Although the military intervention in Syria has been eclipsing the migrant crisis in recent weeks, there seems no doubt that the flow of desperate people seeking hope and refuge in Europe will continue right through 2016. How will we respond this year?

People in countries where the refugees are seeking help are pulled in two directions. The heart says reach out, care, show compassion; but the head says what will it cost, who will pay and what will the consequences be?

The debate is particularly polarised in the media. Those wanting to restrict the flow of refugees are accused of being cold and heartless, while anyone advocating unconditional welcome is dismissed as woolly-headed.

But do we have to choose?

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Jesus went on to say that loving your neighbour is inseparable from loving God. In fact this second commandment was ‘like the first’ – in authority, certainly, but could there also be an echo of the head and heart nuance in how we are to love our neighbour?

If so, then our compassion for refugees should not be naive, but qualified by a sober realism about what it will cost, in time, resources, goodwill and patience, to turn around the miserable fortunes of those who have fled the slow destruction of Syria. Likewise, our pragmatism must not be hard-hearted, but tempered by sacrificial kindness (the virtue which God puts at the top of his CV, according to Jeremiah 9:23-24). This means that we will pay up, go out of our way, and help people who are caught up in the horror of all-out war, which for 70 years has mercifully not touched Britain’s shores.

And the greatest reason for doing this? Because if we were in the refugees’ shoes, if we had seen our town bombed into ruins street by street (talk to someone who lived through the Blitz), would we not long to be welcomed in a land that was at peace, and take refuge there until the nightmare was over?

Of course there are risks and ramifications to opening the door to refugees, which is why compassion should be tempered with strategic thinking and planning; the heart needs the head if our help is to be both effective and sustainable.

But as followers of Jesus, whom we believe to be Lord of history and Lord of the nations, let us also try to discern what might be happening spiritually through this mass movement of people. That will come through prayer and by listening to the stories of refugees and those who come alongside them. Let us go into 2016 with our hearts, heads and spirits fully prepared to engage with whatever comes towards us, and by God’s grace, do our utmost to put his kingdom first.
Caesar: Cash is king

Guy Brandon

Caesar is the most influential character never seen in the New Testament. The Roman emperor does not make a personal appearance in the accounts of the disciples and the early Church, but he stands behind the scenes of almost everything that occurs.

Caesar's face does make an appearance: New Testament. There is one occasion when Pirate Roberts or Dr Who, there is always identities barely matter; like the Dread the strings of the Roman Empire. Individual into a single shadowy and dark force pulling which Nero's name is one of its solutions. Revelation 13:18 is a specific method for 'calculating' the number of the Beast in the fall of Jerusalem. The Greek word for of the Romano-Jewish war that ended in Christians, and whose reign saw the start brutally persecuted the new sect known as AD (Acts 18:2). Then there was Nero, who brutally persecuted the new sect known as Christians, and whose reign saw the start of the Romano-Jewish war that ended in the fall of Jerusalem. The Greek word for 'calculating' the number of the Beast in Revelation 13:18 is a specific method for which Nero's name is one of its solutions.

But all of these characters are conflated into a single shadowy and dark force pulling the strings of the Roman Empire. Individual identities barely matter; like the Dread Pirate Roberts or Dr Who, there is always a new Caesar. However, perhaps it is not quite fair to say Caesar is never seen in the New Testament. There is one occasion when Caesar's face does make an appearance:

'When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.' (Matthew 22:15-22)

Jesus' response – typically ambiguous and raising more questions than it answers – opens a discussion about the nature of power and our relationship to it.

Pagan rule
The silver denarius bore the head of Tiberius, emperor since Jesus' teenage years. Behind the Pharisees' question lies the catalogue of public services and protections enjoyed by the Jews. It is Caesar's coin, both produced by and funding Caesar's state machinery, so Caesar has a legitimate claim to it.

But the remark is, like the coin, double-sided. What does belong to Caesar? What belongs to God – and what happens when the two claims come into conflict? Jesus' listeners likely recognised that the answer to those implicit questions lay on the same coin. The Roman denarius bore the likeness of Caesar. Thus the demonstration of ownership was also a direct breach of the second commandment, 'You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.' (Exodus 20:4) The denarius was the most common coin used in Jesus' time, the standard wage for a day of labour (Matthew 20:2). It would have been a constant reminder of pagan Roman rule and infringements on the Jews' religious freedom – raising the same uncomfortable question that the Pharisees asked every time it changed hands.

Moving beyond the most obvious implications, there is a wealth of significance just under the surface of this episode. The small coin symbolises not just Caesar, but every government and human power of any kind. As explored in previous Engage articles, the Jews had had long and painful experience with centralised authority. It was ingrained upon their collective memory thanks to their years as slaves in Egypt, and contact with numerous belligerent nations in the centuries afterwards. As a result, Israel's own structures of power were to be more dispersed and less prone to abuse (Deuteronomy 17, 1 Samuel 8:11-20).

'He whose coin is current is lord of the land'
Money is one of the tools of that centralised authority, open to all the abuses that control over its supply enables. The coin in Jesus' hand was the perfect example of those dangers.

The denarius was originally minted towards the end of the 3rd century BC. It was made from almost pure silver and weighed roughly 4.5 grams. In the time of Augustus, a few years before Jesus’ conversation, its silver content had been reduced by around 13 percent. This meant Augustus could mint coins with the same face value, but that cost less in silver to create – a discrepancy that represented an attractive source of income to him and subsequent emperors.

Seigniorage – the difference between the cost of minting a coin and the face value of that coin – has been subject to
abuse throughout history. Jesus’ audience must have been aware that the coin they showed him was worth significantly less than its recent equivalent. As it happens, over the course of the next two centuries the denarius was subject to further debasement, until it was no more than a copper token with a thin silver coating – causing dramatic inflation as people found out their money was worth less than it used to be.

Before about the 7th century BC, money took place firmly in the hands of the end users of money. Coins were probably only used for everyday commerce. The purity of these could be checked on a touchstone and they would be weighed out at the point of transaction. It was dependent on standard weights, but took place firmly in the hands of the end users of money. Coins were probably only introduced to the Israelites in the 6th century, after their return from Babylon. With this convenience also came debasement for personal and political gain. The state had a monopoly on this process, and exercised it to an extent impossible for an ordinary merchant or customer. Centralising money creation resulted, as night follows day, in the state extracting wealth from its people.

Debasement and inflation was only one of the abuses to which the Roman Empire subjected its citizens, but it was part of an overall package of evils by which those in power controlled their subjects. The denarius was the closest that most Jews would ever get to Caesar. It was not a ringing endorsement for his rule. Jesus’ answer could then also be interpreted as something like, ‘Caesar has defrauded you and lied to you. He forces you to handle idolatrous images of him every day. What does such a man deserve?’

Real power
Finally, the exchange over the denarius highlights the different approaches to power embodied by Jesus, on the one hand, and earthly authority on the other. ‘Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” (Matthew 16:24-26) Although this is presumably meant figuratively, there was only one person who could claim to have gained the whole world: Caesar.

The idea of voluntarily giving up power, of course, would have been anathema to Caesar. Rome was the global superpower of its day, a sprawling, expanding empire kept in check by a huge military machine, funded by oppressive taxation and an ever-more debased currency. But, as Paul writes, “the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.” (1 Corinthians 1:25)

Application
Jesus’ exchange with the Pharisees over a denarius suggests several areas of application for us.

Hold money lightly. Inflation is an earthly reminder of what money is really worth in the long-term: nothing. In the long run, as Keynes said, we’re all dead. ‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.’ (Matthew 6:19-20)

Identify the ‘Romes’ in your life. Are there institutions, organisations, structures of power, and so on, in your life, which exert an undue and unwelcome influence on you, simply because they set the rules for the way you engage with the world? It might be our monetary system, your employment, even the consumer culture we take in through different media. How can we reduce their influence on us?

Rethink ‘leadership’. Much has been written about Christian Leadership, though this is often conventional management/leadership techniques with a thin Christian gloss. The contrast between Jesus’ and Caesar’s approaches to leadership suggests that it should involve giving up power rather than accumulating it – a difficult challenge for those in any position of authority or leadership in any sphere of life, large or small.
What makes a business Christian?

Jonathan Tame

This is the question we have been exploring over the last couple of months through our latest research project, in collaboration with Faith in Business at Ridley Hall, and with the support of LICC. Much has been written about what makes a Christian entrepreneur or business owner, and on different values and principles of Christian business.

However, there is less on how these principles evolve in practice over time. How resilient are they to tough market conditions? What happens to them when management changes hands? Our project investigates how businesses that began with or later adopted a Christian ethos have been able to embed that ethos in company culture as the business has grown and as personnel have changed.

Having adopted a case study approach, our two researchers are interviewing directors of eight businesses in various sectors including construction, banking, commodity trading, legal services and engineering. All the companies involved were started or subsequently led by people with a strong Christian commitment which they wanted to express through their business; all have gone through a change in leadership, and have experienced significant growth.

By listening to their stories, we are learning how people sought to base the business on biblical principles, what happened when those principles came under pressure, and how they have influenced working practices and company culture over time.

We are looking in particular at the connection between the Christian ethos of the company and the relationships between all different stakeholders, not just owners, directors, employees and clients, but the wider stakeholders such as suppliers, local and national authorities, trade unions and the local community.

We hope to bring a summary of the findings in the next edition of Engage, which we’re praying will help other entrepreneurs wishing to create and sustain a distinctively Christian ethos and practice in their company – bearing fruit that will last.

Relational Companies consultation

Philip Powell

A main focus for Jubilee Centre’s international work this year has been to facilitate a research and consultation project on how to apply Relational Thinking to some of Europe’s crucial challenges. This is a follow up to the conference we held in Caux, Switzerland in October 2014, entitled ‘More than a Bailout: a new narrative and strategy for rebuilding Europe’.

The Economy, Finance and Business working group met twice during 2015, and Michael Schluter, Paul Mills and Jonathan Rushworth gathered with other thinkers and practitioners associated with the Christian Political Foundation for Europe and the European Economic Summit. The second consultation in Amsterdam from 26th to 28th November looked at new initiatives to create Relational companies.

At a time when fundamental questions are being raised about the legitimacy of capitalism in its present form, the consultation was an opportunity to discuss the role companies can play in transforming capitalism from within. They discussed the need for a new language to describe the relationship between a company and its multiple stakeholders, and the impact of companies on wider society.

One session focused on how to build closer relationships between shareholders and company directors. Some of the key features of a relational company are effective accountability of the board to the shareholders, engagement with all its stakeholders, and ownership that remains largely regional and local.

Paul Mills and Michael Schluter have been drawing many of these ideas together and are due to launch their report in the spring at the European Parliament in Brussels. This will be a follow up to their 2012 book After Capitalism, and will set out a relational policy framework for business, finance, and the wider economy that will be promoted by the European Christian Political Movement in the European Parliament and more widely.

Henry Heinz (1844-1919) based his business on Christian principles and proclaimed that his success was a direct result of his faith in God.
Finding Security in the ‘Risk Society’

Philip Powell

The Lisbon earthquake of 1755 led to Rousseau and Voltaire discussing the role of faith and hope when natural disasters strike.

What does it mean for Christians to live distinctively and faithfully in a world that is defined by risk? How should Christians engage with the latest scientific and technological developments? Our new Cambridge Paper by Amy Donovan addresses these issues.

Our modern world is increasingly structured around the management of risk. We are continually bombarded with information about what is good for us and what is not; what is likely to increase our risk of health; what we should invest in and plan for. A great deal of research is focused on calculating, discovering and understanding risks so that we can better control them.

Risk is now a major ‘organising concept’ in Western society.

What exactly is risk? Risk is dealing with the unknown, ‘what we do not see’ – and that is why society is so obsessed with managing it. One major instrument for dealing with risk is using probability – putting numbers on outcomes and thereby implying that we understand risk and can control it. But the problem is that risk assessment is frequently dominated by uncertainty, there are some risks that remain incalculable. Paradoxically, the more we try to control and make the future safe, the more it seems we are on the back-foot playing catch-up.

How should Christians respond to risk? The Christian faith does not remove responsibility for our decisions, but it provides relief from both our sin and from the angst of feeling that our whole life can be deflected by a single wrong choice. Christians do not shun risk but instead take risks – within the compass of God’s sovereignty and ‘risk’y only in the sense that we don’t know God’s plan for us. Atheists take ultimate, spiritual risks in not trusting in God, but within their frame of reference there is no other choice or hope. Thus, a key aspect of Christian life in a risk society is that we have eternal hope that refocuses our lives. We take ‘risks’ when we step out in faith into an unknown future, but we do so in dependence on God, knowing that ultimately, we are safe. We are secure because we know that God is in control. This is counter-cultural in a risk society.

The prevalence of fear in the modern world – hidden though it sometimes is behind the complex risk mitigation technologies that surround us – is an immense opportunity for Christians both to engage with the issues that drive the fear and to demonstrate that we live with a fundamentally different and eternal perspective. The church provides an antidote to risk through relationships – relationship with God and with each other. The risk society reminds us of what we have in Christ, and the opportunity we have to serve others both in using knowledge wisely and in witnessing to the sovereignty of God that neutralizes uncertainty and risk in our lives.

The Christian life in the risk society is a radical one.

Read Amy’s paper online at www.jubilee-centre.org or else order a printed copy from centre.org

Forming a Christian Mind

Sally Bertlin

‘Human Flourishing and the University’ was the theme of our third annual Forming a Christian Mind conference on 24th October. The 60 participants were primarily postgraduate students and post-docs, who came from as far afield as Paris and Edinburgh.

The feedback from those who attended was overwhelmingly positive. One student on the planning group said, ‘Postgrad students and researchers were glad to participate and engage in discussions about their disciplines and Christian faith. Some have never been part of an event like that. So I believe we helped them to think more about how Christianity informs and encourages scholarship.’

Our plenary speaker Professor Donald Hay from Oxford gave a stimulating talk exploring five understandings of human beings in society: theological, evolutionary psychology, rational choice, social theories, persons.

The theme of Human Flourishing was further developed in the seminars where participants could explore their disciplines in more depth with experts in their field, Eugenio Biagini, Alasdair Coles, Tom McLeish and Paul Mills who discussed history, medicine, science and economics respectively.

A highlight was Dr Louise Driffill’s plenary workshop on ‘Flourishing beyond the University’. She concluded by saying that in the context of some of the most pressing challenges facing society, the biblical message is not wishful thinking, not faith in human ingenuity, not loose confidence in some generic idea about God’s faithfulness, but a hope that:

• is deeply rooted in all that Jesus Christ has won through his death and resurrection
• aligns with God’s purposes to one day liberate the earth from its bondage to decay and renew all things
• perseveres in prayer
• embraces the Bible’s counter-cultural vision of how to live in relation to God, each other and the environment
• leads to love and joy

• leads to love and joy
Introducing Maggie Jones, our Supporter Relations Administrator

Maggie Jones joined us in October, taking over from Emily Shurmer, who moved to be Communications Manager at Middle East Media. We are most grateful to Emily for her hard work and all that she contributed while she was part of our team and wish her well in her new role.

Maggie’s primary role is with supporters so we wanted to introduce her to you so that you know a little more about what she has been doing and is now doing with Jubilee Centre.

What were you doing before you came to Jubilee Centre?
I was born and brought up in Glasgow and very proud of it, though I have spent most of my adult life living in Cambridgeshire. I have a degree in Computing Science and in my former career I was a software engineer eventually moving onto project management and training. I then took a lengthy career break to devote time to my family. During that time I became very involved in my local community – schools, church, gospel choir etc.

What drew you to working with the Jubilee Centre?
I have known of the Jubilee Centre for a while since the Keep Sunday Special Campaign and have a huge amount of respect for the work you do. I became aware that you had a vacancy which was a good match to the skills I had to offer. I had been considering returning to work part time for a while and I was more interested in making myself useful in a small office than attempting to return to the fast changing world of the IT industry. And being a Christian charity, I knew the team at the Jubilee Centre had to be very nice and friendly!

What does your work involve from day to day?
I work on building good relationships with our donors and supporters. I process and track all the donations coming into Jubilee Centre, write thank you letters to our supporters and maintain our supporters’ database. Jubilee Centre is funded entirely through voluntary gifts, mostly private donations. I am truly stunned by the number of generous supporters who donate to the Jubilee Centre on a regular basis. The Jubilee Centre team is made up of extremely talented and gifted people and without our supporters, we could not continue to operate.

The Relational Thinking Network Conference

Sally Bertlin

In September, Jubilee Centre staff participated in the international Relational Thinking Network conference in Cambridge. The Network brings together individuals and organisations to explore how putting relationships at the forefront of personal, business and policy decisions can transform society.

The theme was ‘Relational Risk and Sustainability’, and participants presented, considered and discussed ideas in plenary sessions and in specialist tracks on business, international development and public services, so as to examine how to build relational capital in companies, organisations and communities around the world.

Much ground was covered included the global economy, business, management, leadership, good governance, peace-building, freedom of thought, politics, international aid and development. It explored ways of measuring and mitigating relational risk in companies and supply chains, and how relational risk surfaces and can be managed in public sector organisations working together, as well as in communities, schools and health care systems.

The Relational Thinking Network was inspired by Jubilee Centre founder Michael Schluter, as a way of turning the biblical vision for society into a broad agenda for institutional and personal transformation. An excellent website tells the story at www.relationalthinking.net.