

Money can't fix everything

the impact of family relationships on
poverty

Matt N. Williams



Money Can't Fix Everything

This new report by Matt N. Williams demonstrates that family dysfunction is a key driver in poverty and, because of this, healthier families are a big part of the solution.

If you look at the manifestos of political parties on both the left and the right, you'll see a pattern emerge; in many cases, tackling poverty is seen as a left-wing concern, whilst strengthening family is the sole province of the politically right. This separation of key social and economic issues along political lines is all too common. But what if, after taking a holistic look at the ugly wound of poverty, we find that it's not just unhelpful, but *impossible* to talk about poverty without the family?

This booklet starts by painting three pictures of contemporary poverty, covering public consciousness of poverty in both Africa and the UK. In part II, it explores how we can recover the overlooked economic reality of family, arguing that the Scriptures give us a holistic perspective on family as part of a wider socio-economic vision. Finally, part III brings this biblical perspective to bear on today's world. It suggests ways in which these ideas can be applied to face the contemporary challenge of poverty in three key areas: households, churches and government policy.

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Preface

The very first Jubilee research report in 1986 was called ‘Reactivating the Extended Family’ and it sought to set out the connections between family life and public policy in Britain. Since then the Jubilee Centre has continued to emphasise the vital economic and social role that families play in a thriving society.

Our conviction stems from our belief that the Bible offers an enduring framework for all aspects of life – both individual and social, religious and political – that leads to personal wellbeing and the common good, even two millennia after it was written.

The research work behind this report was driven by two factors. The first was the decision by the trustees of the Family Matters Institute to hand over the charity to be managed by the Jubilee Centre in 2019, which led to a renewed emphasis on the theme of family and some funding to generate new ideas.

At the same time, Matt Williams was given a grant by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, who were funding his PhD in Theology at Durham University, to spend time undertaking a social research project with a charity of his choice. Happily for us, he decided to spend this time with the Jubilee Centre.

We agreed the project should explore the extent to which poverty – whether on the streets of British cities or in shanty towns in Africa – was linked to people’s experiences of family and wider community relationships.

The booklet in your hands is the result of this research, which packs a considerable punch in arguing that poverty alleviation should never be seen in material terms alone. The idea that allocating money is the answer to reducing poverty is thoroughly debunked, and instead a holistic approach which centres on renewing relational connections and commitments – especially involving extended families – is shown to be the key factor in poverty alleviation in any society.

This is all the more important now, as the coronavirus pandemic and the lockdown measures needed to stop the transmission of Covid-19 are

causing economic distress for millions of people on every continent. New approaches to helping people who are struggling financially and at risk of becoming destitute are needed, and this report is our contribution to the challenge.

Jonathan Tame,
Executive Director, Jubilee Centre.
July 2020.

Introduction

Talking about family and poverty together is unusual in the political arena. Party manifestos show that tackling poverty is a left-wing concern, whilst strengthening family is the province of the right. This separation of key social and economic issues along political lines is all too common. But what if a holistic look at the problem of poverty reveals its deep connection to family matters?

This booklet makes the argument that family dysfunction is a key driver in poverty and, because of this, healthier families are a big part of the solution. For those suspicious that this sneaks Conservatism in through the back door, there's an important caveat: 'family' is not meant in the traditional nuclear sense. The biblical perspective is much broader and is not defined exclusively along biological lines. This understanding of family addresses poverty in a way that should appeal to those across the political spectrum.

A relational approach

The Jubilee Centre was founded to answer this question: 'Is there a biblical alternative to capitalism and socialism?' What emerged over time was 'relationism', the idea that relationships are the fundamental building blocks of society. Because of this, we get to the heart of social, political and economic issues by seeing them through a relational lens, revealing a reality that is often hidden. When we approach the economy this way, we discover two principles: the economy is a function of the quality of relationships and, conversely, the quality of relationships has a role in shaping the economy.

So how do these broad principles work in a specific area? Using the relational approach to consider the economic issue of poverty and the social context of family, we land on one main idea: Poverty is better understood as a symptom of relational dysfunction, especially in families, rather than a purely financial condition. Because of this, it should be treated by addressing the relationships that underlie it. This isn't simply about internal and emotional wellbeing; family relationships have an economic dimension (providing material resources and support) that strengthens the relational

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fabric of society as a whole. In short, families have a key role in both causing and curing poverty.

This understanding of poverty is crucial, because society has so often misdiagnosed the problem. As a result, attempts to solve it have proven inadequate. Poverty is like an ugly, infected wound; it can't be healed by the 'sticky plaster' of extra cash. Covering up the problem with more money may salve our consciences, but the wound will fester unless the source of the infection is treated.

As it happens, the same language was used by prophetic voices over 2,500 years ago. Looking at his own nation's ills, the prophet Isaiah rejected popular quick-fix solutions. He gave this analysis of the situation in Israel: 'From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds'.¹ The problems that Isaiah identified were not merely 'religious' and able to be covered over by ritualised

Poverty is an ugly wound that we as society routinely fail to diagnose properly.

worship; these were matters political, military, social, legal, environmental and, crucially for us, economic. This ancient yet surprisingly contemporary critique makes it clear what's at the root of these social ills: it's relational dysfunction going right down to the profoundest level of humanity's

relationship to God. Insights from Isaiah will be an important part of the perspective offered later in the booklet.

However, before moving to a biblical perspective on family and poverty, we need to start with a careful look at the contemporary situation. Part 1 of this booklet establishes a picture of poverty, especially as it is manifest in the UK, and shows how family relationships are relevant to it.

Part 2 shows how Christian Scripture contributes to understanding the connection between family and economy that impacts on poverty. Far from narrowing our perspective, this enables us to draw on a breadth of material from the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament, a collection that spans many centuries.

Finally, part 3 brings this biblical perspective to bear on today's world. It suggests ways in which the ideas developed here can be applied to face the contemporary challenge of poverty. Three key areas are addressed: households, churches and government policy.

At the end of the day, money can't fix everything – addressing poverty requires grappling with the role of family.

1 Diagnosing Poverty: Beyond the Visible Problem

Three pictures of poverty

‘Poverty’ is not a concept with a self-evident meaning. It is a contested term that we need to wrestle with rather than just assume a simple definition. While there is a lot of technical academic debate around the issue, our everyday perceptions are not meaningless. Nobel Prize winning economist Amartya Sen puts it this way: ‘much about poverty is obvious enough. One does not need elaborate criteria, cunning measurement, or probing analysis, to recognize raw poverty and to understand its antecedents.’²

Recognising the reality, however limited, in what we see in front of us is vital in helping us not to be easily swayed by statistics-based arguments that run flat against our experience. At the same time, we need to properly interrogate our perspective; it is a starting point, not a final word. We must look under the skin of what we see in order to be able to diagnose it properly.

Therefore, our approach will be to look at three pictures of poverty that confront us in the UK and use these as a basis for a deeper understanding. We will take each one seriously as portraying problems that are, on one level, ‘obvious enough’. However, we will not simply take them at face value but analyse them in order to be able to better explain and respond to what we are seeing.

The pictures we are looking at move from the international scale down to the national and finally the personal. In the third picture, the importance of families comes into focus as the domestic starting point for understanding the relational dynamics that impact poverty. Such dynamics function differently at a social and political level but are still connected to patterns seen within the family.

Only by addressing economic problems at their relational root can a lasting cure be found.

As we analyse each picture, it will become increasingly clear why the (usually implicit) conviction that money can fix everything is so problematic. It fails to deal with the dysfunction in relationships that plays such a key role

in poverty. Only by addressing economic problems at their relational root can a lasting cure be found.

‘A scar on the conscience of the world’: African poverty in public consciousness

The notion of ‘poverty’ as something to be solved on a global level is relatively new. From the mid 20th century, powerful nations in the West were challenged by the situation in ‘less developed’ regions that they had previously colonised. With the success of economic reconstruction in ravaged post-war Europe, there was a new-found optimism about what could be done further afield. What resulted from this was a series of aid initiatives marked with various combinations of paternalism, well-meaning beneficence and economic imperialism.³ Much of the way this unfolded depended on the dynamics of the Cold War and the strategic importance of the countries being given ‘aid’.

From all the significant moments in this story, Live Aid in 1985 stands out from a British perspective as a particularly vivid picture of poverty. Video coverage of famine in Ethiopia had been beamed into millions of homes, bringing human suffering shockingly near to those from whom it had previously been remote.⁴

Musician Bob Geldof’s response was the massive fundraising operation that culminated in a series of high-profile concerts watched by nearly a quarter of the world’s population. Because Geldof himself was Irish, and London hosted one of the concerts, public consciousness in the UK was highly impacted by the whole event.

At the centre of the Live Aid campaign were images of the ‘poor, helpless African’ that became synonymous with global poverty.⁵ With the problem presented in this way, the solution was apparently simple: send money. And send money the world did – to the tune of over \$100,000,000. The response was remarkable, but was this diagnosis of poverty as financial lack accurate?

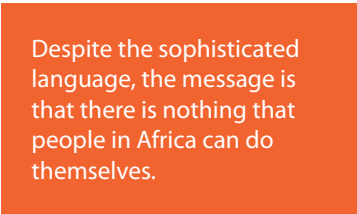
Many people were fed as a result of the aid campaign, whose sincerity cannot be doubted. But unfortunately, the compassion directed towards the victims of famine was marred by political ignorance.⁶ All the time, a civil war had been raging in which military forces gained control of food supplies and used hunger as a weapon. Some of these same forces were those to whom

resources were entrusted to bring relief. There was a marked failure to take seriously the relational dysfunction underlying poverty; problems remained that money alone was unable to fix.

Of course, even before this incident, many knew that cash injections could not sustain real development and that a more holistic approach would be necessary. Indeed, it seems that the lesson had been learned as Tony Blair referred to the importance of trade and political engagement with Africa in his 2001 election victory speech. Yet the same picture of poverty that animated Live Aid resurfaced graphically in what he said: 'The state of Africa is a scar on the conscience of the world. But if the world as a community focused on it, we could heal it. And if we don't, it will become deeper and angrier.'⁷

This language reinforces the passivity of the African 'patient' whilst warning of danger to the doctor unless there is decisive action. And what did the 'world community' (whatever exactly that means) offer? As Blair explained in the same speech, to 'provide more aid, untied to trade; write off debt; help with good governance and infrastructure; training to the soldiers, with UN blessing, in conflict resolution; encouraging investment; and access to our markets'.⁸

Despite the sophisticated language, the message is that there is nothing that people in Africa can do themselves. More foreign money, together with a better (Western) understanding of how to run things, is the answer. Africans are not treated as active partners and thus the relational inequality that functions at an international level is perpetuated.



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The idea that money can fix everything is subtly based on a low view of the personhood of the materially poor. Even if people have enough to eat, this alone is not the goal of development. Michael Schluter comments that this 'would reduce all human purpose to no more than filling the belly, it should be seen as an essential precondition'.⁹ It is a precondition for a holistic relational wellbeing that both dignifies those in poverty and, within those relationships, ensures the end of their poverty.

‘A social calamity and an economic disaster’? UK poverty in public consciousness

The mention of Tony Blair brings us to another important aspect of the UK’s perceptions of poverty: the UK’s perception of poverty is influenced by the United Nations (UN). The UN’s Millennium Development Goals provided a clear way to measure progress on the issue, whilst their successors (the Sustainable Development Goals) have been even more enthusiastically received and have helped shine the spotlight on climate change.¹⁰

Although not directly focused on the socio-economic impact of environmental damage, figures such as David Attenborough, as well as movements such as Extinction Rebellion, highlight the cost of what is at stake in human terms.¹¹ So whether the issue is poverty or the environment, British public consciousness would seem to be in broad alignment to the UN, at least in contrast to the USA’s Trump administration. However, a recent UN report brought into the limelight a very different side to its relationship with the UK.

In 2018, Special Rapporteur Philip Alston provided the second picture of poverty that we will look at, which brings us closer to home.¹² According to Alston, poverty in the UK was endemic and his report was headlined as follows:

*Although the United Kingdom is the world’s fifth largest economy, one fifth of its population (14 million people) live in poverty, and 1.5 million of them experienced destitution in 2017. Policies of austerity introduced in 2010 continue largely unabated, despite the tragic social consequences. Close to 40 per cent of children are predicted to be living in poverty by 2021.*¹³

Particularly stark is the claim about child poverty, which Alston warned could become ‘a social calamity and an economic disaster rolled into one’.¹⁴ More damning still, he claimed that the situation he found had been directly perpetuated by austerity policies, making the government culpable of human rights violations.¹⁵ The British public have become used to Labour accusing the Tories of abuses of power. But it is a different matter for the UN to use such language (typically reserved for so-called ‘developing’ nations) about the UK.

For many, this portrayal of stark inequality would have been no surprise.¹⁶ The 2016 EU referendum unleashed enough chaos to expose deep

dysfunction in the British social fabric that was not just political but economic. Yet the Government's repudiation of Alston's report was almost total. In varying responses to it, as well as the main one delivered at the 2019 Human Rights Council in Geneva, the consistent message was clear: the UN is wrong; the UK is doing well; poverty is not widespread and any challenges are well on the way to being overcome.¹⁷

How is it that, despite Alston's reliance on detailed research by several respected British charities, there could be such a discrepancy between his report and the Government's account of poverty in the UK? Of course, one factor is the universal impulse to mount a defence after apparent flaws are exposed. This is especially the case when international reputation is at stake. But another factor is the ambiguity about the measure of poverty being used.

Alston uses the *relative measure* of poverty, which is defined as anybody who lives at less than 60% of the median income in that population. Although the UK response is not explicit about using a different measure, its denial of domestic 'poverty' may relate to the fact that it is thinking in terms of an *absolute* measure, for example the UN's official poverty line of \$1.90 a day.¹⁸ Applying the relative measure to the UK would make some of its poor people far wealthier than the global average.¹⁹ Likewise, Alston's use of the term 'destitution' does not necessarily mean that 1.5 million are lacking in basic food or shelter, as such a term would imply when used in a global context.

This is an important point to acknowledge on the back of our first picture of poverty. Those who experienced the Ethiopian famine faced a far more severe lack of material resources than affects most of the UK's poor today. Tragically, there are similarly extreme situations in the contemporary world, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Half of the entire population of Malawi was living under the UN poverty line in 2015. They had an average income of less than £50 a month, experiencing periodic hunger as a result.²⁰

Conditions in many parts of the world today are no better and it is vital to keep such examples in mind when talking about poverty in the UK. This is especially important when one considers the continuity between economic disparity at an international level and colonial history, with the theories of racial superiority that helped drive it.

Despite all this, Alston's use of the relative measure does not render it useless. There are many who fall far below the 60% mark and the number

is increasing. Even for those at the upper end of this statistic, it should be remembered that inequality is part of poverty. A person who does not share in the resources that guarantee a normal standard of life in that society, even if this 'normal' is higher than the global average, can be thought of as poor, at least in material terms.²¹

UK poverty should be seen as a serious issue in its own right, but also one that is connected to even more serious problems globally. However, there

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is no recognition of this seriousness at all in the governmental response. Instead, it simply states that employment was high and that welfare systems were delivering the money where it was most needed and being improved to function even better. Alston's report paints a diametrically opposite picture of the situation. Yet despite these differences, the two sides share a common presupposition that is worth interrogating.

Whether through more generous welfare provision (advocated by the UN or Labour) or increased employment (advocated by the Conservative government), the answer to poverty is framed in purely material terms: the problem of poverty is a matter people not receiving enough money. Whether through creating employment or providing adequate benefits, the basic answer is always to generate more cash.

Granted, both the UN and the UK Government are involved in plenty of development work that is far more nuanced than this bald statement implies. Schemes to build personal capacity in business ventures or develop functional skills treat economic empowerment more holistically, especially for those marginalised by society (who are often women). But even such schemes are often treated as if their success is directly proportional to the money that is put into them.²² Moreover, the (often implicit) aim is ultimately to enable individuals to have sufficient cash income, as if this would solve the whole issue.

A second common problem is that neither the Alston report nor the Government have a realistic view of the relative responsibilities of the citizens and the state with regard to the economy. On the Government side, there is no recognition that opportunities are not equally available to the population and structural change would be needed to remedy this. Creating

'more employment' in the general does not mean that problems are solved universally.

Ideological bias is a key factor in such a position, particularly in the notion that 'business' is always socially benign. This largely explains its repeated claims about employment, ignoring Alston's evidence that *in-work* material poverty, where one or even two members of the household are employed, is still prevalent.²³ The Government does not seem to recognise the malignant impact of massive pay differentials within corporations (itself a relational issue) nor the limitation of decently paid jobs to certain people and places. These are hidden by the idea of a 'growing economy' but are equally as important to the economic wellbeing of the nation as the aggregate GDP.

Alston's own perception on the relative responsibilities of state and citizen is also inadequate. His report tacitly suggests that people can do nothing about their situation until they are helped by 'the system' from above. He does not recognise the agency that even those within broadly disadvantaged communities have. Personal choices can play a huge part in socio-economic outcomes and tacitly denying this reinforces the very sense of hopelessness that helps keep people down.

Ideological bias is a key factor, particularly in the notion that 'business' is always socially benign.

Again, this view is not merely Alston's individual quirk, but reflects ideological positions with much deeper roots. At one point he states that 'abandoning people to the private market in relation to services that affect every dimension of their basic well-being... is incompatible with human rights requirements'.²⁴ This broadly socialist angle valorises the phenomenon of the 'state' in a way that ignores its propensity to fail and even abuse the populace in many instances. At the same time, he ignores the well-documented benefits that enterprise brings to people's lives.

Economists, as well as social scientists and philosophers, continue to debate the relationship between citizens, civic institutions, private organisation and the state. The aim here is not to nail the answer, but simply to point out that these questions should be treated as relational issues. Only a clear perception of one's own and others' lives and capacities within the various components of society can allow money to be invested and used effectively. Mutual lack of understanding, particularly culpable in leadership, is a sign that relationships between those in political power and the poorer

segments of society are not as they should be. The underlying issue is these relationships, which money itself cannot fix.

‘Nowhere to lay his head’: a personal experience of poverty in the UK

We now turn to our third picture, which gives a deeper insight into the relationships so crucial in causing and curing poverty. Despite varying degrees of social division along economic lines, this picture is one which people at any level of society should be able to engage with. For those reading this who have lived on the streets, or those with family or friends who have, the realities of homelessness will be all too familiar. But everybody will have encountered a person sleeping rough at some stage.

For those who are outsiders to such situations, assumptions and biases are likely to kick in quickly. We can assume that they are helpless victims of circumstance and need a hand, or that they are too lazy to work and have squandered their cash; we can see this as an indication of a chronically unfair society, or just an anomaly in an otherwise successful free-market economy. We can also assume that homelessness is something experienced only by individuals. However, many homeless people, including families, are out of sight in temporary accommodation.²⁵

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How can such assumptions be checked? For those without personal experience of it, the primary way to get a deeper insight into homelessness is simply to hear the story of a person living on the street. This does not have to be invasive or patronising; if somebody asks for help, it's not unreasonable to respond by asking about their situation. Listening and understanding, even if one is unsure how to respond, is an important step.

Let me introduce you to Jay.²⁶ Jay is a friend of mine from the north of England. Three times during his life, Jay has experienced homelessness: the first time was because of a breakdown of relationships in his household whilst the second was because he was caught stealing from the hostel where he stayed. The third time Jay was homeless was a period just a couple of weeks before research on this booklet began in September 2019.

Before becoming homeless, Jay had been living with two friends. However, he badly fell out with the one that he thought he could trust most. Because Jay wasn't in control of the tenancy, he was the one that had to get out. Some of this period was spent on the streets and some on different people's sofas. Jay was still on benefits when he was on the streets, and being in reasonable physical health, he could also move around to find free food and good spots to beg. His big problem was that he simply had nobody, either in the system or otherwise, who could help him find decent, permanent accommodation. He had nowhere to lay his head.

Jay, still in his twenties, has engaged with social services for a long time. He talks articulately and in detail about the various nuances of welfare provision, including the government legislation that most impacts it.²⁷ His experience of the system is mixed, but how he fares within it goes beyond the regulations themselves. A key factor is the way that those he deals with at the desk or on the phone actually treat him. Some in these positions treat him with kindness and adopt a conciliatory interpretation of the rules rather than enforce them as rigidly as possible. Others are either harsh or insist on talking in such technical jargon that even an intelligent first-language English speaker like Jay finds their speech impenetrable.

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Despite his intellectual ability and physical fitness for work, Jay often finds it hard to believe that he could hold down a job. There are several reasons for this, including negative habits of thought that are changing for the better over time. However, the main challenge is his mental health; anxiety and depression are a constant battle ground. These problems began to develop in his adolescence after he and his two siblings underwent years of being beaten up by his dad. His mum (the only family member Jay retains contact with) had tried to stand up to her husband as best she could, but ended up having to move out.

It was in the context of this domestic violence that Jay committed a very serious offence. This landed him in various youth offenders' institutions where he experienced even more violence, but at the same time had a chance of education for which he is deeply grateful. All of this should have made him more employable, but a criminal record that includes more than just petty theft counts heavily against him.

After all this, Jay is not miserable. He has been challenged to think hard about the big questions of life during some very dark days and, through contact with some Christians, found answers. Since starting his new life as a follower of Jesus Christ, things certainly haven't been smooth, but the upward trajectory is clear for all to see. The low times have become gradually less low; he has stopped his routine abuse of substances, and is much better able to control his temper.

Jay explains that as a result of his relationship with God, he is better able to relate to other people. He is part of several church-run groups, is acquiring employability skills, and is back in the house that he was thrown out of recently. His landlord decided that it was not Jay, but his friend, who was the real problem. The only time you'll see Jay on the streets now is when he's helping out with a team who bring relief to rough sleepers. He even has a new girlfriend whom he's hoping to settle down with one day.

We should always be careful how much weight to place on a single example; a specific experience should not be presented as a universal truth. Furthermore, narratives are often used to spin a particular message, just as images are. The very stereotyping that we are trying to get away from comes from making a thoughtless jump from a picture (of a 'poor African' for example) to a response. However, this story is by no means without value.

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This insight into Jay's life, as do all stories, helps develop in us the kind of attitude that statistics alone cannot. Narratives (especially those which we hear first-hand) have a unique capacity to cultivate empathy. As we can see with Live Aid, not to mention protests against police brutality, emotion is a powerful political force, even at the level of parliamentary debate.²⁸ Empathy, as long as it does not credulously adopt a certain position, is a crucial driver for change.

So at the very least, Jay's story should make us pause to consider the depth of human suffering behind the various ways in which poverty is portrayed. Indeed, regardless of its shortcomings, the picture of poverty painted by Alston demonstrates an engagement with the reality of people's difficult experiences. By contrast, government responses were notably devoid of any such sense. This is especially culpable since they tacitly concede the claim that 'food banks have proliferated; homelessness and rough sleeping have

increased greatly'.²⁹

As well as connecting us more deeply to the pain of poverty in the UK, Jay's story shows how important relationships are in poverty. Simply giving Jay more cash would not have addressed the relational breakdown and the mental and emotional wounds that characterised his early life. It is those things that stop him having more financial stability. Recognising that he was unable to save himself (essential to anybody who becomes a Christian) was the first step in the ongoing process of healing that is leading Jay out of poverty. But it has needed his participation, especially in relation to various church members and groups, which money itself could not buy.

Cash would not have addressed the relational breakdown and the mental and emotional wounds that characterised his early life.

Without suggesting that all poverty is caused by similar circumstances, this picture of domestic and systemic relationships is commonplace. Indeed, the connection between the two is especially clear in this case. The kind of job done by Jay's father, along with thousands of others, was not considered a priority by Westminster in the 1980s. Margaret Thatcher's government felt both geographically and emotionally remote but the resulting unemployment so lowered morale that the impact was felt across the whole community, including the home.

There are aspects of Jay's life that are recognisable as common issues in the UK and beyond. These connect to what we have already seen in our two previous pictures of poverty and allow us to draw out broader principles, to which we now turn.

A relational approach to poverty: three principles

The main idea of this booklet is that poverty is best understood as a symptom of relational dysfunction, especially in families, rather than a purely financial condition. Because of this, it should be treated by addressing relationships as a fundamental priority. A relational approach requires that we recognise three principles: relationships are essential for understanding poverty, relationships are holistic and include the material aspect of life, and families in particular have an economic function. We now look at each of these in turn.

Poverty is understood through relationship

Attempting to understand and deal with poverty without close knowledge of those who are in that situation simply does not work. It is the equivalent of a doctor trying to treat someone after walking past them on the street and greeting them. With medicine, physical examinations provide some of the knowledge needed for appropriate treatment, though a longer term relationship with patients helps this process.

It would not be realistic for every person who is poor to develop a relationship with a key person in political power. But the reason why election candidates make so much effort to talk to their prospective constituents is that this kind of personal knowledge is recognised as a good thing. Whether or not this is done sincerely is quite another matter. But knowing the reality of people's lives, and for them to be able to have a voice

Knowing the reality of people's lives, and hearing their voice, makes a huge difference in the task of devising effective policies.

in expressing their predicaments, makes a huge difference in the task of devising appropriate and effective economic and social policies.

You can see this basic idea at work at the most fundamental level of economic life, in the home itself. Children need financial and other support in ways that change

drastically over the two decades or so of dependency. Parents need close understanding as they share resources and expect children to develop in their capacity to use such resources.

I have personal experience of this dynamic from the time I spent working in Malawi. Through trying to help a student in the local secondary school, I had to learn the hard way how true it is that money could not fix everything. Shadreck had no family who could support him, but showed some aptitude for study. After I knew him for a while, I saw that he could flourish in a boarding school where he would not have to spend all his spare time earning money for rent.

Shadreck started well, but fell in with the wrong crowd and did some bad things. He was expelled, and I was tempted to simply let him go his own way. Destitution would have been the likely result, but it would not have been my fault (so I thought). But I was convicted to give him another go. He needed a family-like environment and the support of an older brother, which

is what I became. Whilst staying in my spare room, he did his schooling locally, became deeply involved in our Christian community, and excelled. He moved on from there to train as a mechanic and even have his own family.

My relationship with Shadreck was vital to understand his own situation and, as a result, certain things about poverty more generally. Only through such detailed insight could be such economic problems be alleviated. But the relationship was more than just a means of *understanding*; it also played a part in the actual alleviation of poverty. This brings us onto our second principle within a relational approach to poverty.

Relationships should be understood holistically

Moving back to Jay's story, his poverty was never a straightforward case of material lack, but was tied into broader relational dysfunction. Even with sporadic periods of homelessness, financial resources were sufficient for him to have some shelter, food and clothing. But all these things depended on his relationships to the people and networks through which these things come, whether they be those in his households, the social services, or potential employers. When these interconnected relationships broke down, poverty was the result. This means that relationships, even those that we do not characterise as being 'structural' or related to 'business', have an economic significance.

Although those who are financially secure feel independent, they are just as subject to relational dynamics as Jay was. Home life, access to services, and relationships to employers all play a part in ensuring that one's needs are met. Likewise with retaining a bank account and debit card, all of which are part of a global network of financial relationships. If there is one lesson that the 2008 crash should have taught us, it is that even the actions of a small number out of the millions in this network can have a devastating impact when they neglect their relational responsibilities to others.³⁰

For Jay, the key relationships in his life always had an 'economic' dimension.

'Relationships' can be associated with a sense of emotional wellbeing or a vague idea of togetherness: good for our interior world, but not much use in facing the harsh realities of physical deprivation associated with extreme poverty. Yet we should remember that for Jay, the

key relationships in his life always had an 'economic' dimension. Despite the violence of his family home, those relationships provided shelter and sustenance which the state later took over, to whom Jay relates as a citizen.³¹

The problem with his housemate and friend was not that the relationship had an economic dimension but that this dimension suffered when disagreements arose. Even in his new life as a Christian, the church community is not all about 'fellowship' if that word is understood in a disembodied sense (people sometimes use the word 'spiritual' this way).³² Through it Jay has been materially assisted and has even been given the chance to extend such assistance to others in need.

Anybody who has been a parent or a child (which covers about everybody reading this) will know that a home is not purely about emotional wellbeing. As we already alluded to in our first principle, the responsibility to provide for (or be provided for) is a non-negotiable aspect of household relationships. In fact, this dimension that deals with basic resources is vital for establishing bonds from the earliest age of infancy, as breast-feeding illustrates.³³

Beyond biological family, relationships in which 'economic' factors are central are usually distinguished from 'friendships'. However, friendships are incomplete if there is no sharing of goods, even if only in the form of gifts.³⁴ This is not to suggest that every single relational interaction has this

Instead of being a hidden or 'dirty' aspect, the economic element should be acknowledged as a vital component of relationships.

kind of material dimension to it, but it is interesting that part of what gives those in material poverty relational wellbeing is the capacity to give and receive material goods, especially food. Instead of being a hidden or 'dirty' aspect of things, the economic element should be acknowledged as a vital component of relationships at many different levels.

Family relationships have an economic impact

The two principles above argue that economic issues cannot be treated in isolation from the wider relational matrix shared by the various parties concerned. In fact, the economy *is* this relational matrix, seen from the perspective of its production, distribution and use of material resources.

Conversely, broken relationships are not only a *cause* of poverty, but an *aspect* of poverty when seen more holistically.

A particularly important set of relationships that has emerged in both these points is family. The pervasive influence of family breakdown on Jay's life is plain; the violent environment was the only model he had for life. This is not to say that it entirely determined his behaviour – he still had choices to make. But it certainly shaped his mental wellbeing, made it difficult to establish healthy spending patterns, and encouraged a mode of relating to others that had profound consequences for his economic livelihood. Research about homelessness shows that it is often caused by breakdown in relationships at home.³⁵

Research about homelessness shows that it is often caused by breakdown in relationships at home.

Yet although Jay's biological family relationships contributed to his living in poverty, it is a different relational matrix that is helping lead him out of it. In the case of the church, this is explicitly 'family-like', as his referring to fellow Christians as 'brothers and sisters' makes plain. My own relationship with Shadreck is another case of what anthropologists call 'fictive kinship', a term first coined by Carol Stack to refer to 'non-kin who... conduct their social relations within the idiom of kinship'.³⁶ This includes not only religious contexts, but also close friendship, especially where the element of economic necessity became pressing. This can even work at the apparently impersonal level of social services, where institutions take on a pattern of kinship in their structural organisation.

One example of this is Pupil Referral Units, where children excluded from mainstream education are accommodated in alternative arrangements. The holistic care on offer means that these function much more like homes, with institutional relationships resembling that of parents to children.³⁷ What is being tacitly recognised here is what every teacher knows; no amount of formal education can replace a healthy home life.³⁸ This is not explicitly 'fictive kinship' of course, but is part of the same phenomenon.³⁹ Socialisation through such formative education is economically crucial; it not only shapes a person's ability to relate to the various networks (including employers) that sustain them, but, on the other side, it comes at a high financial cost to the state.

It is one thing to recognise that families are hugely important within the relational matrix that constitutes the wider economy. But it is another thing to properly theorise the place of family in such a way that rightly discerns its connection to the other institutions of society with economic roles to play. We need to paint a bigger picture around the relational understanding of poverty developed so far in order to make a coherent response to poverty.

Summary

In part 1 we attempted to diagnose the problem of poverty through looking at three pictures. The Ethiopian famine of the mid 1980s, and the response of Live Aid, showed the power of empathy. But it also highlighted the importance of a relational understanding of poverty that took into account political factors in particular.

With the 2018 visit to the UK by the UN's Philip Alston, there was also a strong reaction accompanied by the same tendency to prioritise money itself. This again showed a lack of understanding of the relational dynamics that caused and cured poverty, and the capacity of actors within these relationships.

Jay's story helped us see that through relationships we can both know and begin to deal with poverty. In particular, family dynamics (whether biological or through 'fictive kinship') provide the holistic context for economic wellbeing. Such knowledge can be applied even at the bigger structural levels of society where crucial decisions are being made about the populace.

Taking into account the role of family relationships in economic understanding is not to shift focus from the structural to the domestic sphere but to adopt a more holistic and realistic approach. When those in positions of power neglect the relational nature of poverty, policies will reflect that and may become self-defeating as a result. Family units in particular can be damaged in a quest to promote economic wellbeing.

We can now offer a brief definition as it has emerged through engaging with the issue: poverty is the state of being in such relational dysfunction that people are excluded from the resources, including material ones, needed for their holistic wellbeing. This makes it clear that even the rich and powerful suffer from poverty in society, even if not immediately in material terms.⁴⁰

2 From Diagnosis to Treatment: A Socio-Economic Vision that deals with Poverty through Family

Having painted a picture of poverty that more accurately reflects the reality of relationships, we need to move on to constructive approaches to address it. What intellectual resources can we bring to bear on this issue? Can we find a coherent perspective that helps the family's role in the economy be maximally fulfilled?

In this section I will look at some of the ways that family has played a part in public economic thought before looking in more detail at the biblical perspective on the issue. We will do this not by picking out certain verses and proof-texts, but by looking at the wider narratives that comprise the majority of the Hebrew Bible and Greek New Testament. Certain passages in Isaiah and the Gospels will emerge as being particularly characteristic of what these narratives show, and we will give special focus to these. By the end of the section, we should have a clearer idea of how the Bible brings together the realities of family and economy that are often treated separately to one another.

Can we find a coherent perspective that helps the family's role in the economy be maximally fulfilled?

Recovering the hidden economic reality of family

Despite their opposing stances, the Alston Report and the government's response have one thing in common: both of them ignore the issue of family. This blind spot is ubiquitous. The 2019 Oxfam inequality report contains no mention of the issue at all.⁴¹ Likewise for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, which is all the more surprising considering one of its headline claims: 'single parent families are more prone to child poverty'.⁴²

On the other side of the political spectrum we have the same conspicuous absence; for all Theresa May's claims to be for 'ordinary families' in her 2017 manifesto, there was not a single proposal aimed at family per se. Where

the issue was mentioned in Boris Johnson's 2019 equivalent, it is highly problematic.⁴³

The government itself had recognised their previous failings in design and implementation with one of the most holistic measures, the Troubled Families programme.⁴⁴ Fiona Bruce, the main Conservative party champion of the issue, raised the additional concern about how long funding for the Troubled Family programme would continue.⁴⁵ She also complained that government policy in general related to families did not go nearly far enough partly because their economic importance was being underestimated.⁴⁶

More consideration of the political side of the matter will come in part 3. For now, the point to make is that the discourse around poverty in the UK generally separates family from economy. However, there is no good reason for this to be the case. In fact, our word 'economy' comes from the ancient Greek οἰκονόμος (oiko-nomos), meaning 'household law'.⁴⁷

Our word 'economy' comes from the ancient Greek οἰκονόμος (oiko-nomos), meaning 'household law'.

This original idea of managing resources in the home is better grasped when we bear in mind the reality of the ancient world. Families in the broader sense (not our 'nuclear' one) were not only the primary unit of consumption, but also of production. As

remains the case in many parts of the world today, people lived more directly off the land. There were those, of course, who did not themselves farm, but markets tended to be for non-essential goods rather than the staple.⁴⁸

With the industrial revolution, which had its centre in Britain, the emphasis shifted. Mass production ensured that factories became the site of 'work' rather than the home, which thus became peripheral to the market.⁴⁹ Hence we have become accustomed to equate the common measure of economic output, GDP, with the total amount of productive work done in a country. Yet much of what is done at home – especially provision for children and other dependents – has no financial value attached to it. Therefore, as the Oxfam report points out, women contribute the same (if not more) labour but control far less of the wealth.⁵⁰

Even if the 'household' is seen primarily in terms of consumption of goods and production of labour (and the 'firm' vice versa), it is still key to the

economy. In the 1970s, Gary Becker, a member of the hugely influential Chicago School, tried to incorporate this point into his theoretical work. He saw that to understand the internal workings of the household, you had to consider how family dynamics functioned.⁵¹

Exactly how these dynamics affected things has been a matter of dispute, and certainly has not been answered by Becker. But fast forward to 2016, and the UK's Prime Minister was in no doubt of the extent of their significance:

*'Families are the best anti-poverty measure ever invented. They are a welfare, education and counselling system all wrapped up into one.'*⁵²

David Cameron's statement may well have been a justification for state-shrinking austerity measures. Yet it was no more than a reiteration of traditional Conservative policy to strengthen family. This is what makes it so extraordinary that what was earlier claimed to be a priority is so completely off the radar of economic policy only a few years later. Indeed, one of the government's own MPs challenged this state of affairs in a bid to gain support for strengthening family, referring to it as 'the overlooked engine of economic growth'.⁵³ What could account for such a neglect of this issue?

Underlying the complex political manoeuvring that determines policy at any one time is the force of ideology. It is all the more difficult to recognise because it is not restricted to a particular party. Amongst the several cultural streams militating against the central role of family is a certain conception of personhood developed in the West.⁵⁴ Known as the 'autonomous rational individual', it is an 'anthropology' that thinks of a person as one who acts independently according to logical calculation with no necessary reference to anybody else.

Connected to every idea of how society works is an idea of how the individual works.

We have already seen the problem of reducing personhood by over-emphasising immediate material need. But we now need to unpack this wider anthropological pattern of thought in relation to our topic. Connected to every idea of how society works is an idea of how the individual works, which is why, for example, Plato used the human soul as an analogy for the political state.⁵⁵ As we have seen, the prevailing view of the state's responsibility has been that it should ensure its citizens have sufficient material resources. The assumption is that this aim also drives the rationale

for each person's actions, including the way one conducts relationships with other individuals.

This notion of a person as an autonomous rational individual will be familiar to all economics students in the guise of the 'rational consumer'. This is the hypothetical person upon whose behaviour economists make their charts and predictions regarding such things as supply and demand. And this abstracted view of human nature, which only deals with one angle on how people behave, has since gained a more general validity.

When an 'economic anthropology' prevails, it is easy to see why political popularity depends on the ability to run the economy. It is also easy to see why the media would downplay family in such discussions, since it is not seen as immediately relevant to economic progress. In fact, the family is sometimes seen as a hindrance to such progress, since it seems to prioritise a collective structure over individual autonomy.

Yet there are challenges to this widely (if tacitly) held view, even within the discipline of economics. Some studies have shown that those trained as economists become *more* egoistic as a result of having egoism held up in front of them as the norm for years on end.⁵⁶

Even more powerful evidence comes from social research around wellbeing. An excellent example is the 2014-15 ONS survey in which Northern Ireland and the North East of England had the lowest levels of income but the highest levels of wellbeing. It is no coincidence that these areas, in contrast to the wealthier London, have particularly strong communities. Ironically, this example is quoted in a standard textbook on economics.⁵⁷

All this forces a revaluation of what constitute real 'goods'. Increasingly, people are expanding the category to include 'relational goods'.⁵⁸ This is not just a quaint term for a 'nice environment'; such goods have value for the whole person. We need only think of the level of illness caused by relational stress or, on a more positive note, the long-term health benefits of marriages.⁵⁹

There is ample reason to believe that family should have a central role in our approach to the economy and the holistic definition of poverty we have developed rings true. But how can this insight be incorporated into a wider social vision? We can turn to the best-selling book of all time to give us a holistic perspective – one that is well worth grappling with.

The Bible in short

Many brand names have become common words in our language. With the word 'Bible', it is the opposite; a common noun – βιβλος (biblos) in Greek – became the name for a unique book. This collection of writings in a diversity of genres forms Christian Scripture.⁶⁰ Rather than picking out small portions and taking them out of context, we will try to look at the big picture before getting into details.

In the English translation, the Bible opens as follows: 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth'.⁶¹ There is a lot for us to unpack in this one sentence. The first thing is that it points to a time when there is just God and nothing else. This either sounds like 'God' is a being who doesn't need relationship, or else 'God' was lonely. But neither is the case. We get a picture elsewhere of God as a dynamic, interactive community of three persons in such harmony and unity of being that we can refer to God in the singular rather than the plural. The three-ness is described in family-like terms, as Father, Son and Spirit.

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However exactly God is related to the universe, two things are clear: God is *present* in creation (immanent) but God is *other than* creation (transcendent). One of the ways in which God is present is by being reflected in it, and this is true in a special sense of people, who are 'made in God's image'. Again, the exact meaning of this is debated. But one aspect of it is that the basic unit of human community is established with Adam, Eve and their children, i.e. family.

Conversely, things go wrong ('sin') in the arena of relationships also, when the first couple's irrational decision to push back against the God who made them has the impact of destroying community at all levels. This also affects creation outside of humanity, so that the production and use of resources is no longer a simple occupation that can be enjoyed by each household. The land is better in some places than others and is never easy to cultivate: hence the economy becomes a fraught thing, and is one of the biggest issues as we trace the biblical story through the history of one particular people: Israel.

Everything narrated so far happens before 'Christianity' per se comes into being. This movement is a result (as the name suggests) of the coming

of Jesus Christ. Rather than just a surname, 'Christ' is a title meaning 'the anointed one'. It points to Jesus' role in the world to deal with the disastrous human story by showing how things should be. Pretty much the exact opposite of what you would consider 'success' followed: Jesus was martyred by a corrupt establishment (with the help of popular support).

Jesus wasn't the first, and nor would he be the last, Jewish martyr. But the movement he had started didn't fizzle out after his death, as so many others have done. It grew stronger, so much so that it accounts for over two billion followers today. Why? The early message of the Church was quite simple: the dead Jesus was now alive.

Despite widespread belief in the supernatural, the resurrection event was initially accepted only by the relatively few who personally met Jesus after he rose from the dead. Yet it led to a transformation of those people's lives and a gradual realisation of how his death provided the unexpected solution for all that had gone wrong. Along with this came a new approach to both the family and to economics. When practiced as it should be, it has had a radical impact on poverty, noted from the earliest days of Christianity.

We now need to dig into what this approach was, since its roots lie deep in the history of Israel.

Family and economy in Israel's constitutional order

The big picture of God's dealings with humanity up to the time of Jesus focuses in on one nation: Israel. It's not that these people were special in themselves, but they were chosen by God to play a special role in the story. A bit like a model home, they were there for others to learn how things should be done in their own homelands (since not everybody would be able to move in).

The house of Israel started from a single person, Abraham, whose relationship to God is one of friendship.⁶² It developed from there to a nation named after his grandson (Jacob/Israel) via 12 tribes named after the next generation.⁶³ They thrived and multiplied (too much so for their own good) in Egypt. As a key global political force at the time, Egypt felt threatened by the Israelites and confined them to the status of a slave labour underclass. It is from there that God rescued them through Moses in the well-known story of the Exodus.

This small nation could never have freed themselves from Egypt. Likewise, it would have made no sense for them to break from God and try to go it alone like their first parents did (we know where that ended up). They needed house rules or 'Torah', the most well-known of which are the 10 commandments given by God through Moses.⁶⁴ At the heart of this constitutional material is an economic order that starts literally from the ground up.⁶⁵

Every tribe had land, which was itself divided up between clans and then families. We shouldn't think of 'family' in the modern nuclear sense here; instead, these were groups typically spanning three generations who lived in a house, or at least a compound of several buildings. Just as the parents had looked after the children when young, so the son (usually the eldest) would take responsibility for ageing parents along with his own children. Together they would cultivate their land and develop it for their household's use.

In addition to this, outsiders were welcome to become part of the community, though they had to adopt some key cultural practices to become part of Israelite society. Because of this, households and compounds often contained a blend of people, some of whom were akin to domestic labour and others who were 'non-familied' (orphans and widows).⁶⁶ A variety of crops was grown, and trading also took place with surrounding nations. But the economy was never supposed to become detached from the family structure. Hence the 'Jubilee law' ensured that any land sold had to return to its original owner every 50 years.

A perpetual difficulty people have is that such a strong focus on family and local community is a recipe for insularity and racism. This was never supposed to be the case. It is true that Israel was not completely permeable, and dealings with other nations were not conducted on exactly the same basis as internal relations. Yet there would have been no way to establish any kind of culture at all if the population was in endless flux, especially where conceptions of 'God' (or the gods) varied so much in surrounding nations. It was this encounter with God as the LORD that grounded Israel's relationships and gave it its distinctive social structure.⁶⁷

This encounter with the LORD grounded Israel's relationships and gave it its distinctive social structure.

But despite the violence that was horribly prevalent in the ancient near east, in Israel foreigners were supposed to be treated as people worthy

of respect. This concern is explicitly written into the Torah as provision is made for them to glean from other families' land. By the same logic, Jonah the prophet (known for his maritime adventure) was culpable for his xenophobic attitude to the Assyrian people whom God deeply loved.⁶⁸

Progression and decline: becoming 'like other nations'

Just as the very brief introduction to Torah given above is only one angle among many possible ones, so there are different ways to tell the story of how Israel fared under its constitution. But however it is told, it is clear that things went badly. So how did it get to the stage described by Isaiah at the beginning of this booklet where Israelite society was like a body with no soundness in it? We can narrate it in line with our family and economy theme in the following way.

Biblically, having material wealth enables a good worker to invest more in relationships rather than merely to address their own needs.

Regarding political structure, Israel was set up as a kind of tribal confederacy under the judicial guidance of its spiritual leadership, the Levites. They themselves were to be under the authority of God via Torah. Consequently, we are ultimately talking about a 'theocracy', but (contrary to more modern manifestations) not one that was supposed to be centralised. The turn towards

monarchy was an aberration, recognised as a rejection of God and the distinctive character of Israel.⁶⁹

King Saul, the first to occupy the throne, was a huge disappointment, but many positive things happened under his successor David. His famous defeat of Goliath was just one in a series of victories that established the kingdom. Yet despite his sincere pursuit of God, he was far from perfect. Indeed, things went downhill fairly rapidly after what amounted to a spectacular abuse of power. Having achieved military peace and the prosperity that came with it, David used his position to sleep with the wife of one of his commanders, whom he then had killed on the battlefield.

Some of the key reasons for the decline that followed also related to family and economy. This is most vividly brought out in the reign of David's son Solomon, born under morally compromised circumstances.⁷⁰ Although his

proverbial wisdom was God-given and attracted people from all over the world (we still read it today), it was clearly limited. It could not prevent him making decisions whose negative results reverberated for generations.

Israel under Solomon had all the appearance of a success story when judged from a modern political vantage point. Peace had been achieved with its neighbours, and excellent trading conditions established as a result. There was a hitherto unknown level of prosperity that culminated in a massive building project. The temple in Jerusalem was a national focal point which hosted huge celebrations in praise of God, and Solomon's palatial structures were known far and wide.

Yet for all the undoubted fervour on display, and the divine endorsement of that place of worship, the temple ended up becoming the centre for an institutionalised religion. The first sign of its unhealthy centralised control was that Solomon himself offered sacrifices, despite that being the priests' role.⁷¹ Those priests had already lost some of their independent authority by being embroiled in political machinations,⁷² and there are no references to them teaching the Torah that they were supposed to promote. Due at least in part to these developments, sacrifice and ritual (the 'cultic' aspect) were split from the day-to-day social ethics (the 'civil' aspect) with which it was supposed to be integrated in the life of Israel, as later prophetic critiques point out.

In terms of the economic situation, it should be stressed that abundance itself is never decried; like wisdom, it is seen as a gift from God. However, in practice it is frequently attached to all sorts of problems. One of them is that it depends on international business relations that are too easily based on expediency. The almost inevitable moral compromise accompanying this comes in Solomon's case in two ways. Firstly, his amassing of a thousand-strong harem leads him into adopting some of these women's worship of other gods, taking his heart away from the God who shaped Israel's character. Secondly, his forced labour programmes (instigated in partnership with a neighbouring king) sow seeds of resentment that were the immediate political cause of the kingdom being split apart during the reign of his son Rehoboam.

Solomon's actions devalued marriage and forced labourers into a mobility that took them away from their homes.

It is not insignificant that both of these things involve a denigration of the place of family, whether through devaluing marriage or forcing labourers into a mobility that took them away from their homes. This split between family and economy was only deepened by the creation of taxation areas based not on the kinship fabric of tribal land, but bureaucratic divisions made on a different basis.⁷³

These were all the kind of things that had been warned about centuries earlier through the prophet Moses,⁷⁴ and exactly the things that were decried centuries later by the prophet Isaiah in his portrayal of Israel as a body riddled with open wounds. What social reality lay behind this medical metaphor? There are at least six aspects of it related to family and economy, reflecting trends already visible in Solomon's time:

1. Isaiah diagnoses the core sickness as a particular kind of family breakdown, though on a profounder level than a social one. The nation as a whole is castigated for having been a child lovingly reared by God only to irrationally turn against him: 'I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me' (Isaiah 1:2-4).
2. Formalised worship had become meaningless because it was accompanied by oppression of society's most vulnerable, namely those without a family. 'The multitude of your sacrifices – what are they to me?... Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow' (Isaiah 1:10-17).
3. Material abundance was tarnished by corruption; the vulnerable again lost out: 'Your silver has become dross... Your rulers are rebels... they all love bribes... they do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them (Isaiah 1:21-23).
4. International trade involved ethically compromising relationships: 'They are full of superstitions from the East... their land is full of silver and gold... their land is full of idols' (Isaiah 2:6-8).
5. The decadence of society led to military failure and thus a crisis in male population: 'In that day the Lord will snatch away their finery... your men will fall by the sword... in that day seven women will take hold of one man' (Isaiah 3:18 - 4:1).
6. Family land was overtaken by ruthless accumulation of property, implying that people were completely disregarding the Jubilee rule to

return land to its family owner every half-century. 'Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field... surely the great houses will become desolate and the fine mansions left without occupants' (Isaiah 5:8-9)

All the abundance that should have been seen as a gift from God in order to strengthen the family-based economy had been pursued as an end in itself by means of unscrupulous expansionism. Although people seemed to look after their own immediate families (there is no critique suggesting otherwise), the callous treatment towards the un-familied reveals a rejection of the Torah's more inclusive family ethos. It raises the ugly spectre of the kind of 'putting family first' that is exclusive and not truly in service of the 'other', creating a comfortable but impermeable social space for oneself.

This ethos deals with poverty at the preventative stage by making sure that the household units and the networks between them remain rooted in their source of material provision, i.e. the land. Because of this, there should be no poor in Israel. Paradoxically, however, there is also the assertion that the poor will always be among the people of Israel.⁷⁵ For those in poverty, often foreigners, something has gone wrong in their own relational networks.

Structurally, this situation is exacerbated when political leadership neglects the paramount relationship to God, makes worship superficial, and wrongly prioritises economic and military gain over community wellbeing. As a result, more of the needy are not served by the relationships that should sustain them, including being provided for by those in strong families. Torah insists that such people must not be allowed to fall through the cracks; concern for the poor is written into the system. Charity starts at home, but the home is also supposed to benefit the homeless.

The callous treatment towards the un-familied reveals a rejection of the Torah's more inclusive family ethos.

Out with the old, in with the nuclear? From Jewish to Christian family

There is a certain idea of the family that many would associate with the Christian one: Dad, mum, 2.4 kids and maybe a dog. It could even be tempting to think that this notion can be traced directly to the Bible. But do we see a change from an extended, more complex family arrangement to a nuclear one when we move from the Old Testament to the time of Jesus?

The 'household' implied more than just two generations and often members who were not even related by blood.

Actually no: one can read the whole New Testament without finding anything prescriptive on the composition of the family unit besides the need for monogamy.⁷⁶ It assumes that its teaching will be worked out within the social patterns that were already there. Both in Jewish and Graeco-Roman culture, the 'household' implied more than just two generations and often members who

were not even related by blood.⁷⁷ Such arrangements have remained in many cultures since this time. In fact, it is a matter of sociological dispute how the idea of a self-standing nuclear family became normative, and whether it stems primarily from biological or cultural factors.⁷⁸ Wherever it came from, however, the source was neither Jesus nor those who first followed him.

So the question is, if not through the introduction of what we now know as the Western nuclear model, how does the New Testament reshape the understanding of family and economy already found in the Old Testament? It is worth beginning with a general principle: Jesus affirms the validity of Torah but brings a new interpretation to it.⁷⁹ This is because he himself is its ideal interpretation, the embodiment of what a life true to Torah looked like. Jesus summed up what this meant; when challenged about priorities in Jewish legal understanding, he replied as follows:

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' (Matt. 19:37-39)

Neither of these commandments directly mentions family, economy or poverty. However, the range of social problems we have already seen in Israel stem from failing to do one or both of these things. This is most obviously manifest in idolatry (failure to love God) and abuse of the

vulnerable (failure to love neighbour). However, we have also seen that a distorted view of the temple and adoption of unscrupulous trading are signs of the same ethical decay. Therefore, it's not surprising that Jesus' challenge to the economic practices around this institution was so instrumental in his death. Here is a brief account of the key conflict in Jerusalem during the climactic days of his career:

Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of those selling doves. 'It is written,' he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer," but you are making it a "den of robbers." The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they were indignant. (Matt. 21:12-15)

Commercialism had grasped the temple institution and was standard fare elsewhere in the Roman Empire, as in Ephesus for an example.⁸⁰ Jesus staged a one-man protest that is a perfect enactment of love for God and neighbour: he restores the heavenward focus of this 'house' and makes provision for the most vulnerable by healing them.

The economic impact of this on the disabled was life-changing of course, especially in a society with such limited welfare provision.

Children rejoiced that somebody greater than

Solomon was there, the one who really fulfilled the promise of King David.

But the powers that be could not see past the threat to the establishment upon which they relied.

The economic impact of this on the disabled was life-changing.

Shortly after this incident, the Jewish community leaders managed to sway both public opinion and the judgment of the Roman political overlords against Jesus. The blatantly false conviction of an innocent man ended in an excruciating execution, which involved being strung up on two beams in the shape of a cross. It raises a troubling question: if this is what happens to the person who best exemplifies how to love God and neighbour (and there are countless lesser examples of the same phenomena), is the Christian gospel really 'good news'? Should we just give up fighting poverty or any other symptom of relational dysfunction?

There is, in fact, plenty of optimism in the New Testament surrounding its moral teaching but this cannot be grasped in isolation from the story

that underpins it. The career of Jesus is not the end of the story, but the beginning. All 27 books of the New Testament are premised on his resurrection from the dead and his encounter with women and men who testified about what they saw.

What became clear is that these events were essential for Christian social ethics to be meaningful. Jesus' death was the consequence of humanity's anti-God decision (and all its horrible results for family and economy) but it was the only thing that could enable the slate to be wiped clean. Things were too serious for anything less.

As a result, Jesus became not just a political leader for Israel but a truly cosmic statesman, forging a new connection between God and the world. This potentially nebulous idea became very concrete during the supernatural events around 'Pentecost'.⁸¹ Here, at a festival in Jerusalem, several thousand people experienced within themselves a power associated with the message about Jesus that convinced them it was all true and enabled them to live as he had done. The empowering presence of God is called the Holy Spirit, without whom everything in Christianity remains at the level of interesting ideas at best, and tame platitudes at worst.

The holistic relational force of love

What does all of this have to do with family and economy? Well, the direct response to these events was for a diverse group of people to establish an alternative community in which resources were pooled to support the poorest among them. Rather than a precise model to be replicated everywhere, this was an outworking of something that was non-negotiable in the Christian message: a holistic commitment to Jesus Christ and to other members of the Church.

This later resulted in the very first recorded international aid effort when the apostle Paul gathered support from as far north as Macedonia to relieve those affected by famine in the area around Jerusalem.⁸² Paul makes his appeal to several Christian communities as a direct implication of the core gospel message. But the same thinking is even more succinctly put by another apostle, John:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees

his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3:16-18)

Love starts with Jesus and leads to responsibility for Christian family, which includes women as much as men despite the normative masculine language. These new relationships are worthless if they are simply paid lip service under the guise of being 'spiritual'. Instead, this new life of love is to be lived in the harsh reality of an economy that had no government safety net.

Love starts with Jesus and leads to responsibility for Christian family.

Therefore the imperative to 'love God and love neighbour' is carried through to the church. But isn't this a rather abstract interpretation of the Old Testament? Is the Christian economic vision really severed from its Jewish roots in a family structure that also provided for those who were socially vulnerable? There are good reasons to answer in the negative.

Firstly, Christianity does not supplant the Jewish people. The Church starts with God's people, Israel, and draws others into the reign of God. Jesus was a Jew, as were his immediate followers. At Pentecost, things began to branch out because Jews from the diaspora joined the movement. They were ethnically Jewish, but had other national identities linguistically and, to an extent, culturally.

As Israel was originally supposed to be a 'model house' for others to follow, so the Christ-following Jews now shared that calling. But they no longer constituted a nation state and many travelled throughout the world (sometimes as a result of persecution), inviting non-Jews (Gentiles) to join them. This was a natural result of the fact that Jesus established a new humanity and not just a new nation.

Secondly, on family. The radical community in Jerusalem only pooled material resources and didn't pool wives and children as the leaders of Plato's ideal polis were to do. In fact, we see the opposite of abolishing family in Jesus' own teaching as well as that of Paul and others.⁸³ The economic role of family spelled out in Torah was underlined, but this doesn't mean that the exact social pattern of Israel was replicated. Rather, the basic responsibility for household and neighbours in need remained, only within a different context. Central to this was the mandate to work, whether directly in agriculture or in the variety of occupations possible in Graeco-Roman

urban centres. From this work, people were supposed to support not only children but also elderly relatives.

Thirdly, on vulnerable members of society. Widows and orphans in particular, when they were without other means of support, were still to be cared for by the church as a community. Responsibility for regular care was a controversial issue that had to be worked out structurally, as Paul's first letter to Timothy addresses.⁸⁴ However, the stories of the early Christians (not to mention Jesus himself) makes it clear that compassion and even supernatural provision was the response to occasional encounters with those in need. Crucially, though, the solution offered is not that of immediate financial benefit.

The Church cared for their members *through* biological family whilst doing so as a family structure *in itself*.

For example, when Peter and John are asked for money by a lame man, they offer healing in Jesus' name instead of cash.⁸⁵ Paul exorcises an enslaved girl in Philippi and makes her less economically profitable to her owners and thus in danger of losing her

own limited wellbeing.⁸⁶ But in both of these cases, those suffering are given an experience of God and the beginning of reconciled relationship to him that will bring holistic and lasting wellbeing. It is these people who would have joined the Church, who cared for their members *through* biological family whilst doing so as a family structure *in itself*. It is this kind of church community that the girl could have turned to in Philippi.

This final point brings us full circle to the main theme of our booklet. Christianity transforms poverty through addressing its relational root. Poverty is not sheer material lack that can be solved by an injection of finances. Rather, it is the state of being in such relational dysfunction that people are excluded from the resources, including material ones, needed for their holistic wellbeing.

Going to the heart of relational dysfunction, the gospel reconciles people to God and then to each other. In so doing it enables a social structure that does not abolish nation and kin but extends and relativises them. Biological families are still vital socio-economic units, but they make up part of a wider body that anthropologists would characterise as 'fictive kin'. This international family is constantly inviting others to join in its community life under God, where there should be no poverty. Where there is poverty, it is a sign of the Church failing to be the Church as God intends it.

3 Treating Poverty: Family Medicine

Principles

We now need to see how the biblical perspective can help develop the account of poverty set out in the opening part of this booklet.

We started with serious reflection on three pictures of poverty encountered in the UK. A combination of this everyday experience and relevant research led to deeper understanding. In particular, Jay's story opened up the symptom of homelessness to a much wider set of circumstances that led to his poverty. At the heart of the issue was a breakdown in the network of relationships upon which he – and indeed all of us – depend for material sustenance.

Family, both biologically and in terms of 'fictive kinship' of the local church, was instrumental for Jay. Although much of what is publicised about poverty implies the key role of family, the most influential voices in the UK overlook it in their anti-poverty measures. Treating the problem, both domestically and in foreign aid policy, demands a relational approach. Seeing poverty as something that can be addressed primarily through financial means only perpetuates its root causes.

A biblical view sees the relational dysfunction underlying sociological analysis of poverty as a cosmic reality, starting between God and humanity. Everything that works against holistic wellbeing is ultimately a result of this rupture between people and God, their Creator and Provider, though provision is mediated through land and society. Living out this relationship properly does not result in a harsh theocracy; instead, the Torah of Old Testament Israel shows how a society can be established for the common good. It sets out a relational economy that expects personal responsibility in cultivating resources productively but guards against the domination of the weak by the strong.

Key to this vision is the family in the sense of a household arrangement more expansive than the 'nuclear' one. It is rooted in and tied to the land

Everything that works against holistic wellbeing is ultimately a result of this rupture between people and God.

that sustains it, and is home to a multi-generational biological family whilst not being closed to outsiders.

This ideal comes to grief when it departs from its founding principles (which it takes to be a result of revelation) and follows the prevailing global culture. Part of this general degeneration of ethics in Israel is the phenomenon of relationships being conducted with the purpose of individual economic gain to the detriment of love for God and for others.

Although connection to land is not as explicit in the New Testament, the same principle applies there (even to urban homes, which rely on agriculture as much as their rural counterparts). What Jesus establishes is not a new economic method or structure, but a renewed relationship with God. With this comes the moral power not only to understand Torah but to live it in the new context of the church family. This underlines the fact that it was not Old Testament social ethics *per se* that were the problem, but the ability to live up to them.

Much has changed since the times of Solomon, Isaiah and Jesus' life in Israel. Yet the networks of relationships in which people were enmeshed back then remain as important to human wellbeing as ever. When they are distorted, the devastation is all too clear in the visage of material poverty.

The biblical perspective shows how developing resilient multi-generational families that conduct their economic life in deliberate cooperation with one another is essential to addressing poverty. These families are not self-sufficient nuclear units, however. Their mutual concern should extend to relatives more widely and those in the local community who are without these relational networks.

All people benefit from strong household bases, not only when its individual members can reach out to them in need, but when they are brought in to participate in the household to a variety of degrees. Furthermore, the psychological reality is that relational patterns developed in the family

All people benefit from strong household bases.

act as the paradigm for people's ways of conducting relationships more widely. This is the case even where there is apparently little personal interaction, such as relationships based around business and trade.

None of this means that individual mobility should be quashed, but only that it is highly beneficial for there to be a family base. For extended families to

play a mutually supportive role, there needs to be sufficient proximity to one another to care for each other's emotional and spiritual needs. There will always be members whose vocations require them to be further afield, but it is socially and economically detrimental for this to be taken unthinkingly as the norm.

With this in mind, what practical recommendations can be made to move towards this vision?

Households

We will begin at the household level for three reasons. Firstly, it makes sense to start with the life of families since this is the area we have identified as particularly important. Secondly, this is the most broadly applicable category of the three areas for practical implementation. Most people reading this will be part of a household of some kind, even if you currently live alone or in temporary accommodation. Thirdly, it is preferable to begin with your own agency first rather than that of institutional structures. Although these structures are vital in shaping individual and family life, there is no need to view ourselves as passive actors waiting for their provision. Governmental bodies with this kind of status have either been given (or are taking) such control over local and domestic life that they unduly limit personal freedom and responsibility.

Family life should be the pattern for behaviour pertaining to those outside it.

The basic principle is that family life should be cultivated with holistic mutual care at its centre. However, such economic practice must avoid becoming closed to those outside a tight unit. Neither should the conception of the household be restricted to nuclear family, nor should its attention be insular. In fact, as Aristotle taught long ago, family life should be the pattern for behaviour pertaining to those outside it.⁸⁷

This fits with the biblical perspective we have set out. There should be continuity between the way we conduct personal relationships and those on a wider scale, even where they have an institutional context. What is most needed for this change is a shift in attitude so that responsibility for others within the family is seen as a mutually beneficial aspect of economic life.

Indeed, there are ways in which family patterns connect directly to larger structural matters.

For those leaving school to pursue tertiary education, proximity to family is too often seen as a barrier to economic progress. Students who study close to home rather than going away enjoy both the economic benefits of their family (going into far less debt) and building strong roots in the area. This helps prevent a 'brain drain' and the accompanying financial unbalance that sees everything focused around the big cities. In the case of the UK, a disproportionate amount of human and financial capital flows into London and the South East, leaving other parts of the country too dependent on it.⁸⁸

Although Australia and Singapore could be cited as societies where the default is not to leave home for studies, Northern Ireland is a more local example. Some of its students go to Britain, Ireland or further afield of course, but a large proportion stay within the country. Moreover, if you were to walk on a weekend around the main student areas of Belfast such as 'The Holylands', you would find them nearly empty. Most will have gone home (usually a relatively short distance away), where they still participate in family and community life. Such a 'homely' environment by no means prevents innovative economic enterprise, which is blossoming across a number of sectors. It is worth reiterating as well that Northern Ireland regularly scores the highest in the 'happiness' surveys in the UK.⁸⁹

Another way in which the economic benefit of families can be pursued is to look again at the role of marriage. As we have already seen, children in single parent families are more likely to suffer from poverty and the state is increasingly unable to care for older people. A renewed commitment to marriage can be a benefit in both generational directions; it is obviously easier to care for dependent relatives (both older and younger) as a couple. Statistics also favour marriage over other cohabitational arrangements when it comes to longevity of relationship. This does not mean that marriage is a silver bullet; it is only when its values of faithfulness, commitment and co-ownership are inculcated in people that it can have this effect.⁹⁰ Establishing this kind of culture will in turn benefit the couple themselves when they reach a stage where their children need to take more responsibility for them.

In terms of how families can be economically significant for those outside the home, the key is to develop meaningful relationships with those who are vulnerable or in need. The ultimate example of this is adoption or fostering, which provides a holistic environment of care for a child whose own family

networks are unable to sustain them. At the other end of the spectrum of commitment is a household member (even in a one-person household) developing a relationship with a person who regularly begs on the streets, which helps establish a certain social coherence.

Such personal connections, if widely practised across society, will yield some benefit to the individual (possibly a life-changing one). However, it also guards against the larger scale problems caused by those in power being separated from the reality of poverty. As broken relationships lie at the heart of poverty, so building up relationships is the avenue to addressing it.

Just as this is valuable in the local area, it's also useful on the bigger global stage. Of course, it's impossible to have *direct* contact with those who work as primary producers in the supply chains that we rely on. But if we begin by seeing them in their 'familied' identity as wives, fathers or children of others with whom we are linked economically, an important shift of perception results. The attitude of trying to get the cheapest deal for ourselves will give way to a sense of kinship that wants the best for all parties involved.

Seeing those who are part of the supply chain on which we rely in these relational terms should have a concrete impact on consumer practices. Promoting fairly traded production is one way to exercise family-like care for those with whom we are in relationship through business transactions alone. The fair trade movement is one way to engage with this approach. Stories of producers' lives as well as some of the broader ethical issues involved are set out in much of the Fairtrade Association's material.⁹¹

Thinking about interconnectivity on these terms broadens out the issue again. We can value strangers across the globe through seeing them as 'familied' but also have a sense of their kinship with us as inhabitants of a 'common home', which heightens our sense of ecological responsibility.⁹² Simple measures taken as a household, such as buying domestically and/or organically made products, take on a significance that cannot be reduced to politicised morality.⁹³

We can value strangers
across the globe through
seeing them as 'familied'.

Churches

Much of what this booklet advocates can be acted on without specific reference to Christianity, as the applications for households and government policy show. There are even parts of this section that will be applicable to community groups other than the Church. However, the biblical perspective given here locates the root of relational dysfunction in such a way that economic matters become impossible to abstract from the reality of God.

Those who *do* profess faith are the ones with the primary responsibility for the full enactment of this vision.

Deeper and wider than simply being a problem with a particular society, poverty reveals something about the human heart in relation to its Creator. The shape of social relational networks are ultimately defined by this fundamental relationship.

Seeing the problem on this profound level should have some resonance even for those who do not profess Christian faith. After all, if the things that cause poverty recur in every single human society, they are unlikely to have a root in social dynamics specific to a particular culture. Those who *do* profess faith are the ones with the primary responsibility for the full enactment of this vision. As churches, the priority must be to integrate biblical thinking on the family and economic justice rather than allow these issues to remain politicised as ‘right’ and ‘left’ respectively.

This should involve not only teaching but living in an exemplary way in relation to family that takes the economic aspect of its life seriously. Special effort should be made to get away from the idea that the ‘nuclear family’ is the zenith of Christian life. Families should be open to the third or even fourth generation, and built around blood ties but not be bounded to these ties. There is much mutual benefit in families and non-familied church members being more deeply integrated in each other’s lives. Several churches already have optional ‘adopt-a-student’ schemes, for example, an attitude of care that should be extended to others as long as it avoids being patronising.

Since family life has become largely separate from economic life, churches should encourage families to participate in activities that strengthen this aspect of the relationship. Small-scale projects in agriculture or business can play this role, as well as joint insurance schemes that facilitate more family co-operation in such areas.

A more formalised arrangement could be established to give structure to this kind of activity. The 'Family Association' model of the Relationships Foundation is one such arrangement that has already been developed, and there is nothing to stop churches piloting it. Family Association Networks (FANs) are simple and practical to set up and are described as follows:

*'A commercial means of enhancing privately funded welfare provision through group savings within the extended family... a FAN would be a formal legal entity comprising a group of people primarily linked by marriage, blood or adoption. The FAN would strengthen family relationships by creating a common financial interest, and enabling greater welfare provision within the extended family. Extended family groups could form a tax friendly FAN and benefit from group savings on insurance, financial and commercial products. The savings could then be used in welfare provision for the group members such as education, health and care needs.'*⁹⁴

In terms of treating poverty rather than preventing it, cross-church initiatives both model and offer a means of extending the Christian family. Instead of sporadic aid or Christmas gifts, long-term relationships with those in a congregation's local area can form the basis for lasting change. There is no reason to see this work as being in competition with evangelism.

As Jesus exemplified, speaking about the kingdom of God should never be separated from expressing it in actions. Being 'salt and light' (Matthew 5:13-16) applies equally to mundane care for the needy as it does to the more spectacular acts that have been performed by Jesus and his followers throughout Christian history. The possibility of so-called 'rice Christians', whose attachment to the church is purely for economic benefit, should not discourage these efforts; it is the responsibility of a congregation to keep members accountable for their discipleship, and weeding out mercenary motivation is part of this.

Government Policy

The 'Family Manifesto' set out by MP Fiona Bruce with the support of several peers and other MPs brings together a whole range of concerns related to this topic.⁹⁵ A subsequent debate tracked the progress of the proposals made as well as other government action on the issue from 2010 onwards.⁹⁶ This shows how family is affected by such diverse matters as benefit allocation, relationship education and regulations around armed services and prisons.

A much more detailed look at the recommendations would be needed to assess them individually. But overall, Bruce makes it clear that more commitment to strengthening families is needed in relation to *all* government policy. This was the point of the 'Family Test' introduced in 2014.⁹⁷ The problem is that it has not been sufficiently implemented, despite efforts to make it mandatory.⁹⁸

Passing the bill making the 'Family Test' mandatory is the first concrete policy suggestion to make. But it is also important to implement the Family Test in key areas. In particular, economic policy (as we have seen) is too often discussed in isolation from families. Applying the Family Test more rigorously could prevent counterproductive moves, such as focusing on job creation in a way that systematically encourages individuals or nuclear families to uproot from their extended base. Of course, this would also require a broadening of the definition of 'family' to include the extended, rather than the nuclear one. Doing this is the second concrete policy recommendation.

Family is affected by benefit allocation, relationship education and regulations around armed services and prisons.

One area that is not included in the 'Family Manifesto' would potentially have the most sizable economic impact; however, it's not usually seen as directly related to the economy. This is policy regarding care for older people.

As we have seen, the government recognises the important role played by family in care for its dependent members. This recognition becomes more urgent when we factor in relational wellbeing, which is higher for those who live in family situations (though this is more readily acknowledged in relation to children). This of course has hugely beneficial impacts on mental and physical health, which in turn saves the NHS money.

However, even those families that do not accept the norm of putting ageing parents into a home can sometimes be forced to do so due to the lack of other viable options. It would save the taxpayer significant amounts of money if some of the budget for social care was put into enabling households to facilitate extra living arrangements, such as providing subsidies or VAT exemption for creating a 'granny flat'.

The 2017 Conservative manifesto states that housing policy should be 'supporting specialist housing where it is needed, like multigenerational

homes and housing for older people, including by helping housing associations increase their specialist housing stock'.⁹⁹ Whilst only a vaguer commitment to 'innovative housing' remains in the 2019 version, a commitment to make provision for elderly family members would fit squarely within government policy commitments.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, the third policy recommendation is to include resources within welfare provision to help families who need assistance in fulfilling their responsibility to care for older members.

A natural corollary to this last point would be to incentivise the strengthening of the family structures that facilitate this care. Marriage is the main area where this is the case, as has already been mentioned. Policy that panders to those who baulk at the ideological associations of this institution ends up having negative results economically, not to mention socially.

Families are the primary arena in which trust is built among citizens.

In reality, the significance of families goes far beyond economics. They are the primary arena in which trust is built among citizens and the organ through which cultural values are communicated and policies enacted within and across generations. They are key in a nation's relational goods, since 'trust is a part of a country's invisible capital that is produced by the family and transmitted to subsequent generations'.¹⁰¹

Already within Fiona Bruce's 'Family Manifesto' there are recommendations along these lines, but they do not go as far as to promote marriage per se, perhaps in awareness of the ideological challenges of doing so. Given a more robust economic basis, however, relationships education could include a positive role for marriage. This is the fourth policy recommendation.

Finally, in terms of foreign policy, there must be a rethink of the concept of 'aid'. The 0.7% figure boasted by the British government is meaningless unless it can be shown that the money is making a positive difference to economic and social conditions in those countries to which it is directed. Direct budgetary support for government has been shown to be detrimental to development, and a more relational strategy should be pursued with other nations.

One excellent example of a multi-agency approach is the Scotland-Malawi Partnership.¹⁰² This model is based on the deliberate cultivation of a kind of 'fictive kinship' based on a shared past through 19th century Scottish

missionary work in Malawi. Built across every level from government down to primary schools, the idea is to facilitate joint projects that allow participants to know each other, whether through electronic communication or face-to-face.

Ventures like the Scotland-Malawi partnership must be undertaken in such a way as to combat the unhealthy power dynamics between the UK and former colonies. This goal is reflected in the simple fact that the organisation on the Malawian side is called the Malawi-Scotland Partnership. Relational dynamics have their own impact in the extreme economic inequality that sees African resources and labour valued far less than they should be. A degree of penitence over the British Empire's wrongdoing is beginning to be in evidence, but it should be accompanied by constructive efforts to pursue genuine partnership in development. Establishing partnerships similar to the Scotland-Malawi model is the fifth and final policy recommendation.

Conclusion

Poverty is an ugly phenomenon that is horrible to experience and, for those with an attuned conscience, deeply uncomfortable to witness. But it is not a self-standing condition of material lack that can be fixed by pouring more money into it. Poverty is the state of being in such relational dysfunction that people are excluded from the resources, including material ones, needed for their holistic wellbeing.

Since poverty is a symptom of relational dysfunction at the deepest level, it can only be addressed by restoring and building up these relationships. This is why we start with the gospel message of Jesus Christ giving himself to reconcile us to God. This does not 'spiritualise' the problem, and neither does it 'internalise' or 'emotionalise' it. A biblical understanding of healthy relationships gives a prominent role to their economic component.

All this is especially the case with family, when properly understood as a multi-generational and flexibly constituted entity whose love starts from home but is enabled to grow outwards as a result. If this sounds disturbingly

simple, that's because it really is simple, at least at the level of understanding. Putting it into *practice* isn't so easy.

History makes it clear that even with the Church, which is defined by its reconciliation with God, relationships within the church community and with those outside it have been far from perfect. But if one looks at genuine Christian communities in all their imperfections, there will always be signs of that same animating love that made early Jerusalem groups so economically radical (Acts 2:42-47). Their Spirit-inspired response to the gospel was worked out in family and 'fictive kin' networks that had international implications. When we are talking about this kind of love, connected to all the material and social realities of life, then it really can fix everything.

Endnotes

- 1 Isaiah 1:1-20. 'Israel' in this case refers to the (southern) kingdom of Judah. The (northern) kingdom, also referred to as 'Israel', had gone into exile by this point.
- 2 Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), vii
- 3 Edward Oyugi, 'Re-thinking Aid: Development Cooperation in a Multilateral Crisis' in *The Reality of Aid 2004* (Manila: IBON Books, 2004), 48-49
- 4 The event is chronicled in a 2015 article in The Atlantic: <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/07/live-aid-anniversary/398402/>
- 5 At least one of the people behind these images has spoken out about the experience: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/13/face-ethiopian-famine-live-aid-birhan-woldu-nothing-her-geldof>
- 6 Some investigative journalism done around that time opens the lid on this aspect of the situation. See the article reproduced at <https://www.spin.com/featured/live-aid-the-terrible-truth-ethiopia-bob-geldof-feature/>
- 7 The speech is reproduced in full: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/oct/02/labourconference.labour6>
- 8 The quotation is found in the speech; see note 7 above.
- 9 Michael Schluter, 'What Charter for Humanity?' (Cambridge Paper, 2006), p.3
- 10 These can be found at <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> and <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030.html> respectively.
- 11 The 'Attenborough effect' was stark but, it seems, short-lived: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/attenborough-effect-praised-for-reduced-use-of-plastic-1.3945951>
- 12 This statistic is on the opening page of Philip Alston's report, whose final version was published in 2019. It is found at <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/112/13/PDF/G1911213.pdf?OpenElement>
- 13 Alston Report, p.1
- 14 Alston Report, p.3
- 15 Alston Report, p.8
- 16 Ken Loach's film *I, Daniel Blake* was released that same year and raised public consciousness of life for Britain's poorest. It was a picture of poverty that was a direct attack on Conservative austerity policy.
- 17 The UK's official response to the report can be read here: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/41/39/Add.3>. Interestingly, however, several of Alston's recommendations have been quietly adopted since the public repudiation of his report.
- 18 This measure is, of course, not actually 'absolute' in that it still measures one's income against a currency unit (dollar) that is itself subject to economic fluctuation.
- 19 The reasons for such disparity at the national and international level is also a relational problem in its own right and has to do with colonial dynamics, which is an issue that cannot be addressed in detail here.
- 20 Richard Mussa and Winford Masanjala, 'A Dangerous Divide: The State of Inequality in Malawi' (Oxfam, 2015), p.14
- 21 Guy Brandon looks at poverty as a relational issue UK in his 'Poverty in the UK – financial or relational problem?' (Jubilee Centre blog, 21.5.2015). Theresa May identifies inequality as one of the 'five giant challenges' facing the UK in the 2017 Conservative Party Manifesto, pp. 6-7. It is found at <https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/conservative-party-manifestos/Forward+Together+-+Our+Plan+for+a+Stronger+Britain+and+a+More+Prosperous....pdf>
- 22 Numerous conversations with frustrated NGO field workers affirm this to be the case with schemes funded by such organisations as USAID, DFID and the UN itself.

- 23 Alston emphasises this repeatedly (eg. Alston Report, p. 6), but there is no reference to it in the UK response.
- 24 Alston Report, p.11
- 25 There is a detailed report on family homelessness in Dublin found at <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Long-et-al-2019-Insights-Vol-2-No-1-Family-Homelessness-in-Dublin-%E2%80%93-Full-Report.pdf>
- 26 This is not his real name, but his identity needs to be protected.
- 27 Much of his contact is not directly with government but with charities, or agencies such as the <https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/what-do-if-you-need-housing-advice-or-are-homeless>
- 28 MP Rose Duffield's personal account of domestic abuse deeply moved others in the chamber as a bill on the issue was brought through the House of Commons. The whole debate from October 2019 is recorded on Hansard at <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-10-02/debates/C3488538-CFEC-4670-9299-732672E2BE67/DomesticAbuseBill>
- 29 Alston Report, p.1
- 30 Economist Paul Mills has analysed this in 'The Great Financial Crisis: A Biblical Diagnosis' (Jubilee Centre Cambridge Paper, 2011)
- 31 As Jonathan Tame pointed out in personal conversation, technically we're subjects (of the crown) rather than citizens, though terms like 'citizens' advice bureau' does confuse things.
- 32 Any church that claims to be so is not only in danger of Gnosticism at a formal level, but on a practical level is probably so (unevenly) yoked to the world's economic system that it has lost all awareness of the fact.
- 33 One of the hallmarks of children who were physically neglected is their inability to form relationships later in life
- 34 Academics from varying disciplines are increasingly interested in the role of reciprocal gift-giving in social relationships. For an introduction to the issue, see John Barclays *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), pp. 11-65. Lorna Zischka's work also deals with these themes. See https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/2051802314_Lorna_Zischka
- 35 Evidence for this can be seen, for example, in relation to Cambridge in 'It Takes A City' (Cambridge Summit on Homelessness, November 2018) and Dublin at <https://www.homelessdublin.ie/content/files/A-profile-of-families-experiencing-homelessness-in-the-Dublin-Region-2016-2018-families.pdf>
- 36 Margaret K. Nelson, 'Whither Fictive Kin? Or, What's in a Name?' *Journal of Family Issues* 2014, Vol 35(2), p.205
- 37 They entail 'provision for pupils with behavioural, emotional, social and medical difficulties' according to Ofsted: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/6542/1/Pupil%20referral%20units%20establishing%20successful%20practice%20in%20pupil%20referral%20units%20and%20local%20authorities%20PDF%20format.doc.pdf>, p.5
- 38 A study by Professors Martin Mills and Patricia Thompson mentions several times the importance of family as an aspect of a pupil's social formation that contributes to how they fare in education, and its connection to PRUs. See https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/748910/Investigative_research_into_alternative_provision.pdf (note the bibliography with many relevant items, pp.160-182).
- 39 Fictive kinship addresses a deep need and is found in surprising places. A report on the now defunct fitness phenomenon 'Skinny Bitch Collective' ends with the following observation: 'Maybe we are seeing fitness fads evolving into something else: fitness families?' See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/49891889>
- 40 Hence the frequent calls to recognise that inequality is bad for everyone on a relational level that will eventually have economic consequences. See, for example, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/02/06/how-rising-inequality-hurts-everyone-even-the-rich/>
- 41 See <https://indepth.oxfam.org.uk/public-good-private-wealth/>
- 42 Joseph Rowntree Foundation Research Unit, 'UK Poverty 2018', p.2
- 43 See p.2 of the manifesto, https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bdc353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf

- 44 The progress of the 'Troubled Families Programme' is set out in a briefing paper from August 2019, <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7585/CBP-7585.pdf>
- 45 January 2020 saw an announcement that the programme would be extended for an extra year: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-50999083>
- 46 Fiona Bruce MP led a debate on 'Strengthening Families' in February 2018 in which she raised these points, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2018-02-08/debates/BE428F1B-9336-4DC6-A5DA-F2D85121B6E1/StrengtheningFamilies>
- 47 Our earliest knowledge of the term comes from Xenofont, according to Lubomír Mlčoch, *Economics of the Family: Theories, institutions, policies and values* (Amersfoort, Netherlands: Sallux, 2018), p.11
- 48 For an insightful overview of this situation, with its political and social complexities, see Roland Boer and Christina Petterson, *Time of Troubles: A New Economic Framework for Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress, 2017)
- 49 Mlčoch, *Economics of the Family*, p.12
- 50 Oxfam Inequality Report 2019, pp.13-14
- 51 Robert A. Pollak, 'Gary Becker's Contributions to Family and Household Economics', *Review of Economics of the Household* 1, 2003, 111-113
- 52 David Cameron's speech on Life Chances can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-ministers-speech-on-life-chances>
- 53 Fiona Bruce MP and Lord Farmer, 'Family Manifesto', 2017, p.13 https://www.strengtheningfamilies-manifesto.com/assets/Family_Manifesto.pdf
- 54 See Michael Ovey's 'The Human Identity Crisis: Can we do without the Trinity?' (Jubilee Centre, 1995)
- 55 Jean B. Elshtain, 'Politics and Persons,' *The Journal of Religion* 86, no. 3 (2006), 402-403
- 56 See Norman Bowie, 'Challenging the Egoistic Paradigm', *Business Ethics Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Jan., 1991), pp.1-21
- 57 See John Sloman et al (eds), *Economics*, 10th edition (London: Pearson, 2012), p.325. For the corresponding report on wellbeing, see <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/measuringnationalwellbeing/2015-09-23#measuring-personal-well-being-in-the-uk>
- 58 The term was first coined by Carole Uhlaner in 'Relational goods and participation: Incorporating sociability into a theory of rational action', *Public Choice*, 1989, Vol.62(3), pp.253-285
- 59 See the half-century long Harvard conducted research, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/04/over-nearly-80-years-harvard-study-has-been-showing-how-to-live-a-healthy-and-happy-life>
- 60 There are actually three biblical languages if you count Aramaic, which is similar to Hebrew and accounts for a small proportion of the Old Testament in the books of Ezra and Daniel. The Bible in the Protestant tradition, from which this booklet is being written, contains a 'canon' of 66 books.
- 61 Genesis 1:1
- 62 James 2:23
- 63 Manasseh and Ephraim are actually named after Jacob's grandsons, the sons of his son Joseph
- 64 Found in Exodus 20 and also Deuteronomy 5
- 65 More detail on the following description can be found in Schluter and Clements, 'Reactivating the Extended Family' (see note 2 for details), pp.13-24
- 66 The question of slavery is a tricky one that can't be addressed here. One way to look at it is that Israel were not allowed to take other Israelites as slaves because they were already slaves – slaves of God (Leviticus 25:54-55).
- 67 In English translations, 'the LORD' represents the special name God revealed to Israel, the four Hebrew letters (written from right to left) as follows: יהוה (YHWH). Although often thought to be pronounced 'Yahweh', the original vowel sounds are no longer known.
- 68 Jonah 4 narrates this part of the story
- 69 1 Samuel 8:4-18
- 70 1 Kings 1-11 narrates this story. The reading that follows is influenced by the interpretation in Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 40th Anniversary edition (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress,

2018). However, this reading tries to nuance some of Brueggemann's criticisms of Solomon, which underplay some of the positive features that the biblical narrative brings out. The alternative biblical narrative of Solomon's reign in 2 Chronicles 1-9 does not include certain negative aspects of his story that are found in the 1 Kings narrative.

71 1 Kings 8:62-65

72 Eg. 1 Kings 2:22

73 1 Kings 4:6-20

74 Deuteronomy 17:14-20

75 Both of these statements are found in Deuteronomy 15:4-11.

76 Jesus implies this in Matthew 19:3-9 and Paul's injunction to elders in this regard in 1 Timothy 3:2 is implicitly normative for all Christians. Ethical teaching regarding household conduct mentions parents, children and slaves but says nothing about who would actually be living under one roof. Descriptive evidence of households is too varied to draw any definite patterns from.

77 The Greek word οἶκος (oikos), which we've mentioned as part of the etymology of 'economy', did not have identical associations as the Hebrew (בַּיִת, 'bait'). However, the standard meaning of a 'household' is the same.

78 Daniel Smith questions whether the idea of a move from complex, extended families to 'Western' nuclear ones has solid historical foundations; see 'The Curious History of Theorizing about the History of the Western Nuclear Family', *Social Science History*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Autumn, 1993). Mapping the composition of households is a historically knotty task. For an introduction to the issue, see Laslett, P., Wall, R. (eds), *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge: CUP, 1972), especially the introductory chapter.

79 This principle is especially associated with Matthew 5:17, but can be drawn from the New Testament as a whole.

80 R. Alan Culpepper: 'Temple Violation: Reading John 2:13-22 at the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus' in R. Alan Culpepper and Jörg Frey (eds.) *The Opening of John's Narrative (John 1:19 – 2:22): Historical, Literary, and Theological Readings from the Colloquium Iobanneum 2015 in Ephesus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017)

81 This is recounted in Acts 2

82 Paul mentions this several times in passing (eg. Romans chap. 15) but the fullest exposition of the topic is found in 2 Corinthians 8-9

83 See, for example, Mark 7:9-32 and 1 Timothy 5:8

84 1 Timothy 5:1-16

85 Acts 3:1-11

86 Acts 16:16-19

87 Elshtain, 'Politics and Persons', pp.3-4

88 Jack Brown of the Centre for London recently challenged the simplistic idea of London as a 'drain' on the rest of the UK whilst advocating much more evenly spread development across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. See <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/20/london-uk-economy-decentralisation>

89 County Fermanagh in the west of the country is profiled in this regard at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34336951>

90 Alissa Goodman and Ellen Greaves discuss this in 'Cohabitation, Marriage, and Relational Stability', Institute of Fiscal Studies, 2010 (<https://www.ifs.org.uk/bns/bn107.pdf>). This study addresses difficulties with arguing for marriage over cohabitation in relation to relationship stability. In particular it argues that 'much of the difference in relationship stability between married and cohabiting parents is due to pre-existing differences between the kinds of people who get married before they have children and those who cohabit' (p.12). However, it leaves open the possibility that the institution of marriage strengthens those cultural, religious and socio-economic factors identified as 'pre-existing differences' between people and thus has a key role in relationship stability.

91 See the Fairtrade website: https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMImKwKqfS5QIVmK3tCh2Glgb5EAAYASAAEgJKW_D_BwE

- 92 Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'* sets out this way of seeing the world in some detail. See http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html
- 93 The Jubilee Centre study *Thoughtful Eating* covers several of these issues. See <https://www.jubilee-centre.org/blog/thoughtful-eating>
- 94 More details and a fuller report can be found at <https://relationshipsfoundation.org/publications/a-network-of-family-associations/>
- 95 See https://www.strengtheningfamiliesmanifesto.com/assets/Family_Manifesto.pdf
- 96 See <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2018-02-08/debates/BE428F1B-9336-4DC6-A5DA-F2D85121B6E1/StrengtheningFamilies>
- 97 See <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7714#fullreport>
- 98 Bruce and Farmer themselves sponsored a bill to this effect. See <https://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/familyrelationshipsimpactassessmentandtargets.html>
- 99 Conservative Party Manifesto 2017, p.71
- 100 The 2019 Manifesto pledges to 'encourage innovative design and technology to make housing more affordable, accessible, and suitable for disabled people and an ageing population' (p.31).
- 101 Mlčoch, *Economics of the Family*, p.21
- 102 Much of the work goes on a smaller scale, but the main organs of the partnership can be learned about from <https://www.scotland-malawipartnership.org/>