JUBILEE CENTRE

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THE MEASURE OF ALL THINGS?

A biblical perspective on money and value in Britain today

Nick Spencer

'I TELL YOU, USE WORLDLY WEALTH TO GAIN FRIENDS'

Luke 16:9

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Acknowledgements

This booklet is a contribution to a programme which is 20 years old this year. Since 1983 the Jubilee Centre has conducted a great deal of work on the topic of money and value in Ancient Israel and modern Britain. This publication draws on this legacy and will, I hope, encourage others to engage seriously with this fundamental issue.

Details of earlier publications can be found in the Further Reading section, but my particular thanks for their comments and guidance are owed to John Ashcroft, Jason Fletcher and Michael Schluter.

NICK SPENCER
May 2003

Summary

We have an odd relationship with money. On the one hand, it is our liberator, freeing us from the limitations imposed by birth, locality, class, and even ability; promising us food, fun, fame, and fulfilment. On the other, it is our jailor, who, having freed us from the prison of circumstance, incarcerates us in a far subtler jail of anxiety and stress.

The tension is reflected in our consumer society. We like to denounce our 24/7 retail culture, and yet still shop 'out of hours' in our millions. We lament the estimated £800 billion consumer debt we have accrued but then wait nervously for the next consumer spending figures. We are torn between wanting more and needing less.

Consumerism is, in reality, merely a symptom of the problem. Our ruthless commercialisation of everything, from news and entertainment, to time, space and even relationships is no more than the product of an idea which has slowly grown to dominate our minds, often without us even realising us. Simply put, it is that money is the rightful measure of all things.

At first we baulk at such an idea. No one *really* believes this. Money may be important but we know, along with spokesmen of the twentieth century's most optimistic decade, that it can't buy you love. Our values transcend our bank balances.

Yet, when we start to look at the details of our everyday life, the picture is less comfortable. Our time, possessions, homes, future, and security are all measured in monetary terms. Price invariably trumps principle in our purchase decisions. Our virtual public space is shaped primarily by financial concerns. Our physical public space is heading in the same direction. Even our relationships, those supposed oases of non-monetary values, are increasingly infected by a culture of litigation, separate finances and pre-nuptial agreements. Research has shown that no one thinks of him or herself as a consumer but virtually everyone behaves like one.

More than any other modern social or cultural trend, our monetary culture lends itself to a biblical analysis. Scripture is noticeably concerned with money and although the complexity of financial systems has vastly increased over the last two millennia, the basic building blocks of a monetary culture, not least our relationship with and attitude to money, transcend all immediate historical circumstances.

The Measure of All Things? begins and ends with the biblical vision for money in society, moving from what the Bible has to say about money to what it has to say about value. Chapter one deals with the popular misconceptions of the biblical attitude to money and shows how around

every biblical financial soundbite quoted today, there lie four or five concentric circles which contextualise the apparent meaning and prevent its interpretation from being hijacked for someone's existing agenda. The Bible's distinct approach to money is not, as some superficial modern interpretation would have it, in its outright rejection of it but instead in the way the role of money is simultaneously recognised and restrained within a bigger picture.

To contextualise the Bible's monetary teaching is not to water it down, however, and chapter two examines why Scripture has such discomforting things to say about money by looking at what money actually is. The question appears rather odd at first: everyone knows what money is, where to get it and that you never have enough of the stuff. Yet closer inspection reveals that although technically a tool, with our complicity, money behaves like a god, demanding faith and promising liberation and salvation in return. It is personified as Mammon for a very good reason.

The chapter then proceeds to show what can happen when 'Mammon' escapes the limitations imposed on it by society's other value systems. Not only does the unfettered pursuit of money not equate to the pursuit of happiness but it can also have significant detrimental effects on society. Entertainment broadcasting, in its frantic pursuit of the high ratings which guarantee profit, either drifts towards the anodyne and formulaic or quietly pushes the boundaries of language, sex, violence, and vulgarity in search of headlines. News broadcasting and journalism become soap operatic because reasoned objectivity and detailed analysis do not deliver the same audiences as 'clear-cut fables starring creepy Iagos and ravished Desdemonas'. Public space is invaded as every possible surface is covered with advertising or it is abolished altogether as high streets are replaced by shopping malls. Ethical products struggle to capture more than three per cent of market share because principle comes a poor third behind price and performance in the majority of purchase decisions. The list goes on.

To recognise this is not to question the necessity of the cost/benefit analysis in life but rather to become aware of the effect of reducing everything to such an analysis. It is to take the first steps in the process of disentangling money and value.

The final chapter returns to Scripture to ask what *should* be the measure of all things if not money. The biblical answer points towards an altogether different approach. 'God measures a society… not by the size of its GNP or by the efficiency of its markets, but by the quality of its relationships.'[1] The chapter uses this observation to outline a series of conceptual, personal and structural changes which would help British society shift from a monetary yardstick to a relational one. No one should underestimate the enormity of this task. The extent to which we think, talk, shop, spend, save, travel, play, and work according to monetary criteria is vast. The fact we do not realise it simply shows how deeply ingrained it is within us. Changing our attitudes and behaviour will be difficult but failure to do so merely passes the problem on to future generations.

Thinking through our often unconscious and highly pervasive attitude to money can be an extremely profitable exercise. The wealth of readily available metaphors – 'tool', 'language', 'servant', 'medium', 'yardstick', 'compass' – through which we understand money makes writing about it highly rewarding and punning on it an occupational hazard. But it is also a daunting task. Our attitude to money has uniquely deep and complex roots and this booklet can only begin to excavate the conceptual and attitudinal ground around them. It is hoped, however, that in doing so it will help readers to understand money better and equip them to shape their lives accordingly.

Notes

1 Michael Schluter, 'Relationism: Pursuing a biblical vision for society' *(Cambridge Papers*, Vol. 6, No. 4, December 1997), p. 3

1. Through the eye of a needle: money and the Bible

Popular notions of the biblical attitude to money are superficial and confused. In reality, a series of concentric contextual circles surrounds biblical monetary aphorisms. Creation, from which money is an abstraction, is fundamentally good, if fallen. Its enjoyment is heartily encouraged. At the same time, it is contingent on God and comes with vital social responsibilities. Money and wealth are not goals in themselves but are intricately tied up with the ends of justice, compassion and right relationships. It is only after having recognised these critical contextualisations, that we can properly understand Jesus' stern warnings about the dangers of money.

Popular notions

In 1633 two young boys were caught breaking a church window while playing ball in their Somerset churchyard. Facing punishment they managed to defend themselves with some fearfully quick-witted reasoning. 'Where is the church?' they asked. '[Surely] the church is where the congregation is assembled?'[1]

Their cunning question went straight to the heart of one of the major theological arguments of the day, an increasingly passionate debate about the true nature of the church. Was 'the church' the institution, the building or the people? Facing the prospect of the rod, the boys homed in on a profound controversy in the hope of dividing and disuniting their accusers. Their ruse failed but in their attempt to wriggle free, the miscreants revealed some astute theological reasoning.

The boys' erudition, although not unusual for the time, sounds utterly foreign to modern ears. Biblical phrases, particularly those from the King James' Authorised Version, are still occasionally heard in conversation but they tend to have been emptied of their theological content. We hear of 'the salt of the earth' and 'the powers that be' but these are, in essence, no more scriptural than the Shakespearean proverbs alongside which they are heard.[2]

The one major exception to this is biblical teaching on money. Not only do people still cite the Bible's monetary aphorisms but they think they understand them. Even in our post-Christian culture, phrases about money being the root of all evil, rich men failing to get into heaven and the impossibility of serving both God and Mammon are widely used.

Jesus is remembered for having thrown the money-lenders out of the temple… hence showing his unyielding loathing of consumerism. When handed a coin, he told people to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's… hence divorcing religion from all areas of finance (not to mention politics). He told the rich young ruler that if he wanted to be perfect, he should sell what he owned and give the money to the poor… hence demonstrating that all Christians had to do the same if they truly wanted to be Christians.

The implications are clear. Christianity is about renouncing wealth. Money is sinful. Wealth is dubious. Poverty is blessed. God and Mammon do not mix. And Christians have a great commission to be poor. The logic is as incontrovertible as it is false.

The goodness of creation

As with most well-digested and overly-simplistic assertions, this popular view is really only a half-truth. Phrases and stories are heavily decontextualised, abstracted from speaker, audience, situation, cultural context, and genre, and then treated as timeless truths or, worse, messages addressed to early twenty-first-century Western consumers. Without contexts, they become pretexts.

Contextualisation is important for any analysis of Scripture but it is especially so for the biblical teaching on money, where a series of concentric contextual circles quietly surround the New Testament's most memorable financial aphorisms. The outermost of these circles is the doctrine of the goodness of creation.

This essential goodness of creation is asserted seven times in the opening chapter of Genesis. The phrase 'And God saw that it was good' regularly punctuates the creation narrative, becoming a lyrical refrain celebrating God's work and leading up to the concluding, climactic affirmation in the final verse of the chapter, 'God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.'[2]

That the Fall disrupts this unqualified goodness is made clear in God's words to Adam in Genesis 3.

> *'Cursed is the ground because of you;*
> *through painful toil you will eat of it*
> *all the days of your life.*
> *It will produce thorns and thistles for you,*
> *and you will eat the plants of the field.*
> *By the sweat of your brow*
> *you will eat your food*
> *until you return to the ground,*
> *since from it you were taken;*
> *for dust you are*
> *and to dust you will return.'*[4]

Mankind's relationship with his environment has been disrupted. In place of the unspoilt lushness of Genesis 1, we hear of thorns, thistles and dust. Instead of the creation over which God gives Adam and Eve authority, we see one which resists and fights their efforts.

As the Pentateuch progresses we realise that the fall has marred rather than destroyed the goodness of creation. Human relationships with God, each other and the environment may have been ruptured but that does not entail their complete abasement. Israel is promised a land which flows with milk and honey, an epithet used fifteen times in the Pentateuch alone. The land's physicality is no mere incidental detail but central to the whole idea of their salvation, as the paean of praise in Deuteronomy 8 indicates.

> *'For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land – a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.'* [5]

Throughout the Old Testament, the fulfilment of God's kingdom is envisioned not in the ethereal, beatific images of later visionaries, still less the corrupted picture of angels playing harps on clouds, but rather through concrete images of mankind enjoying the goodness of creation in a harmonious and right way. It is the creation in which God

> *'makes grass grow for the cattle,*
> *and plants for man to cultivate –*
> *bringing forth food from the earth:*
> *wine that gladdens the heart of man,*
> *oil to make his face shine,*
> *and bread that sustains his heart.'* [6]

Enjoying creation

This full-blooded view of creation is not simply a theoretical point, useful only to counter later thinking influenced by Greek dualism or puritanical tendencies. It underpins a second concentric contextual circle within the biblical view of money. Creation is there to be enjoyed.

The best but perhaps most overlooked illustration of this is in the yearly round of festivals which re-enacted Israel's history, preserved their traditions and united their society. Throughout the Pentateuch, there are frequent commands to 'celebrate' Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of

Harvest, and the Feast of Weeks. Over-familiar modern translations can blind us to this very simple fact: at the heart of Israelite life was a succession of national parties, to which everybody, even the immigrants living among them, were invited.[7]

This principle also stands at the foundation of the Torah. In Deuteronomy 6:3, Israel is told *why* they have been given the law.

> *'Be careful to obey [these decrees and commands] so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey.'* [8]

The law is not an exercise in spiritual gymnastics or a series of legalistic hoops that mankind has to jump through in order to please a demanding God. Instead it is there 'so that it may go well' for the Israelite people. A picture of what constitutes 'going well' is given a few verses later when God reminds the Israelites that they don't deserve anything they are receiving.

> *'[you will receive] a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant.* [9]

And all this is, ultimately, so that the Israelites 'may enjoy long life'.[10] This picture of celebration remains central to the Hebrew worldview. Half a millennium or so later, when Israel is looking to return from exile, the prophet Jeremiah declares God's promise in now familiar terms.

> *'I will build you up again*
> *and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel.*
> *Again you will take up your tambourines*
> *and go out to dance with the joyful.*
> *Again you will plant vineyards*
> *on the hills of Samaria;*
> *the farmers will plant them*
> *and enjoy their fruit.*
> *There will be a day when watchmen cry out*
> *on the hills of Ephraim,*
> *'Come, let us go up to Zion,*
> *to the Lord our God.'*[11]

The biblical attitude to wealth needs to be understood in this context. Genuine affluence is the capacity to enjoy God's good creation to the full. The writer of Ecclesiastes, in spite of his sobering and recurring assertion of the 'meaninglessness' of everything, repeatedly encourages the enjoyment of wealth: 'when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work – this is a gift of God.'[12] He even goes as far as to say that even if 'a man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet… if he cannot enjoy his prosperity… I say that a stillborn child is better off than he.'[13]

The contingency of wealth

There is, however, an enormous caveat which underpins this enjoyment of wealth, and this provides a third contextual circle: everything we have is dependent on God.

In an agricultural society like Israel's, wealth was very closely linked to land. Although Hebrew society was no stranger to precious metals and stones, wealth was primarily generated and distributed by means of land. To be 'loaded' was to be landed.

In the midst of the Jubilee legislation in Leviticus chapter 25, when God is instructing the Israelites about the importance of relaxing every Sabbath year and returning to their ancestral homelands every Sabbath of Sabbaths, he tells the people, 'the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.'[14] The implication is that whilst the Israelites had control over and responsibility for their wealth, ultimately they owed it to God.

This theme is echoed throughout Israel's history, with its grandest vision coming in David's consecration of the Temple in 1 Chronicles 29. David lists in considerable detail the generosity which made the Temple possible. From his resources he provided large quantities of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, onyx, turquoise, precious stones, and marble. In his wake other national figures – family leaders, tribal officers, army commanders, and king's officials – gave over 190 tons of gold, 370 tons of silver, 670 tons of iron, and a wealth of precious stones. Offerings, the writer points out, were 'willingly… freely and wholeheartedly' made. The atmosphere is one of a national party, as the Israelites rejoiced and then, following the sacrifices, 'ate and drank with great joy'.

And then, in the midst of this great celebration, David proclaims

> *'Who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. O Lord our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple… it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you.'*[15]

It is an astonishingly unassuming proclamation but one which captures the Hebrew worldview perfectly: the pleasure gained from the luxury and artistry of creation is contextualised within an awareness that everything they have is effectively on loan to them from their creator God. It is 'the Lord your God… who gives you the ability to produce wealth.'[16]

The social responsibilities of money

With this realisation comes responsibility and a fourth contextualisation: if money comes from God, God has the right to direct its use.

The Bible is not commonly regarded as a source of economic wisdom, largely because it is assumed that changes in technology and economic complexity render its financial lessons anachronistic, crude or irrelevant. Yet the principles which govern economic organisation, such as the ownership of capital, work incentives, finance, taxes, welfare, levels of trust, and human relationships are technologically and temporally non-specific. The Ancient Israelite economy would have been far simpler than the modern British one, but then so would the economy about which Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations* in the 1770s and that does not automatically invalidate free market economics.

A close reading of the Torah reveals a surprisingly coherent economic system.[17] This left the production and sale of goods almost entirely to the unfettered operation of market forces but had strict laws which governed the use of labour, the allocation of land and the role of finance, each of which was geared towards ensuring a minimum level of income and wealth for all. A combination of low taxes, a small state infrastructure, a stable price level, and predictable property rights encouraged economic growth by maintaining incentives to work, save and invest. At the same time, equitable property allocation, a leasehold market for land, various employment requirements, and the prohibition of a commercial loans market placed a brake on the economic power of the rich and created the conditions necessary to give economic independence to the poor.

This overall system was a kind of structural reflection of David's hymn in 1 Chronicles 29. If creation is to be enjoyed, and money is not intrinsically evil, creating wealth through trade is not inherently wrong. At the same time, if creation is a gift, and wealth merely an element within that, finance and trading should not be permitted to become goals in themselves but remain subservient to their proper objectives. In the case of the overall economic structure of Israel, these objectives were the capacity for all to enjoy the fruits of a just, equitable and joyful relationship with one another, with the land and with God.

These structural characteristics were founded on personal responsibilities. There was a clear responsibility to be productive. The book of Proverbs, in particular, places emphasis on this. The writer lauds the 'wife of noble character' because 'she work[s] vigorously [and] her trading is profitable,' and famously advises his son, 'Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!'[18] Time and again the author extols the virtues of work.

> *'Lazy hands make a man poor,*
> *but diligent hands bring wealth…'*
>
> *'He who works his land will have abundant food*
> *but he who chases fantasies lacks judgement…'*
>
> *'All hard work brings a profit,*
> *but mere talk leads only to poverty…'*
>
> *'The sluggard's craving will be the death of him,*
> *because his hands refuse to work…'*
>
> *'He who works his land will have abundant food,*
> *but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty…'*[19]

Just this theme is taken up by Paul centuries later when he wrote to the various communities he planted around the eastern Mediterranean. To the Ephesians he wrote, 'he who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands.'[20] To the Corinthians, he insisted on his and Barnabas' right to financial support for their pastoral work among them (by comparing himself to an ox).[21] And to the Thessalonians he wrote, 'even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."'[22]

Unfortunately, these sentiments, once decontextualised, have been used to justify a hopelessly naïve 'prosperity gospel' in which the link between industry and prosperity is hardened to an incontrovertible law of nature, and then read backwards, so that all those who endure poverty and misfortune are simply not working hard enough or, more sinisterly, are under God's judgement.

Such readings are, like the popular understanding of the biblical view of money, at best half-truths, quietly ignoring important related teachings. The wife of noble character works hard and then 'opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.' Neither Paul nor Barnabas actually exercised their right to receive payment: 'we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel.'[24] And when Paul instructs the errant Ephesians to stop stealing and start working it is so 'that [they] may have something to share with those in need.'[25] The responsibility to work is bound into the responsibility for compassion and justice.

The dangers of money

It is only once we have gone through these concentric contextual circles – of creation being good, of its enjoyment being advised, of its contingency being remembered, and of its responsibilities being exercised – that we reach the heart of the matter and begin to understand the undeniably stern warnings about money.

Money is sometimes treated neutrally in Scripture, as a means of exchange[26] or for funding large projects[27] for example, but more frequently it has genuine moral weight. That weight, as observed, is not necessarily negative but all too often money corrupts other value systems and is used for selfish, malevolent or destructive purposes. The more money one has, the greater the danger of this corruption and so it is not surprising that the severest biblical warnings about money are targeted at its concentrate form: wealth.

We have a tendency, as the book of Proverbs notes, to treat wealth as if it were a 'fortified city' or 'unscalable wall'.[28] Often unconsciously, we 'heap [it] up', 'trust' it and put our hope in it.[29] It becomes our defence, our protection, our security. The 'deceitfulness of wealth' is one of the factors which chokes the kingdom of God.[30]

Jesus is particularly concerned with the dangers of money. 'What good is it for a man to gain the whole world,' he asks after Peter's seminal confession in Mark 8, 'yet forfeit his soul?' 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth', he declares in the Sermon on the Mount. His initial explanation is that no earthly banking system is truly secure: somehow or other, whether through moths, rust or thieves, treasures decay. But he then shifts tone for the more profound explanation: 'For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'[31]

The question of money, Jesus recognises, is ultimately a question of love. Money is dangerous because it reveals *and influences* who and what we love. Two very different incidents in Jesus' life exemplified this.

While watching the donors in the temple treasury, Jesus observed a poor widow putting in 'two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny,' and remarked to his disciples 'she has put more into the treasury than all the others'. 'They all gave out of their wealth,' he continued, 'but she out of her poverty.' The reality behind his comments – that 'she… put in everything – all she had to live on' – is that she loved God with everything she had, rather than the other donors, who 'gave out of their wealth'.[32] Her heart was where her treasure was – in the temple.

At the other end of the scale, Jesus' oft-quoted aphorism that 'it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven,' was made after he had seen an eager young man, faced with a straight choice between God and Mammon, chose Mammon. Money distorts our values. Much as we might think otherwise, if we have it, and particularly if we have a great deal of it, we will end up loving it. Quite simply, as Jesus says elsewhere, if you have two masters, you'll end up short-changing one of them.

Perhaps the only biblical monetary aphorism quoted more frequently than 'the eye of a needle' is the one about money being 'the root of all evil.' The slight misquote is hugely important. When Paul wrote to Timothy he warned that 'people who want to get rich fall into… many foolish and harmful desires.' The context is not wealth but the obsessive pursuit of it.

> *'For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.'*[33]

Once again, the question is not about money but love: specifically, who or what we love. Paul's advice is simply a rephrasing of Jesus' warning about serving two masters or his guidance about storing up treasures.

The problem comes not so much with money but with our love of it. Money is a blessing, enabling us to enjoy the goodness of creation and exercise our personal and social responsibilities. It permits us to develop relationships, help friends and celebrate life. But like all gifts it should not be valued over the giver. It should remain servant not master, a means and not an ends. It is a tool, but, like fire, a hazardous one.

One important question remains unanswered through all this. Money is so dangerous because we are inclined to love it, albeit unconsciously, and give it the respect due only to God. But why is this so? Why *do* people end up worshipping money so readily?

To answer this we need to look at money itself.

Notes

1 H. A. Wyndham, *A Family History, 1410–1688: The Wyndhams of Norfolk and Somerset* (OUP, 1939), p. 168, quoted in Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth Century Revolution* (Allen Lane, 1993), p. 51.
2 Matthew 5:13; Romans 13:1
3 Genesis 1:4,10,12,18,21,25,31
4 Genesis 3:17–19
5 Deuteronomy 8:7–9
6 Psalm 104:14–15
7 Exodus 12:48; Numbers 9:14
8 Deuteronomy 6:3
9 Deuteronomy 6:11
10 Deuteronomy 6:2
11 Jeremiah 31:4–6
12 Ecclesiastes 5:19, 8:15, 11:8
13 Ecclesiastes 6:3
14 Leviticus 25:23
15 1 Chronicles 29:14–16
16 Deuteronomy 8:18
17 Paul Mills, 'The divine economy' (*Cambridge Papers*, Vol. 9, No. 4, December 2000)
18 Proverbs 31:17–18; 6:6
19 Proverbs 10:4, 12:1, 14:23, 21:25, 28:19
20 Ephesians 4:28
21 1 Corinthians 9:1–14
22 2 Thessalonians 3:10
23 Proverbs 31:20
24 1 Corinthians 9:13
25 Ephesians 4:28
26 Ezra 7:17
27 2 Kings 12
28 Proverbs 18:11
29 Psalm 39:6, 49:6; 1 Timothy 6:17
30 Matthew 13:22
31 Matthew 6:19–21; cf. James 5:2
32 Mark 12:41–44
33 1 Timothy 6:9–10

2. Playing with fire: the dangers of confusing money and value

Although theoretically a tool, money, if we permit it to, readily assumes the role of a god, demanding faith and promising freedom in return. This role has traditionally been limited by prevalent ideologies but was liberated in the twentieth-century West, resulting in the mass pursuit of happiness through the pursuit of wealth. This pursuit has proved somewhat chimerical, however, with research showing that we are no happier today than we were 50 years ago. The side-effects of the pursuit have also proved detrimental with the quality of our virtual and physical public space, our politics, our principles and our relationships all suffering as a consequence. To note this is not to question the importance of the financial cost/benefit analysis but rather to disentangle money from value and begin to ask what should replace it.

Faith in money

To understand why the Bible and especially Jesus were so acutely aware of the dangers of money, we need to look at what money actually is and how it works.

This sounds at first like an odd undertaking. Money is one of the first concepts we grasp in childhood. From a very early age, we know what it looks like, what it does and where we can ask for it. But that is rather different from knowing what it actually is, something for which dictionary definitions offer some guidance.

> *'A current medium of exchange in the form of coins and banknotes.'* [1]
>
> *'A medium that can be exchanged for goods and services and is used as a measure of their values on the market.'* [2]

What these definitions highlight is the key idea of money as a medium: 'an intervening substance through which a force acts… or through which impressions are conveyed.'[3] In essence money is a language, one of the reasons why we like to say that money talks. It is something which stands for something else, an abstraction from the real world in order to help us manipulate that world.

In its origin and simplest form, money was one step on from barter. Instead of exchanging one valued thing for another, you could exchange it for a 'third party' which was also considered valuable, such as precious metals or stones, but which was more readily transferable. Instead of swapping livestock for land, or food for tools, which demanded that both parties and their possessions were present at the transaction, individuals could swap each for a mutually agreed amount of this precious medium, and in that way make exchanges easier and more flexible. The imperishability of the medium made long-term transactions more practical. Its portability made distance much less of a problem. Its scarcity allowed central authorities to optimise their control over subject peoples and land. Long before the first coin was struck, precious metals had allowed mankind to make a great leap forward.

Even at this early stage, however, a Rubicon had been crossed. The crucial difference between the products and the medium by which they were exchanged was that the goods at each end of the transaction did have some intrinsic value whereas the medium did not. Whether it was food, tools, land, shelter, labour, or protection that was being bought and sold, each had some demonstrable worth and benefit to human life.

The medium or 'third party' within the transaction did not. Gold, silver, minerals, jewels, gemstones, conch shells, or any other monetary medium had only as much value as people invested in it. Thomas More satirised this paradox in his famous *Utopia*:

> *'[In Utopia] silver and gold, the raw materials of money, get no more respect from anyone than their intrinsic value deserves – which is obviously far less than that of iron. Without iron human life is simply impossible, just as it is without fire or water – but we could easily do without silver and gold, if it weren't for the idiotic concept of scarcity-value… Mother Nature has deliberately placed all her greatest blessings, like earth, air and water, right under our noses, and tucked away out of sight the things which are no use to us.'*[4]

Central, therefore, to the most basic idea of money, is the concept that even at its most primitive level, of weights of precious metals through which simple transactions are facilitated, we have to have faith in it for it to work. It was only because there was widespread agreement concerning the value of these media, that they ever came to be used, let alone attain any power.

The more complex a financial system becomes, the more faith money requires. The initial belief that the precious metal within a coin would remain precious and that the coin was pure and had not been debased, was supplemented, as money became more and more abstract, with the need for faith in wholly debased coinage, credit slips, paper money, share price, and all the other financial arrangements which constitute a modern economy. Ultimately, faith in money became intricately tied to faith in the system which validated it, with the result that both could collapse simultaneously, as in inter-war Germany or modern Argentina, with disastrous consequences.

The promises of money

That money demands our faith in order to work is not in itself a problem. In one sense, every tool we use requires our faith that it will work. If we weren't prepared to put our trust in bicycles, we would never learn to ride. From the start, however, money was in a uniquely powerful position which made the faith it demanded dangerous.

There is, in reality, no difference between acting as a neutral medium of exchange and actually embodying the goods that the exchange is based on. The (potential) worth of an item you wish to purchase exists already in the medium of the exchange. If I have enough money in my pocket to buy a widget, I already own the potential of that widget and everything it can do. Money thus comes to embody the value of an object, with its uniquely powerful position deriving from the fact that it is so versatile, able to promise so much more than any other 'tool'. Fire offers warmth, protection and light; bicycles speed, distance and excitement, but an almost endless range of human needs and wants can, in theory, be satisfied by money.

Material needs are only the most basic ones to be met by what one writer calls this 'indiscriminate satisfaction incorporated in money'.[5] Sensual pleasure can be purchased with financial resources. Money helps the physically vulnerable to enjoy security. It allows individuals to gain freedom from human dominion. It promises status and respect. It allays anxieties about misfortune and the future. It can even take some of the sting out of death through life insurance. With such promises, it is hardly surprising that it can pass so swiftly 'from being a mere conveyance of desire to being the object of all desire.'[6]

Versatility is not the same as omnipotence, however, and there are values which are not susceptible in any meaningful way to money's promises. As endlessly observed in popular culture, money cannot buy you love, friendship, peace, or any of those qualities which are essential for a truly fulfilled human life.

Moreover, even those human desires money does promise to satisfy are inherently fragile. Because many of the things within money's gift are not satisfied by a one-off payment but instead demand an on-going supply to feed them, the pleasure of desire fulfilled is often undermined by anxiety for the future. As the writer of Ecclesiastes put it, 'Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.'[7]

As soon as we recognise that money is not just a 'medium of exchange' but in fact a medium of exchange which works by demanding our faith and then promising us wellbeing, hope, status, comfort, and much else besides, it becomes obvious why biblical writers in general and Jesus in particular saw 'Mammon' as a direct competition to God.

Liberating mammon

This rival nature is intrinsic to the way money works: it has always required faith and has always promised fulfilment. But that does not make it inherently wicked. If its nature is controlled – if, in other words, we don't allow our faith in it to displace our faith in other things, and, more importantly, we don't confuse the price of an object with its value – then money can be used perfectly successfully within society. Money needs human sinfulness in order to become Mammon.

People have, of course, been inclined to offer it exactly that sinfulness for millennia but most societies have still forced money to operate within rigid social structures which have mitigated the effects of our sin on it. Ideologies, power structures and social systems have each moderated the impact that a complete blurring of price and value would have on society. For centuries, the authority of God or the gods, the state, the king, the emperor, or the priesthood, and the hierarchical order imposed on society, dictated to people a value, purpose and status which was largely independent of money.

In the twentieth century, however, all this changed. A combination of crumbling social authorities and rising discretionary income shifted the balance. British society turned away from the old structures, which imposed rank and value on roles and individuals, towards a more flexible, personalised format based primarily on financial calculations. No longer used to shore up the foundations of traditional social structures, money was liberated to satisfy people's instinctive demands.

The move apparently had everything to recommend it. The old social structures could be palpably unfair, defining a life simply through the circumstances of its birth. They were, for all intents and purposes, arbitrary, imposed from above, self-interested, self-perpetuating, constricting, and burdensome. The new system, or more precisely the lack of it, seemed, in direct opposition to this, liberating, even-handed and meritocratic.

If value is made contingent on price, so the argument ran, society is, in theory at least, wholly democratised. Everything is made available to everyone. Privileges are no longer restricted to a pre-ordained elite but are now open to the populace, with the only arbiter being whether people want something enough to be willing to pay for it. Indeed, rather than living in a democracy, where each person has one vote, we have moved to a 'leptocracy',[8] where every coin is a tiny vote, every individual has many thousands of them and everyone is free to exercise them as they see fit.

Not only could people now choose or 'vote' for themselves the particular combination of leisure, status, power and wellbeing that suited them, but through the enormous impact of the economy in general, and individual corporations in particular, they could even contribute to the policies, successes and failures of more traditionally elected governments.

A 'leptocracy' seemed a perfectly equitable solution, freeing money to facilitate people's 'natural' desires rather than society's 'artificial' structures. The last thirty or so years have shown, however, that the theory didn't quite match the reality, with the first problem coming with the 'natural' desire to be happy.

The pursuit of happiness

The nineteenth-century philosopher, John Stuart Mill, was educated by his father and Jeremy Bentham, along determinedly utilitarian principles. The objective of life was to realise the greatest happiness for the greatest number. It was a doctrine which brought him to the brink of mental breakdown at the age of twenty.

> *'"Suppose that all your objects in life were realised… would this be a great joy and happiness to you?" And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, "No!" At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm… I seemed to have nothing to live for.'* [9]

Mill was exceptionally precocious but his 'crisis of faith' set a tiny but vital precedent for the twentieth century. The natural human inclination to be happy is a complex phenomenon and not as susceptible to money's promises as was first thought.

It took quite a while to recognise this. During the 1950s and '60s an ever more money-centred culture raised living standards and, it was assumed, levels of happiness too. It was only after the post-war boom began to fade that people started to ask seriously whether a money-focused society really did deliver the goods.

The answers, unfortunately, were never as clear as the question, largely because it was (and is) not that easy to agree on what 'the goods' actually are. On one side of the equation, the argument is straightforward. Society may suffer ever greater income polarisation but as a whole it is roughly three times richer today than it was after World War Two. The leptocracy has clearly delivered those goods. The pursuit of wealth certainly brings wealth.

On the other side, though, it is hard even to agree what should be measured – happiness? wellbeing? contentment? – let alone *how* it should be measured. The Human Development Index (HDI), which averages longevity, adult literacy and living standards (as defined by GDP), has Western nations, including Britain, at the top of the pile, leagues ahead of poorer Third World countries. Even if one were to remove the self-fulfilling element of living standards from this measure, it would still be clear that wealthier societies were better educated and longer lived. The pursuit of wealth appears to deliver both health and education.

However, as many social researchers have pointed out, happiness is a rather subtler animal than that measured by the HDI. You can still be old, clever, rich, *and* miserable. Many people are.

Happiness and life satisfaction surveys have been conducted consistently in Britain since the 1970s. These are invariably an inexact science depending as they do on how happy or satisfied people *say* they are as opposed to how happy or satisfied they actually are, and hence being dangerously susceptible to national moods. Nevertheless, in as far as it is possible to tell, people today do not feel as contented with their lives as their parents did at the same age.[10] As the social scientist and happiness researcher Andrew Oswald has written, 'The big question – has a country like ours become happier through the last few decades? My judgement, as a happiness researcher, is no.'[11]

Richard Layard who delivered the Lionel Robbins Memorial Lectures in 2003 at the London School of Economics, put it more forthrightly.

> *'People in the West have got no happier in the last 50 years. They have become much richer, they work much less, they have longer holidays, they travel more, they live longer, and they are healthier. But they are no happier.'*[12]

Recent attempts to calculate happiness hint at the reason why. One 2002 paper which calculated the impact of different life events upon human wellbeing, suggested that

> *'getting married… bring[s] each year the same amount of happiness… as having an extra 70,000 pounds of income per annum… [and] widowhood brings a degree of unhappiness that would take, on average, an extra 170,000 pounds per annum to offset'*[13]

In one sense these precise figures are patently absurd. No grieving widow if offered the choice between £170,000 and her husband back, would sensibly choose the former. Moreover, £170,000 is an inconceivable sum to some, and small change to (a tiny minority of) others. Yet, the overall purpose of the analysis points towards an important truth: the things that make us truly happy, like a stable, loving marriage, are on a totally different scale to our everyday concerns, and completely transcend the ambitions and day-to-day sums of a consumerist culture. We can't buy happiness because it is effectively beyond the medium of money.

And we also cannot buy it because it is a chimera. To quote Andrew Oswald again

> *'The curse of human-ness is that people feel compelled unconsciously to look over their shoulders all the time: happiness and self-esteem depend on rank and relative income.'*[14]

We may be excused for hearing Ecclesiastes in the background: 'whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.' Liberating money to facilitate our 'natural' instinct for happiness results not in the satisfaction of that instinct but in a perpetual, exhausting, anxiety-inducing, chimerical pursuit. The end of our leptocracy, to quote Ecclesiastes again, is 'a chasing after the wind,' or worse, 'wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners'.[15]

Infotainment

If this were the only effect of a leptocracy, it would be bad enough. However, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that there are significant detrimental side-effects of our frantic pursuit.

When money and value are confused, or more precisely, when money becomes the universally accepted yardstick for value, other measures are inevitably displaced. In one sense this is hardly surprising. It is far easier to tell whether something is expensive than whether it is any good. Exactly why an action, artefact or artwork is 'good' is very difficult to say, let alone measure. The issue has kept moral philosophers and art critics busy for centuries. Moreover, with the erosion of any social authorities or belief systems to pronounce on the topic, the problem becomes even harder. If you and I disagree over what is good and have no mutually agreed criteria, or respected and authoritative third party to arbitrate our debate, there's no reason why we should ever reach an agreement.

In a leptocracy this Gordian knot is cut by redefining the question altogether. 'What is good?' is meaningless for a system which is based around the pursuit of happiness through the pursuit of wealth. The question assumes some value system which transcends our monetary yardstick but about which there is little agreement and no verifiable evidence. Instead, what is good is what makes people happy enough to be prepared to vote with their money. Put more simply, it is what sells.

This marks a fundamental shift in our outlook. Increasingly, our prime criterion for judgement is not 'is it any good?' but 'will people like it?' If they do not, we can only assume that it has failed the basic test and not made people happy enough to part with their cash. Money has such a powerful attraction that it sets all our other compasses, moral and aesthetic, spinning.

This can be clearly seen in recent trends in entertainment and information. Chasing high ratings and circulation is, of course, as old as the printing press. Few media actively want to be unpopular. In a system structured primarily on financial concerns, however, popularity becomes the only yardstick of any worth.

There is a grimly predictable logic to this and it is one which has shaped our broadcast landscape profoundly and, through that, our virtual public space. With more and more TV channels becoming available to the general public, existing broadcasters face stiffer and stiffer competition. This, so the theory goes, works to everyone's advantage. The public has more choice. Broadcast channels are forced to keep on their toes and satisfy audience demand aware of the Damoclean sword which hangs over them: unless they provide the goods, the public will vote with their purses and consign them to a televisual graveyard.

The reality is somewhat different. Increased competition means reduced audience sizes. In a system in which revenue comes from advertising and is therefore contingent on audience size, this means less money available to make programmes. The result is more cheaply made programmes, fewer new ones and more transatlantic buy-ins. TV executives become too terrified to risk commissioning anything genuinely innovative in case it fails to deliver the audiences, so channels anxiously clone successful programmes and schedules become ever more formulaic. The result can be seen in the modern explosion of docusoaps, all-but identical and very cheap to make. Quality broadcasting, as evaluated by a wholly distinct aesthetic, intellectual or moral set of criteria, suffers.

News information broadcasting endures a similar fate. The stress on accessibility oversimplifies complicated stories, breeds a soundbite culture and abandons difficult issues altogether for stories which major on sex, scandal, suffering, conflict, consumer affairs, or stars: anything, in short, which excites the emotions over the mind. Media stories are effectively turned into soap operas because objectivity is far less entertaining than drama. As Allison Pearson wrote in the Telegraph, 'the commercial imperative to deliver clear-cut fables starring creepy Iagos and ravished Desdemonas has smothered any lingering loyalty to journalism.'

Form, in the shape of schedules, is affected just as much as content. ITN threw away what was effectively recognised as the gold standard of TV news broadcasting, the News at Ten, because network companies wanted to sell more advertising. The best way of doing so was to show blockbuster films, and the News at Ten prevented uninterrupted, prime-time film viewing. Serious documentary coverage has been massively cut back over the last decade because it is expensive and relatively unpopular, a double-whammy if financial return is your only yardstick.

It is vitally important to recognise that there is an unimpeachable internal logic to all this. Commissioning programmes with the objective of returning the highest viewing figures appears perfectly utilitarian. Asking people what they want and giving it to them sounds like the simplest, fairest, most democratic means of running any broadcasting organisation. If people don't like it, they'll vote first with their remote controls and then with their wallets.

The fissures only appear in the argument if one chooses to use yardsticks other than audience size to measure the product. It is perfectly reasonable and, to many, plain common sense to see how sensationalist TV, quietly pushing the boundaries of language, sex, violence, and vulgarity in search of that big entertainment scoop, provides, and then normalises a coarsened and even brutalised view of life. It is obvious to many that asking people what they want and then giving it to them results in little new or innovative but simply a depressing succession of the familiar. Unpopular as it is to recognise it, an audience needs an 'elite' of creative and experimental individuals to offer it things it could never have thought of itself.

The problem comes with the fact that these various measurements – coarsening/enlightening, brutalising/humanising, innovative/familiar – are never as obvious, widely recognised or verifiable as simple viewing figures. What matters is what is measured and when your yardstick is financial profit, anything that doesn't make money, is at best of questionable worth. As Margaret Thatcher once said to a BBC executive, displaying a near perfect confusion between money and value: 'You take public money, you spend public money. Where is your profit?'

Public space and identity

What is said of our virtual public space, that area for relationship and discourse created by the media, can also be applied to our physical public space.

Our relentless hypermobility and increasing rootlessness have had significant and detrimental effects on the nature of our public spaces.[16] We don't know our neighbours and are increasingly unlikely to live amongst close friends and relatives. The antisocial motor car is omnipresent, paranoia about 'stranger danger' is all-pervasive and a siege mentality is slowly spreading to all areas. Because of the way we move about today, public space is far less convivial than it used to be.

But the death of public space is not simply due to our hypermobility. Our leptocracy has the effect of making public space rather less 'public'. Billboard advertising and retail dominated high streets are not new. What is, is the unprecedented encroaching of commercial interests on public space over recent years. From adverts being projected onto the House of Commons to roundabouts being sponsored, fewer and fewer places are free from commercial interests. In much the same way as Margaret Thatcher questioned the BBC executive about the 'profit' of public service broadcasting, a wholly monetary worldview asks, where is the profit in 'unused' public space.

Nowhere is this better seen than in the rise of the out-of-town shopping mall. At one point in his book *Devil's Advocate* John Humphrys reminisces about old High Streets. They may have looked amateurish, he writes, but they were altogether 'human'. Rather than simply being dominated by retailers, they included churches, chapels, cinemas, theatres, libraries, town halls, schools, banks, solicitors' offices, parks, playgrounds, marketplaces, war memorials, pubs, cafes, and even private houses. They were places in which people might play an active role as citizens within a community.

Modern shopping malls deliberately ape some of these features. Bluewater in Kent, for example, incorporates not just three different malls but three distinct 'leisure villages', architecture inspired by Kentish oast houses, a vast map of the river Thames and seven lakes and 50 acres of landscaped parkland 'to explore'.

The one critical difference is that all this 'public' space is not really public but commercial. Ultimately, it has one overriding purpose: to encourage you to buy. Retail sofas are to relax and detain you in store. Cafés are to recuperate in between shopping sprees. Parkland is there to encourage you to spend a summer's day at the mall rather than at some National Trust property.

Bluewater and malls like it deconstruct our citizenship and replace it with a consumerist identity. Public space, meaning an area for the people, is slowly replaced by consumer space, an area for the purchaser. Our identity, value and significance within society becomes increasingly dependent on our capacity to spend money.

Principles, politics and price

The capacity for money to distort politics is, oddly enough, one fact that cannot be placed at the door of our monetary culture. After the various political scandals of the 1990s it is fashionable to lambast politicians as corrupt and mendacious but the truth is that rulers have been corrupted by riches for millennia. Politics in Britain in 2003 is far cleaner than in many comparable countries, not least some of our European partners.[17]

Nevertheless, any political party faced with an electorate which sees the government's first and foremost task as to maximise its discretionary income, after which it can engage seriously in issues of social justice or public service provision, is one whose ideological compass is in grave danger of being spun by the power of money.

Similarly, the trend towards corporate gigantism and the government's need to woo investment from companies which choose between nations with the ease people choose between supermarkets, further displaces the use of other criteria for important political judgements. Such political decisions are too important to be sacrificed to other principles.

As with governments, so with people. The rise of the ethical consumer movement over the last 20 years has been widely welcomed. It shows, we are told, that principles can affect profits and while this is undoubtedly true, closer inspection paints a more complex picture.

The reality behind the numbers reveals what has been called the 30:3 syndrome: 'a third of consumers profess to care about companies' policies and records on social responsibility, but ethical goods rarely achieve more than a 3 per cent market share.'[18] Market segmentations suggest that around 15 per cent of people can be described as being *actively* motivated by ethical issues in their lives as consumers.

Most critically, research also suggests that, except among a minority of consumers, ethical principles come a poor third behind price and performance in the purchase decision. Anecdotal evidence supports this. The disappointing performance of green detergents in the 1990s following their impressive impact in the '80s was due at least in part to consumer dissatisfaction with their performance. Green detergents did encourage mainstream manufacturers to change and so, it could be argued, they performed their function. But the fact remains that as consumers we are primarily concerned with a product's price, then its performance, and lastly, if at all, the principles behind its manufacture.

Relationships

Perhaps the most corrosive effect of our leptocracy is on our relationships with one another. Relationships which are based on vague and indefinable qualities such as trust, mutual understanding, shared history or a common goal are inevitably vulnerable to circumstances. Trust can take years to build up but only seconds to destroy. Mutual understanding demands a commitment which sits ill-at-ease with our culture of instant gratification. A shared history or common goal is increasingly uncommon in a society which has deified autonomous choice.

The result is a growth in relationships which are based on and adjudicated by financial criteria. This is most readily seen in the public sphere where contractual relationships dominate and have acted as midwife to our compensation culture. The idea of compensation is, of course, wholly right and fair. Any free, market-based society will be populated with contractual relationships for which compensation, in the event of a broken agreement, is no more than the essential restitution of justice.

Recently, however, many other, less obviously monetary relationships have also become susceptible to this attitude. Stories of parents taking legal action against councils for injuries sustained on park playgrounds, holidaymakers suing travel agents for contracting food poisoning on vacation, or children taking action against schools for their poor results are common currency today, and no less serious for being paraded on the front page of sensationalist tabloids. As long ago as 1999, the Centre for Policy Studies estimated that litigation culture was costing the UK £6.8 billion a year in payouts and legal fees.[19]

Regrettably, the trend becomes self-perpetuating: compensation culture weakens morale, heightens anxiety, erodes trust and further contractualises relationships. A 2001 poll for medix-uk.com found that 42 per cent of doctors had suffered a complaint or compensation claim against them in the previous three years, 71 per cent said they practised defensive medicine (where patients may undergo a battery of tests for even the most trivial conditions simply to minimise the risk of litigation) and over 90 per cent said they thought the compensation culture could affect the NHS's viability.[20] Similarly, because teachers' morale and confidence have been severely weakened by parents threatening to sue over permanent exclusions, accidents at school, admissions policies, and exam results, more and more teachers are refusing to accept any responsibility beyond the bare minimum. The result is another set of relationships which are seriously damaged.

In spite of the rising spate of pre-nuptial agreements, this contractualisation has not yet affected our more intimate relationships in any substantial way. Instead, our monetary culture shapes personal relationships in an altogether different way. Money acts as potential energy for wellbeing, hope, status, power, comfort, and self-worth, and in a single-mindedly monetary society, the inevitable consequence of this is that poverty not only threatens discomfort and hardship, but also acute humiliation, indignity and worthlessness. As a number of commentators have remarked, Western poverty can be far less severe but far more debilitating than its Third World counterpart. As soon as money becomes the measure of all things, all things can disappear with it.

The result of this is not simply a persistent anxiety but the pressure towards lengthening working hours. The non-negotiable need to ascend or at least maintain financial standards breeds a long-hours culture which erodes the relationships with family and friends which actually make work worthwhile in the first place.

Britain's long-hours culture is widely recognised. A survey conducted by the Department for Trade and Industry and *Management Today* in 2002 found that one in six workers now works over 60 hours a week (compared to one in eight in 2000) and that 25 per cent say they would like a better 'work/life balance' but think their career would suffer.[21] Both men and women in the UK work the longest hours of all their EU counterparts.

The consequence of this is that, coupled with ever-lengthening commuting times, men and women have less time for each other and for their families. Domestic relationships are not the only ones which matter, of course, and workplace friendships are themselves valuable and sustaining. Nevertheless the basic principle remains that because we believe our happiness, wellbeing and self-esteem are based on financial calculations, we feel an insistent pressure to maintain and extend our income, unaware that the real sources of our joy and self-worth are eroding in our absence.

Conclusion

This, then, is the logical end of a leptocracy. The theory that money fully democratises society is undermined by the reality that our all-too-human tendency to love it rather than use it neutralises our other life-compasses and serves to erode the value of those things which cannot be calculated monetarily. If money is the measure of all things, those things which are too subtle or intangible to be quantified in that way, are devalued. A narrow view of profit leads to a narrow view of life.

The love of money undermines the quality of our virtual and physical public space. It redefines us as consumers, sacrifices principles to profits and distorts political priorities. It contractualises relationships, breeds anxiety and mistrust, and eats through the bonds which hold society together.

To note this is not to preach a monastic rejection of all property or some naïve, money-free utopia. Nor is it to question the importance of the cost/benefit analysis in life. Instead, it is to become aware of the detrimental effect that reducing everything to a financial cost/benefit analysis can have. We need to disentangle money and value, to enlarge our definition of 'profit' and to restore other yardsticks as means of assessing value. We need, in effect, to put money back in its place and, as Christians, to ask what *should* be the measure of all things.

Notes

1 *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: OUP, 1973 (2nd ed. 1993))

2 *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000; 4th ed.)

3 NSOED, op.cit.

4 Thomas More, *Utopia*, quoted in John Carey (ed.), *The Faber Book of Utopias* (London: Faber, 1999), p. 41

5 Buchan, op. cit., p. 58

6 Buchan, op. cit., p. 269

7 Ecclesiastes 5:10

8 From 'lepton', a small Greek coin, the like of which the widow threw into the temple treasury, and 'kratia', meaning 'rule'. cf. Nick Spencer, 'Buy the Right Thing' (*Third Way*, Vol. 24, No. 5, July 2001)

9 John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (London: Penguin, 1990)

10 For a number of academic papers exploring this topic, cf. www.oswald.ac.uk

11 Andrew Oswald, *So Are We Getting Happier?*, August 2002, www.oswald.ac.uk

12 http://cep.lse.ac.uk/events/lectures/layard/RL030303.pdf

13 Andrew Oswald and Andrew Clark, *A Simple Statistical Method for Measuring How Life Events Affect Happiness*, www.oswald.ac.uk

14 Oswald, *So Are We Getting Happier?*, op. cit.

15 Ecclesiastes 5:13, 6:9

16 Nick Spencer, *Where do we go from here?: A biblical perspective on roots and mobility in Britain today* (Cambridge: Jubilee Centre, 2002)

17 cf. Tobias Jones, *The Dark Heart of Italy* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003)

18 Roger Crowe and Simon Williams, *Who are the ethical consumers?* (The Co-operative Bank, 2000), p.1

19 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/322849.stm

20 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/1160029.stm

21 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/2223653.stm

3. 'Use worldly wealth to gain friends': a way forward

In the biblical view of the world, relationships, rather than money, should be the measure of all things. Any move to effect such a transformation must begin with conceptual changes: we need to be able to think, speak and evaluate relationally rather than simply financially. Such changes will only be effective, however, if they help us to work, move, shop, save, and spend time in more relational ways. Just as our personal behaviour demands reconsideration, so do the financial structures and systems which shape our lives. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of what such a reconsideration might entail.

From money to relationships

A few days before Jesus was crucified, he found himself in an extremely busy and politically volatile Jerusalem. In the course of an insistent battery of questions from various official and sectarian religious leaders, he was asked by a legal expert which he thought was the greatest commandment. His response was absolutely orthodox, taken from the foundational statement of Hebrew faith in Deuteronomy 6:5.

> *'"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.'*

He then went on to supplement this with another quotation, taken from a different book of the Torah, which he proclaimed the second greatest commandment.

> *'And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself."'*

He went to on declare that

> *'All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'*[1]

Jesus' response corresponded precisely with the excruciating role he found himself fulfilling days later. The restoration of our 'vertical' relationship with God and thereby our 'horizontal' relationship with one another intersected at the cross and summarised the value system which encapsulates biblical teaching. 'God measures a society… not by the size of its GNP or by the efficiency of its markets, but by the quality of its relationships.'[2]

Relationships frame the biblical story. They are the fundamental measure of value, intrinsically the most *valuable* thing we have. And it is within this framework that the biblical understanding of money operated. The Jubilee cancelled debts and ordered a return to family land in order to maintain and strengthen relationships within the clan and to counter economic and social polarisation.[3] The ban on interest had a similar intent.[4] An individual's financial situation was to make no difference to their position before the law and their right to justice.[5] Israelites had a duty to help their fellow countrymen, and the aliens who lived among them, if they fell into poverty.[6] Overall, wealth was to be used, as Jesus later commanded, in order 'to gain friends'.[7]

As chapter one outlined, the Bible does not reject the concept of money and indeed, in as far as money is an abstraction from a creation which is good if flawed, it positively embraces it. However, that embrace also restrains it, effectively saying that money can and should be freely used as a means to construct and protect personal and societal relationships. In essence it requires 'Mammon', freed by the seismic social shifts of the twentieth century, to be captured and imprisoned once again, although this time not for the benefit of a self-serving class structure but in the service of healthy, strong and joyful relationships.

A new measure

The real question comes in how to implement this change in perspective. How might we shift from a society underpinned and directed by financial considerations to one framed by relational concerns? Or, to put it another way, once we recognise that money talks, how can we make it say godly things.

The ultimate goal is relatively easy to visualise: relationships governed by trust rather than financially mediated contracts; public space for the public rather than for consumers; media which are motivated to experiment, shun sensationalism and engage in serious debate rather than simply to chase ratings; and product manufacturers and consumers for whom ethical concerns are at least as important as price considerations.

In order to achieve this, however, we need to think biblically not just about money but about the areas of life which money shapes. Disentangling money from value entails not just rooting out our monetary presuppositions but thinking through how our relational values should replace them. It demands that we look beyond the biblical teaching on money and wealth to the overall biblical social vision and how it might be implemented.

This has been the Jubilee Centre's agenda since its foundation and many of the examples which follow are drawn from earlier studies, which can be pursued in greater detail through the Further Reading section below.

The task does not lend itself to a simple five-point plan and what follows is neither comprehensive nor incontestable. Nor is this a call to transform all aspects of society, but rather just those which are moulded by our monetary minds. Hence, working, saving and spending are touched upon, but criminal justice is not.

At least three distinct but concurrent strands of engagement are needed. Most of us are not inclined to think biblically about money and value and so any move to subvert our leptocracy demands important *conceptual changes*. Thinking relationally is important but unless thought is translated into action it remains impotent, and so *personal changes* in the main areas of our life comprise a second front of engagement. Thirdly, these transformations need to work in tandem with broader *structural changes*, so that not only are individuals transformed but so is their society.

Conceptual changes

We need to start thinking relationally rather than simply financially and the two fundamental elements for doing that are having the right words and numbers: an appropriate language and a suitable system of metrics.

It may seem a minor point to call for a reinvigorated relational language but the fact is that the manner in which we use words both indicates and dictates how we think. We only need to look at our monetary lexicon and the way in which financial terms lend themselves to a vast range of circumstances to get a sense of how our language shapes our minds. We hoard, debase, prosper, spend time, pay tribute, credit people, tax our abilities, and deem incidents fortunate, advice valuable, mistakes costly and stories priceless. By the words of our lips do we recognise the values of our hearts.

We cannot, of course, dismantle a millennium of financial language accretion and nor should we try to, but becoming aware of the vast range of financial metaphors should make us more conscious of the values which underpin our thinking.

There is no shortage of relational words which we might consciously use more often but, by and large, they come from 'softer' or personal lexicons. Words like association, connection, affiliation, agreement, promise, attachment, collaborate, and combine, or rapport, bond, link, familiarity, closeness, care, relationship, affinity, and empathy tend to show how relational concepts have been dismissed as too soft to compete with the harder terms of profit, loss, debt, and credit.

In some areas, relational words do have a tougher feel to them. The legal lexicon of pledges and contracts is tough to the point of being combative, and the burgeoning socialist movements of the nineteenth century also introduced an extremely valuable series of words into the mainstream, such as cooperative, mutual, shared, and communal. Nevertheless, many of these words have a slightly archaic feel to them and need to be consciously redeployed. Such an exercise is not, it should be re-emphasised, simply an incidental exercise in saying rather than doing the right thing. Our words shape our thoughts which shape our actions. The more we talk relationally, the more we will think it. 'The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts.'[8]

The manner in which we develop or redeploy our relational language will depend greatly on the metrics we develop to aid our relational thinking. As already observed, one of the advantages of thinking in financial concepts, is that they are easily measured and in the world of business and government, what can't be measured, doesn't matter.

There are a great many ways by which we can evaluate our lives and our society's with a financial yardstick: income, outgoings, savings, credit, debt, GDP, budget, deficit, etc., but the growing mania for measurement has also generated a range of other metrics. Internationally, as observed, the Human Development Index uses level of education and adult literacy alongside living standards. Within the UK, there is an ever-growing emphasis on league tables. Those for hospitals are calculated on criteria such as patients' access to service, the standard of service provision and measurements of improving health.[9] Those for schools are dependent on examination results and certain 'value added' measures which are designed to show the progress which children have made between different stages of their schooling.

Whilst such metrics are a step on from measuring the success of an organisation entirely through financial calculations, it is still relational in only the vaguest sense. The idea that children, parents, guardians, or patients owe anything to their public service provider, such as a commitment to hard work, discipline, or a healthy lifestyle, is simply not there. The relationship is, for all intents and purposes, one way.

Studies of social capital add to these existing measurements of health, education or crime levels by looking at the other direction within the relationship: people's contribution to society. By assessing the intensity of involvement in community and organisational life, varieties of public engagement, levels of volunteering, types of 'informal socialising', and reported levels of inter-personal trust, such analyses get a better idea of the relational health of a society.[10]

A third set of metrics comes from happiness research programmes.[11] In one respect these are profoundly non-relational, calculating not the quality of people's relationships but their own individual happiness levels with measures taken from economics, sociology, psychology, and epidemiology. However, if, as research consistently shows, happiness is heavily contingent on the quality of people's relationships, these metrics can offer some sense of a society's relational strength.

Lastly, in their 1993 book *The R Factor*, Michael Schluter and David Lee set out a way of measuring 'relational proximity' between people.[12] They identified five dimensions based on the nature of peoples' contact which determine their relationship. Directness measures how immediate contact is, e.g. a face-to-face chat versus an e-mail. Continuity measures how regularly and over how long a period people have contact with one another. Multiplexity measures the number of different roles and contexts in which people meet, with more tending to give the relationship greater depth and robustness. Parity measures the symmetry of power in a relationship, with equal footing tending to generate stronger bonds than a master–servant arrangement. Lastly, commonality measures the closeness of two people's objectives or purpose, with shared interest breeding a stronger relationship.

Each of these metrics offers possibilities for understanding and hence fostering society's relational health. Their variety and complexity suggest that this is neither a straightforward nor an easy task. Nevertheless, if the biblical idea of relational thinking is to be credible in society, it needs to be backed up by a credible, comprehensible language and some credible, comprehensive numbers. We need to show that relationships do provide a robust and calculable basis for social thinking.

Personal changes

Conceptual changes provide the foundations of the overall process. Being able to think and talk relationally is important but only if it is a precursor to acting relationally. And much as it would be nice for existing social structures to pave the way for such an approach to life, the reality is that unless people's behaviour changes such structures, they will not change at all.

Replacing a (subconsciously) monetary intellectual framework with a (consciously) biblical relational one requires individuals to re-evaluate their attitudes and behaviour accordingly. Biblical teaching does not, of course, dictate exactly how a modern Westerner should live his or her life but it does offer guidelines in a wide range of areas.[13] The questions which follow are not intended to encourage a general life survey but rather an exploration of some practical daily issues which all too often become dictated by monetary rather than relational considerations.

Time[14]

We intuitively and rightly calculate how efficiently we use our time and although our calculations are rarely nakedly financial, being more likely to be based around some measure of productivity, that 'productivity' is rarely relational. We may not go so far as to judge relational time as waste or supplementary time, but we are rarely inclined to think of it in terms of 'investment', 'productive output' or 'efficiency'. Relationships are time's leisure not time's purpose.

And yet, time is the primary currency of relationships. Because, unlike money, it is both fixed and scarce, our use of it communicates worth very effectively. Relationships are dependent on time in a way they are not on money and if we are to take them seriously, we need to recognise the relational productivity of our time just as we do its financial productivity.

That involves prioritising the time we spend with other people. It means sacrificing activities for people. And it entails questioning some of our assumptions and attitudes. How far are we prepared to spend time with people outside our natural and preferred circle? Do we evaluate certain company as 'inefficient' because it has no obvious return for us? How far will we travel to stay in touch? How often do we communicate with those people we do not see? Are we inclined to spend money on, rather than time with, people? Do we resort to quality time simply because we can't 'afford' quantity time?

Work

Outside sleep, work demands more time from us than any other single activity. To question the financial basis of work seems ludicrous: why do we work if not to earn money?

The answer is two-fold. Firstly, while income generation will, of course, be central to most employment, the sense of vocation, personal worth, friendships, and potential for development which work offers is also vital. Secondly, the money which is supposed to be the *raison d'être* of our labour is unfulfilling if it cannot be spent on people. A packed funeral service is an altogether happier memorial than a fat bank balance.

Too often we fail to acknowledge these contextualisations and end up undervaluing work which does not produce a monetary profit. The work of the voluntary sector, caring professions and homemakers can be as, if not more, relationally productive as more obviously financial jobs, but this is less likely to be recognised in a 'leptocracy'. We need to ask ourselves how broad is our definition of 'profit'?

Similarly, we should examine whether our work leaves us missing the wood for the trees. Are we so wrapped up in optimising our income for the sake of our relationships that we are tacitly sacrificing our relationships for the sake of our income? Would working part-time or flexible hours build family and community relations in such a way as to offset the income decrease?

Roots[15]

Today in Britain money cannot help but be the number one consideration when we consider where to live. The astronomic rise in property prices over the last decade has shaped people's living and financial arrangements in a way many people are uncomfortable with. Many first-time buyers are faced with the grim choice between minuscule accommodation, vast mortgage or unsuitable area.

Nevertheless, the balance between a financial or a relational foundation to our rootedness is still important, and often connected directly to our work. In an age in which job mobility is often demanded, what price do we put on the local community in which we live? Are we prepared to move away from friends and family at the drop of a relocation policy or job offer? Do we secretly envisage our future as an ascension of the income ladder behind which roots and relationships will be reluctantly dragged?

Retailing

Whilst many of us like to think our consumption habits are driven by ethical considerations, the reality is that even those who are motivated by principle tend to place it below price and performance.

There is a convincing logic to this. A product which is ethically impeccable but fails to do what it should or costs the earth, is not a product but the sop for a donation. And whilst there is a place for donations, the goal should be to integrate principles alongside profit rather than leave people facing an either/or choice.

The ethical consumer market is energetic but still nascent and offers people a genuine opportunity to show how relational considerations can trump financial ones in their life. Many ethical purchase decisions, such as ethical banking or favouring Fair Trade labelled goods will appear only vaguely relational, but that is inevitable for a society whose supply chains stretch across continents. Buying tea which gives smallholder tea farmers in Uganda greater autonomy and a higher level of remuneration through which they can improve health, housing and education conditions for themselves and their families is profoundly relational: it just happens to be largely invisible to the consumer. More visibly, we can favour small, independent, local shops, whose presence has a positive impact on local community relations.

The relational retail questions which face us are, then, quite straightforward. Why do we buy what we buy? Are we aware of the relational cost of *where* we buy? Are we aware of the relational cost of *what* we buy? Do we even consider the principles behind the products we buy or do our eyes stop at the price tag?

Personal investment and saving[16]

The question of personal investment is so obviously financial that a relational critique seems downright inappropriate. When thinking about savings and investments we ask the 'how much?' question so often, that we forget there even *is* a 'how?' question. Bank accounts are about as non-relational as you can get, or so we think.

In reality, the interest we are guaranteed on our bank accounts comes from banks lending our money to companies so that they may invest it in whatever business opportunities they see fit. The actual relational network is therefore vast but, as with retailing, largely invisible to us and, by and large, outside our knowledge or control. Whether we like it or not, our invested money ties us, with many long-distance, virtual cords, to a multitude of other lives.

This can lead to embarrassing hypocrisies on our part. As Paul Mills has written

> *'Banks have been widely criticised for their non-forgiveness of developing country debt and foreclosing too harshly in recessions. Yet it is in the interest of the great bank-depositing public that such deeds are done.'*[17]

There are similar, if less acute problems with other mainstream means of saving. Building societies facilitate greater depositor involvement but still resort to standard repossession procedures despite the membership status of their borrowers. Pensions, endowments and unit trusts are usually managed with the sole intention of maximising return and offer little information about how profits are made (although the establishment of 'green' and 'ethical' funds is slowly raising the profile of this problem).

The uncomfortable question – how far do we think about our investments and savings in any terms other than financial return? – will usually result in the answer, 'not at all'. It is the classic example of money slipping the confines imposed on it by the biblical contextual circles and achieving a life of its own. Recapturing it in a relational net is very challenging but no less important for that.

Structural changes

Once our time use, work, rootedness, shopping, and investing is driven by a relational cost/benefit analysis as well as just a financial one, the idea of importing relational principles for society as a whole will seem less daunting. This does not mean, however, that silent, personal reform is a substitute for public action, and there is much evidence to suggest that public campaigns can be effective *and* raise the profile of causes.

Such an approach is especially important in addressing our modern, increasingly global 'leptocracy'. Immense, hugely complex financial systems, companies the size of small nations and trading systems in which direct human agency is minimised all profoundly disempower the individual and make structural reform vital.

What follows is a brief summary of some structural changes which would help establish a relational rather than a financial foundation in certain areas of society. Rather than being stand-alone recommendations, they are grounded in a more comprehensive and systematic agenda for reform which has its roots in the biblical social vision and can be pursued in greater detail in the Further Reading section.

Relational audits[18]

The concept of a financial audit is not merely recognised in society but demanded by it. Understanding and calculating the financial health of an organisation is a *sine qua non*; knowing its relational health is deemed incidental, immaterial or impossible. Yet a relational audit is, in its own way, just as important, not least because the relational health of an organisation contributes to its financial performance.

Making a relational audit mandatory for all organisations over a certain size would soon have companies (and government departments) thinking differently about their priorities and organisational structures. Such an audit might cover life–work integration, staff mobility and the effectiveness of mentoring and appraisal systems, among other things, and might make the tired company mantra, 'our staff are our biggest asset', actually mean something.

Regional finance[19]

One of the problems of personal investment, that there is effectively no relationship between people and organisations between whom flow millions of pounds, would be countered by an increased emphasis on regional banking. Regional banks are relatively common outside the UK and lend more readily to local businesses and those situated in 'peripheral' areas which are less well-known and more likely to be bypassed by big central banks.

Regional banks often provide better support for small and medium enterprises, help promote regional balance in growth and employment opportunities, and tend to empower local communities. They also fulfil the relational criterion of 'parity', or symmetry of power in a relationship, rather better than national or international, multi-billion dollar, banks.

The argument that regional banks do not benefit from economies of scale is overplayed, and the recent spate of corporate fraud cases suggests that big does not necessarily mean more reliable. Regional finance would introduce a greater degree of 'intimacy' into an otherwise wholly anonymous system.

Regional finance could extend beyond regional banking and include, for example, the formation of regional investment trusts which would focus on equity investment, rather than loan finance. The aim of such trusts would be to assemble and package portfolios of the shares of companies based in a particular region, so as to form 'baskets' of regional securities which could then be purchased by individual or corporate investors.[20] Overall, regional finance would help money serve locations, rather than shape them.

New currencies[21]

The idea of scarce resources, like time or information, becoming valuable currencies, metaphorically if not literally, is not new. What is (relatively) new, is the emergence of local and alternative currencies which do actually subvert money and loyalty from the mainstream and channel it into specific areas.

Supermarket points systems are a variety of these, although somewhat neutralised now by their ubiquity. Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) are trading networks supported by their own internal currency, being self-regulating and allowing users to manage and issue their own 'money supply' within the boundaries of the network.[22]

Time dollars or time banks, developed in the LSE in the 1980s and now operating in a number of US and Japanese cities, are currently running in 51 locations in UK.[23] They record, store and find new ways of rewarding the kind of transactions in which neighbours help neighbours, such as giving lifts to car-less people, accompanying the elderly to the doctor or tutoring local children. One hour is worth an hour, irrespective of the individual's own personal financial wealth.

Ithaca, in upstate New York, faced with the prospect of local economy and community meltdown due to the destructive presence of out-of-town, nationwide chain stores, developed 'hours', a local currency with restricted circulation, which has strengthened the local economy and community immeasurably.[24] 'In Ithaca we trust' boast the notes. Such are just a handful of ideas and experiments which have attempted to subvert the dominant monetary system and to replace it with something which is more human and relational.

Reconsidering interest[25]

The biblical ban on interest held firm in Europe until the Reformation. Once societies found interest morally justifiable, however, there was no turning back and the modern world was built on the economies which interest finance helped construct. Only the recent scandal of Third World debt repayment and growing levels of consumer debt in the 1990s have brought the topic back onto the public agenda.

The medieval justification for the ban on interest seems arcane now: 'it is to live without labour… to sell time, which belongs to God… to rob those who use the money lent.'[26] And yet, there is increasing recognition that an interest-based economy can have a severely detrimental impact on relationships, encouraging short-termist investment strategies, concentrating wealth into fewer and fewer hands and eroding community and regional cohesion.

A non-interest financial system would be costly and would involve the shocking repudiation of our modern idea that 'financial capital can be both return-bearing and "safe" simultaneously.'[27] Nevertheless, in a society founded on relational criteria before financial ones, the biblical ban on interest points towards the need for some serious reconsideration of now axiomatic practice.

The enormity of the move towards an interest-free society might be mitigated by the growth of projects such as CityLife, which actively model a new approach in a mix of radical idealism and pragmatic realism. CityLife raises private sector investment and uses it to fund employment-generating projects and local regeneration schemes. Investments are essentially loans on which no interest is paid but which are underwritten by major financial institutions and matched by funding from Government and European sources. The overall project subverts conventional economic thinking by using an interest-free approach to help build lives and communities.[28]

Limited liability[31]

Limited liability is unique in the law of contract in that it allows that certain debts may be left unpaid. In essence it divorces the rights of ownership from the responsibility of ownership and in doing so unbalances the relationships intrinsic to any corporate structure.

This is particularly evident in cases of insolvency where creditors, such as suppliers, customers, employees, and pension-holders are rarely able to achieve any justice from company directors against whom they have a legitimate grievance. Similarly, shareholders, who are technically owners of the company, have residual claimant rights over assets and receive regular dividend payments, escaping any responsibility to creditors when a company becomes insolvent.

In the same way as the post-Reformation West was built on the justification of interest, the twentieth century 'was built by equity finance which is built on limited liability.'[30] Challenging limited liability appears hardly less daunting than challenging interest, yet, once again, moving towards a society founded on relational rather than simply financial criteria would necessitate reconsidering the merits of limited liability and reintegrating risk, reward and responsibility in the corporate world.

Taxation policy[31]

Few topics excite public opinion as much as taxation. Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees and the Herodians on the Temple mount is yet another of those biblical monetary aphorisms which are infinitely easier to interpret out of context than to understand within it. Jesus' response to their question, 'Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' surely means, if it means anything at all, that the church should have nothing to do with taxation: 'Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things which are God's.'

The fallacy of such decontextualisation has already been discussed. If money has become a vehicle, indeed *the* vehicle, for value in society, then biblical teaching surely has something to say about taxation. In fact, it has many things to say, although none of them is uncontroversial. Tax incentives should be focused on helping secure, robust, long-term relationships. Local authorities should have more taxation-raising powers in order to foster a sense of local community. Taxation policy should offer incentives to those who are engaged in building social capital. In as far as possible, taxation levels need to counter the growing wealth differential in the UK, without acting as a total disincentive to competitiveness.

Taxation can be a highly sensitive, if highly complex, barometer for social and political ideas, reflecting our prioritisation of values such as freedom, autonomy, equality, social justice, and relationships. If relational thinking were to dictate modern taxation policy, the suggestions outlined above would be likely to have a rather higher profile.

Conclusion

Just as 'life [is] more important than food, and the body more important than clothes,' so value is more important than money.[32] Modern psychological theories of money are divided between interpreting it as a tool or as a drug. In reality, it is both: in theory the former, in practice almost always the latter. The biblical view has its feet firmly in both camps. It is a tool, by means of which God's kingdom can be built; a language, for communicating his message of healed, joyful, incarnate relationships; a servant for doing his will; a medium, for conveying his values. It is not inherently wicked or sinful, despite what decontextualised aphorisms may seem to tell us. On the contrary, as an abstraction from a creation which is repeatedly affirmed as good although fallen, it shares many of creation's characteristics: its capacity for immense joy and goodness mingles with that for grief and evil.

It is also, however, an astonishingly powerful and volatile tool, one which has an uncanny ability to become a drug when mixed with our myopic, idolatrous inclinations. Its intrinsic danger merits the draconian warnings it receives from the lips of Jesus and the pen of Paul.

In his book *Is there a Gospel for the Rich?*, Richard Harries, Bishop of Oxford describes how he lectured in Australia on that topic.[33] A number of people came up to him after the lectures and said, 'I must ring my wealthy friends and persuade them to come.' Harries comments

> *'It was always assumed that the wealthy were other people. One of the most curious and slightly perverted features of riches is that very few people will actually admit they are rich. The rich are always other people…'* [34]

Any tool that can simultaneously be so powerful and so subtle is dangerous indeed.

That danger is more readily recognised when we see money as a god rather than a drug, demanding our faith and promising our wellbeing. In reality, it has neither the right to our absolute faith nor the ability to ensure our happiness. When we fail to realise this and have no alternative ideology with which we might control this slippery servant, the consequences can be dire. Few people will agree with *all* of the analysis of the consequences discussed in chapter two but there can be little doubt that that is the direction in which we are headed. If money is deemed the only dependable measure for all things, price and value become perilously entangled, and anything which can't be measured, ends up not mattering.

Biblical teaching is as pertinent in such a situation as it is helpful in restraining the power of money. If Scripture warns us about the drug theory of money and advocates the tool theory, it also suggests what edifice the tool should be used to construct. That structure is of healed and restored relationships, between God and mankind, between people, and between humanity and creation.

Reasserting the tool-nature of money can be challenging. Doing so with a specific purpose in mind – a purpose which we instinctively know is right and yet find so difficult to adhere to – can be even more so. It demands conceptual changes within us, attitudinal and behavioural changes from us and social changes around us.

This booklet has, I hope, gone some small way to effecting those changes and interested readers can pursue specific areas in greater detail through the Further Reading section. Above all else, it is hoped that the booklet has helped correct the popular notion that the Bible claims money is the root of all evil. It does not. Instead, it is uncomfortably clear that *love* of money is and that we are alarmingly inclined to offer it that love. We need to learn how to use money rather than obey it. No one can serve two masters.

Notes

1 Matthew 22:34–40

2 Michael Schluter, 'Relationism: Pursuing a biblical vision for society' (*Cambridge Papers*, Vol. 6, No. 4, December 1997), p. 3

3 Leviticus 25:8–55

4 Leviticus 25:36

5 Exodus 22:3, 6–7

6 Leviticus 25:35, 39–43

7 Luke 16:9

8 James 3:5

9 www.doh.gov.uk/performanceratings/2002/national_pco.html

10 cf. www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/innovation/2001/futures/attachments/socialcapital.pdf, and www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital/index.htm

11 cf. www.oswald.ac.uk

12 Michael Schluter and David Lee, *The R Factor* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993)

13 See Michael Schluter and David Lee, *The R Option* (Cambridge: The Relationships Foundation, 2003) for a more detailed exploration of the matters discussed here

14 cf. Paul Mills, 'A brief theology of time – Part 1' (*Cambridge Papers*, Vol. 7, No. 1, March 1998), Paul Mills, 'A brief theology of time – Part 2' (*Cambridge Papers*, Vol. 11, No. 4, December 2002)

15 cf. *Where do we go from here?*, op. cit,

16 cf. Paul Mills, 'Investing as a Christian: Reaping where you have not sown?' (*Cambridge Papers*, Vol. 5, No. 2, June 1996)

17 Paul Mills, 'Investing', op. cit., p. 3

18 cf. *The R Factor*, op. cit., p. 189ff.

19 cf. David Porteous, *The 'Trust' Proposals for Regional Banking in the UK*, (Jubilee Centre, 1993); *The R Factor*, op. cit., pp. 200–203

20 Porteous, *op. cit.*, pp. 47–9

21 cf. David Boyle, *Funny Money: In Search of Alternative Cash* (London: HarperCollins, 1999), Community Exchange Systems in the Global South: http://ccdev.lets.net/; Local Money: www.pluggingtheleaks.org/

22 LETSystems: www.gmlets.u-net.com/

23 Time banks: www.timebanks.co.uk/

24 www.ithacahours.com/

25 cf. Paul Mills, 'The ban on interest: Dead letter or radical solution?' (*Cambridge Papers*, Vol. 2, No. 1, March 1993); Paul Mills, *Interest in Interest: The Old Testament ban on interest and its implications for today* (Cambridge: Jubilee Centre, 1989)

26 R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (London: 1926), p. 43

27 Mills, 'Ban on interest', op. cit., p. 6

28 www.citylifeltd.org

29 cf. Michael Schluter, 'Risk, reward and responsibility: limited liability and company reform' (*Cambridge Papers*, Vol. 9, No. 2, June 2000)

30 *The Economist*, 31 December 1999

31 cf. Christopher Townsend, 'Render unto Caesar? The dilemmas of taxation policy' (*Cambridge Papers*, Vol. 10, No. 3, September 2001)

32 Matthew 6:25

33 Richard Harries, *Is there a Gospel for the Rich?* (London: Mowbray, 1992)

34 Harries, op. cit., p. 1

Further reading

Books
David Boyle, *Funny Money: In Search of Alternative Cash* (London: HarperCollins, 1999)
James Buchan, *Frozen Desire* (London: Picador, 1997)
John Humphrys, *Devil's Advocate* (London: Arrow, 1999)
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Michael Schluter and David John Lee, *The R Option* (Cambridge: The Relationships Foundation, 2003)

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Websites

Relationships Foundation: www.relationshipsfoundation.org
CityLife: www.citylifeltd.org
Cambridge Papers: www.jubilee-centre.org/cambridge_papers
Time banks: www.timebanks.co.uk
Credit Action: www.creditaction.com
Happiness Research: www.oswald.ac.uk
Lectures on Happiness: http://cep.lse.ac.uk/events/lectures/layard/RL030303.pdf
Local currency: www.pluggingtheleaks.org, www.ithacahours.com
Ethical consumerism: www.ethicalconsumer.org

About the Jubilee Centre

The Jubilee Centre was founded by Dr Michael Schluter in 1983 out of the conviction that the biblical social vision remains vitally relevant to the modern world.

The vision of a better society initially led the Jubilee Centre into a number of campaigning roles, in partnership with others, on such issues as Sunday trading, family life and credit & debt. It also led to the launch of The Relationships Foundation in 1994 to engage in practical initiatives to reform society around issues such as criminal justice, health, unemployment, business practice, and peace building.

Over recent years the Jubilee Centre's focus has shifted away from campaigning towards promoting a coherent social vision based on careful research that applies the biblical pattern to social, political and economic issues. It aims to share its work widely in order to equip Christians in the UK and overseas to engage more effectively in the transformation of society.

The Jubilee Centre publishes a quarterly newsletter called *Engage* which provides thoughtful comment from a biblical perspective on a range of social, political and economic issues. It is the primary means for keeping up to date with the activities of the Jubilee Centre and is available for free.

The Jubilee Centre also publishes *Cambridge Papers* quarterly. Each Paper looks in depth at a single contemporary issue – such as cloning, taxation or multiculturalism for example – from a Christian perspective. *Cambridge Papers* has an emailing list as well as a postal mailing list and is also available for free.

You can join the *Engage* and/or the *Cambridge Papers* mailing list(s) by contacting us at the Jubilee Centre – you need only write, phone or email us. You could also sign yourself up to the *Cambridge Papers* mailing lists through our website if you prefer.

In addition, the Jubilee Centre regularly publishes booklets, research papers or books that will help you understand and apply biblical social teaching to today's pressing issues.

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Apolitical animal?*: A biblical perspective on political engagement in Britain today* – Nick Spencer (Jubilee Centre, 2003)	£2.50 + p&p (50p UK, £1.50 overseas)
The Status and Welfare of Immigrants – Jonathan Burnside (Jubilee Centre, 2001)	£5.00 + p&p (90p UK, £2.50 overseas)
Christianity in a Changing World – Michael Schluter and the *Cambridge Papers* Group (Zondervan, 2000)	£6.99 + p&p (£1.50p UK, £2.50 overseas)
The R Factor – Michael Schluter and David Lee (Hodder & Stoughton, 1993)	£7.99 + p&p (£1.50p UK, £2.50 overseas)
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