

Engage



Quarterly comment from the Jubilee Centre

July 2017

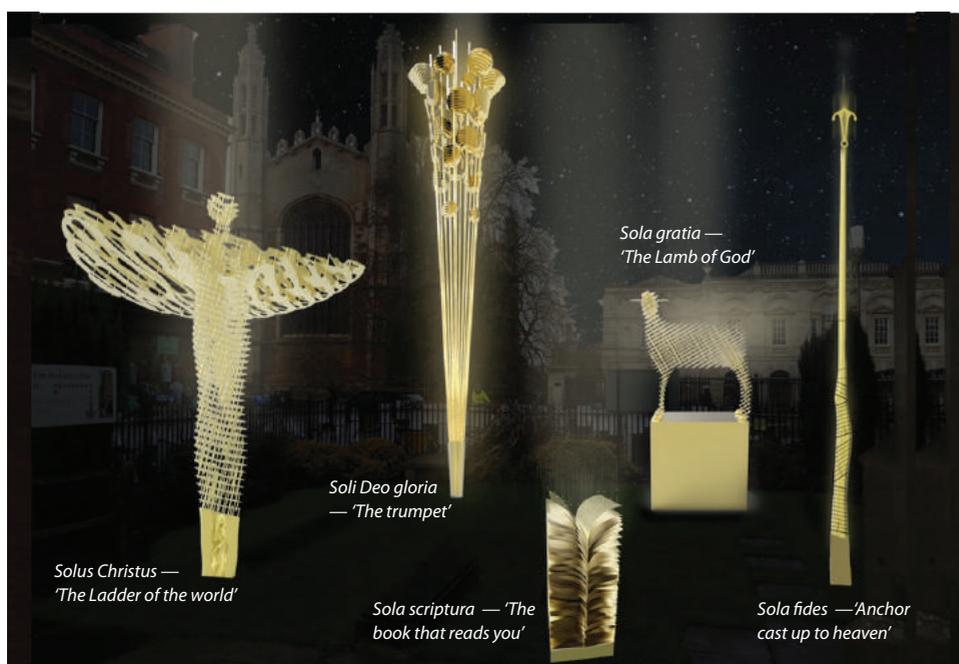


Illustration showing how the 'Five Foundations' sculpture exhibition by Liviu Mocan might look at night outside Great St Mary's church in Cambridge

Contents

Biblical biographies: Amos the Unprofessional	2
95 Theses for Today	4
Book Review: A New Heaven and a New Earth - Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology	4
Time for a Financial Reformation?	5
Cambridge Papers 100th edition	5
Public Leadership course graduates	6
European update	6

Art and social transformation

Jonathan Tame

As a research-based organisation promoting Christian social reform, it's not surprising that Jubilee Centre's output is primarily in the form of words. However, personal and social transformation are unlikely to take place through words alone – no matter how eloquent our language or convincing our arguments.

Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band was released 50 years ago last month. Around the same time as the Beatles were recording this epoch-shaping album, Francis Schaeffer was in discussion with many people trying to make sense of life, at L'Abri in Switzerland.

He understood then how crucial the arts were to influencing the way people viewed the world, and urged Protestant Christians to rediscover God's purposes for this neglected sphere of life.

Since then the evangelical Church has been slowly re-engaging with the arts, which have subsequently become central to postmodern culture. We live in a highly visual age, and so the power of art to reach the soul and touch the heart is becoming more and more important.

I suggest that there are three great benefits of art, which every Christian should embrace.

1. Beauty. Despite the rejection of beauty by many modern and postmodern artists, our God-given longing for beauty has not diminished. The philosopher Roger Scruton states, 'The great artists of the past were aware that human life is full of chaos and suffering. But they had a remedy for this, and the name of that remedy was beauty. The beautiful work of art brings consolation in sorrow and affirmation in joy – it shows human life to be worthwhile. However, many modern artists have become weary of this sacred task.' By bringing beauty into all that we make and do, we enjoy the material world more and honour God as the source of all that's beautiful, both in creation and redemption (see also Phil 4:8).

2. Truth. Art can bring us closer to reality, both positively and negatively. A fresco in a Romanian Orthodox church depicts Jesus raising to life the widow of Nain's son. Surprisingly, perhaps, the boy and his mother were not gazing in awe at Jesus, but at each other in gratitude and wonder; Jesus was almost a bystander. The artist is revealing

Continued on page 3

Amos the Unprofessional

Guy Brandon



The Prophet Amos by Juan de Borgona 1535

In the collection of the prophetic books of the Old Testament – simply titled ‘The Prophets’ or *n’bi’im* in the tripartite classification of the Hebrew Bible – Amos is the earliest prophet with a book to his name. Despite the twelve so-called Minor Prophets coming after the longer books of the Major Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel in the Bible, Amos began his ministry before any of them, though he overlapped with Isaiah and Hosea.

We don’t know a great deal about Amos, but he was the first to write his message as well as speak it (Elijah and Elisha, of course, were well-known, and there were other prophets before them, but none have whole books dedicated to their ministries). Amos 1:1 sets the scene: ‘The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa – the vision he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel.’

Amos’s prophesies can be dated with a reasonable degree of confidence to around 760 BC or shortly after, within the overlap of the reigns of the two kings. There is archaeological evidence for the earthquake that apparently devastated the area around that time, two years after the events of the book. The same earthquake is apparently

referenced by Zechariah, centuries later. ‘You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah.’ (Zechariah 14:5)

Not your average prophet

There are a couple of unusual features about Amos’s ministry. The first is that he was not sent to Judah, his home country. Amos was from Tekoa, 12 miles south of Jerusalem, but he preached to Israel. A little like Jonah, then, he speaks to a tough audience. Jonah brought his message to Nineveh – the capital of Assyria, which oppressed Judah and destroyed Israel. Amos is from the southern kingdom of Judah, but he speaks to the northern kingdom of Israel. Whilst they share a common history, only splitting into two lands in the time of Solomon, Israel and Judah have grown apart since then and hostilities occasionally erupt into war.

Secondly, the Prophet Amos was, in his own words, ‘not a prophet’. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel – one of the Israelite sanctuaries against which Amos had been prophesying – confronts him: ‘Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don’t prophesy any more at Bethel, because this is the king’s sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom.’ (Amos 7:12-13)

Amos answers him with the enigmatic words, *lo’ navi anokhi*. The Hebrew can be interpreted in several ways. The word ‘I’ comes at the end of the phrase, and is the honorific form, indicating some emphasis: ‘I’m not a prophet! (or a prophet’s son)’. Because the verb is understood, it’s not clear whether he’s saying he *isn’t* a prophet, or *wasn’t* – but is now. It’s the same with his CV: it’s not clear whether Amos is saying he is still a shepherd and sycamore fig-tree tender, or that he was before he was called to speak.

It’s even unclear what ‘prophet’ means in this context. Amos could mean that he doesn’t consider himself a proper prophet; he is simply a shepherd who was called by God to deliver a message – just as Christians might not consider themselves Evangelists, but nevertheless are involved in evangelism. But it might be that he is referring to the formal, professional prophets who were attached to the Temple – the ‘sons of the prophets’ as they were sometimes known.

Whichever of these is correct, Amos obviously takes exception to Amaziah’s description of him as a prophet – something which may be down to Amaziah’s evident contempt for his prophecies as much as the profession itself.

Preaching to the choir

It’s hardly surprising Amaziah had issue with him. Amos’s message was carefully crafted to shock and even insult his listeners. It begins in the traditional manner, with a series of attacks on the surrounding nations. Amos preaches like a boxer, landing blow after blow on a sequence of Israel’s neighbours. The message is broadly the same: they have engaged in unnecessarily cruel and oppressive wars. The Arameans, Philistines, Tyrians, Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites – they have all brutally punished their neighbours, butchering and enslaving whole communities.

But then Amos’s message takes a turn for the unexpected. The prophet from Judah turns his criticism onto – Judah itself. Israel’s neighbour is being added to a list consisting of the surrounding nations, with their vile religious practices. Judah, whilst lacking the others’ belligerence, has forsaken the Law of the Lord and is no better than them!

At this point, you can imagine his hearers nodding quietly and experiencing a certain *Schadenfreude*. They’d always known the

Judeans were a bad lot, breaking away from the true Israel like that and acting all holier than thou with their 'one true Temple' propaganda. The fact that a prophet from Judah is now admitting this openly is surely a knockout blow.

Unfortunately, it turns out to be only a feint. Because as comfortably familiar as the criticism of the surrounding nations was, and as surprisingly welcome as the attack on Judah is, the majority of Amos's message is reserved for none other than Israel itself. The rest of the book is a series of stinging rebukes of Israel for their sins, chiefly their failure to ensure social justice, as well as their disregard for the Law. They have become well off – Amos delivers his message at a time of material prosperity – but have neglected the poor and needy. 'For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent. They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name.

They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines.' (Amos 2:6-8)

Many of Amos's messages are directed at the wealthy elite, who find whatever ways they can of defrauding the poor to enrich themselves. They deny them justice in court; they impose high taxes on those who cannot afford them (5:10-12). They bulk out grain with dust and dirt and end their Sabbaths and festivals as early as they can to sell more (8:5-6).

And although they observe a form of religion, it is empty: going through the motions of sacrifice and festivals, but omitting what really matters. It resonates with Jesus' message, centuries later: 'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former.' (Matthew 23:23) Enough is enough, says Amos: judgment is coming.

Tekoa's river today - Betty Nudler



Application

There's a lot the Church can take away from Amos's message – some encouraging, some less so.

1. We're unprofessional. Amos didn't see himself as a professional. He wasn't a priest or a 'real' prophet: he was just a shepherd whom God decided to call to speak. And yet an entire book in the Bible is devoted to his message. That should be an encouragement to millions of 'non-professional' Christians going about their daily work and lives.

2. We're unprepared. Amos speaks at a time of relative peace and prosperity. Financial Crisis notwithstanding, we are also experiencing a time of unprecedented peace and material prosperity. Amos's critique of no-holds-barred capitalism and the corruption of the political-economic elites, as well as the lacklustre faith of the Israelites more broadly, should prove a warning to us to 'fix the roof while the sun is shining'.

3. We're undeserving. The Israelites looked at the nations around them and told themselves what so many other nations have told themselves: *They're not like us*. Amos's message is challenging: *You're exactly like them – except worse*. Surveys suggest that self-identifying evangelical Christians often don't live lives much different to non-believers in areas as diverse as money, sex and racism (all of which feature in Amos).¹ Whilst also prompting us to rethink our lifestyles, this uncomfortable truth should also reinforce a message of grace. We are undeserving of God's love, but we receive it anyway.

¹ See Ronald J. Sider's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience* (Baker Books, 2005). Sider writes of the American Church; due to the political motivation for research more statistics exist for US Christians than for the UK.

Continued from page 1

the truth of God's relational purpose in the gospel. In contrast, Chinese dissident Ai Weiwei invites people to engage emotionally with real injustice. His 90 tonne installation 'Straight' is made entirely from the iron reinforcing bars recovered from the poorly-built schools that collapsed in the Sichuan earthquake of 2008 – killing over 5,000 children – which the authorities tried to hide. This simple installation confronts us with reality in multiple ways.

3. Imagination. Faith and imagination belong together; Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is being sure of what we hope for, certain of what we do not see. Through combining beauty and truth, and giving form to something which we long for, the arts can help strengthen our faith, deepen our

worship, and affirm that there is much more to reality than what we see with our eyes.

Art speaks the language of the soul; it has the subversive power to bypass our rational defences and speak to the heart – which is the wellspring of life (Proverbs 4:23). Thomas Cranmer, one of the 16th century English Reformers, wrote, 'What the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies.'

In pursuit of this, we are delighted to be organising 'Five Foundations', a sculpture exhibition for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation – opposite Kings College Chapel in Cambridge. The Romanian artist Liviu Mocan is creating a set of sculptures representing the five solas that summarise the Reformers' vision for salvation: *sola scriptura* (by scripture alone), *sola fide* (by

faith alone), *sola gratia* (by grace alone), *solus Christus* (through Christ alone) and *soli Deo gloria* (glory to God alone). The image on the front page shows what the objects might look like in place.

By expressing these core theological truths in the form of public sculptures, we are praying that thousands of visitors will be touched by this unique exhibition that weaves together history, faith and contemporary art. Liviu is working hard to complete the sculptures, and as I write we still need to raise several thousand pounds more to cover the costs; our hope and prayer is that we can install them before the summer is over, and that through local and national media, they will add a significant dimension to the 500th anniversary of Luther's 95 theses on 31st October and beyond.

95 Theses for Today

Our project to 'crowdsource' 95 new theses on biblical social transformation is progressing in exciting ways. So far, 36 theses have been submitted by more than 20 different authors, reflecting concerns ranging from environmental issues to mental health stigmas. Each thesis has a 100 word limit and includes three parts (*Affirmation, Analysis, Action*), which mirror the three-fold biblical paradigm of Creation, Fall, and Redemption. Below are two examples from the past several months; please do visit our designated website and join the conversation at: Reformation2017.org/95-new-theses

'Giving' people make better communities (Lorna Zischka)

We affirm that 'giving' people make better communities. Their willingness to react to the needs and interests of others brings communities together, building positive relationships and enabling people to work together more effectively.

However, our current measures of welfare barely recognise these relational assets, focusing instead on individualistic indicators such as how good I feel or how much wealth I have. We should therefore start asking ourselves what we give as well as what we get. The willing transfer of time and money between persons and across social boundaries is an indicator of social cohesion we do well to consider.

Teaching about the effects of pornography (Florence Gildea)

We affirm that sex is an act of love, trust and vulnerability, and therefore should be reserved for marriage, where husband and wife are committed to loving and serving each other.

However, pornography is used by most British and American men, whether married and/or Christian. Porn has been found to increase negative attitudes towards women, decrease empathy for sexual abuse victims, and increase sexually aggressive behaviour.

Therefore, we ask that the neurological and relational effects of pornography are realistically addressed in sex education programmes, and that churches address the issue more directly and encourage accountability among their members.

A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology

Review by **Richard Gunton**

What does the Bible say about heaven? Genesis states that the sun, moon and stars are in heaven, and birds fly there. Rain and thunder come from heaven – and so do the voices of God and angels. Heaven is God's dwelling place (1 Kings 8; Psalms) – or his throne, with earth his footstool (Isaiah 66) – as if God is above heaven – and finally in Revelation we see a multitude of people worshipping before the throne in heaven. How can we make sense of all this? Is our English distinction between 'sky' and 'heaven' necessary to grasp what the biblical writers meant? Biblical Hebrew has just one basic word for the realm of birds, clouds, moon, sun and angels – and God's dwelling place itself. And New Testament Greek is the same. So what are we to believe about meeting our Lord and God, about Christ's return and our citizenship in heaven (Phil 3:20)?

There are many books about both 'heaven' and eschatology, but Richard Middleton's offering focuses on the biblical phrase first used by Isaiah to sum up the creation's glorious future. 'A New Heaven and a New Earth' is a book with a bold agenda stated in its subtitle: 'Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology'. The book's thorough overview of how the biblical story develops, from Genesis to Revelation, is bolstered by the book's extensive scripture index. The aim, as mentioned in the Preface, is 'to marshal the central biblical evidence... for a holistic understanding of salvation, with a focus on eschatology' in a way that would be 'accessible and clear'. This is not a book about heaven; it's far more important than that!

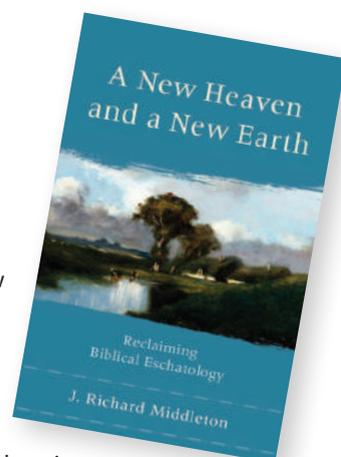
As I devoured the book's 300 pages, each section promised to answer questions I had, and hopes I felt, about the power of the Scriptures to encompass my own life story here in 21st-century Britain. After an introduction setting out 'the problem of otherworldly hope', Part 1 takes an original look at the overarching plot of the biblical story 'from creation to eschaton'. Part 2 then dwells on 'holistic salvation in the Old

Testament', showing how even in the absence of much clear teaching about

resurrection there is a very obvious sense that the earth is the focus of God's purposes (how could anyone who took the Old Testament seriously preach a heavenly destination?). Then Part 3 surveys 'the New Testament's vision of cosmic renewal', showing how intimately bodily resurrection is linked to believers ultimately reigning on earth with Christ, and the redemption of all things. Part 4 deals with a list of 'problem texts for holistic eschatology' – an invaluable resource for systematic exploration of the questions that will remain – before Part 5 asks 'so what?' – showing how 'the ethics of the Kingdom' make much more sense within an understanding that salvation is an earthly matter. Finally, a fascinating appendix, 'Whatever happened to the new earth?' provides an account of how various notions of holistic eschatology came and went through church history.

It may be clear that I have very little criticism of this book. It isn't a light read; there are other treatments more suited to the non-scholarly churchgoer. But I find in these pages a much needed and masterfully written introduction not just to biblical eschatology but to the very nature of a salvation that is truly Christian. I recommend it highly!

At the beginning of May we co-hosted an event with KLICE in the Jubilee Lounge, when Richard Middleton spoke about the theme of his new book. Dr Middleton is well known for 'The Transforming Vision' which he co-wrote with Brian Walsh, introducing a biblical worldview. Richard Gunton is a Research Fellow from Leeds University and co-ordinator of Thinking Faith Network (www.thinkfaith.net), and accompanied Richard Middleton on his recent lecture tour.



Time for a Financial Reformation?

Philip Powell



Our latest Cambridge Paper by Prof David McIlroy discusses the need to re-think our banking system and its purpose in the way that the Protestant Reformation five hundred years ago radically re-thought the Church and its mission.

Banking is a perilous business. The Bible warns that the love of money is at the root of all evil and Jesus spoke the biting words, 'You cannot serve both God and Mammon'. Overcoming the temptations of money is not easy and our current banking system has produced financial super-predators.

There are two reasons for the growth of these banking behemoths: a mismatch between reward and risk, and the ability of banks to trade with the benefit of a government guarantee. The toxic behaviour of banks that has become so endemic hasn't always been the case. In the past bank shareholders used to have unlimited liability for the debts of a bank. Commercial banks and investment banks dealing with complex financial arrangements were partners, but separate entities.

But all this began to change in the 1980s and '90s when banks became limited liability companies whose shareholders wanted to extract more and more profit but would lose nothing more than the value of their shares if the bank failed. These changes have had dramatic consequences. Banks could take greater risks without bearing the full weight of the consequences of their actions. Large banks could borrow 10 or 20 times more than other companies because of the government guarantee they had. Risky behaviour was rewarded and if the banks failed somebody else paid the price. Banks started to behave like casinos with little or no sense of social obligations to wider society.

There was an explosion of financial trading for trading's sake. Big banks borrowed money cheaply because they knew that governments would be bound to bail them out. In April 2008, according

to the Global Financial Trading Report, the total debts, shares and assets of commercial banks amounted to 4 times global GDP and derivatives about 12 times global GDP.

Given this state of affairs what will it take to bring about a financial reformation? McIlroy explains that it will require changes at the personal, institutional, and legal levels.

At the level of personal change, integrity is vital. All social reform begins with personal change. But there is a limit to which it is possible to take a stand against seemingly profitable activity which everyone in an industry is engaging in. At the level of institutional change, there needs to be a change in the mismatch between the risks and rewards and the benefits of government guarantee removed. This would lead to a culture-shift in banking away from short-term financial transactions toward more long-term, sustainable relationships with customers. Banks are there to serve people and the economy, and not the other way round. Finally at the legal level, regulatory oversight should not just be about complex technical rules that indirectly serve big banks, making it difficult for smaller banks to compete, but about values and clear principles about the purpose of banking. More rules don't necessarily mean more positive outcomes.

If a bank is too big to fail it must be broken up. A simple way of achieving this objective is to tax banks above a certain size at a punitive rate for the benefit of the government guarantee that they enjoy. Those who own banks would then have an incentive to break them up into smaller units.

To conclude, the Global Financial Crisis ought to have been a wake-up call but instead, it has largely been an opportunity missed. A financial reformation will require radical change and there is an alternative to the domination of our financial system by a few large banks focused on short term profits. Banking was different in the past and it could be once again.

Cambridge Papers 100th edition

Sally Bertlin

In April we published our one hundredth Cambridge Paper, a wonderful milestone in the ministry of Jubilee Centre. To mark the event we held a celebratory tea party on 7th April in St Edmund's College in Cambridge, hosted by Dr Denis Alexander, one of the founding members of the Writing Group. It was lovely to gather some of those who have contributed to the Cambridge Papers over the years, whether as writers, editors or indeed readers.

Cambridge Papers was started in 1992 with the aim of developing a biblical way of thinking on a variety of issues from a Christian perspective, and they have been sent out quarterly throughout the past 25 years. Some have been on the Writing Group since its inception, including Chris Townsend, who chairs the Group (now renamed the Editorial Group). Our 'Celebratory Cake' was in the form of 100 cupcakes, each with its own flag depicting the title of one of the first 100 Cambridge Papers published.



Public Leadership course graduates

Philip Powell

Our second Biblical Foundations for Public Leadership (BFPL) course is coming to an end in July. Two of the international participants share their feedback:



Vahe Jebejian is from Lebanon and currently works as a civil engineer in Lausanne, Switzerland.

Q. How has the course challenged your thinking?

The readings have helped me understand how to think biblically about today's issues. We live in an era where morality has become futile, where historical foundations of society are being shattered. People are losing a framework through which to look at the world. The online discussions have helped me engage with people from different backgrounds, and together we're finding a foundation on which our thoughts and hopefully our actions can be based. I feel much more confident in my faith, and eager to engage in conversations – even on Leviticus!

Q. How might you apply what you've learned?

Living as a Christian in a secular society is a struggle; our values and principles are challenged daily. I am regularly challenged over the question of family and sexual ethics – both inside and outside the church. This module opened my eyes to the depth of this problem and has given me much confidence in the relevance of the biblical stance for individuals and society as a whole. The approach taken by this module was highly persuasive and helpful. The readings didn't only show how Christians have developed a biblical sexual ethic through the centuries, but most importantly, why it is so relevant and why it can help society progress.



Jiayun Emma Leong is from Singapore doing her law pupillage; she is due to be called to the Singapore Bar in August 2017

Q. How has the course challenged your thinking?

From the outset the Foundation module had a profound effect on the way I evaluated contemporary ideas and policies. I was reminded that the gospel is essentially relational, and a flourishing life must prioritise right relationship with God and neighbour. Even while we were exposed to occasionally technical concepts, as the months went by the unifying theme that right relationships are truly on God's heart crystallised for me. I am convinced that the conversations started during the online discussions must carry on, in our local church and Christian community. Through the course I've come to believe the Bible offers truths for radical engagement with today's society.

Q. How might you apply what you've learned?

This course has offered me another paradigm for decision-making, even decisions such as where I should work – a prestigious, well-paying firm with minimal time to maintain personal relationships, or choose less pay but with greater flexibility of time? The module on Law & Justice was instructive in widening my understanding of justice to go beyond retribution and include questions of social justice. I was also challenged to look beyond righting legal wrongs to considering a more holistic concept of justice as restoring *shalom* – which might practically mean encouraging clients not to pursue a claim but to compromise, reconcile and settle as achieving 'justice'.

The next course begins in October 2017; for details visit www.jubilee-centre.org/training.

European update

Jonathan Tame

The European political party ECPM's think tank, Sallux, invited Jubilee Centre's founder Michael Schluter, together with David Lee and Paul Mills, to write an ambitious report on an alternative economic framework for the EU. 'Confederal Europe: Strong Nations, Strong Union' argues that four dysfunctional relationships are weakening the European economy. These are between nations, because of the euro; between lenders and borrowers on account of debt finance; between suppliers and users of capital and finally between governments and their electorates. The report, which was launched in the European Parliament on April 11th, makes 20 far-reaching policy recommendations for a more relational economy and society (see <http://relationalthinking.net/confederal-europe>).

I presented a summary of this report at the opening session of the annual State of Europe Forum in Malta on 7th and 8th May, and also introduced our new research report comparing Relational Thinking with Catholic Social Teaching (which you can order using the response form).

About Jubilee Centre

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

Jubilee Centre is based in Cambridge, where it collaborates with some of the other organisations launched by Michael Schluter, including the Relational Thinking Network and Relational Research. Our office has been in the heart of the city since July 2015.

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