complex business. A major challenge to any Christian contribution to the surrounding debate is the question of whether sufficient technical expertise can be mobilised. To do so requires a concerted and, significantly, an expensive effort. Contributions made without an appropriate level of professional competence do nothing to further the debate and may discredit Christianity. Since effort and expense is often required, Christian organisations may need to make hard, strategic decisions about which policy issues to focus attention on.

Several factors may limit the influence even of well-researched contributions to the policy-making process.[49] The 'two communities' hypothesis suggests that researchers and policy-makers live in different assumptive worlds. This can result in different values, concepts and jargon, which substantially reduce the capacity of research-based contributions to influence the debate.

Policy-makers are not usually receptive to submissions that require them to change their minds. While people may be compelled to accept compromises, argument alone rarely causes people to relinquish firm convictions in which they have invested much and which are supported by the 'plausibility structures' of their own communities. Many policymakers give greater authority to their own political judgements and intuitions, based on personal experience, than to researched conclusions.

Policy-making, insofar as it involves reaching a compromise between conflicting interests, may favour vagueness and ambiguity. Research or lobbying which makes the costs and the losers more explicit is not necessarily welcomed as such information makes the task of reaching a compromise that much more difficult. Policy-making also requires making complex situations sufficiently simple to enable action, whereas research and public debate tend to complicate matters.

Seven different elements, logical though not in practice sequential steps, make up the policy process:

1.   Ferment - marking a general state of readiness and concern;

2.   Conceptualisation - when issues begin to slot into focus;

3.   Translation - when the implications for action are considered;

4.   Assessment or bargaining - where the participants weigh or argue over options and alternatives;

5.   Construction - or the piecing together of concrete proposals;

6.   Decision - the emergence of the commitment to a particular course of action;

7.   Feedback - when the commitment is publicly acknowledged;

Objectives and methods for entering public-policy debate will vary according to which part of this process is underway. The last two stages 'decision' and 'feedback' are the preserve of policy makers and are rarely stages to which churches or Christian organisations can readily contribute. The process of constructing policy may involve, occasionally, church leaders or Christian organisations. Through the bishops in the House of Lords amendments to planned legislation can be introduced. Nonetheless, the stages of policy making to which contributions will most often be made are those of 'ferment', 'conceptualisation', 'translation' and 'assessment or bargaining'. There will also be more general contributions to public debate not tied to specific policy issues.

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[49]   This analysis draws on T. Booth, *Developing Policy Research* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1988).

The Cultural Context

Social, political and intellectual forces shape the context of debate on public policy. They influence the need for contributions, but can also present considerable obstacles to communicating a biblical perspective. Secularisation, individualism, materialism and pluralism, briefly sketched below, are perhaps the most significant current factors.

Secularisation

As societies as a whole, and their institutions, become increasingly secularised it becomes less likely that Christian values will inform public policy. Arguments based on Christian values may well appear increasingly alien and unconvincing. Other values or perspectives such as individualism, materialism, secular humanism or other religions offer competing visions and the Church, rather than being accepted as guide or social cement, may have to defend its own views more robustly in public debate. The churches' authority and profile in public debate are also likely to be reduced. Where once the church may have spoken for the nation, it may come to be regarded as speaking on behalf of a significant minority.[50]

This view that society has become secular is not universally conceded. In this country education policy still maintains that Christianity is the major religious tradition and that this pre-eminence should be reflected both in worship in schools and religious education. The Archbishop of York is also more optimistic seeing the persistence of 'folk religion' as evidence of greater sympathy for Christian values than church membership would imply.[51]

For the moment 'religiosity' of a sort continues. Although opinion polls inevitably simplify complex questions, a recent NOP poll in Britain found that 71% of parents of school age children thought that children should be taught that there is a God and 70% thought that children should say prayers at school.[52] An alternative indicator is people's beliefs. A study conducted across Europe under the auspices of the European Value Systems Study Group found in 1990 that 77% of people believed in God, 64% defined themselves as religious and 52% believed in life after death.[53] These indicators show little change compared to 1981. However the young are in all cases more secularised than the old and tend to maintain their lower levels of belief, practice and general religiosity as they age. Thus the future may offer a less favourable environment for contributing to public debate from a Christian perspective.

The Church is also perceived to have lost its role as the keystone of culture, but no other institution has assumed that role in its place. The process of secularisation and individualisation are reflected in people's

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[50]   Of course in some countries this has long been the case, while in others the churches look forward to a growth in influence.

[51]   J. Habgood, *Church and Nation in a Secular Age* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983).

[52]   NOP poll for *The Independent,* 6 September 1993.

[53]   D. Barker, 'Changing Social Values in Europe', paper presented at the Centre for International Christian Studies, University of Maryland at College Park, 15 November 1991.

attitudes to religion and the role of the churches. While Europeans are happy for the Church to pronounce on matters concerned with human rights, Third World problems, disarmament and the environment which are remote from intimate personal lives, a strong sense of moral autonomy leads them to reject comments on issues which are felt to affect them more directly.[54]   If the churches wish to challenge society's values, clear thinking on how this task can be fulfilled in the modern social context will be needed.

Individualism

This is not a new trend: Macfarlane, for example, traces the origins of English individualism to the eleventh century.[55]   However, there is a perception that the degree of individualism has increased sharply. Individualism is partly a matter of self-identity and may be associated with an emphasis on individual autonomy, independence and even narcissism, and partly an aspect of the contemporary liberal political ethic. Here again, it is important not to exaggerate trends, nor to hark back to mythical golden ages. People do continue to care for family members. Parents still make sacrifices for children. There are, however, three aspects of modern Western individualism of particular significance.

First, there is the sense of isolation and loss of community. Urbanisation, mobility and family breakdown have all played their part in this. Significant changes in the nature of relationships, not least in families and communities, and associated changes in attitudes to them have occurred. The value consciously placed on relationships may, for many, be different today than it was for people in previous decades. For those with unhappy experiences, a social vision rooted in the biblical tradition, may seem a distant dream. 'Family values', for example, may bring fear of stigma and alienation rather than the positive images their proponents hold dear. Significant social changes bring policy changes in their wake, and Christian contributions to the debate must keep pace with this change, and not be based on views of people or society which no longer hold true.

Our longing for community is, however, at best ambivalent. Indeed, while living in places which have a sense of community is attractive to many people, in practice affluence is used to buy more privacy and less community. For all too often in practice we rather resent the impositions 'community' may make upon us. Relationships with other people bring obligations, from which many shy away. This brings us to another aspect of individualism: the emphasis on self-fulfilment. While the growth and realisation of our humanity are fully consistent with a biblical vision of human flourishing, such a vision will challenge the hedonism and emphasis on self-centred choice often espoused in contemporary culture.

Finally, individualism may be associated with an emphasis on moral autonomy which poses a challenge to Christian contribution to public debate. Individualism and pluralism are like a pair of scissors,

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[54]   Ibid., p.17.

[55]   A. Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978).

each blade contributing to a situation in which moral choices are coming to be regarded as exclusively individual choices.

Materialism

Western societies are highly materialistic. This can hamper communication of a biblical vision of human life, imbued with very different values. 'Consumerism' signifies, in part, the attempt to find status, security and identity through possessions. Where other sources of identity such as geographical roots, family or work have been lost, designer goods allow identities to be bought off the peg.[56] Security is found in independence based on wealth as much as through supportive relationships. Thus materialism, in its quest for independence, is closely associated with individualism. Men and women are increasingly no longer political animals but economic ones. Participation in society is seen primarily in economic terms - either through production or consumption. As a result, the unemployed and less well-off older people can easily be marginalised.

This materialistic perspective influences political life. Success and failure are measured in narrow economic terms such as GDP, inflation and interest rates. Nonetheless, there are currents moving in the opposite direction. The concept of human development, for example, is gaining ground in development thinking.

> Human development is moving to centre stage in the 1990s. For too long, the question has been; how much is a nation producing? Now the question must be: how are its people faring? The real objective of development is to increase people's development choices. Income is only one aspect of these choices - and an extremely important one - but it is not the sum-total of human existence...People must be at the centre of development. Development has to be woven around people, not people around development.[57]

However, mainstream policy frameworks, whether capitalist or socialist remain doggedly materialistic. Equality and welfare are still predominantly defined in material terms with no clear framework for integrating social and economic policy.

Value surveys point to the rise of 'post-materialism' in younger generations. This is a somewhat misleading description for it does not necessarily mean that people are becoming any less materialistic, but rather that such attitudes are taking on new guises. Materialist values are seen as emphasising economic and physical security whereas 'post-materialist' priorities emphasise self-expression and quality of life. The change is from security to enjoyment: the materialist perspective remains.

Pluralism

In a society which comprises different groups, with tolerance regarded as a primary virtue, it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain a privileged position for Christian values in public policy. Christians can

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[56]   See, e.g., M. Starkey, *Born to Shop* (Eastbourne: Monarch, 1989).
[57]   United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1991* (Oxford: OUP, 1991)*,* p.13.

respond to this either by seeking consensus and common ground, or by articulating and defending their distinctive views more robustly. Indeed, the challenge of pluralism is whether the public square - and the prevailing social vision - will be formed and filled by consensus or through conflict.

Writers such as Alasdair MacIntyre suggest that consensus is not possible: 'There seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture.'[58] Christians are simply one of a number of groups in society each with distinctive understandings of the nature of justice, human well-being, rights and so on. Christians may still wish to participate in public debate so as not to acquiesce meekly in the views of others but will not be able to win others over by rational argument. In our subjectivist and emotivist culture, debates are 'won' by the groups with greatest influence. Shorter-term goals may be achievable by forming, either independently, or with others, significant interest groups. However, the essential task is to nurture the life of one's own distinctive moral community.

There are, however, grounds for believing that this is too pessimistic a view of the potential for fruitful public debate. There are Christian ethicists, such as Robin Gill,[59] who find that in practice they and their secular counterparts can often reach substantial agreement on the ethical principles relevant to the moral dimension of public policy issues. The difference lies in the underlying justification for those principles and, sometimes, the respective weight attached to each one. Furthermore, it is not at all clear that philosophical doubts about the possibility of rational public debate in a plural society must have the last word. The necessity of co-operation if people are to live together does not guarantee, but provides a powerful incentive, for finding common ground. The existence of 'a naked public square' is, in the last resort, an impossibility because both policy objectives and practice are inevitably infused with values. It may be that the majority is able to assert its will over the minority or there may be a lack of shared language to debate how common interests should best be handled. Nevertheless, the public square will be filled and people must make their choice as to how to fill it.

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[58]   A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 2nd edn, 1985), p.7.
[59]   See, e.g., R. Gill, *Christian Ethics in Secular Worlds* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991)

PART II

A NEW RESPONSE: RELATIONISM

Part II introduces Relationism, an evolving set of ideas emerging from the Jubilee Centre, and presents some key convictions underlying its development, outlines its aims, explores its biblical roots, summarises its key ideas as set out in The R Factor *and reviews its application in practice to date.*

Part I of this report fell into two main parts. First, we explored certain new directions in public debate on government policy and several aspects of Christian involvement in such debate.   Secondly, we explored the problems of formulating and communicating a biblical perspective which face Christians who want to use the Bible for the purposes of that debate. These are opportune times to seek to influence the patterns of social and political thinking that shape public policy. However, there are real difficulties facing Christians who wish to relate the Bible in an authentic and effective way to the modern world with its complexities and prevailing attitudes. The development of Relationism represents an attempt to find a new way through these challenges, negotiating both problems of formulating and communicating a biblical perspective, thereby paving the way for a distinctive contribution to public policy debate.

By 'Relationism' is meant the an approach to involvement in public policy debate and a collection of ideas emanating from the Jubilee Centre under that name. Relationism is a particular expression of the 'relational thesis' and has been described most fully to date in *The R Factor*. However, as the following pages reveal, a compact description of Relationism is impossible. The underlying convictions which led to its development, its presentation in *The R Factor* and its practical application to date may all be distinguished. Notwithstanding the considerable work that has already gone into it, Relationism is still evolving.

PRIMARY CONVICTIONS

The primary convictions about the use of the Bible in public policy debate which lie behind the development of Relationism to date may be listed as:

> (i)   the importance of a 'social vision';
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> (ii)   the benefits of close attention to the Bible;
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> (iii)   the centrality of 'relationships';
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> (iv)   the scope for a 'translation' strategy.

These are now considered in turn.

The Importance of a Social Vision

Part I identified several kinds of contribution to public policy debate, all of which are important. Nonetheless, the development of Relationism was founded on the view that there is a particular need to offer an overall social vision. There are several reasons for this.

First, issues are affected by long term trends in political thought and social fact. The Sunday trading debate illustrates this. The decision by the House of Commons on 8 December 1993 to allow substantial deregulation was not the result merely of opinions and lobbying on this particular issue. It was shaped decisively by longer term trends. These trends include the decline in church attendance over the last several decades but they also include intellectual and practical changes in what may be described as the dominant social vision operating in the minds of public and policy makers. These included: the rise of economic liberalism creating a presumption in favour of removing regulations from the marketplace; the growing reluctance to use the law to enforce views perceived to belong to a particular morality; the rise in female participation in the labour force creating pressure for an extra shopping day; the increase in home ownership underpinning the growth of the DIY market which created the conditions in which large DIY multiples were willing to break the law and campaign for its abolition. The debate on Sunday trading has, thus, been informed by views on larger questions concerning our attitude as a society to the marketplace, the relationship of law and morality, the role of women in society and their aspirations to be both earners and homemakers. Christians should want to influence public opinion on these larger questions: they are important in their own right and they influence the outcome of particular issues.

Secondly, issues are interconnected. For example, a debate about homelessness is - or should be - a debate about the housing stock, public and private provision of rented accommodation, street level provision for the homeless (including medical care), employment opportunities, social security provision (not least for 16-18 year olds), care in the community for the mentally ill, attitudes to deprivation, and so on. Christians need to think about issues in an integrated way. Developing an overall idea of the direction in which society should, ideally, move assists such integrated thinking.

Thirdly, society needs 'utopias'. A social vision is about possibilities: a matter of seeing how things could be, of what could be achieved. A social vision provides direction. In the post war period, the Beveridge Report formed the basis of a powerful vision of a society that would care for its members 'from the cradle to the grave'; more recently Thatcherism provided a vision which, *inter alia*, sought to roll back the frontiers of the state, promote a spirit of self-reliance and emphasise the virtues of the marketplace. In their different ways both visions have been highly influential. If there is no sense of what society should, ideally, be like, then policy measures are bound to purely pragmatic, ad hoc responses to problems as they arise. By contrast, if a society knows what it is aiming to become, it can take steps in that direction. The Archbishop of Canterbury in a

column in *The Telegraph* wrote: 'We need a sense of direction and vision. We must know what kind of society we strive to be, and what values we encourage.'[60]

It is possible to go further and identify certain characteristics which a social vision should have if Christians may confidently commend it to others in the context of public policy debate. It should be coherent - its various elements must knit together. Secondly, it should be distinctive - simply to add our voice to others promoting, say, liberal democracy would suggest a failure to think through the implications of the distinctively Christian understanding of reality. This is not, of course, to say that every aspect will be distinctive: we shall find that on an eclectic basis there is much in competing visions of social and political life which we will wish to affirm. Thirdly, it should be capable of delivering a significant degree of consensus - otherwise it will fail to have any impact. It may, however, not be a Christian social vision *per se* which provides the ground for consensus but that social vision may provide a suitable point from which then to 'negotiate' a consensus on a more pragmatic basis. Fourthly, it should have sufficient content to be capable of generating policy directions as well as philosophical ideals. Finally, it must avoid rigidity - an inflexible framework of ideas would become rapidly redundant.

It will be apparent that these characteristics are in tension. There may well be a trade-off between offering a distinctive social vision and being able to secure consensus. The language and concerns of, on the one hand, a vision of what is possible and, on the other, the principles to shape policy in the next five years are related but different.

The Benefits of Close Attention to the Bible

We saw in Part I that the appropriate contribution of the Bible to the formation of Christian perspectives on public policy issues is much debated among Christians. However, we believe that there is a strong case for Christians paying close attention to the Bible in this process. The reasons Biggar and Hay give for this view are several. First, the moral teaching of the Bible is not merely a rag-bag collection of diverse views but an ethical tradition. So it is inconsistent, even a little perverse, for Christians to pay heed to ethical traditions in the church over the years and yet exclude the one found within the Bible. Secondly, 'the variety of historical situations which somewhat shape the moral teaching of the Bible is a great advantage: the wealth of specifications and instantiations of particular ethical themes make it easier to identify the underlying principles and how they might be applied in different contexts.'[61] Thirdly, this approach generates fruitful insights: the themes which can emerge from reflection at a more general theological level are supplemented by 'clarification and extensions.'[62] For Christians who believe that the Bible is in some unique sense the word of God there is an additional incentive beyond these three arguments. The Bible is a guide, not to every kind of truth, but nonetheless to real and relevant truth.

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60   *The Telegraph*, The Saturday Column, 15 January 1994.
61   N. Biggar and D. Hay, 'The Bible, Christian Ethics & the Provision of Social Security', op. cit., p.19.
62   Ibid., p.19.

A determination to pay close attention to the Bible can help prevent the Christian from becoming the unwitting captive of secular viewpoints which happen to be in vogue at the time. The Bible provides an alternative benchmark against which to assess the dominant ideas of a culture. In the experience of the Jubilee Policy Group, since the Bible offers a distinctive resource, it helps pave the way to ideas and suggestions which often escape other contributors to public debate who are locked into mainstream secular approaches to policy issues.

The development of Relationism has also been based on a belief in the value in examining the whole of the Bible, Old and New Testaments. The people of God occupy in Old and New Testaments different political contexts. In the Old Testament, for much of the time span covered the people of God constitute a political entity. Old Testament material addresses the ordering of Israel's political life, the policies to be adopted in connection with social, economic, judicial and foreign affairs, the responsibilities of rulers as well as subjects. New Testament is addressed to a minority group with no political power in the Roman Empire. New Testament material with an overt political dimension covers the responsibilities of citizens and subjects who cannot influence political affairs. It is therefore no surprise that Christians who find themselves in positions in which political influence is possible have tended to draw upon Old Testament material.

Not all Old Testament material has contemporary socio-economic relevance and that which does must be interpreted with great care. Unravelling the complex issues of interpretation and developing a consistent hermeneutic for the application of Old Testament material to public issues today provides fertile ground for lengthy debate among Christians. However, we would want to affirm the conclusion reached by Bauckham: 'while the law and the prophets cannot be *instructions* for our political life, they can be *instructive* for our political life' (his italics).[63] He goes on to urge that we 'consider each part and aspect of the Old Testament in the light of Christ. The effect of doing this will take a wide variety of forms. We should also not forget that ... In their political teaching, as in other matters, the two testaments supplement and inform each other.'[64]

The Centrality of Relationships

Our discussion of the centrality of relationships may be introduced by setting out what we refer to as the 'relational thesis'. Put in its simplest form, it is an argument involving the following steps:

(1)   Relationships are, to a greater or lesser extent, neglected by the ideological and technical frameworks currently used to assess and develop public policy options;

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[63]   R. Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics. How to Read the Bible Politically* (London: SPCK, 1989), p.6. The editorial of *Themelios*, 19.2 (Jan. 1994) draws extensively from Deuteronomy to provide an insightful - and painful - critique of public policy in Britain in the areas of provision for the poor, worker protection, immigration policy, personal credit and debt.

[64]   R. Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics*, op. cit., p.7.

(2)   Neglect of relationships in public policy thinking is a significant oversight because good relationships are essential to a healthy society and the wellbeing of individuals;

(3)   A 'biblical social vision' is essentially concerned with the nature and quality, moral and otherwise, of the relationships that form families, communities and, ultimately, society.

In this context 'relationships' refers, first and foremost, to relationships between people who are in direct contact with one another. However, using the word in a somewhat different sense, within its purview are relationships between people and institutions (e.g. a taxpayer and the Inland Revenue) and even relationships between institutions (e.g. a manufacturer and a component supplier). However, 'relationships' which involve an institution may sometimes be analysed in a significant measure in terms of the relationships between the people who represent those institutions. Moreover, the significance of relationships involving one or more institutions relates above all to their impact on the people involved and affected. Finally, 'relationships' understood in a somewhat wider sense, includes relationships between people but mediated by one or more institutions (in this sense, there is a 'relationship' between every taxpayer and every pensioner).

In the following paragraphs we illustrate, first, the emerging awareness of the neglect of relationships in public policy and, secondly, the fact that relationships are central to Christianity. This discussion tends to focus on unmediated relationships between people.

(i)   Public Policy and the Need to Address Relationships

There has, perhaps always, been a current of academic thinking and political reflection that has emphasised the significance of nurturing relationships. For communitarian writers, both individualism and collectivism have been philosophies which dehumanise rather than liberate or empower. However, there is evidence of an emerging awareness in political and media circles of the need to redress the neglect of relationships in policy thinking.

The 1994 edition of *Social Trends*[65] revealed that in 1991 more than a quarter of households in the UK consisted of one person living alone; whereas in 1961 only 14 per cent of homes fell into this category. An editorial in *The Times*, after describing this as an 'intriguing disclosure' reflecting the general cultural shift to individualism and, for many, the desire to be self-reliant, added:

> Yet the desire for privacy and independence can also lead to sequestration from society. People know where they can claim their rights. But from where come their duties? Today's report suggests the growing detachment of modern Britons from the communities in which they live: the decline of voluntary work and the increase in television-watching. There is a risk that a growing number of householders will sink into isolation and - in many cases - lonely dependency upon the State.
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> To their credit, several ministers...are starting to explore ways of strengthening communities and the ties that bind them. Politicians cannot reverse fundamental technological and social changes that are taking place throughout the world. But they ought to provide ideas about how man's need for society can

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[65]   Central Statistical Office, *Social Trends 24* (London: HMSO, 1994), p.34.

continue to be addressed...At a time of general political listlessness, there are rich possibilities to be found in this new agenda.[66]

The mounting evidence that children of divorced parents are more likely than other children to leave school early and have a child early, and thus to become low earners and single parents has not escaped comment. While such conclusions are open to challenge, *The Economist* remarked: 'there is evidence enough for government to consider how to make marriage more robust, bad though they are at social engineering.'[67]

There are concerns that the discipline of economics, owing to the mistaken assumption that human beings are autonomous, rational and purely self-interested individuals, has become 'an ideology whose predictions about the real world are frequently wrong'.[68] Labour market theory predicts that in response to changes in the supply of and demand for labour wage levels should rise or fall. In practice, wages are not flexible - in recessions firms will lay off workers rather than reduce everyone's wages. The explanation is, in a sense, relational. 'Employees find that workers have a conception of fairness which they simply have to respect to preserve their firms as ongoing social organisations. Cutting wages is not seen as "fair"...'.[69]

> One of the saddest by-products of the new right revolution is that, under the barrage of propaganda, some employers are beginning to believe that respecting fairness and creating trust is economically irrational - and are trying to make wages flexible, as the economists recommend. But...the initiatives are not raising productivity. The new right's world does not work.
>
> ...We need to be able to trust the social networks in which we are embedded; and unless we can trust them we perform less well. We are not happy simply choosing and maximising our individual preferences...[70]

Relationships - in one form or another - have been neglected but are edging their way onto the policy agenda.[71]

(ii)   *Christianity and the Centrality of Relationships*

The 'relational thesis', and its emphasis on relationships, finds its roots in Christian doctrine and biblical ethics. In what follows we survey - briefly - the central importance attached to relationships by Christianity.

In *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* Lesslie Newbigin refers to the view of Dr Harold Turner that:

> ...there are only three possible ways of understanding the world: the atomic, the oceanic, and the relational - symbolised respectively by billiard balls, the ocean, and the net. … The atomic, which is characteristic of contemporary Western society and has deep roots in Greek philosophy, sees reality in terms of its individual units. ...The human individual, conceived as an autonomous centre of knowing and willing, is the ultimate constituent of society. The oceanic view, on the other hand, sees all things ultimately merged into one entity which is

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[66]   *The Times*, Editorial, 27 January 1994.

[67]   'Unhappy Families', *The Economist*, 20 March 1993.

[68]   'Wealth of happiness may be in store', *The Guardian*, 8 November 1993.

[69]   Ibid.

[70]   Ibid.

[71]   In the business world, the last few years have seen books and articles written on 'relationship investing' (long term commitment by investment funds to a few companies in which significant shareholdings are held), 'relationship marketing' (developing individual customer relationships) and 'relationship fundraising' (developing to its full potential the relationship that exists between a charity and its supporter).

both the soul and all that exists. ... The third view sees everything as constituted by relationships, whether it is the material world or human society. This view … [is] the view of the Bible.[72]

A 'relational' view of humanity is in harmony with the distinctively Christian understanding of God as Trinity. Professor Macleod in an overview of trinitarian doctrine holds the traditional Western view that: 'We state the unity in terms of *ousia*. We state the distinctions in terms of *persona*.'[73] However, he stresses the importance of relationships within the Trinity, analogous though not identical to those between human individuals, characterised by intimacy and mutual delight.[74]

An understanding of the Trinity which finds the unity of God in the *perichoresis*[75] of the persons is still more emphatically relational. This approach has been developed by some, notably John Zizioulas, in such a way that a new ontology is developed: 'for God to be is to be in communion.'[76] The significance of this view of the Trinity is powerfully expressed in *The Forgotten Trinity*:

> What is implied by the teaching that God is what he is as three persons in relation? The chief lesson is that if God is essentially relational, then all being shares in relation: there is, that is to say, a relational content is built into the notion of being. To be is to exist in relation to other beings.[77]

The BCC Commission believed that the Trinity, first, brings into focus the inadequacies of individualism and collectivism, 'political systems which threaten either to set the person against all others or to swallow up everyone in an impersonal mass society.[78] The Trinity points towards the formation of a community of persons-in-relation which asserts 'both the importance of each particular person and the interdependence of all upon one another'.[79]

The traditional forms of the doctrine of the image of God in humankind tend to focus on some characteristic or quality found in the *individual* man or woman (e.g. reason, moral awareness, moral freedom). This century has seen more emphasis on 'relational' elements in theological writing on the *imago Dei*. Some writers argue for a catch-all approach in which, for example, metaphysical, intellectual, moral, emotional, volitional and relational elements all form part of the image.[80] For Professor Gunton, we share the divine

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[72]   L. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989), pp.171-2.

[73]   D. Macleod, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, 3.1, (Spring 1985), p.12.

[74]   See ibid., p.14.

[75]   The term *perichoresis* was introduced into trinitarian theology by John of Damascus. It speaks of the mutual indwelling of the divine persons, the unbegun and unending 'circulation' of divine life and energy, and the sharing in common of various attributes.

[76]   Basil of Caesarea, Letter 38 4, NPG 32 332a14f and 332d5 - 333e1, E.T. in M. Wiles and N. Santer, eds., *Documents in Early Christian Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 1975), pp.34-5, quoted in C.E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), p.9.

[77]   Report of BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today, *The Forgotten Trinity* (London: British Council of Churches, 1989), p.16.

[78]   Ibid., p.43.

[79]   Ibid., p.43.

[80]   See, e.g., G.R. Lewis and B.A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids,: Zondervan, 1990), vol. 2, pp.143-60.

image as persons through our relatedness to others and in this our being human consists.[81] Scripture nowhere defines the *imago Dei* and an unequivocal assertion that the image of God in humanity is specifically concerned with our capacity and need for relationship is debatable. Nonetheless, Scripture stresses this as an essential part of being human. Before the fall, God declared that it was 'not good for the man to be alone' (Gen.2:18).

When Jesus is asked to identify the greatest commandment he draws his hearer's attention to the commands to love God with all one's heart, soul and mind and to love one's neighbour as oneself. A person fulfils the most important ethical requirements of God if his or her relationships with God and fellow human beings are characterised by loving action and attitudes.

In the Old Testament the idea of *shalom,* summarising the 'all-rightness' of things, the dynamic peace of the community, fulfilment, wholeness, is at heart about right relationships between individuals, the community and God. Finally, the process of salvation may be seen as the restoration and healing of relationships: with God, with one another, with oneself, with the non-human creation.

In short, relationships are an essential category of analysis and a pre-eminent concern emerging from the biblical world-view.

The Scope for a Translation Strategy

Part I of this report identified some of the problems facing any attempt to communicate biblical principles, priorities and values in a modern plural secular society. We begin here by identifying four distinct types of communication strategy which Christians can adopt: proclamation, incarnation, dialogue and translation.

Proclamation is the confident declaration of Christian truth, in all its fullness. The full range of distinctively Christian concepts is available to be brought into play: the sovereignty of God, the sinfulness of humankind, the significance of the cross, the prospect of judgement. Proclamation rests on the conviction that Christianity provides the most adequate account of reality and should be confessed as such in the public realm.

Incarnation is the embodiment of biblical values or principles by a community of Christians or indeed by an individual within it. Incarnation involves verbal communication but goes beyond it. For Christians who believe that in Christ the Word was made flesh the potential of incarnation cannot be overemphasised. Nonetheless, our focus in this project is on public policy *debate* and accordingly, we say little further on incarnation.

Dialogue is a popular term used by different people to mean different things. Some see dialogue merely as the process of speaking and listening until each party has fully understood the other; others see this as

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[81]   See, e.g., C.E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, op. cit..

merely the first step essential to the main aim of the process, namely convincing the other party to adopt one's own view. There is undoubtedly a potential role for both kinds of dialogue.

Translation is the endeavour to convey, so far as possible, Christian truth in secular language using secular concepts. The language of the Bible is avoided and the biblical drama of creation - fall - redemption - glory is not mentioned. While proclamation aims to convince hearers that this drama is true and to act out its implications, translation is concerned with the implications alone. An influential exponent of this approach was R.H. Tawney. Professor Forrester comments:

> ....theological argument is not to be found in some of Tawney's most influential writings, notably *Equality* (1931). But this is a profoundly Christian book although there is hardly any *explicitly* Christian language or theological reference in it. He is appealing to what Orwell called 'the deep tinge of Christian feeling' which characterises the British people (or so Orwell believed) even if they have little explicit religious practice or belief. Writing in an increasingly secular society, Tawney feels the need to temper his argument to make it accessible to secular readers. The underlying vision and the basis for the values is acknowledged to be Christian but Tawney believes he can commend it in secular terms.[82]

It has been observed that there are three elements in any ethical theory: a perception of fundamental reality, a statement of ethical objectives and a motivation to act in an ethical manner.[83] A social or political vision has, or needs, elements analogous to these three. This raises the complex question of whether each is equally capable of adequate translation. At the risk of over-simplification, some comments are offered below.

The aspect of a biblical social vision, once formulated, that is easiest to translate is the statement of social objectives. Social objectives, by comparison with 'fundamental reality' and 'ethical motivation', are more tangible, practical, measurable matters. A secular world-view can accommodate and articulate such things.

Translation of the Christian perception of fundamental reality into secular terms replaces a three-dimensional world view with one that is only two-dimensional: the vertical Godward dimension is lost. Men and women can be described as relational but not, except in the most anodyne fashion, spiritual beings. The concept of human accountability to God is incapable of adequate translation; one can only speak of its human shadows - accountability here and now, notions of responsibility, the sense that future generations will evaluate our actions.

Turning to questions of motivation one finds, again, that real but not complete translation is possible. Christian ethics includes appeals to the divine order of creation and divine activity in redemption. A translation strategy commits one to using arguments which are, for example, intuitionist, consequentialist or rationalist. This *form* of argument is not wholly inimical to Christian ethics: the Bible occasionally contains an appeal to a person's intuition and often urges attention to the consequences of different possible courses of action. There

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[82] D.B. Forrester, *Christianity and the Future of Welfare* (London: Epworth Press, 1984), pp. 28-9. The work by R.H. Tawney is *Equality* (London: 1931).

[83] D. Hay, *Economics Today. A Christian Critique* (Leicester: Apollos, 1989,) pp. 60-1.

are grounds for believing that similar *conclusions* can be reached by Christians and non-Christians on some ethical issues even though each may have different reasons for reaching them. Oliver Barclay, discussing those ethical norms which Christians ground in creation, argues that these principles will 'commend themselves intuitively to the majority of people to a large degree', that 'they *are* the best [for society] and [Christians] can show enough evidence that that is true to use this as a reason for commending them for all men' and that if matters are 'thought out rationally the result will correspond to an impressive degree with basic Christian ethics'.[84] However, the fierce debate over abortion in which Christian arguments about the 'right to life' have made little or no headway against the 'right to choose' arguments warn us against excessive confidence in the power to persuade those who are not Christians.

A basic issue when selecting a communication strategy is the main objective. If, as a political activist, the objective is to influence the shape of policy translation is likely to be the tool for the job; if, as a church, the chosen objective is to bear witness to eternal truth, proclamation and dialogue will have a larger role to play. The closer one gets to Whitehall and Westminster and the closer one gets to matters of policy rather than simply principle, the more appropriate - indeed essential - is translation. Nonetheless, public policy debate would lose a vital component if the church's contribution was all through the medium of translation. The public arena needs to be reminded of the transcendent and modern culture needs theology as well as morality.

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[84]   See O. Barclay, 'The Nature of Christian Morality' in B.N. Kaye and G.J. Wenham, eds., *Law, Morality and the Bible* (Leicester: IVP, 1978), and in particular p.143 from which these quotations are drawn.

THE AIMS OF RELATIONISM

The 'relational thesis' articulates certain minimal claims about public policy and biblical concerns for society. However, whether one's ambition is to understand the world or to change it for the better, a general thesis is an inadequate tool. Relationism seeks to give specific expression of the general thesis and thereby provide an instrument capable of identifying a direction for social change which may be pursued if people are willing.

The Main Aims of Relationism

The development of Relationism is an attempt to pursue two broad aims. The first aim is to promote *human well-being* given a belief that there are fundamental flaws in both capitalist and socialist policy frameworks which prevent them from generating effective responses to resistant sociely and economic problems. The second aim is to enable Christians to offer an *effective contribution* in the political arena and in public debate which is rooted in *biblical reflection*.

These aims overlap at some points (e.g. biblical reflection guides a proper understanding of human wellbeing) but are in tension at others (e.g. effectiveness may mean making common cause with people who would reject some of the conclusions of biblical reflection). The contribution of these broad aims, and the way the tensions are resolved, significantly influences the shape of Relationism.

Associated Aims of Relationism

The broad aims of Relationism bring with them several associated or subsidary concerns. Thus, the concern for human well-being includes, for example, a desire to promote:

- a better understanding of the nature of human flourishing
- greater coherence between social and economic policy
- a social vision to inspire and guide social change.

The concern to Christians to make an effective contribution to politics and public debate which is at the same time rooted in biblical reflection includes, for example, a desire to see churches and Christian organisations:

- upholding the use of the Bible in any contribution
- providing, when appropriate, a distinctive contribution to public debate
- influencing the practical outcome of the debate
- shaping a gospel-friendly society.

For this to happen, solutions must be found to the problems discussed in Part I, namely that Christian contributions to public policy debate are often politically ineffective, lacking clear/agreed theological and biblical foundations, politically partisan, or without authority and intelligibility in a secular and plural society.

Arenas of Influence

Relationism reaches out potentially into several arenas of influence.

Changes in *public policy* may be encouraged, such as decentralisation of government, changes in the regulatory framework for financial institutions, greater emphasis on community-based penalties for offenders, in welfare provision a new balance between state, individuals and intermediate institutions, more favourable fiscal policy for married couples and so on. All these require legislation or government decisions or action by statutory bodies.

Changes in *public practice* may be encouraged, such as management styles which place more emphasis on the relationships involved in or affected by, for example, a business enterprise (e.g. employer-employee, worker-family, business-customer relationships) or a prison (e.g. staff-inmate, inmate-family relationships). Such developments might arise simply from a change in ethos but they might be accompanied, for example, by changes in corporate mission statements, new standards of 'best practice', or the use of 'relational audits'.[85]

Changes in *lifestyle* may be encouraged by a value system which challenges preoccupation with material acquisition, self-indulgence or mere self-expression. If developing and enriching relationships with others is treated as a key priority, significant implications for the use of time, energy and money follow: career ambitions may be reined in so that work does not become all-absorbing, time spent watching television may be reduced, efforts may be made to avoid 'grazing' on snacks and solitary dining to spend mealtimes with friends or family, involvement in community activities may grow.

Churches and many other groups are involved in *social service*, that is to say, voluntary, practical service to groups and individuals in need. Relational thinking might encourage greater attention to certain kinds of service (e.g. visiting elderly people living alone, giving to developing countries through sponsorship of individuals, families or identified groups). Most 'social service' involves a relationship between the provider and the recipient and it is often appreciated that how this relationship is handled is important. Relational thinking would underscore this awareness.

Our concern in this report is with public policy and the debate which surrounds it so little more will be said about the other arenas.

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[85] These are a new management tool being developed by the Relationships Foundation (see pp. [ ]) intended to help institutions guage the impact of their policies and practices on relationships relevant to, or affected by, the life of the institution.

Parameters of Relationism

There are a great many tasks for the church which Relationism does not address or addresses only partially and indirectly. This is true even if one restricts the discussion to those tasks which form part of the Christian community's social responsibilities.

Relationism does not seek to:

- provide a coherent body of Christian ethics;
- offer an academic critique of the intellectual contours of modernity;
- offer a comprehensive political theology or philosophy;
- address directly key problems of concern to Christians in areas such as bio-ethics and the environment
- exhaust the implications of biblical material for the social, political and economic arrangements of modern society.

Relationism does seek to:

- offer a much needed reforming dynamic to place relationships on the political agenda;
- underline the significance of an overall social vision and offer the first sketch of a biblically-rooted vision for society;
- highlight the institutional features of modern society which militate against the development of long-term, committed relationships;
- emphasise the role of relationships in enabling a society to maintain its reserves of obligation (see p. 56 below);
- enable longstanding problems to be looked at from a fresh perspective and to develop policy directions which help foster relationships and obligation;
- provide, at least in part, a language which Christians can use when participating in public debate on government policy.

THE R FACTOR: AN INITIAL VIEW OF RELATIONISM

The R Factor presents the fullest account of Relationism to date. However, it needs to be stressed, that Relationism as described in *The R Factor* is not a 'finished product'. The authors state in their preface:

> ..we do not regard this book as a definitive statement...we present it in the hope that
> others will be stimulated to expand and develop its ideas further.[86]

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[86]   M. Schluter and D. Lee, *The R Factor*, op. cit., p.4.

Indeed, as the first attempt to put flesh on the 'relational thesis' *The R Factor*'s account is, inevitably, flawed. Nonetheless, *The R Factor*'s account of Relationism affords a good introduction and in what follows we summarise some of the thinking integral to Relationism in terms both of formulating and communicating a biblical social vision. We then provide a summary of certain key concepts and proposals found in its account of Relationism.

Formulating a Biblical Social Vision

Relationism in *The R Factor* can be analysed at three levels: its focus, its structure and its morality. The book is written for a secular audience and no hint of the biblical roots of its ideas is given. Nonetheless, the Bible underlays the formation of these three elements of Relationism though functioning in a different way in each case.

The focus of Relationism on the importance of relationships can be derived from the basic doctrines and broad themes of the Bible. The Trinity, the social nature of humanity, salvation designed to restore us to relationship with God and experienced as part of the people of God all stress the significance of relationships for human flourishing. It was, we understand, reflection on a particular text, Matthew 22:37-40, which led Michael Schluter first to emphasise relationships as central to God's concerns for society's ordering. However, it is plain that this emphasis can be gleaned by giving the Bible only what we have called an indirect role.

The structure of Relationism - its key concepts, analytical tools and policy proposals - depends to some degree on a formative role for the Bible. Its concepts such as choice, obligation, commitment, constraint, encounter relationship, contingent relationship and Relational Base owe their origin to diffuse reflection on a wide range of biblical material accompanied by empirical observation. However, Old Testament texts, particularly Old Testament Israel's law, have provided a crucial and substantial source of biblical material shaping Relationism. Old Testament Israel's law is treated as a key resource for developing a Christian social ethic and as providing a *paradigm* from which societies today may draw ethical guidance. The analysis of giantism and mobility, the ideas of Relational proximity and the policy proposals for financial markets, corporate governance and political structure all find their roots in reflection on this paradigm.

The morality of Relationism refers to the reciprocity principle, its claim to afford a moral basis for a modern pluralist society, and its stress on relationships as the key to inter-generational transmission of moral values. This morality draws from the Bible, picking out the Golden Rule, building on the strands of biblical teaching which suggest that a basic morality is common to all humankind, and finding support for the notion that relationships (e.g. parents-child, pastor-congregation, friend-companion) can preserve, reinforce and/or and pass on a sense of morality (though the Bible is candid about the fact that bad relationships can have the opposite effect). However, the attempt to pave the way for Relationism to enjoy wide appeal has meant that the Bible's ethical teaching has not been drawn upon explicitly or in detail.

(i)   The Idea of a Paradigm

In C.J.H. Wright's exposition[87] of the paradigmatic approach to Old Testament material, the laws, institutions, history and traditions of Israel - all that goes to make up Israel's ethics - are studied from three angles: theological, social and economic. The three keystones of Old Testament ethics - God, Israel, and the land - once in place, allow a measure of organisational coherence to be brought to the study of specific laws or institutions. Each of these is examined in its original context and its relevance and contribution to the overall structure and life of Israel (as intended by God) assessed. The whole framework, and the resulting principles, are, it is argued, to be applied to our social ethics; the individual item is evaluated from the function it has within the wider framework of Old Testament life and thought.

These aspects of the Old Testament are thus taken as a *paradigm* which can legitimately be brought to bear on issues of our contemporary world. A paradigm is a particular case used to illustrate a general principle. It functions as a pattern for other cases where details and contexts vary, but a basic principle remains unchanged.[88]   When the social life of Israel is taken as paradigmatic the fact that our circumstances and context differ greatly is recognised. Nonetheless, study of the social life of Old Testament Israel enables us to form objectives and to initiate action in our day which will recognisably display the shape of the Old Testament paradigm.

Wright justifies the use of Old Testament Israel as a paradigm for Christian social ethics by reference to the mission of Israel. The Old Testament, it is argued, asserts that part of God's purpose in bringing the nation of Israel into existence and in ordering their social life was in order to make visible His moral requirements on the rest of the nations. Israel as a nation were to be a priesthood (Ex. 19:6), and to represent God's word and ways to the nations. If as they lived out the quality of national and social life demanded by the law they were about to receive, with its great chords of freedom, justice, love and compassion, they would function as God's priesthood.

When establishing the laws by which Israel was to live God was unavoidably expressing His character and concerns. So the laws reflect not only the characteristics of a predominantly agricultural, kin-based society but also ethical illumination. While revelation is progressive and a cultural gap must be negotiated, it is possible to see Israel, particularly in its ideals, as a 'case study' revealing the impact of divine activity and instruction on a society. This notion of Old Testament Israel as a 'case study' becomes all the more relevant in the context of a theological framework which acknowledges continuing relevance for the law of the Old Testament.

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[87]   The key exposition of his approach is C.J.H. Wright, *Living as the People of God* (Leicester: IVP, 1983). A shorter exposition may be found in 'The Use of the Bible in Social Ethics', *Transformation*, 1.1, Jan./Apr. 1984, pp.11-20.

[88]   The analogy used by Wright is that in books of French grammar the verb *parler* is used to illustrate the conjugation of most other verbs ending in *-er* . It is learned as a pattern verb which is then applied to other verbs.

(ii)   *The Focus on Relationships*

Relationism is based on the view that not only is there an Old Testament paradigm to learn from but also that the paradigm has an integrating focus in the idea of love - love to God and neighbour. In an exchange in Matthew's gospel a lawyer asks Jesus which is the greatest commandment. Jesus replies:

> 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (Matt. 22:37-40)

Jesus seems to be saying that the instruction of 'the Law and the Prophets' is the outworking of the two great commandments. The way, therefore, to understand the purpose of particular laws is to try to understand how they were intended to enable the people of Israel better to love God and one another.

This emphasis on love leads, it is suggested, to a focus on relationships. How did a particular law foster better 'relationships' between people in Israel? How does this pre-eminent concern add to our understanding of Israel's institutional structure and societal arrangements?

This can be illustrated by reference to the Jubilee land laws (Lv. 25) which provide that every fiftieth year, the Year of Jubilee, each extended family is to return to its own land. In the original division of the land each tribe and each 'clan'[89] had received an area of land: the effect of the Jubilee land laws was to ensure that the families had an inalienable right to a share in the land. Scholars debate whether the right of the families was to a particular plot of land or to an appropriate share in the clan's land. In either case, the entitlement was to a plot of land in a particular part of Israel. This is emphasised by the story of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21), in which Naboth refuses to relinquish *his family's land* even in exchange for 'a better vineyard' (v.2).

A 'relational' understanding of the Jubilee system, while not overlooking its implications for wealth distribution, places the emphasis elsewhere. A key feature of the laws is that they ensured the reconstitution of the 'clan' in one physical space.   Each person is brought back into contact with his roots: the key to his security, identity and belonging. In the language of *The R Factor* 'relational proximity' is re-established.

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89   The word 'clan' has been placed in inverted commas because anthropologists use the word to refer to an exogamous kin group. Israelite 'clans' did not prohibit intra-'clan' marriages and so the term is being used in a slightly different sense than is customary.

(iii) Features of the Paradigm

Israel's law acted as an 'ideal' never fully realised by the people of Israel. While the implications of this failure must be heeded, it is the 'ideal vision' which has most significance for our reflection on biblical principles to inform a vision for society. We present below thumbnail sketch of some key features of the paradigm afforded by the law and life of Old Testament Israel. This material draws up on several dozen Jubilee Centre papers on the contours of Old Testament Israel understood as a 'paradigm' society as well as a number of other texts.[90] Key features include:

(1)   *'Place' as the Key to Community*: The Jubilee legislation implied that each individual and family was to have a permanent association with a particular local area.[91] Land was allocated by tribe, then by clan, then by household.[92] Thus around each household would be neighbouring households linked not only by physical proximity but also by kinship ties. The permanence of the landholding created both the incentive and the opportunity for enduring relationships and strong community. The link with a particular location meant that place could come to represent identity, belonging, community, roots: a place linking each household with its past, its future and its neighbours.

(2)   *Shared Access to Economic Resources*: Land, the principal economic asset, was distributed among the people of Israel as widely and as equitably as possible. Since Palestine has a diverse geography, it was impossible for each family to have the *same* but each family was allocated *enough* for economic viability. Old Testament Israel's economic life involved in principle a free market in goods and services (though as a kin-based society its notion of free market would have differed from our own) but significantly the markets for factors of production (land, labour and capital) operated under direct or indirect restrictions (namely the Jubilee legislation and the ban on interest).

(3)   *Welfare Provision through Family Care, Community Responsibility and Individual Generosity*: The Old Testament arrangements for bringing about a minimal level of material provision begin with the distribution of land to every family group and the expectation that family members will work to support themselves but provides a safety net through land redemption procedures (where a kinsman redeems land an impoverished relative has had to sell), work as a hired labourer, gleaning privileges for the poor, interest free loans and debt release.[93] These arrangements were supervised by

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90   Helpful overviews include: R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London: Danton, Longman & Todd, 1973) and C.J.H. Wright, *Living as the People of God*, op. cit., and C.J.H. Wright, *God's People in God's Lan*d. *Family Land and Property in the Old Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1990). Space considerations preclude the listing of a fuller bibliography.

91   See, e.g., Lv. 25:8-34, Num. 27:1-11, 36:1-13, 1 Kings 21.

92   See, e.g., Lv. 25:13, Josh.14-22. There is a debate about whether land was owned primarily at the clan level or the household level. If the inalienable land ownership rights were at the clan level, the implication is that people would return at the Jubilee to their clan's land and the clan elders would redistribute that land equitably among the households of the clan.

93   See, e.g, Lv. 19:9-10, Lv. 25:25-28, 35-43, Deut. 15: 1-11.

decentralised administration through community elders. Promoting the potential for self-reliance and providing a network of interdependence catch the flavour of these arrangements.

(4)   Devolution of Political Power: The king was under the law and under limits intended to restrict his military power and economic muscle.[94] The tribal system combined with the land allocation arrangements created a confederation of regions. Local elders were responsible for the affairs of the local community and also served as a key judicial forum.[95] In many senses this last and lowest tier was the most significant level of government. The sense that every Israelite was a 'brother Israelite' and the even distribution of economic resources created resistance to any notion of a ruling oligarchy or plutocracy.

(5)   Financial Arrangements - Interest-Free Lending and Debt Remission: Commercial lending at interest was prohibited.[96] Gifts and interest free loans to the poor and needy were encouraged; the cancellation of debts every seventh year removed the prospect of lifelong indebtedness; nonetheless, the hazards associated with borrowing and lending are not ignored in Old Testament Israel's Wisdom literature.[97] The provision of finance for commercial purposes such as investment in infrastructure (e.g. irrigation channels), productive livestock (e.g. oxen) and equipment (e.g. ploughs) may often have been obviated by communal enterprise or shared ownership. If finance was provided, provider and recipient were linked not simply by a cash nexus but, typically, by kinship ties and certainly some 'relational nexus'. The provider of finance might participate on a profit-sharing basis in the enterprise or, given the principle of reciprocity in traditional societies under which a person helped by another acknowledges a social debt to give help in return, might anticipate some future unspecified benefit.[98]

(6)   Criminal Justice - Retribution, Reparation and Reintegration:[99] The legal system was characterised by community jurisdiction (the court of elders), community responsibility and community-based penalties (such as restitution through 'unpaid' labour or corporal punishment).[100] Principles at work in shaping forms of punishment included retribution (cf. the *lex talionis*), restitution (e.g. of stolen property) and, normally, the ultimate goal of reintegration into society.[101] While certain

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94   See Deut. 17:14-20.
95   See, e.g., Deut. 21:1-9, 18-21, Ruth 4, Job 29:7.
96   Exod. 22:25, Lv. 25:36-7, Deut. 23:19.
97   See, e.g., Deut. 15:1-11, Prov. 22:7, 26-7. A useful paper exploring biblical teaching on interest, the reflection of the church over the ages, and contemporary application is P. Mills, *Interest in Interest. The Old Testament Ban on Interest and its Implications for Today* (Cambridge: Jubilee Centre, 1989).
98   See, e.g., S.J. Osgood, *Early Israelite Society and the Place of the Poor and the Needy: Background to the Message of the Eighth Century Prophets*, a Ph.D. thesis submitted to University of Manchester in May 1992, chapter 3.
99   This account is based on material in the appendix to *Relational Justice: A New Approach to Penal Reform - An Interim Report* (Cambridge: Jubilee Policy Group, December 1992).
100   See, e.g., Lv. 5:1, Deut. 21:18-21, 25:1-3.
101   See, e.g., Ex. 21:23-7, 22:1-4. The goal of reintegration is implicit in, for example, the slender use of the death penalty relative to neighbouring cultures and that the offender proved guilty is still regarded as a 'brother' (e.g. Deut. 25:3).

serious crimes led to removal from the community (by execution, exile or excommunication) most offenders were dealt with in the community (prisons are conspicuous by their absence) and thereafter received back into the community with no loss of rights or privileges.[102]

(iv)   Culture, Morality, Lifestyle, Institutions

The quality of relationships in a society is affected by a host of factors including cultural patterns, moral precepts, lifestyle choices, intellectual convictions, *and* the structure, functions and operation of economic, social and political institutions. 'Institutions' is used in a wide sense to include, for example, phenomena such as the free market.

Relationism addresses in a broad brush way culture, morality, lifestyle choices and (some) intellectual convictions: individualism and materialism need to be replaced by a prior, even pre-eminent, concern for the fostering of good human relationships; society must strike an appropriate balance between 'choice' (people's freedom to do as they wish) and 'obligation' (people's responsibility to others); the principle of 'do as you would be done by' should be the cornerstone of our morality; a decision to forgo promotion but stay in the same locality may often be the sanest choice as existing relationships can then be deepened rather than stretched or severed.

However, much of the *detailed* content of Relationism is directed at the impact of social, economic and political institutions, structures and arrangements on the capacity of people to develop and maintain their relationships. This focus dovetails with the concern to contribute to public *policy* debate: government policy can more readily influence these aspects of society's life than the other aspects we have mentioned.

A recent edition of *Transformation* addressed the theme of 'The Bible, Truth and Modernity'.[103] The introductory article by Christopher Sugden reports that at the Consultation of the Lausanne Theology Working Group in June 1993 on the topic of 'Christianity and Modern Culture' it was emphasised that:

> ...Enlightenment/Modern ideas [have] found expression in three institutions: Capitalism, which is held to be the only form a rational economy can take; the modern bureaucratic state, and the knowledge industry of universities and the media which promote scepticism and humanism.[104]

In the same edition, Os Guinness argues that the origins of Modernity, which replaces "'top-down God-centred" living with "bottom-up" human-centred living',[105] can be traced in two main ways. One focuses on the evolution of ideas examining the seventeenth century scientific revolution, the eighteenth century Enlightenment, the nineteenth century romantic movement and the twentieth century modernist and post-

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102   See, e.g., Deut.19:1-13, Num. 15:30 and footnote 42.
103   *Transformation*, 10.4 (Oct./Dec.1993).
104   C. Sugden, 'Modernity, Postmodernity and the Gospel', in *Transformation*, 10.4 (Oct./Dec. 1993), p.1.
105   O. Guinness, 'Mission Modernity', *Transformation*, 10.4 (Oct./Dec. 1993), p.5.

modernist movements. The other focuses on social change examining the structural and institutional developments which arose from the emergence of capitalism in the late Middle Ages and thereafter, the technological and industrial revolution in the eighteenth century and the communications revolution in the twentieth century.

Relationism addresses the institutional expressions of modernity as: capitalism, the bureaucratic state and the knowledge industry (the first two more than the last). In a significant measure, Relationism operates without directly challenging certain important philosophical features of modernity such as pluralism and relativism. Pluralism affirms the validity of many, or even all, religious opinions. Relationism is more readily integrated with Christianity than other religions but any declaration that, for example, Islam, Hinduism, atheism are mistaken faith-commitments is deliberately omitted. Relationism proffers no explicit opinion on the existence and identity of God or the characteristics of the cosmos. Neither, and it is an important point, does capitalism. Relationism is a tool for social involvement not Christian apologetic. It is worth saying that Relationism is a response to the existence of plural society which affirms the legitimacy of differing views being articulated and acknowledged in the public arena. Relativism denies the existence of any moral absolutes. While Relationism does not offer a coherent ethical theory its moral content has affinities with natural law reasoning (we are social beings so our values should assist rather than undermine our common life), a personalist ethic (the key criterion is the perceived impact on the quality of relationships) and consequentialist ethics (long-term, committed relationships are better for the wellbeing of the people involved). Such an ethical approach is not capable of defining or generating moral absolutes in any strict sense.

Relationism offers, however, some implicit challenges to the commanding heights of modernity's intellectual landscape. At present, the challenge is no more than implicit because Relationism is pragmatic in character (focused on improving public policy) and aims at developing consensus on policy issues (and prefers not to alienate people by challenging their opinions on more metaphysical matters).

Communicating a Biblical Social Vision

In modern, plural society in which respect for the church and the Bible has been waning for decades, there is a vital need to develop effective methods of communicating biblical values and principles to a secular audience. The language of relationships provides a vibrant and versatile common ground between Christians and non-Christians. Christians can use and develop this 'language' to articulate crucial elements of a biblical perspective to others of different faiths or none.

Relationism was developed as an attempt to offer the 'big new idea' to the political debate - a framework for reflection on social and economic policy able to compete with capitalism and socialism in the marketplace of ideas. That is certainly beyond its reach at the moment. One day, perhaps, Relationism will be able to compete as an 'ism' of that kind, but, as Part III indicates, it may prove more appropriate for Relationism to make its contribution in other ways. In the meantime, it is easier to see Relationism having an impact as a transforming influence on existing schools of thought. Relationism offers a set of connected concepts and

analytical tools used for both diagnosis of our present social condition and a prescription for a better one. Further, it offers a new criterion by which public policy can be evaluated. A review of the policies of every government department could be made and questions asked. 'What impact does this department's policies have on human relationships?', 'What policy changes can be introduced which would assist the flourishing of human relationships?' Public policy and popular opinion do not always coincide but the latter influences the former and reduced to the most popular level Relationism seeks to sponsor a new political buzz-word: 'Relationships'.

Key Concepts in *The R Factor*

The following paragraphs summarise the key concepts in *The R Factor* and the main themes of its critique of contemporary Western society.

(i)   The Importance of Relationships

Relationism argues that human relationships have *inherent* importance and *instrumental* significance. Their inherent importance stems from the fact that humankind is made to relate. Men and women are social beings and relationships are crucial to personal identity and well-being. In contrast to the implicit claims of individualism and materialism, two of the dominant notions of the 20th century, people cannot find fulfilment in themselves alone or in material prosperity alone. Their instrumental significance lies in their capacity to foster a sense of 'obligation' to others. Such obligation is a social resource that pays dividends at personal, social and economic levels. Relationism argues that public policy should seek, so far as it can, to promote good relationships for both the reasons set out above.

(ii)   Encounter Relationships and Contingent Relationships

The R Factor distinguishes between encounter and contingent relationships. An 'encounter relationship' is a 'connection between two individuals which is based on some degree of unmediated contact'.[106] The basic idea is that encounter involves two people who *meet* each other and have therefore begun to get to know each other. There is, of course, 'plenty of room for disagreement about whether a taxi driver and the passenger he chats to between Holborn and Bank can truly be said to have encountered one another'.[107] However, the basic idea is plain. A contingent relationship, by contrast, is 'a connection of two individuals who may have no knowledge of one another but are, none the less, linked through social, political, and economic institutions...'.[108] 'The patterns of contingent relationships in a high-income society are extremely complex.'[109] People can have a major impact on other people, with no conscious intention of doing so, by the medium of such contingent relationships.

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[106]   Ibid., Glossary, p.274.
[107]   Ibid., p.7.
[108]   Ibid., Glossary, pp.273-4.
[109]   Ibid., p.7.

(iii)   Choice and Obligation

At the heart of *The R Factor* is the thesis that a healthy society must find an appropriate balance between 'choice' (my freedom to do as I wish) and 'obligation' (my responsibility to others) and that in the West we have for too long promoted 'choice' without paying proper attention to the nurture of 'obligation'.

Obligation, however, is an essential element in society's effective and humane operation and a crucial ingredient in the formation of community. It is 'obligation' which inspires unpaid carers to devote time and care to those unable to care for themselves. Obligation, in the form of honesty, enhances economic efficiency by reducing expenditure on security services, cutting down legal documentation for transactions and reducing the incidence of litigation.

The willingness to fulfil obligations (moral, contractual, marital, etc.) to others springs from 'commitment' and 'constraint'. By 'commitment' is meant the inner conviction that makes fulfilment of an obligation a natural reflex, or at least the preferred course of action, because we believe the obligation to be morally binding. By 'constraint' is meant the conclusion that failure to fulfil a particular objective would not be in our interest because such failure would or might lead to censure by others, either through the enforcement of formal regulations (e.g. dismissal, imprisonment) or expression of social disapproval (e.g. criticism, ostracism).

More than this, The *R Factor* argues that relationships, or at least those of a particular quality and potency, are the seedbed of commitment, constraint and thus obligation. Relationships involving 'encounter' - direct communication with another person - are important throughout life in this regard. However, they have a special significance in the early years of a person's life and in the primary group of the 'family'. The individual's interpersonal skills, moral awareness, sense of self-esteem and general emotional stability depend in a large measure on his or her relationships.

(iv)   Relational Base

The term 'Relational Base' is defined as the 'cluster of relationships surrounding the individual from birth to death (the most significant usually being found in the primary group or linking him or her to local institutions) which collectively govern personality development and moral education, and provide psychological stability and emotional support.'[110] The relationships in a person's Relational Base include both encounter relationships and contingent relationships. However, the 'presence of encounter relationships will always be critical in maintaining [a person's] wellbeing'.[111] Naturally, a person's Relational Base is changing all the time as some relationships become more significant or intimate and others less so. The concept of Relational Base is not just 'family values under a new name'.[112] A 'family is an arrangement of relationships...it is the relationships that matter, and not the family *per se*'.[113] Nonetheless, while the family as an institution 'can take an enormous

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110   Ibid., Glossary, p.276.
111   Ibid., p.53.
112   Ibid., p.54.
113   Ibid., pp.54-5.

variety of forms, 'the Relational instincts and social forces surrounding the process of reproduction seem almost always to anchor it in a nucleus of mother-father-child'.[114]

(v)   The Reciprocity Principle

If public policy is to put promoting 'good relationships' on the agenda, a definition of 'good' is needed. Whether a relationship is 'good' has emotional, functional and moral dimensions. The moral dimension means that 'a relationship can be judged good or bad not only by how the partners feel...but by how well they treat each other.'[115] The difficulty of finding a secure foundation for morality and a consensus on what represents the morally 'good' is acknowledged to be problematic. However, the view is expressed that:

> At least in cultures influenced by the Judaeo-Christian tradition (and despite the trend to moral and cultural pluralism), there is still widespread agreement on values like fair play, trustworthiness, honesty, respect for dignity, honour, courtesy, commitment, reliability and altruism: in summary, for the subtle dictum of 'doing as you would be done by'.[116]

This dictum is referred to as the 'reciprocity principle' and serves as a 'powerful rallying point'[117] for public discussion of values.

(vi)   Relational Proximity

The potential for 'relational proximity' - closeness in relationships - is enhanced where the following circumstances are at work:

(a)   *directness* - face-to-face contact between people;

(b)   *continuity* - relationships continuing over significant periods of time;

(c)   *multiplexity* - people in relationships across more than one dimension
(e.g. work and sports club);

(d)   *parity* - people or organisations having comparable levels of power in the relationship;

(e)   *commonality* - people having shared purposes or interests in common.

Relational proximity does not itself embody the obligation - or morality - central to a good relationship. Indeed, ultimately it does not account for our willingness - our personal commitment - to fulfil those obligations. Obligation and commitment are derived in the final analysis from an underlying ethos which is philosophical, or metaphysical, in nature. Relational proximity is a midwife, not a mother. Moral values, or

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114   Ibid., p.55.
115   Ibid., p.58.
116   Ibid., p.59.
117   Ibid., p.59.

at least the force with which they are felt, are eroded when people's contacts with others are typically indirect, infrequent, impermanent It is easier to steal £20 from a faulty cash dispenser than a lifelong neighbour. Relational proximity helps to keep in good order the relationships by which obligation and commitment are cultivated, reinforced, and safely transferred from one generation to the next.

Relationships Under Pressure

In *The R Factor* some of the important ways in which economic, structural and cultural features of modern Western society have adversely affected the ease with which people can build and maintain good relationships.

(i)   Giantism

There are, it is argued, links between the availability of debt finance, the growth of firm size and the built-in advantages of large corporations in the market place. Large companies and plants differ in relational terms from small companies and plants: the latter enjoy far greater relational proximity. The typical response to giantism is that another giant, the government, should regulate the corporate giants: rarely is it asked whether giantism is a desirable trait. The key problem arising from giantism is *power imbalance* - or lack of parity. The major power bases - government, business and media - are identified. Each relies on, influences and contains the others. We need the strength and the will to hold the powerful accountable for their actions (to contain giantism); better still, we should make power more diffuse (to tackle giantism head on).

(ii)   Mobility

'Mobility is choice drawn on a map'. Mobility in its modern form is a new phenomenon. Tribal migration in previous eras involved the movement of large groups: physical location changed but social relations remained. Today mobility is by individuals or the nuclear family, often at the behest of an employer, and relational links with others are stretched or snapped. Many residential zones today are as a result *transit camps* - temporary stopping points in a personal migration. Other residential zones are *detention areas* - ghettos for the poor and disadvantaged who cannot move out. Neither can create community satisfactorily.

Some communitarian theorists argue for 'belonging' or 'association' founded on voluntarism not territory. However, such associations rarely generate 'obligation'. Modern communications allow contact between people over great distances but, at the same time, establish conditions in which relatively low level of relational proximity become the norm (e.g. telephones take the place of visits but cannot ever fully substitute for them). Ultimately, it is argued there is a link between 'community', 'obligation' and 'place' because geographical proximity facilitates relational proximity.

(iii)   Consumerism

Consumerism involves an ethos that always invites us to extend our choices not our responsibilities. This ethos can have costs. 'Debt' becomes 'credit' and this euphemism takes away the reluctance to borrow. Naturally, the idea of taking the 'waiting out of wanting' appeals - until repayments cannot be met. Extending consumer

choice for those who wish to shop on Sunday will restrict choice for poorer consumers: by raising prices in the short run and causing some small local shops to shut in the long run. We have already referred *After the Gold Rush* and its argument that 'consumer capitalism' and rising material prosperity has brought growing unease, deepening divisions in society and new threats to economic and social stability.[118]

(iv)   Political, Economic and Social Ideals

The R Factor argues that there is a tension between our political, economic and social ideas. In politics we champion 'choice' in the form of democracy; in economics, we want consumer 'choice' made possible by economic growth. But in our social ideals we long for justice, association and some sort of equality. The fact that the first two and the last are in tension at points should give us pause for thought: does our system of political economy need adjustment?

Relationism: Policy Implications

Two basic propositions undergird any policy programme put forward to promote Relationism:

(i)   the creation of a relational society is the proper object of social policy;

(ii)   while obligation is difficult for public policy directly to influence, relational proximity can be fostered by public policy initiatives affecting the shape of the social and economic superstructure and this indirectly fosters increased obligation.

Relationism is 'not another applicant for the widely advertised vacancy of the political middle-ground'.[119] It is not *merely* a new attempt to define the proper balance between a free market and government intervention, between the ideals of liberty and equality. It advocates that relationships should become an issue of public policy. Many might construe this as implying, for example, tax and welfare changes to favour marriage over cohabitation, more conservative sex education and tougher divorce laws. This is to mistake the main focus of Relationism which is 'to confront the social and economic forces that make relationships hard to sustain and make us think in terms of choice rather than obligation.'[120] Thus, ultimately, a Relational society demands a Relational economy and a Relational democracy.

Thus, in the economic sphere *The R Factor* advocates the development of a 'Relational Market Economy' which would:

-          accommodate competition;
-          pursue sustainable economic growth; and

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118   S. Lansley, *After the Gold Rush*, op. cit..
119   M. Schluter and D. Lee, *The R Factor*, op. cit., p.177.
120   Ibid., pp.187-8.

- affirm the necessity of the private (i.e. non-state) ownership of property.[121]

The Relational Market Economy favours, as its name implies, a market-based economy but one with the harsh edges tempered by, e.g., concern for the environment. 'Marxist and socialist models based on collective ownership' are rejected because they 'have been shown to work at best badly, and at worst disastrously'.[122] The distinctive feature of the Relational Market Economy is that it aims to achieve the aims set out above 'within structures that facilitate rather than undermine relational proximity'.[123]

The R Factor goes on to generate ideas for implementing proRelational change: in the economic sphere, for example, promoting regional financial institutions, reducing the role played by debt finance, restraining mergers and takeovers, developing alternative models of corporate governance; in the political sphere, promoting decentralisation and federalism; in criminal justice policy, more attention to the relationship between victim and offender with reparation playing a larger role; in welfare policy, greater emphasis on facilitating home ownership, allowing regional and local welfare authorities to establish priorities and criteria for welfare provision (allowing claimants to deal with people rather than a rulebook). Policy change of this kind cannot create good relationships but it can help create conditions in which they are easier to achieve.

RELATIONISM IN PRACTICE

We have concentrated for several pages on Relationism as presented in *The R Factor*. The Jubilee Policy Group has been involved in three projects seeking to apply 'relational thinking' which reveal the flexibility with which Relationism is deployed in practice and sheds some light on how it might develop. The largest has been a three year project, carried out with Prison Fellowship, entitled 'Relational Justice: A New Approach to Penal Reform'; in 1993, a joint project with CARE known as the Famliy Policy Initiative ('FPI') took the form of an initial one-year feasibility study; finally, a feasibility study to assess the potential benefits of 'relational business audits' with a particular focus on work/family conflicts is soon to get underway.

Relational Justice

In the Relational Justice project the significance of flourishing relationships for human wellbeing and patterns found in Old Testament Israel's law and practice informed the development of Relational Justice. Crime is seen primarily as a violation of relationships and only secondarily an offence against the state. The themes of retribution, reparation, reintegration of offenders into the community, community responsibility for and participation in the judicial process - all found in the Pentateuch - are taken up by Relational Justice. Selected parallels exist between the ideas of Relational Justice and both God's activity in Christ on the cross and the practice of church discipline in New Testament times, as evidenced in Paul's letters to the Corinthians.

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[121]   Ibid., pp.195-6.
[122]   Ibid., p.196.
[123]   Ibid., p.197.

The development of Relational Justice has involved sustained interaction with mainstream secular theory and practice with regard to criminal justice issues. The nature of justice has been considered at a philosophical level as well as criminal justice policy at a pragmatic level. The key ideas in *The R Factor* of choice and obligation, encounter and contingent relationships, relational base, relational proximity and the reciprocity principle played a limited, but not insignificant, role. The project has illustrated the fact that when the focus of attention turns to a specific area of society's life, Relationism needs to draw extensively on conceptual ingredients from sources beyond the schema in *The R Factor*. However, a process of selection and, often, reshaping occurs as ideas are adopted and incorporated. It is not (except as a backdrop or by implication) a biblical vision for society which is promoted; on the other hand, such a vision (however imperfectly conceived) acted as the impetus for initiating the Relational Justice project. Relational Justice does not purport to offer a 'meta-narrative' articulating a definitive approach to criminal justice policy. *The R Factor* makes a simple appeal to different communities (e.g. secular, Muslim, Christian) to find common ground in relational thinking. Expositions of Relational Justice are a little more candid about drawing upon a Judaeo-Christian tradition of enquiry but the emphasis on seeking common ground remains. It serves as a perspective from which old problems may be seen in a particular, sometimes new, light.

It offers a reforming dynamic, providing a rationale for a range of policy measures. Local, multi-agency partnerships to promote a range of crime prevention measures would be encouraged. Mediation and reparation schemes would be given an enhanced role, creating opportunities where appropriate for constructive communication between victims and offenders and compensation by offenders to victims. In the Probation Service a key aim would be to maintain, in the face of financial pressures, the traditional role of the Probation Officer to 'supervise, assist, advise and befriend' probationers. More selective use of custodial sentences and greater use of community-based penalties would be favoured. Prisons will remain vital but, as Lord Woolf advocated, 'community prisons' to be 'sited within reasonable proximity to, and having close connections with, the community with which the prisoners they hold have their closest links' should be a key feature of any prison building programme.[124]

The language of 'relationships', as novel terminology and not perceived as intellectually partisan in the way religious language is, has undoubtedly assisted the process of gathering interest in the ideas in the various branches of the criminal justice system and the Home Office. However, its appeal in several quarters has depended in part on fortunate timing: a number of observers and practitioners disenchanted with prevailing trends welcomed the prospect of a counterbalance to mere retributivism, the dominance of a management ethos, and the pre-occupation with market-testing the privatisation of prisons.

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[124] Lord Justice Woolf and Judge Stephen Tumim, *Prison Disturbances April 1990* (London: HMSO, Cm. 1456, 1991), para. 11.49.

A publication bringing together Christian and non-Christian contributors, including two senior academics, a High Court Judge, a prison governor, two chief probation officers, will seek to summarise the ideas of Relational Justice is due to be issued next month.[125] One chapter will examine understandings of justice in the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity and Islam and provide a preliminary assessment of the compatibility of these perspectives and the ideas of Relational Justice.

The Scottish Prison Service has commissioned a project to develop a methodology to assess, through quantitative and qualitative data, the characteristics and quality of relationships within prisons. Relational proximity is acting as the organising idea for the gathering of quantitative data. The use of 'relational prison audits' will, it is hoped, encourage the employment of human and financial resources in a way which is taken into account relational concerns, to reduce some of the negative aspects of a custodial sentense and to help prepare prisoners for eventual release. The potential for a significant impact on the management of prisons exists.

Family Policy Initiative

The initial year of the Family Policy Initiative ('FPI') aimed (i) to confirm the need for a new initiative which could provide regular commentary on family policy issues in consultation with a range of voluntary organisations working with families and (ii) to assess the feasibility of drawing together on the same platform organisations with different perspectives and agendas, some with a specific Christian value base and some with no religious affiliation. Initial discussions with the different 'family organisations' suggested that finding common ground would be well nigh impossible. The idea of promoting marriage as a social norm was keenly supported by some and forcefully resisted by others. The main achievement of the FPI was persuading a large number of these family organisations with different clients (e.g. lone parents, the elderly, children) to agree that the primary goal of public policy with regard to families should be strengthening long term stable committed relationships in families. The basis and benefits of this agreement were: awareness of a growing consensus among psychologists that stable family life provides the best environment for human development; its focus on the quality of family life rather than family structure opening, perhaps, potential for dialogue across the Left-Right divide; the opportunity to introduce some steps towards consensus on value judgments in a field of policy marked by sharp conflicts in values and, at times, a reluctance to express value judgments; and the scope for reducing the degree of family breakdown and the associated cost to the public purse. An emphasis on the quality of human relationships sought to challenge preoccupation in policy debate on the material and financial needs of families.

Funding is now being sought to establish a pilot scheme under which the FPI would regularly prepare and circulate Family Impact Statements which would, in each case, be endorsed by some or all of the family organisations associated with the FPI. The aim would be: to focus policy makers and media attention on the

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[125] J. Burnside, N. Baker & M. Schluter, (eds.) *Relational Justice. Repairing the Breach* (Winchester: Waterside Press). Due to be published in November 1994

quality of family relationships and what public policy can do to sustain stable family life; to recommend changes in public policy and practice in favour of strengthening long term family commitment; to build the case for coherence in family policy across different Government departments; to argue for long-term commitment in family relationships; to facilitate co-operation between organisations and interest groups from different perspectives and thereby enhance the credibility of the statements; to provide a flexible mechanism able both to develop long-term thinking on underlying issues and respond within weeks to specific political initiatives.

Observations

Both these projects have made a minor contribution to public policy debate, neither has yet made any impact on public policy. However, the development of 'relational prision audits' in the Scottish Prison Service holds out promise of potential change in prisons within 2-3 years if all went well. The Family Impact Statements, if launched, might reasonably expect to have some influence within, say, a decade if only because of the involvement of a significant number and range of family organisations.

These thumbnail sketches illustrate that 'relational thinking' is, certainly at present, more readily applied and promoted in the context of individual policy areas than as an overarching schema of thought. The notion of Relationism as an alternative to capitalism and socialism, individualism and collectivism, has not been articulated as a major feature; it has been at most a minor supporting role in promoting the ideas of Relational Justice and the FPI.

The two projects illustrate the advantages of 'relational' language for the building of co-operation and coalitions. The end result may not be all that a Christian would like, ideally, to see but a strong case can be made that more can be achieved in practical terms by this route than by dogmatic assertion of a distinctively Christian approach. The two projects also suggest that there is scope for combining 'relational' language with explicit identification of its Christian roots. In both projects, people were made aware that the sponsoring organisation(s) were Christian based but, for various reasons, not least institutionalisation of Christianity in prisons through the Chaplaincy to HM Prisons, it has been possible to give Christian ideas a slightly higher profile in the Relational Justice project.

In *The R Factor* the development of a relational society was closely linked to the idea of fostering greater relational proximity; in the Relational Justice project, the idea of restoring the damage done by crime to relationships and punishing in ways that damaged as little as possible, perhaps even helped strengthen, relationships; in the FPI the emphasis was on long-term, stable, committed relationships. The 'relational goal' in each context was different. Relationism is a flexible tool - and hard to pin down. This has obvious disadvantages but does bring advantages as well by making versatility possible. A model or tool for public policy engagement does not need the same degree of precision as a scientific theory.

PART III

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE POTENTIAL OF RELATIONISM

Part III seeks to assess the potential of Relationism to promote the influence of biblical ideas and priorities in the public policy arena. The strategy, content and future development of Relationism are considered in turn.

Part II of this report presented Relationism as an attempt to respond to the problems of formulating and communicating a biblical perspective on public policy issues. Our task now is to assess the potential of Relationism as a means of enabling the Bible to make an appropriate and effective contribution to public policy debate. This task is complicated by the fact that, as Part II illustrated, one can distinguish:

(i)   the primary convictions which underlay the development of Relationism;

(ii)   Relationism as presented in *The R Factor*; and

(iii) Relationism in practice to date.

Further Relationism is still developing and its format and content might evolve in a number of ways.

Nonetheless, common themes are ascertainable in all the variants of Relationism in terms of formulation and communication of a biblical perspective or, to put it another way, in terms of both content and strategy. Our assessment of Relationism considers, in turn, its strategy, its content (with particular reference to its articulation in *The R Factor*) and its prospects for the future.

THE STRATEGY OF RELATIONISM

Relationism has two main aims: promoting human well-being and enabling more effective Christian contributions to public policy debate. As Parts I and II have shown, there are many possible ways - in terms of both general strategies and specific objectives - of pursuing these aims. There, however, are three main elements at the heart of the strategy of Relationism:

(a)   offering a vision for society;

(b)   translating biblical principles into secular language and concepts; and

(c)   a willingness to compromise biblical ideals in order to secure progress towards those ideals in society.

Our assessment of these elements of the strategy seeks to address in each case some or all of a number of overlapping issues. Is this strategy feasible? Is it directed towards the right objectives? Is it likely to be

effective? Will it entail implications beyond the arena of public policy debate and, if so, will these be desirable or undesirable?

Offering a Vision for Society

This report has drawn attention to the widespread search for a new vision to guide public policy in the coming decade and perhaps beyond. We discussed in Part II some of the practical benefits of approaching public policy issues in terms of a social vision. We now reflect on whether it is feasible for Christians to offer a vision of society rooted in and distinctively shaped by biblical reflection?

If we examine the biblical material, we find that it contains several visions of several societies. Of these *The R Factor* is rooted, above all, in reflection on Old Testament Israel as a paradigm society. Deuteronomy contains what has been described as 'the first and fullest' of the visions of society in the Bible.[126] Micah envisages the day when 'every man will sit under his own vine and … no-one will make them afraid' (Micah 4). The letter to the Ephesians includes the vision of God's new society, the church, characterised by unity, equality and yet diversity. The book of Revelation reveals the new Jerusalem, the City of God, free from suffering, sickness and sin; peopled by men and women from every tribe and nation; characterised by harmony, healing and holiness. These 'social visions', of Moses, Micah, Paul and John, may be thought of as the social implications of the kingdom of God in turn, prefigured, prophesied, initiated and perfected. None except the first is a social vision for a nation-state as such; from all, however, it is feasible to draw inferences for a nation-based society. In other words, the notion of a 'social vision' is not alien to the biblical writers.

However, these social visions reveal the development of the biblical tradition with its attendant continuity and diversity. In the light of such diversity, Nigel Biggar and Donald Hay have argued that the ethical teaching of the Bible is not 'an arbitrary melange of ethics that are fundamentally inconsistent with one another. On the contrary, they comprise an ethical <u>tradition</u> whose components by definition share fundamental characteristics in common. But what the <u>relativ</u>e ethical diversity in the Bible does mean is that a Christian ethic can never be in any simple sense "biblical", as if it were simply lifted intact from the Bible. Rather it necessarily involves the <u>construction</u> of a coherent ethic out of biblical bits and pieces.'[127]

In a similar way a biblical vision for contemporary society cannot be discovered intact in the Bible. Instead, a process of developing a social vision drawing on a range of biblical resources will be needed. However, there is a strong case for treating the laws and life Old Testament Israel, the paradigm society, as a primary resource. Focus on the paradigm will need to be undergirded by theological reflection on key doctrines and complemented and qualified by insights from elsewhere in the canon. Such a process cannot be expected to deliver a unique, precise and definitive biblical vision for a contemporary society. What is possible,

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[126]   T. Houston, 'What Does the Bible Offer as a Vision for Society Today?', a talk delivered at St. Andrew's Undershaft, City of London on 21 March 1993. Copies of the transcript are available from the Jubilee Centre.

[127]   N. Biggar, and D. Hay, 'The Bible, Christian Ethics & the Provision of Social Security', op. cit., p.3.

however, is to identify and develop interlocking principles which more accurately capture biblical patterns and priorities than prevailing visions for society. Moreover, on the basis of biblical reflection, parameters may be proposed within which biblical priorities may be regarded as expressed to a significant degree and beyond which such priorities may be considered as contradicted to a significant degree.

The phrase 'offering a vision for society' leaves open the question of manner in which, and expectations with which, the offer is made. It is possible to characterise debate on the shape of a new social vision as involving, on the one hand, a quest for consensus and, on the other, a conflict of competing visions.

The 'quest for consensus' is the process of seeking a social vision on which people from different political traditions and holding different basic commitments can agree. The liberal vision of society in which individuals are free to act as they choose and a minimalist state acts as 'referee' is insufficient. Society needs, to a greater extent, a shared vision not merely an agreement to 'live and let live'. Few policies are value-neutral. Welfare policy, for example, involves judgements about who is responsible, in moral terms, for provision (family, individual, state or local region). Central government will levy taxes and make social security payments at a higher or lower rate. There can be little scope for those who favour provision by individuals to opt out on moral grounds without undermining the system. Likewise, those who favour higher provision by the state cannot by resolving to pay higher taxes bring that about. A decision has to be reached on taxes and welfare and, if it is to work, must represent a common ground which will be accepted by a majority of society.

The quest for consensus will involve a dialogue between very different groups in society. Christians, Muslims, humanists, feminists, all have distinctive views to contribute. Reaching a workable consensus will be difficult. It has to be acknowledged that some believe the search for a new social vision is, mistaken in its assumptions:

> It is axiomatic that the big idea is an anachronistic concept. The central theme the think tanks share is that society has become too diverse and fragmented to be reduced to simple organising concepts such as the market or socialism.[128]

Certainly as John Gray observed in his recent essay *The Undoing of Conservatism*:

> The question of what is to be the content of the common culture in a country such as Britain, when it is no longer animated by inherited transcendental faith or by any variety of the Enlightenment project, is a deep and difficult one.…[129]

Moreover, the 'agreement that we need a richer civic culture and a kinder, more neighbourly society'[130] may founder on the rocks of individualism and materialism. For:

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[128]   R. Cockett, 'Off-the-peg policies to suit the Left', *The Times*, 8 August 1994.

[129]   J. Gray, *The Undoing of Conservatism* (London: Social Market Foundation, 1994).

[130]   A. Marr, 'Civilisers, the bunch of them', *The Independent,* June 1994.

Nonetheless, this 'quest for consensus' is a process which Christians can in many respects endorse and participate in. In a plural society, Christians have an obligation to bear witness to Christ: a unique and distinctive message. They also have another obligation - to seek the welfare of the society they live in. A plural society can easily degenerate into a fragmented society. Christians can and should act as bridge-builders seeking to forge, with others, a consensus that allows different individuals and groups to live and work together for the common good.

Meanwhile, different groups in society will have their own ideal visions of society. (The phrase 'ideal vision' has a measure of ambiguity: how ideal is ideal?) The presence of competing visions may serve to enrich debate, inform the content of any consensus, and help provide resources to respond to change and new problems. However, if such competing visions are to inform fruitful discourse on the shape of a new social vision rather than fuel sectarian conflict in the policy arena, participants in the debate must be prepared to work hard at genuine communication and contemplate compromise.

At its boldest Relationism seeks to be, and perhaps in principle could one day be, both a radical vision and the basis of a new consensus.   Its critique of some key tenets of mainstream socio-political thinking runs deep. Yet in its 'neighbour ethic' and its emphasis on the social nature of men and women it seeks to build the widest possible consensus. As a practical matter, the presence of so many intellectual trends and social forces at once, has significant implications for the likely impact of Relationism. In the foreseeable future, if presented as a candidate for the role of new consensus, it cannot be expected to achieve that position, but it might serve as an influence on the shape of any new consensus.

A further implication of the rapid change of modern times, the complexity of modern societies, and the shifting locus of potential consensus, is that to present Relationism as a comprehensive social blueprint, a specific ideological framework, is unwise. The content of Relationism is not, at present, rich enough to allow such a claim. Even if it were, a proposal which is too specific runs the risk of excluding people who cannot support a pre-arranged programme of change rather than including people who are willing to look at issues from the same perspective informed by a broad vision.   There is a balancing act here. On the one hand, rigid detail must be avoided; on the other, if a vision for society is to have an impact on policy debate, it must have, or be capable of generating, sufficient content to be able to guide decision-making.

To seek to offer a vision for society should have helpful implications for the use of the Bible in regard to public policy debate. Formulating a biblical vision requires wide and deep reflection on the significance of,

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131   A. Marr, 'It sounds nice, but we don't want to live there', *The Independent,* 9 February 1993.

and interconnections between, an extensive range of biblical texts. This methodological necessity should restrain inappropriate short cuts from individual texts to policy prescriptions. The attempt to formulate a coherent social vision derived from a range of biblical materials should encourage a more critical and selective borrowing from contemporary secular analysis and prescription.

Translation

The aim of a translation strategy is, at one level, simply to allow effective communication and enable certain biblical ideas to be heard, understood and acted upon. However, at another level, its aim is to help establish common ground with others in a plural society to facilitate political change in the direction of biblical ideals, if only by a few steps. In Part II we considered the feasibility of translation; here we consider whether translation is legitimate and, indeed, advantageous.

A translation strategy has two elements. The first is the articulation of biblical ideas in language familiar and accessible to the hearer. Such translation is found in the Bible: *Yahweh* became *theos*, *rabbi* became *kyrios*. The words of the receptor language, Greek, were invested with new meaning when Christians began to articulate the gospel and its Hebrew concepts through this new medium. In the life of the church, the gospel has been translated again and again into languages; indeed different philosophies have been used to analyse and communicate its meaning. Translation of this kind is an absolute necessity.

The translation strategy of Relationism, however, goes a major step further, for it involves stripping a biblical vision of its transcendent dimension. The person of Christ is not presented as Lord, the final arbiter of any social order, and the one able to transform human relations by transforming people. However, to advocate a translation strategy is not to recommend a resurgence of 'religionless Christianity'. The idea that Christianity itself, come of age, must abandon its supernatural and its eternal dimensions if it is to be comprehensible to modern man is to eviscerate Christianity and must be resisted. However, translation in the political arena - even though it involves some truncation of Christian truth - is a different matter.

There appear to be three possible justifications for such translation into secular vernacular: avoiding the pitfalls of associating Christianity with a particular approach to politics, pragmatism and pre-evangelism.

The history of Christendom is one of political regimes endorsed and guided by a Church enjoying a highly privileged status in the constitution. Policy frameworks and often specific policies were regarded as 'Christian'. The memory of some of their policies (e.g. burning homosexuals, stifling scientific debate) is sometimes today a hindrance to the credibility of Christianity. Care must be taken when associating Christianity with particular approaches to social and political questions because resistance to the gospel may be created unnecessarily. Moreover, there are legitimate differences of opinion on political matters, among Christians let alone the public at large. To articulate a particular approach as 'Christian' may be imprecise and contentious; to describe any policy as 'Christian' is almost certainly a misnomer.

The argument from pragmatism involves emphasising the importance of securing change in public policy and practice. Human welfare is enhanced little, if at all, by the mere expression of ideas however pure and complete their articulation. Human welfare will, however, be enhanced if we can secure more humane government policy. Political influence is normally facilitated if ideas are presented within the dominant plausibility structure of politicians, one which today offers little room for the transcendent, and if coalitions are built with protagonists who do not endorse Christianity. The use of religious language may lead to marginalisation rather than influence as political involvement in contemporary society reveals scepticism in many quarters about, even hostility to, genuine Christianity. In the echelons of power one frequently encounters what has been described as 'Christophobia'. Translation does not, by any means, achieve all that Christians want to achieve in the public arena, but it offers the best prospects of practical change in the short and medium term.

Finally, the possibility of pre-evangelism exists. The strategy of Relationism is, in part, to create a bridgehead for the gospel in a secular society. The gospel alone has the power to bring full and lasting change for good in people and society. Relationism seeks to establish a more gospel-friendly debate. Our culture may be partially desensitized to the significance of enduring relationships characterised by mutual commitment. People today often seem preoccupied with finding fulfilment in self and things, as an autonomous individual or by securing a high level of material prosperity. In such an environment, the prospect of a relationship with God may be irrelevant or hard to understand. Placing relationships more firmly on the agenda of public debate may sensitize people to some of the categories relevant to rendering communication of the gospel simpler. It may, further, draw attention to areas of moral failure and so begin to pave the way to a recognition of the need for God's grace. The pre-evangelistic potential of 'relational initiatives' can be enhanced significantly by ensuring that, first, its contribution to public debate is as competent as possible, secondly, its advocates acknowledge publicly their Christian faith, and thirdly, if when doors are opened by 'relational initiatives' opportunities to lead on to gospel matters are taken when they arise.

Cross-cultural studies suggest that in the overwhelming majority of cultures certain norms are regarded, to one degree or another, as desirable.[132] These are norms operating at quite a high level of generality (e.g. 'provision for the poor and unfortunate') and, to echo Romans 2:15, are written on people's hearts. Christians can argue with some credibility (if not always success) for retention of these norms by a culture when their status as norms is under threat and for adherence to to them when in practice they are being disregarded. All this may be done without recourse to theological argument in debate. However, Christians will wish to infuse a culture with values that rise above norms that all cultures can acknowledge. The ability to do this by means of a translation will be affected by a host of factors but it is probably right to be less than sanguine about the prospects of success at this level if translation is the sole strategy.

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132   R.W. Wilson and C.L. Blomberg, 'The image of God in humanity: a biblical-psychological perspective', *Themelios*, 18.3 (April 1993), pp. 12-3.

We believe, therefore, that translation is a legitimate strategy offering identifiable advantages. There are, however, important objectives of Christian contribution to public policy debate which a translation strategy cannot help achieve. Relationism can only make a muted challenge to idolatry, pointing out false gods but never pointing to the one true God. Relationism cannot communicate the transcendent aspects of a biblical vision for human living. Some would argue that this vitiates the whole strategy, that omission of the transcendent dimension of the biblical world-view distort a biblical vision for society irreparably and prevents the church from making its most distinctive contribution.

If translation into secular concepts were the only strategy adopted by the church these fears would be justified. The church must communicate the unique message entrusted to her and, in the context of public policy debate as well as the pulpit, be willing to name Christ as Lord over all creation. Problems in the social arena are often symptoms of spiritual malaise evidenced, for example, in failure by those in authority to bow to the highest authority and the compression of human significance to life before death. Christians have diagnostic tools available to no-one else. Nonetheless, our contention is that different representatives of the church are - and should be - engaged in different degrees of translation. Typically, official statements of denominational bodies or addresses by senior ecclesiastics should contain theology even when a secular audience is in view; para-church organisations have more latitude to pursue translation; a Christian politician spends much of his time confined to secular language. Heavy reliance on a translation strategy by some Christian individuals and organisations is, we believe, acceptable provided that other Christian individuals and organisations engage in full-orbed communication.

To opt for translation may assist but it cannot guarantee effective communication. People who engage in political debate habitually struggle to find language that strikes a chord with their hearers, that moves the debate on and leads others to follow, that captures the imagination. Communication in public debate on government policy is complicated by the fact that several audiences may need to be reached: politicians, professionals in the relevant policy area, the public at large. What works for one audience may not work for another. The language of the *The R Factor* is a curious mixture of the technical and the conversational. These each have their place but the landscape of a new social vision needs to be portrayed in language that has a touch of grandeur and the power to stir the heart. Powerful words are needed to move people to embark on a journey into, in a sense, a new land. The language of relationships is accessible, meaningful, and resonates with deep-seated yearnings. However, in the public square, it will be a long time before 'relationship' is freighted with the depth of associations that words like 'justice' and 'freedom' conjure up.

Pursuing a translation strategy has significant implications for the place of the Bible in public life. It does not proclaim the Bible as public truth, though it can make biblical insights more widely available and commend them to society through demonstrating their fruitfulness and relevance. This raises the question of the relative importance of convincing people of (i) the truth or value of ideas consonant with the Bible and (ii)

the Bible itself as a source of public truth. Both are important tasks. Translation focuses on the former to the exclusion of the latter. Translation may in some contexts act as a preliminary stage in communication so that once the merit of certain ideas is established, opportunities may exist for identifying the ultimate origin of those ideas. In this way, translation could serve as a stepping stone to enhancing the credibility of the Bible itself. However, this aim and the goal of securing policy change may be in tension. If the thesis that ideas perceived as Christian in origin are marginalised in public policy debate, there are pragmatic reasons for discretion about the ultimate, that is to say, biblical origin of ideas. There are, furthermore, potential dangers in proclaiming the Bible as public truth in the political arena without also opening dialogue through some form of translation. In the absence of some degree of translation, there is a risk that the Bible while proclaimed as public truth will be unable to act as public truth. Instead it may merely be associated with some Christians, members of a plural society, participants in a public debate which is degenerating into sectarian conflict. This will not necessarily be most helpful for either evangelism or the place of the Bible in society.

Compromise

Compromise, in this context, is driven by the desire to be politically effective. Many Christians will be uneasy about the idea of advocating compromise: it does not, at first sight, fit easily with the seemingly uncompromising counsels of perfection in the gospels or the biblical emphasis on maintaining the faith and relying on God for deliverance.

However Relationism only claims to be one part of a 'twin-track' approach to engagement in the public arena. Biblical ideals must be affirmed in an undiluted form. Yet at the same time living in a fallen world with competing interests requires compromise. For Niebuhr the 'paradox of grace' provides the context in which we can find the freedom to make the compromises that involvement in a fallen world demands. He criticised the sectarian perfectionism which was 'blind to the inevitability of the compromises in which it saw its opponents involved. It therefore poured the fury of its self-righteous scorn upon them without recognising that their compromises were but the obverse side of their responsibilities, which the perfectionists has simply disavowed.'[133] Jesus' teaching on divorce (given for the hardness of men's hearts) illustrates the point that the ideals and demands of the gospel cannot necessarily form the basis for public policy.

Commitment to bringing about practical improvements in well-being through public policy change makes compromise unavoidable. The ideal cannot be achieved; only a 'second-best'. In the words of David Alton MP '... we must realise that politics involves compromise, an acceptance that we can only progress by small steps over a long period and with popular support.'[134] Compromise is, however, a complex business: we may look to an ideal or principle to guide this choice but it may not be clear which course of action will lead us closest to the ideal.

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[133]   R. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. II, 1943, p.242 quoted in J. Habgood, *Church and Nation in a Secular Age* , op. cit., p.184

[134]   D. Alton, 'Stopping the Rot', *Third Way*, 17.5 (June 1994), p. 15.

Faithfulness to the message we have to proclaim may be more important than the amount of change achieved. The tension is particularly keen and a skilful balancing act is required when, for example, the desire to pursue human welfare in the shorter term encourages compromise which may undermine the long-term witness to certain values. For example making divorce 'easier' and less acrimonious may improve the welfare of any children involved but may, in the long term, alter public perceptions about the nature and importance of marriage. Creative policies may reduce this conflict, but it cannot always be avoided.

Relationism, unashamedly, is willing to compromise. So, as we have seen, a Family Policy Initiative is underway and seeking to unite Christian and secular agencies concerned with family issues behind policy statements which promote ''ong-term, stable, committed relationships'. This is not a compromise in the sense of modifying our beliefs to accommodate others, but rather seeking in society something rather less than the vision we would ourselves aspire to. For particular organisations within the Christian community in particular contexts this consensus building approach has important advantages. However, Oliver O' Donovan has rightly argued that the church should pursue 'compromise in relation to truth', a process which involves stating the truth (e.g. Christian ideals for marriage) and then stating the compromise that is acceptable.

> The church will not make its point by proposing compromises unless it finds ways of making it clear that they *are* compromises...if it is prepared to plead [its cause] it may possibly find more than it expects in the way of a sympathetic hearing.[135]

We are suggesting that it is possible for certain para-church organisations to be engaged in consensus building without being explicit about Christian ideals *provided that* within the church as a whole those ideals are being articulated.

Concluding Remarks

The preceding discussion has sought to argue that offering a vision for society, translation and compromise, all elements of the strategy of Relationism to date, are legitimate and valuable components of a contribution to public policy debate which seeks to bring biblical ideas to bear in an effective way on the issues under debate. However, all of these elements *must* be complemented elsewhere in public debate by Christians. Talking in terms of social vision is timely, but there are several ways to inform public debate. One may articulate values, focus on specific issues, pioneer new initiatives to name a few. Moreover, Christians must continue to struggle for the relevance of the person of Christ and the transcendent to every domain, and proclaim the highest biblical ideals.

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[135] O. O'Donovan, *Principles in the Public Realm: The Dilemma of Christian Moral Witness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p.14.

THE CONTENT OF RELATIONISM: A BIBLICAL EVALUATION

In this section we seek to assess how far the content of Relationism accords with biblical teaching.   This is a crucial issue. For the aim in developing Relationism has been to inject biblical thinking into the public arena and, in particular, policy debate. That aim can only be fulfilled to the extent that Relationism genuinely reflects biblical thinking.

Relationism, we have seen, is rooted in reflection on selected biblical material and engages with and draws upon extra-biblical material. This is inevitable in any attempt to fuse the biblical and contemporary horizons and develop a biblical social vision. Relationism plainly does not exhaust biblical teaching on social issues. Relationism in *The R Factor* represents a particular approach to the selection, use and application of biblical material and represents an attempt to take the first steps to articulate a biblical social vision for society.

This distinction between comprehensive biblical teaching on economic, social and political issues and a 'biblical vision for society' needs to be borne in mind.   It is similar to the difference between, say, a comprehensive prescription for a society's political, social and economic life and, say, an account of the principles of social democracy. The latter does not have the range, depth or detail of the former.   The test of Relationism should not be whether it affords an exhaustive representation of biblical teaching but whether sufficient biblical material is brought to bear to provide the contours of a vision for society with a real measure of congruence with biblical teaching.   There is room for debate on how much material and how much congruence is required.

The Range, Detail, Depth and Moral Intensity of Biblical Teaching

We now consider in turn the range, detail, depth and moral intensity of biblical teaching. Doing so not only identifies aspects of biblical teaching on social issues which Relationism wholly or partially omits but also helps us assess whether in Relationism we have, albeit in translation, a biblical vision for society.   The comments below which tend to focus on what Relationism fails to articulate must be read in the light of Part II which indicates the strong biblical roots of adopting in general terms a relational perspective on issues and the detailed attention to aspects of Old Testament teaching undergirding *The R Factor*.

The Range of Biblical Concerns

Social justice is a major concern of the biblical writings for God is deeply concerned for the poor and oppressed.   'The prophetic message concentrates on three elements which are frequently linked: the accumulation of wealth by the rich, the oppression of the poor and the failure to help them, and the perversion of justice.'[136]   The themes of parity, commonality and obligation in *The R Factor*, and its critique of preoccupation with power and money, all resonate with elements of the biblical teaching on social justice. However, they do not constitute an exposition of that teaching.   Nonetheless, Relationism offers a helpful

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[136]   D. Hay, *Economics Today. A Christian Critique* op. cit. p.39.

corrective to a discussion of social justice which focuses exclusively on power and wealth. A discussion of social injustice can go a long way by addressing the questions of *how* and *why* relationships in the marketplace come to be characterised by exploitation, persistent disadvantage and manipulation. Interestingly, too, the categories of people most vulnerable to social injustice in biblical times - the widows, orphans and aliens - were at risk because they lacked adequate relationships with others who might have acted as their providers and protectors.

There is widespread agreement that biblical teaching on the nature, purpose and significance of work is of prime importance at a time when over 20 million people are registered as unemployed in Europe. The *Oxford Declaration of Christian Faith and Economics* (from an evangelical doctrinal basis), the document *Centesimus Annus* (a papal Encyclical) and the statement *Economy as a Matter of Faith* (issued by the World Council of Churches and reflecting liberal Protestant theological ethics) all:

> place a major emphasis on the theology of the nature of humankind. Work is part of the vocation of each person, the purpose of work being primarily, but not exclusively, to provide for human needs. There is therefore a basic right to work, conditions at work should respect human dignity, and remuneration for work should be sufficient to support the worker and his dependents. The organisation of work should be seen as expressing community between those who work in a particular place...Moreover, the right to work is balanced by a right to rest and recreation ....[137]

Relationism can emphasise some of these themes (e.g. the workplace as community), and accommodate the articulation of others (e.g. a key purpose of work being to provide for human needs). By doing so it can rescue discussions of work from being merely about personal fulfilment. Moreover, to be in work is often a precondition to full participation in the life of society and its community networks. However, the core belief that man is created to work and rest is not held in focus and hightlighted by Relationism.

The Detail of Biblical Teaching

The R Factor emphasis on relational proximity and its endorsement of the Golden Rule 'Do as you would be done by' can be traced to biblical roots. However, there is biblical material instructive for an understanding of relationships, how they should be conducted and how public policy might influence them which is not, or not adequately, captured by these two principles. Some of the biblical material on relationships could be integrated into future expositions of Relationism as a vision for society or applications of Relationism to particular policy areas.

First, particular relationships are given considerable attention in the Bible: parent-child, master-slave, employer-hired labourer, state-subject, husband-wife. Christian reflection on public policy in areas such as education, divorce law, industrial relations needs to consider, as one ingredient, the detail of texts that focus on these relationships. This material also sheds light on biblical attitudes to the nature, legitimacy and proper use

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[137]   D. Hay, 'What does the Lord require? Three Statements on Christian Faith and Economic Life', *Transformation*, 10.1 (Jan./Apr. 1993), p. 13.

of *authority*. Relationism, through the concept of parity, has begun to address the issue of power in relationships but not the distinct subject of authority.

Secondly, in Leviticus 19 where the command 'love your neighbour as yourself' (v. 18) is first given there are specific instructions on, for example, respect for parents (v. 2) and the elderly (v. 32), provision for the poor (vv. 9-10), prompt payment of workers (v. 13), not spreading slander (v. 16), equality before the law for ethnic minorities (vv. 33-34), honesty in business (v. 35). All of these, and many besides, provide biblical data which can inform Christian reflection on public policy issues by filling out the distinctively biblical understanding of what it is to love one's neighbour as oneself.

Thirdly, biblical material addressing gender, sexuality and sexual practice is relevant to biblical reflection on relationships. Relationism, in *The R Factor*, does not draw upon this material. Questions of gender and sexuality are controversial and there may be sound tactical reasons for not tryng to bear witness to biblical teaching on too many fronts at one time. How long such an approach can be pursued remains to be seen. A wide range of social, economic and political issues may be discussed without reference to gender. However, it is a vital aspect of many issues, including some on which public policy is an influence.   The idea of 'parity' which has a loose definition at present might be used to communicate some elements of biblical teaching. There may, though, be difficulties in 'translating' biblical teaching on gender into secular terms in a coherent way because the idea of a created order is a vital ingredient of that teaching. Once this might have been communicated by 'natural law' arguments but it is doubtful that this can be done today.

Finally, there are strands of biblical teaching inconsistent with an unqualified insistence on the primacy of relationships. The New Testament endorses celibacy for some, encourages mobility promote mission, and insists that, when they conflict, kingdom priorities must take precedence over family obligations. Relationism does not say that 'relationships with others are all that matters' but may need to guard against creating that impression.

The Depth of Biblical Teaching
Relationism has not emerged from an integrated biblical theology. The themes of creation, fall and judgment, redemption and the formation of the people of God before and after Christ, and eschatological hope are all essential components of a biblical world view. Relationism owes a debt, in places perhaps unconscious, to this intellectual framework - its discussion, for example, of 'choice' and 'obligation' can be linked to the freedoms and responsibilities given to humanity from creation onwards. To the extent that reflection on Old Testament Israel forms the core of the biblical development of Relationism, then one is dealing with source material which implicitly combines the outworking of creation principles, the impact of the fall, and the initiative of God in redemption.   Morever, the creation-fall-redemption-eschaton matrix can be, and essentially should be, understood in relational terms: relationship established, fractured, restored and perfected. Nonetheless, the painstaking work of relating an overall theological framework rooted in comprehensive biblical reflection to the

questions of Christian social ethics is not something Relationism can claim to have attempted. That, of course, would be a massive task.

The Moral Intensity of Biblical Teaching

New Testament ideals of sacrificial service to others, perfect chastity and lifelong fidelity in marriage, unstinting generosity to the needy, inner purity of heart and love of enemies all build on Old Testament roots. The church, harbinger of the coming age, is intended to be a community in which divisions of class and race have no place. Some, at least, of these moral ideals have a place in public discourse that Relationism cannot really claim to fill. We have seen however that there is biblical justification for moral compromise to built into in the legislation suitable for a sinful world. Old Testament provisions allowed and regulated divorce (Deut. 24:1-4), a declension from God's ideal permitted because of the hardness of men's hearts (Matt. 19:8).

Paradigmatic Interpretation of the Old Testament

Part II contained a brief justification for the use of Old Testament material, interpreted paradigmatically, as a key ingredient in applying the Bible to issues of public policy. There is, and is likely to remain, debate on how much emphasis should be placed on Old Testament Israel's law and institutions as a paradigm for later societies. The New Testament neither endorses nor rejects such an interpretive approach. It tends to draw upon Old Testament material in different ways: identifying types and prophecies relevant to an understanding of Christ and developing an ethical tradition which focuses on the life of the church. We are left to reach our conclusions in the face of this silence. For the reasons outlined in Part II, we believe that a paradigmatic application of the principles of social ethics found in the pattern of communal life to which Old Testament Israel was called through the covenant and accompanying law has a key part to play in formulating a biblical perspective on public policy issues.

During its long history before Christ, the people of Israel lived out a variety of patterns of government and relationships with the state. The several stages in their history included periods as a pilgrim family in the Patriarchal period, an oppressed ethnic minority, a nation liberated by the exodus, a gathering of tribes living under the direct kingship of Yahweh, an institutional state under the monarchy, a suffering remnant during the exile, and a distinctive community of the post-exile period. C.J.H. Wright, reviewing these periods, argues that given this range of material, we must 'make careful correlations' between the 'situation in which the community of God's people may find itself in relation to the modern secular state on the one hand and the features of specific periods of Israel's history on the other'.[138] For example:

> Some Christians may be living in a time of nation-building or major political changes (such as Eastern Europe and South Africa), in which they have the real potential of affecting the contours of the nascent state according to values drawn from the Sinai and theocracy paradigm and further refracted through NT [New Testament] development'.[139]

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[138]   C.J.H. Wright, 'The People of God and the State in the Old Testament', *Themelios*, 16.1 (Oct./Nov. 1990), p.9.
[139]   Ibid., p.9.

The period of Israel's history which most nearly matches our own may, then, have particular lessons to teach us. Some Christian communities may find themselves drawing more inspiration from prophetic encouragementsgiven to people during the exile. Nonetheless, there is a period of 'prime significance', namely 'the covenant and law at Sinai, and the attempts of the early theocracy to initiate a community that embodied those social objectives' for this period has 'normative significance' for later periods.[140] The prophetic ministry, for example, often highlights Israel's departure from the norms embodied in her law. Moreover, this primary period is, arguably, the richest source of material relevant to issues of public policy and the formation of social vision.

Paradigmatic interpretation of the biblical texts revealing Israel's law and life, particularly at this key period, is not a short cut to solutions. Sound exegesis and sensitive awareness of the original content and intent do not come easily; nor does a faithful but imaginative grasp of the text's contemporary relevance. So there is scope for discussion of both the *principles* at work in the 'paradigm' and their appropriate *application*. For example, is the key principle in the ban on interest: that exploitation of the poor is forbidden; or that 'kin' should be treated with generosity but 'foreigners' may be treated on a commercial basis; or that money should not be lent in the expectation of risk-free reward (i.e. interest); or, as Relationism stresses, that financial flows, whether for commercial or charitable purposes, should be set within the context of a relationship that links people by more than a mere cash nexus? Often more than one principle will be in play and careful exposition of their mutual interactions and relative importance will be needed.

The principles perceived to be paramount will depend on the hermeneutical strategy adopted. Relationism, as we have seen, depends on a particular understanding of the significance of Jesus' remark that all the Law and the Prophets 'hang on' the commands to love God and neighbour. C.J.H. Wright's account finds a correspondence with socio-economic principles established at creation (i.e. shared access to resources, the privilege and responsibility of work, the expectation of economic growth and shared consumption) and the presence of safeguards to counteract the effect of the fall (e.g. laws governing conditions of employment, preventing excessive accumulation of private wealth, seeking to hold economic exploitation in check).[141] These two approaches could enrich each other.

A further question is how far, in what ways and at which points should the principles derived from examination of Old Testament material be adjusted in the light of the New Testament. To what extent should the New Testament act as a filter (eliminating Old Testament norms) or as a principle of transformation (so that Old Testament priorities are adjusted, qualified or transformed)?

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[140]   Ibid., p.9.
[141]   C.J.H. Wright, *Living as the People of God*, op. cit., pp. 67-89.

The Idea of Relational Proximity

Relational proximity, we have seen, has five dimensions: directness (proximity of contact), continuity (proximity through time), multiplicity (proximity in multiple spheres), parity (proximity in regard to key aspects of power), and commonality (proximity of purpose). These five dimensions can be readily perceived if one envisions an Old Testament Israelite community characterised by low levels of technology (limiting the potential for contingent relationships), low mobility underpinned by the Jubilee laws (resulting in long-standing relationships in the community), pre-industrial methods of production (so that work-based and home-based relationships overlapped), institutional safeguards against accumulation of land and a dominant monarchy (which, had they been followed, would have limited inequalities in power) and a shared history and ethos (promoting the presence of common purpose). The development of the concept of relational proximity is a good example of creative hermeneutics which Richard Bauckham identifies as essential for unlocking the relevance of the Old Testament for modern society.

Relational proximity is used in *The R Factor* both as an analytical tool (illuminating factors which help or hinder the maintenance of relationships) and a prescriptive principle (to be promoted by public policy). It is understandable, given the underlying inspiration for the idea, that some reviewers of *The R Factor* felt that the book was seeking to 'turn the clock back'. There may be some truth in that comment but only some. The criticism is unfair that Relationism is open to both old ways and new ways of securing a social framework more conducive to mutual relationships. It is a misguided one in that there are features of the past from which the modern era can learn and it is a kind of chronological arrogance to assume otherwise. Moreover, Old Testament Israel was, among pre-modern societies, distinctive in many of its characteristics and ideals. In turning to the Bible one is drawing upon the past of a particular people whose history was shaped by God, not the past in general.

However, as we saw in Part I, the task of the biblical interpreter is to discern timeless principles which are therefore relevant today. In this regard, a question to be posed is whether all the dimensions of relational proximity carry the same weight as prescriptive principles. This in turn raises the question of how far the ethical argument behind the prescription is intended to be pragmatic or deontological. The former would argue for promoting proximity on the basis that, given those circumstances, relationships tend to work better. The latter would seek to say (perhaps influenced by their biblical origin) that there is an inherent virtue in promoting proximity even when positive benefits cannot be identified. As a practical matter, in our consequentialist age, policy ideas will need to be promoted on pragmatic grounds. For the Christian though it may be valuable to try to rank the significance of the dimension of relational proximity for the purpose of promoting biblical values: directness (with an ethical parallel in truthfulness?) and continuity (with an ethical parallel in commitment?) might be more important than multiplexity.

The experience of trying to promote 'relational ideas' has indicated that the idea of relational proximity must be adapted for different settings. Promoting directness in a commercial context may simply mean

encouraging personal contact. In a prison (at least one run on traditional lines) inmates and staff meet - the issue is whether there is meaningful person-to-person communication between them. More importantly, the appropriate 'relational goal' in different public policy areas may not be promoting relational proximity but, as in the case of the FPI, supporting and fostering long term, stable committed relationships. Different areas might require different policy goals better to accommodate biblical teaching and political reality.

Relationism: A Complementary Contribution?

Relationism, when it addresses particular fields of human activity, draws upon an insights that originate elsewhere.   Consider economics. The imperative of 'sustainable economic growth' in the Relational Market Economy is not explained in *The R Factor* as a key ingredient of 'relational thinking' *per se*. The principle is, to be sure, derived from reflection on biblical material (e.g. the cultural mandate in Gen. 1:28) and biblical concepts (e.g. stewardship). Moreover, it is illustrated in the laws of Old Testament Israel (e.g. Deut. 20:19-20). Specifically 'relational ideas' do not provide all the biblical or intellectual resources necessary to engage satisfactorily with the issues of public policy. However Relationism provides a fresh perspective, which permeates the biblical texts and helpfully adjusts, enriches and complements other biblical priorities, such as stewardship, already recognised to be significant for Christian reflection on public policy.

A significant contribution made by Relationism as presented in *The R Factor* is that it seeks to communicate biblical ideas, some often neglected, some barely even noticed. These include:

- the significance of 'place' for the sustenance of community life;
- the impact of financial flows on community life and the development of the business sector;
- the idea of relational proximity as an analytical tool and element in guiding policy;
- a many-layered approach to welfare provision that avoid: pure reliance on either individual or state provision by emphasising the significance of intermediate institutions - in ancient Israel the household and community;
- the importance of structural checks on the excessive accumulation of wealth and power;
- the benefits of decentralisation of political power.

The attempt to relate these ideas to the single notion of promoting good relationships may be too ambitious an attempt at simplification. Nonetheless, as we have seen, relationships are vital to a biblical social vision. Promoting 'good relationships' complements rather than competes with the biblical agenda of concern for the poor, stewardship of resources, and the significance of work. Detailed attention to Old Testament Israel's law, life and institutions presents a case study of how these several biblical concerns may be integrated and introduces key new insights into the life of society.

THE CONTENT OF RELATIONISM: FURTHER REFLECTIONS

Relationism, in the particular form described in this report, is a newly arrived and still evolving body of ideas. *The R Factor* makes, in a rhetorical flourish, the bold claim that '...Relationism is a conceptual framework as complete and as robust in policy terms as capitalism or socialism - indeed it is more complete, and more robust...'.[142] At this level - the level of overarching policy frameworks and social visions - Relationism lacks, as yet, the depth and detail to command widespread confidence. Nonetheless, inside and beyond Christian circles, its analysis of the 'mega-community', its affirmation of the importance of relationships and some of its policy proposals have struck a chord. Initiatives to develop practical applications of relational thinking are underway: 'relational audits' and Family Impact Statements are being pioneered. There do seem to be grounds for affirming that, properly developed and handled, Relationism could contribute to a range of Christian goals in the context of public life and debate on government policy.

A Critique of *The R Factor*

The following paragraphs identify matters which Relationism tackles only partially and strains in the internal coherence of Relationism as presented in *The R Factor*. Our critique prepares the way for ongoing reflection on where to develop Relationism more fully and where to accept its limitations.

Political Philosophy

Relationism, at present, does not incorporate a properly developed political philosophy. *The R Factor* tends to discuss political theory at the level of institutional structure (emphasising the benefits of decentralisation of government); there is as yet no systematic reflection on, for example, the idea of citizenship, the meaning of democracy, the function of law, or the authority and legitimacy of the state. Such matters may in time need to be addressed as they have obvious relevance to issues of public policy.[143]

Values

Relationism is based on a value system which by prizing relationships so highly challenges the dominant ethos in the West of materialism and individualism. However, *The R Factor* shows 'a certain hesitancy when it comes to the questions of moral obligation, preferring to use the language of politics, economics or popular psychology'.[144] In *Reinventing Civil Society*, David Green argues that the missing dimension of Thatcherism was 'its inadequate emphasis on "civic virtues" such as self sacrifice, duty, solidarity and service of others'.[145] Relationism does promote these in arguing for 'choice' to be balanced by 'obligation'. However, its treatment of values and discussion of qualities such as responsibility, duty and service is thin. Its advocacy of obligation is

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[142]   M. Schluter and D. Lee, *The R Factor*, op. cit., p. 193.

[143]   The omission of a satisfactory appreciation of relationships in liberalism, socialism and traditional conservatism has been discussed in M. Graham, *Stretching the Limits of Politics* (Cambridge: Jubilee Centre, 1988).

[144]   Book Review, *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 October 1993.

[145]   Ibid.

made on pragmatic grounds: society will work better and people's lives will be more satisfying if choice and obligation are balanced appropriately. No underlying moral basis for obligation is identified. Nonetheless, this may not hamper Relationism in the context of public policy debate. What might be perceived as a weakness in academic circles might be a virtue in policy-making circles where candour about the origin of moral argument can be divisive.

Relationships

The R Factor stops short of detailed discussion of relationships. The creation of a society in which 'good relationships' can flourish is identified as a proper aim of public policy. Discussion of what constitutes a good relationship is opened up by identifying the relevance of functional, emotional and moral dimensions but is taken little further.[146] It is appreciated that within the bounds of morality good relationships will be found to take many forms.[147] Policy changes which encourage relational proximity can be pursued to some extent without further analysis of what makes a good relationship: all that matters is creating opportunities to relate (e.g. by regional policy which reduces the migration of labour and fragmentation of communities).

However, Relationism as it develops and responds to different areas of policy concern will need such analysis. Patterns of corporate government and laws regarding industrial relations will need a fuller idea, explicit or implicit, of what constitutes 'good relationships' between shareholders, managers and workers than relational proximity and the reciprocity principle can supply on their own. Modification of the operation of the Child Support Agency, divorce law reform, the operation of the social services in cases of suspected child abuse, all depend on underlying beliefs about the role of public policy *when* relationships go *wrong* - a topic little discussed in *The R Factor*.

Finally, *The R Factor* also appears to place too much confidence in the positive effects of close relationships. In public life close relationships can lead to injustice and malpractice: nepotism, an old boys' network, political appointees in the alleged 'quangocracy', insider dealing based on price-sensitive information whispered over lunch.[148] A public ethic needs to contain checks against such abuses together with appropriate institutional safeguards.

Gaps in the Analysis

The analysis of modern Western society offered by *The R Factor* is frequently penetrating and illuminating. It is not fanciful to suggest that in social terms a key feature of the history of the modern period has been the unravelling of relational proximity. Nonetheless, some factors in modern life need to be brought more firmly into the analysis. For example, technology, rather than giantism or mobility, may be the most powerful factor

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[146] M. Schluter and D. Lee, *The R Factor*, op. cit., pp. 56-60.
[147] Ibid., p.178.
[148] An article on the front page of *The Independent* on 17 March 1993, for example, began with the paragraph: 'Three businessmen used a "cosy relationship" with government officials to buy thousands of homes in Scotland cheaply. They purchased nearly 2,000 in the Borders for £5m despite a higher bid from another company, the Commons Public Accounts Committee was told yesterday.'

making banks less personal.[149] Technology is bringing us virtual reality and by the end of the century it will be a household presence. Its capacity to simulate personal encounter and yet cocoon a person from genuine encounter raises profound questions. Similarly, international trade, global competition, international capital flows and multinational corporations, are major features in the economic landscape but given little attention in the discussion of the Relational Market Economy. In general, Relationism requires more extensive and sophisticated empirical support and, probably, a more nuanced exposition.[150]

From Analysis to Aims, From Aims to Proposals

The greater part of *The R Factor* builds the case for placing the promotion of good relationships and the encouragement of obligation on the public agenda. Public policy cannot be used to bring these about directly but what it can and should do, *The R Factor* argues, is facilitate greater relational proximity. However, *The R Factor*'s policy proposals do not appear to flow directly and necessarily from the principles of relational proximity. There are jumps in the logic. The ideas for change depend upon principles and assumptions from elsewhere. The most important source is the Jubilee Centre's collection of papers on social, economic and political organisation and policy which seek to apply biblical principles and, in particular, a paradigmatic understanding of Old Testament material. To close the jump in logic *either* a fuller exposition of the underlying assumptions, intellectual tools and policy aims of Relationism is needed *or* greater flexibility in the proposals for change must be accepted.

The Transmission of Moral Values

The subject of the origin and development of our 'moral sense' is a complex one whether explored from the perspective of biblical teaching, moral philosophy or social psychology. This project has not undertaken a careful examination of this topic. Nonetheless, *The R Factor*'s view that relationships are crucial to the transmission of moral values is stressed in biblical teaching. Whether the context is the family or the church, the expectation is that moral example and instruction will take place in the context of encounter relationships (e.g. father-son, pastor-congregation). Moreover, in portraying the importance of marriage, seen not as a private affair but a social institution recognised and supported by the community, as the proper context for childrearing, implicit support may be present. In *The Moral Sense* James Q. Wilson sought to demonstrate that social relationships and the role of the family are crucial in the development of a person's moral sentiments.[151] However, *The R Factor* does not appear to echo the significance the Bible attaches to being part of a community with a history, an ethos, an ethical tradition. Israel was to sustain its collective hold on its distinctive history, by attending to the public reading of the scriptures, by avoiding inter-marriage and idolatry. A community with a moral tradition is more than the sum total of its encounter relationships.

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[149] Computer-based system that apply complex rules to financial data about customers and even learn from the data gathered and continually revise those rules are being developed. Such systems will mean decisions over whether to allow an overdraft can be made by a computer without the personal discretion of bank staff.

[150] Research material prepared since the publication of *The R Factor* has begun to bridge the gap. See, for example, D. Porteous, 'The "TRUST" Proposals for Regional Banking in the UK' (Cambridge: Jubilee Policy Group, September 1993).

[151] J.Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense* (New York: The Free Press, 1993).

Optimistic Analysis of Pluralism

In the concluding chapter of *The R Factor* the authors make the bold claim that Relationism:

> .... distils out an ethic upon which humanist and theist, Hindu and Muslim, Christian and Jew can all agree, and to that extent holds promise of furnishing a moral consensus upon which a modern pluralist society might be built.[152]

There are grounds for believing that relational values could appeal across cultures - though perhaps finding different expression in different cultures. The Golden Rule, at least in its negative forms, is found in many ethical traditions. Moreover, for immigrant communities disenchanted with and fearful of Western materialism and individualism, relational values offer some attractions as an alternative. However, the problems of accommodating different moral traditions (Christian, Muslim, secular and so on) in one framework of public legislation is too complex for agreement on 'relational values' to provide a complete solution. The thorny subject of policy on sex education in schools is a case in point.[153]

The Strengths of Relationism

The essential strength of Relationism is that it builds on the 'relational thesis' with its timeless emphasis on the importance of relationships and their centrality to any biblical social vision. At the heart of *The R Factor*, is the view that 'we do not, first and foremost, exist either as individuals, with rights against society, or as a member, with responsibilities to society. We are persons in mutual relationship'.[154] Such a view can be seen to spring from the distinctive view of God as Trinity which the biblical witness leads Christians to hold. This doctrine implies, in the words of *The Forgotten Trinity*, 'both the importance of each particular person and the interdependence of all upon one another, and that the fulfilment of human beings is to be found in relationships in community and not in self-assertive individualism.'[155] The significance of seeing people not first and foremost as separate individuals or constituent parts of a larger collective but persons in mutual relationship cannot be overstated. It changes everything and is an invaluable contribution from a biblical perspective.

The R Factor argues that policy measures such as changing employment practices, increasing social security spending, providing education on relationships are inadequate means for promoting good relationships in society. More fundamental measures are needed since otherwise:

> You are, in effect, asking people to act proRelationally in a largely antiRelational system: that is, a system in which choice has become dominant at the expense of obligation, and in which institutional structures constrain or erode Relational proximity. In the end, Relationism forces us to challenge not only our behaviour, public spending priorities and social policy, but the whole way our society is organised.[156]

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[152]   M. Schluter and D. Lee, *The R Factor*, op. cit., p.269.

[153]   Policy options include teaching a dominant group's view, teaching a bland syllabus representing the lowest level of common agreement, or creating a range of schools each with a distinctive ethos and approach allowing parental choice. Any of these could be combined with a parental right to withdraw their child from classes. Relational values, in their present state of articulation, do not give much guidance as to the most appropriate solution.

[154]   M. Schluter and D. Lee, *The R Factor*, op. cit., p.3.

[155]   BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today, *The Forgotten Trinity*, op. cit., p.43.

[156]   Ibid. p.190.

This passage highlights three important strengths of *The R Factor*'s account of Relationism as a particular expression of the 'relational thesis'. First, Relationism is right to identify a major problem in the excessive importance attached to freedom, choice and rights in Western society. This analysis is not unique to Relationism; far from it. David Selbourne, to give one example, argues in *The Principle of Duty* that we need to revitalise our notion of citizenship so that recognition is given to duties as well as rights, privileges and benefits.[157] The balance is vital: 'For if duties without rights make slaves, rights without duties make strangers.'[158] One of the most pressing questions of the day is how to restore what *The R Factor* calls 'obligation'.

Secondly, Relationism focuses on an aspect of the debate which is often overlooked, namely the impact of institutional structures and arrangements on the ability of people to maintain the quality of their relationships and fulfil moral obligations. All too often, for example, family breakdown is attributed to a decline in 'family values'. However, the operation of the labour and capital markets can have a powerful effect on the sustainability of a marriage. If jobs can only be found in another region, a family may have to choose between unemployment of one or more breadwinner and uprooting themselves and relocating. Either choice places strains on marital and parent-child relationships. Multi-million pound loans may finance a takeover and the directors of the predator company may decide to close factories and make redundancies. A family may be encouraged by glossy advertising material from banks and finance houses to take out several thousands of pounds of consumer credit, but unexpected loss of income may upset a precarious balance and growing debt can place families under severe pressure. These are simple examples of a wider problem. Much reflection on social issues by Christians is strong on theology, philosophy and ethics - fields in which the academic and clerical leadership of the church tend to well versed - but weak on social and economic analysis. While Relationism needs to improve aspects of its analysis, the importance of its contribution in placing the spotlight on the interface of social, economic and political structures and relationships as the key ingredient of human welfare can hardly be stressed too much.

Thirdly, Relationism shows an admirable willingness to think radically. We may indeed need to realign 'the whole way our society is organised' if we are to make relationships a genuine priority on the public agenda. Christians should not, and need not, shrink from questioning features of contemporary society which nearly everybody else takes for granted.

Looking beyond that passage in *The R Factor,* further strengths may be identified. Relationism has the capacity to draw attention to important factors in social wellbeing which mainstream secular approaches neglect. The emphasis of Relationism on 'place' contrasts with the emphasis of free market capitalism on labour mobility to ensure economic efficiency (captured in the famous misquotation of Norman Tebbit 'On your bike').

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[157]   D. Selbourne, *The Principle of Duty* (Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994).
[158]   Ibid. Quoted in *The Times*, 23 May 1994.

But labour mobility often has a damaging social and pyschological impact. A study of 38 junior hospital doctors and their wives found that:

> Thirty-one per cent of the wives found the physical upheaval stressful. They described it as a 'nightmare', 'ghastly' and 'a nuisance'. In 14 per cent of these mobile families, children experienced emotional disturbance or schooling difficulties. But the problem most commonly reported was loneliness. Sixty-two per cent of the wives experienced loneliness as a result of some, if not all, their moves.[159]

The distinctive priorities of Relationism make it at several points a penetrating diagnostic tool. A Christian sociologist who responded, often critically, to *The R Factor* commented that he was 'impressed' with the ideas of relational base and relational proximity which he considered had 'real research possibilities' for effective study of society.[160] The analytical tools beginning to be developed, for example through the project for the Scottish Prison service, have the potential to allow research-based contributions to public debate. Comment on the importance of community and relationships is not often supported by 'objective data' and is sometimes based solely on impressions and subjective evaluations. Yet 'hard' information, including statistical findings, plays an important role in policy debate. Relationism has the potential, if developed effectively, to make robust analytical contributions as weel as expressing a more diffuse yearning for community.

Finally, a significant strength of an approach which emphasises relational concerns derives from the fact that there is no issue of public policy that does not either involve or affect relationships. Recent years have seen increasing discussion of the environmental dimension of a range of public policy issues (e.g. transport policy, planning controls, corporate regulation, energy policy, global responsibility and international competition). The potential application of a relational perspective on public policy issues is wider still since no issue is without its relational dimension.

Formulating and Communicating a Biblical Perspective

We began this report by drawing attention to problems in using the Bible in the context of public policy debate both in formulating and in communicating a biblical perspective.   We now draw up a few observations about the contribution Relationism makes to overcoming these problems.

The process of developing Relationism has not contributed to academic debate on the authority of the Bible and many of the hermeneutical issues under debate in recent decades. A high view of Scripture and the expectation of contemporary relevance has been taken at a starting point. Three general contributions have been made.   First, the possibility of treating Scripture as inerrant and authoritative and handling the texts in a creative way to address complex modern problems has been illustrated - if not executed perfectly. Secondly,

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[159]   M. Schluter, *Family Roots or Mobility?* (Cambridge: Jubilee Centre Publications, 1986) quoting F.E. Roberson, 'Mobility and the Family in Hospital Medicine', *Health Trends*, 13 (1981), pp.15-6.

[160]   The comment was included in correspondence between A.P. Garrood and Michael Schluter. Further analysis was offered in A.P. Garrood, *Evangelicalism Secularised: Intimacy and Relationism in 'The R Factor',* a paper prepared for the Ilkley Group, November 1993.

emphasising the significance of relationships may contribute to the 'hermeneutical spiral' and challenge some of us in the West who may read the Bible too heavily under the influence of our individualist culture. Thirdly, Relationism in *The R Factor,* built on insights that often owe their origin to Old Testament texts advances the case for seeing the Old Testament as a fruitful source for Christian social ethics. Finally, Relationism at a high level of generality offers some scope for gathering the 'scattered voice' but in its more detailed forms may, regrettably, add yet another voice to those already present.

Relationism pursues a translation strategy and has already found that people without Christian faith have warmed to the language of relationships. The idea of using secular language is not, in itself, new. Where Relationism is, perhaps, a pioneer is in seeking to adopt, develop, even to some extent create, a secular vocabulary applicable across a wide range of policy contexts. It remains to be seen whether this experiment will achieve the goal of more effective communication of biblical ideas.

THE FUTURE OF RELATIONISM

The future of Relationism - better the future of 'relational thinking' as a vehicle for bringing biblical ideas into the public arena - is difficult to predict. The circumstances encountered, the opportunities arising, the results achieved, cannot be ascertained in advance. The aims of different Christian organisations adopting such an approach are likely to differ; the aims of any one organisation adopting such an approach may vary over time. We have identified the articulation of a vision for society as an ambition of Relationism but, in practice, relational thinking may prove instead predominantly to provide:

- a *perspective* which adjusts, even transforms, ways of tackling issues
- a *reforming impulse* - a dynamic creating fresh ideas and initiatives
- a new *criterion* which is urged as essential when evaluating prevailing policy or devising new policy options.

An issue, linked to the evolving content of Relationism and finding appropriate language to convey that content, is whether to abandon the name 'Relationism'. To speak of an 'ism' can smack of reductionism, rigidity and exaggerated claims. Moreover, in the words of one commentator 'isms' can soon become 'wasms'.[161] However, against this, if Relationism develops as a vision for society some comfort may be taken from the fact that 'isms' can take many forms. Witness the recent book, *The Seven Cultures of Capitalism*,[162] which identifies seven variants of capitalism to be found in the modern world. Further, the suffix 'ism' need not necessarily imply sweeping claims. Nonetheless, if a person already regards himself, for instance, a 'socialist' he may be resistant to the idea that he become a 'relationist' but may welcome the fresh insights 'relational

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161   Melanie Phillips, 'Dogmatic isms that turned into wasms', *The Observer*, 4 July 1993.

162   C. Hampden-Turner & F. Trompenaas, *The Seven Cultures of Capitalism* (London: Piatkus, 1993).

thinking' can offer him.   This issue is not finally resolved and different users of ideas with a relational emphasis may opt for differnt labels.

Research Possibilities

Different readers will, in the light of their ares of specialist interest and knowledge, be aware of different possible directions for future research. These might lie in the fields of theology, biblical studies, ethics, economics, or specific policy areas to mention but a few. It is our hope that this short report will stimulate people, particularly Christians, to identify and pursue such research options and, where possible, apply the results.

One driving impulse behind Relationism was to develop and communicate in the modern world a biblical vision for society. The expression 'vision for society' is highly suggestive but not a precise term of art. There is room to take further a discussion of the idea of a 'biblical vision for society'. A decisive and distinctive feature of the vision building exercise behind Relationism has been paradigmatic interpretation of Old Testament Israel.   Thus, an obvious direction for future research is to explore further the nature and contemporary relevance of Israel as a paradigm society. An exposition of the contours of the paradigm society needs to indicate the way principles of timeless significance may be distinguished from those which are time-specific. Biblical principles drawn, or constructed, from material elsewhere in the canon which complement, or adjust the significance we attach to, those located in the paradigm need to be identified. In particular, direct reflection on the process of creation, fall and redemption should itself shape, supply or reinforce insights. A crucial and perennial question is how rightly to read Old Testament material in the light of the New Testament and, in particular, the Christ event.   Further, a discussion of the 'creative hermeneutic' used to develop applications for the modern world out of the timeless principles would be valuable.

While Relationism as presented in *The R Factor* relied on paradigmatic interpretation of Old Testament Israel for its inspiration, the promotion of 'relational thinking' does not hinge on this approach. Some Christians may wish to develop some of the themes suggested in this report but in a way that draws on the broader doctrinal reflection of systematic theology or the implications of concepts such as *shalom* or *koinonia*.

A key concern of Relationism, naturally enough, is relationships. The extensive biblical teaching on relationships could be examined with public policy questions in mind. Much of this is, first and foremost, directed towards the individual and the church, not society, so careful sifting will be needed. Nonetheless specific relationships (e.g. parent-child) and specific models of relationship (e.g. covenant, *koinonia*) could be studied with profit.   The idea of promoting relational values expresses a rejection of individualism and materialism. However, the proper conduct of relationships is a matter much disputed among people today. The dimensions of relational proximity are concepts permitting empirical assessment of factors affecting relationships rather than moral norms. Some have analogues in the moral domain: continuity suggests the

virtue of loyalty or commitment. Nonetheless, the notion of a 'good relationship' which is so central to Relationism since public policy, by fostering relational proximity, is meant to facilitate 'good relationships' needs to be unravelled.

There is scope for extended interaction with a range of writers who have in their own work stressed a relational perspective. In philosophy, one thinks of John Macmurray, author of *The Self as Agent* and *Persons in Relation*; in epistemology, Polanyi, author of *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*; in political theory, communitarians such as Charles Taylor and Michael Sandel; in Christian ethics the personalist school such as Borden Parker Browne and E.S. Brightman. These schools of thought, and no doubt others, are likely to have a contribution to make which could enrich or refine Relationism.

One lesson of the Relational Justice project is that exploring and applying biblical principles to even one area of public life takes a considerable time to do in a meaningful way. Part of any process of developing a biblical vision for society must be a cumulative examination of individual issues and areas of public life. The role of government, the process of education, the provision of welfare, the phenomenon of pluralism, the shape of political philosophy, and much besides, could all be addressed with benefit.

A vital test of 'relational thinking' is whether, in the end, it is capable of developing workable policy ideas. Thus, research into biblical theology and political philosophy must be complemented by practical developments. The work on relational audits is a good example of a practical initiative. A promising area, which might span the theoretical and practical, is that of 'relational finance'. Finance has been described as the Cinderella of Christian ethics[163] - central to the story of human living but for too long neglected by Christian ethics. The ban on interest and associated provisions in Old Testament Israel are likely to offer some novel and constructive ideas which might be honed into specific policy suggestions. The range of possible applications relate tocorporate structures, fiscal policy in regard to corporate finance, banking regulation, the promotion of credit unions and the development of new financial instruments and institutions.

Finally, any research agenda should be influenced by the fact that the goal is to contribute to public policy debate. To engage in debate involves responding as well as initiating. Those Christians, and others, who try to develop relational thinking will need to be aware of the social needs perceived and the ideas canvassed by others. The development of relational ideas should balance attempts to set a new agenda in public debate (shaped by biblical priorities) and attempts to contribute to debate underway (feeding in biblical insights).

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163   R. Preston, 'Is there a Christian Ethic of Finance?', *Finance and Ethics* (Edinburgh: Centre for Theology and Public Issues, Occasional Paper No. 11, 1987), p.13

The Relationships Foundation

One organisation that will be committed to developing and applying relational thinking is *The Relationships Foundation*. The brochure to launch the next phase of its work says:

> The Relationships Foundation aims to meet the challenge of our times by radically changing the way we approach social, economic and political issues. Its core belief is that public policy should be debated and changed in a way that puts people and their relationships first.

Its statement of purpose sums up its aim as 'Promoting relational values in public and private life.' Its focus will be on 'changing the vision, language and goals of public life' through research, initiatives, dissemination and partnerships with others to achieve common goals.

By the end of 1999, the aim is to have influenced five significant areas of public life. These may well include the areas of criminal justice, family policy and business practices and structures (for initiatives are already underway in those areas). In addition initiatives seeking to reduce or alleviate unemployment, addressing aspects of welfare provision and developing new ideas for the finance sector are all possibilities. Work on the 'big picture', the articulation of a vision for society, will not be overlooked. However, most work is likely to focus on specific areas and issues. Know-how gathered this way can only help to inform the bigger picture and helps place a 'relational approach' into the public arena in a practical way.

Meanwhile *The Relationships Foundation* will hope to develop its network of supporters and sympathisers. This will involve seeking the support of national membership organisations; winning the support of key opinion formers in Parliament, business, the media, the church and academia; and recruiting active associates who will be aiming to apply relational values in their public and private lives. A key challenge, inevitably, will be the struggle to establish a sound financial base. It will be apparent that, notwithstanding its commitment to research, *The Relationships Foundation* will differ from a conventional 'think tank', for its range of activities will involve practical initiatives, developing a grass roots movement and, at times, political lobbying.

The Power of Partnerships

The last word, aptly, is that the future success of any attempt to promote a relational agenda in public life depends in a large measure on relationships developed in the coming years. The tasks of refining the *ideas* of Relationism and extending the *influence* of relational thinking depend on whether a number of partnerships are initiated and strengthened. An onus will rest on anyone, and that must include *The Relationships Foundation*, seeking to promote relational initiatives to develop the necessary partnerships.

There is a need to develop more fruitful links between theologians and experts in other disciplines. A contribution to public policy debate intended to reflect biblical thinking must be an inter-disciplinary contribution. To oversimplify biblical theology should provide the intellectual framework within which

practical and technical discussion takes place; economic, legal and political know-how must inform the thinking proposed in the name of advancing human welfare.

There is a need too for close links, in the course of reflecting on particular areas of public life, between academic experts, people with extensive practical experience in the relevant field, and those outside the system able to lobby for radical change. Each brings a particular contribution in terms of insight and potential influence.

In the context of public debate on government policy denominational bodies, local churches, and para-church organisations each have different strengths to offer and a particular contribution to make. On issues of sufficient importance, there is a value in co-ordinating these contributions. The Sunday trading debate has illustrated the respective roles that may most suitably fall to different representatives of the Christian community as a whole. Church leaders were able to declare with authority the principles underlying Christian concern to retain Sunday as a 'special' day. In December 1988 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Hume, the Free Church Moderator and the Chief Rabbi sent a joint letter to the Secretary of State at the Home Office. The Jubilee Centre, a para-church organisation focusing on involvement in public policy questions, acted as secretariat to the Keep Sunday Special Campaign, and was able to mobilise grass roots support and continue a sustained media campaign for eight years, working typically from a six-figure annual budget. The Campaign also pursued negotiations with the Home Office over the text of one of the legislative options to be included in the Sunday Trading Bill put before Parliament. No church, local or denominational, could have matched this effort - and would have been diverted from their primary callings had they tried.   Local churches, or rather their members, wrote letters, visited MPs, organised constituency meetings, prayed, and once the shops began to open on Sundays held informal services in shopping centres as a witness.

The potential partnership between denominational bodies, local churches and para-church organisations can apply to the mutually reinforcing work of pastoral care and involvement in public policy debate. This may be illustrated with regard to marriage and family relationships. The ethical complexities posed for Christians by cohabitation, divorce and remarriage cnnot be ignored. However, if we confine ourselves here to the question of how marriage as a living institution may be encouraged, we find different parts of the Christian community have different parts to play. Denominational bodies can articulate values and ideals and guide church practice. Local churches can, if they choose, provide marriage preparation classes, provide teaching in the pulpit and small-group contexts, and offer pastoral support. Meanwhile a para-church contributing to public debate on 'relationships' might seek to persuade government to reduce some of the pressures on marriage that public policy directly creates (e.g. preferential tax treatment, *de facto,* for umarried parents) or indirectly tolerates (e.g. fostering a free market agenda that regards labour mobility as a virtue).

Last, but not least, the 'relational enterprise' presupposes partnerships between those who are and those who are not Christians. The aim is to change public policy for the better, bringing incremental improvements to

human welfare. Christians may - indeed must - look to the Bible for insights into the kinds of changes needed. In many cases, they will, however, only be introduced if we work alongside people who do not share the same underlying commitment to the Bible. The path of co-operation will pose many questions and call for great judgment, but in regard to public policy issues it is essential.

Conclusion

We believe that this report has illustrated that the ideas of Relationism, while needing much further work to refine, extend and apply them, offer one means by which several key biblical priorities for the life of society may be commended to others. These are times in which the political ideas of the future are being moulded and hence times of opportunity. There are, however, undoubted difficulties in seeking to apply the Bible to public policy issues in an authentic and effective way. There is, further, a shortage of promising strategies for establishing the influence of biblical priorities and values in public life, particularly, in certain kinds of society. These include societies in which adherence to Christianity is limited or waning and those embarking on major social change and seeking a social vision to guide them. There is, we believe, a strong case for Christians to support, encourage and interact with the development of new strategies, such as Relationism, which show promise. New ideas and strategies always need - and Relationism is no exception - careful thought, and sometimes candid criticism, to bring them to full maturity and to guide their application. At the same time, without nurture and initiative their potential fruitfulness will never be realised.

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