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towards a biblical mind

How to create a relational society:

Foundations for a new social order

by Michael Schluter

Africa's development crisis is far more than economic in nature. The lack of political leadership, the dearth of farm organisations, and the general absence of a 'good institutional environment' explain why the crisis will not yield readily to economic prescriptions.

Carl Eicher¹

The Jewish political tradition . . . differs from the political traditions growing out of classic Greek thought in that it begins with a concern for relationships rather than structures.

Daniel Elazar and Stuart Cohen²

[The Lord] will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure.

Isaiah 33:6

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Summary

In an earlier Cambridge Paper (September 2006), a biblical 'Charter for Humanity' was proposed within a 'relational framework'. This second paper seeks to answer the question, 'How do we move towards relational well-being?' The place where the Bible sets out the foundations required to create a society of right relationships in terms of structures, resources and processes is primarily in the law which God gives to Israel when it is first established as a nation. The paper explores how these institutional norms, as deepened and extended by the rest of biblical teaching, provide the basis for social transformation today.

Introduction

The goal of society in biblical teaching is understood as 'shalom', which can be translated as social harmony, peace, prosperity, security and well-being, and is only achieved through right relationships. Such relationships are characterised by justice, truth, compassion, hope, faithfulness and forgiveness. The relationships the Bible is concerned about are not only those between individuals, but those between groups and organisations; between nations, regions, ethnic groups, cities and churches; between rich and poor, old and young, urban and rural interests; men and women; and between God and all these groups and individuals.³

The question addressed in this paper is not how Christians should tackle the symptoms of relational breakdown and distress. There are numerous initiatives by churches, charities and the public services, such as those to resolve local or international conflict, to aid those without family support, and to provide financial help for the destitute. The question here is about prevention rather than cure. How is it possible to design a society's institutions in a fallen world so as to maximise the likelihood of positive relational outcomes, and address the most fundamental causes of relational breakdown? Is it even worth pursuing such a vision in a fallen world?

To pursue right relationships across society is a task of immense complexity. Everyone belongs to many different subgroups, for example being young, educated, urban, Chinese, female, Christian, employed and single all at the same time. So, what guidance does the Bible provide as to how right relationships can be pursued across so many different sectors and segments of society simultaneously? How are these relationships to be prioritised? What are the essential foundations of a relational social order?

Institutions: what they are and why they matter

In the economics literature, 'institutions' are not the same as 'organisations'. Douglass North has defined institutions as the rules, formal and informal, which

1 C. Eicher, 'Institutions and the African Farmer', CIMMYT Economics Program Third Distinguished Economist Lecture, 1999.
2 D. Elazar and S. Cohen, *The Jewish Polity*, Bloomington, 1985.
3 See, for example, Gen. 19:1-29; Is. 11:13, 58:6-9; Ezek. 16:20-52; Amos 1 & 2; Luke 11:37-54; Luke 13:34; Rev. 2 & 3.

govern the behaviour of organisations and individuals. They include a nation's codified rules and laws, and the procedures and organisations for making, modifying, interpreting and enforcing these rules and laws.⁴ The connection between social relationships (or social capital), institutions and organisations is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Relationships, institutions and organisations

Social Relationships	Institutions		Organisations
	Rules		
	Informal	Formal	
Trust	Rules	Regulations	Nations
Networks			Family
Shared values		Laws	Civil society and business organisations
	Norms		Courts
Religion	Traditions	Constitution	Police/defence
			Professional bodies
			Political parties

Source: Adapted from *World Development Report*, Washington DC, 2003, ch. 3.

Institutions, or 'rules of behaviour', have all sorts of functions. They reflect what a society believes is right and wrong, and who has the authority and power to do something about it. They determine how resources like land and capital are distributed, and then the likely pattern of their future development and redistribution. They shape the role of central and local government in education, criminal justice and the economy. They play a major role in determining how vulnerable and isolated people get noticed and provided for, and who feels a responsibility to take on caring roles. Furthermore, they affect how widespread corruption becomes, and the impact this has on the economy, employment, welfare and public services. Institutions may change over time, but only slowly, so the foundational rules – often built into a country's constitution – are likely to be a major influence on long-term cultural and social change.

Recent work by the IMF has shown the primacy of institutions in explaining the difference between the richest and poorest countries. Geography and trade have a relatively small impact on growth of income among low-income countries. The crucial variable is the quality of institutions, defined by the authors as property rights and the rule of law. The study concludes, 'What matters are the rules of the game in society, as defined by explicit and implicit norms and their ability to create appropriate incentives for desirable economic behaviour.'⁵

Rodrigo de Rato, managing director of the IMF, has defined 'good' institutions, whether for high- or low-income countries, on the following principles:

- First, the private sector is recognised as the main actor on the economic stage, with the state stepping in to provide appropriate regulation of markets.
- Second, there is a commitment to protecting property rights and creating an environment where innovation can thrive.
- Third, the rule of law prevails, and corruption is not tolerated in either the public or private arenas.

4 Douglass North, 'Needed: A Theory of Change', in Gerald Meier and Joseph Stiglitz eds, *Frontiers of Development Economics*, NY, 2000.

5 Dani Rodrik and Arund Subramanian, 'The Primacy of Institutions (and what this does and does not mean)', *Finance and Development (IMF)*, 40:2, June 2003, 1. At www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2003/06/pdf/rodrrik.pdf

- And, fourth, there is a stable macroeconomic environment, reflected in low inflation and a sustainable fiscal position.^{6,7}

These institutional principles are designed to achieve economic growth. However, the Bible encourages us to focus on relational goals, and gives us a broader understanding of institutional norms to achieve them.

Biblical teaching on institutional issues

The Bible has much to say about the formal and informal rules which directly or indirectly govern social relationships. However, the categories of 'developed' and 'developing' countries do not apply when looking at the world through a 'relational lens'. All countries have weak, unjust or broken relationships, both at the level of personal relationships and at the level of groups or organisations (Romans 3:23). No nation can call itself 'righteous' (having right relationships) in a total sense, although the wisdom and prophetic literature imply that some nations are more righteous than others.⁸ All need institutional reform initiatives, although the sectors of society most in need of reform will differ from one country to another. For example, in the UK the priority may be to define how the family is empowered to prevent further fragmentation, whereas in India the primary need may be to recognise the equal dignity and worth of all individuals, whatever their caste or gender. Although perfect relationships (righteousness) are unattainable, either for the individual or for society as a whole, Jesus and other biblical writers expect us to pursue this goal.⁹

All Scripture is 'useful for training in righteousness' (right relationships) and therefore relevant in identifying the foundations of a relational society. However, the only place in the Bible which explicitly sets out to provide an institutional framework for the social order is the Law of Moses. Mosaic law is often scorned today by non-Christians, and ignored by Christians, because on a superficial reading it has passages which seem unethical today. However, such passages can be appreciated if studied more closely.¹⁰ OT law offers a wonderful social paradigm that treats society as a complex system.¹¹ The rest of the Old Testament applies the paradigm. Today our task is to derive principles of lasting relevance, always keeping in mind the overall paradigm, Israel's geo-historical context, its unique covenant relationship with God, and the wider context of the whole Bible.

Jesus teaches how the church, though often a minority, is to be 'salt and light' in society (Matthew 5:13–16), addressing in part its role in tackling social decay and darkness. However, Christ also points to the continuing significance of OT law (verses 17–19; see also Mark 7:9–13, Matthew 22:34–40) which has much to say about the institutional foundations of a just society.¹² Beyond this Jesus says relatively little new on these issues except to teach his disciples how they should respond at a personal level to Imperial Rome and Jewish national institutions (e.g. Mark 12:13–17). His extensive teaching on the Kingdom of God is addressed primarily to the community of believers to explain their place in the world, and only indirectly points to norms for the wider social order.

Although the apostles address the clash between Christ and the state for ultimate allegiance, they give little social teaching

6 Rodrigo de Rato (Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund), 23rd Annual Monetary Conference On 'Monetary Institutions and Economic Development', November, 2005. www.cato.org/pubs/journal/cj26n2/cj26n2-1.pdf

7 Arguably, de Rato omitted a further, and primary, principle that international institutions such as the one he represents provide a framework to ensure stability and sustainability of trade, aid and international investment.

8 See Ps. 33:12; Prov. 14:34; Isa. 1:4.

9 For example, Matt. 5:48; 6:33; 19:21; Prov. 15:9.

10 Some explanations of the 'difficult passages' in the OT, such as those on women, slavery and war, can be found in Julian Rivers, 'Moral Difficulties in Scripture', in W.C. Campbell-Jack and Gavin McGrath eds, *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, Leicester, 2006; Jonathan Burnside, *Consent versus Community: What Basis for Sexual Offences?*, Cambridge, 2006; and Michael Schluter, 'Bonded Labour: the ultimate safety net in early Israel', in M. Schluter and J. Ashcroft, eds, *Jubilee Manifesto*, IVP, 2005, pp.193–195.

11 *Jubilee Manifesto*, pp.89–101.

12 The church over the centuries has debated what should be carried over from the OT to the NT and how it should be applied. See Jason Fletcher, 'Mercy not sacrifice: Mosaic law in Christian social ethics', *Cambridge Papers*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2004.

beyond the ordering of church life and the family life of believers. They do not set out a new vision for the political and social system. However, in NT times, the church undertook direct social action. Thus, Puritan commitment to limit the king's arbitrary power, and the campaign by Wilberforce and his friends to stop the slave trade, were based on teaching from both Testaments.

Structures

We shall now examine OT social institutions, taking into account how these have been modified by the coming of Christ. This requires us to consider how these institutions would have shaped patterns of relationships, as well as their relevance for the way societies are structured today.

Religious structures

The opening of the Ten Commandments shows that a society's collective relationship with God is its most significant relationship. It is not clear whether societies in the West characterised by extreme individualism have any meaningful collective relationship with God. The imperative of evangelism was a part of Israel's role as 'light to the nations'¹³ and within Israel the emphasis is on the 'fear of God' (i.e. respect for God) informing every part of national life and decision-making. Israel was required to recognise the hand of God in its history,¹⁴ and to acknowledge dependence on God for its survival and well-being.

The institutional expression of this spiritual priority in the Old Testament was the priesthood, with the temple of Solomon replacing the earlier tabernacle as the central place of worship and religious ritual. There was clear separation of the priesthood from the kingship in institutional terms, but the consequences of Israel's relationship with Yahweh were to spill over into every facet of public and private life. For example, priests were not allowed to own rural land, apart from communal holdings immediately around their designated towns. This would have prevented the 'religious establishment' becoming aligned with the interests of larger landowners. The consequent dependence by priests on the generosity of the public would have been an incentive to remain faithful and diligent.

In the New Testament, the church is described as 'a royal priesthood',¹⁵ and Christ replaces the temple and the land as the focus of religious loyalty.¹⁶ There is no indication that the church as an institution is to play any formal role in the life of the state, but obedience to Christ is still expected to impact on every part of life, including political life.¹⁷

The difficulty for Christian reform is that no society today is in a special relationship with God as Israel was, and most contain many people of different religions and none. Even reference to God in the constitution may be ambiguous because it is not clear which 'God' is referred to. However, wherever possible, Christians should seek to see God acknowledged in public life – in the constitution, the school curriculum, and the courts – and not accept a 'secular state' where the Trinitarian God is excluded from the formal activities of the state. Christians should also seek the right to use religious language and argument in public debate, and to ensure full religious liberty for those of all faiths.¹⁸

Family structure

Biblical teaching does not specify all aspects of family life but sets down a number of markers for family structure.¹⁹ So, for example:

- a person's relationship with God should take priority over all family relationships;
- a family is not just parents and children, as in much Western

13 See, for example, Isa. 42:9; Deut. 4:5–8.

14 See Deut. chs 1–8.

15 1 Pet. 2:9.

16 John 4:21–26.

17 E.g. Col. 1:15–20.

18 Note the difference from the OT, where idolatry and false religion were punished with the death penalty.

19 See *Jubilee Manifesto*, ch. 9.

- thinking, but includes the extended network of relatives;
- obligations to a spouse should take priority over those to parents and other relatives;
- the husband is head of the wife, but in a context of sacrificial love;
- parents have specific duties in regard to their children, and children to their parents.

Within this framework there is room for diversity of cultural expression. For example, biblical norms do not specify how housework and earning power are allocated within the household, or the role of parents in choice of a child's marriage partner.

Relationship challenges in families are the same in nature, but not in origin, in both high-income countries (HICs) and low-income countries (LICs) today. The same relationships are breaking down (husband/wife, parent/child, commitment to extended family) but for different reasons. In HICs, modern and postmodern philosophy and increased mobility, promoting individualism and choice, lead to family break-up. In LICs urban drift is making it difficult for a husband (now working in the city) to keep up a marriage with his wife living far away and in a different cultural setting (a rural village), and whom he sees perhaps only twice a year due to distance and transport costs.

Christian reform strategies to encourage understanding and practice of the biblical model of family structure differ according to cultural and economic context. In Western societies a key need is to give family relationships a more obvious purpose, for example by creating financial benefits for extended families which form themselves into 'welfare syndicates' to look after their older members. In LICs, land reform, agricultural growth strategies and green energy policy can increase rural incomes and thus enable rural families to continue to live near each other, reducing urban drift.

Political structure

The key principles to inform structures for the political order have been summarised by Julian Rivers:²⁰

- *Government has a divine purpose.* The function of government is to use force to ensure civil peace, justice and liberty. Christians are not to be anarchists.
- *Government legitimacy rests in the people under God.* While God is the ultimate source of all political authority, in the Bible God invests that authority in 'the people'. Voluntary commitment to 'a covenant under God' by all sections of the population, to live together as a nation, should be the foundation of national cohesion. The fact that Kenya came into existence through colonial fiat rather than such a covenant among its 300 ethnic groups explains in part the on-going ethnic tensions.
- *Government must be limited, and in particular should have no jurisdiction over religious affairs.* This is still a revolutionary concept. There should be no persecution of believers of any faith by organs of the state.
- *Government must act through law.* Government by 'the rule of law' is directly at odds with government by the arbitrary decisions of a King, President or Prime Minister who regards themselves as 'above the law'. This is a weakness in many countries, especially in Africa and Latin America.
- *Government must be based on civic equality.* The commitment to democratic government is at odds with aristocratic or elite-based control of the state. However, in practice, democracy depends on a wide distribution of property and the population's sense of responsibility to participate in making political decisions. Both are under threat in Western democracies.
- *Government must be divided and diffuse.* The principle of separation of roles between prophet, priest and king in OT Israel is followed in contemporary political thought by separation of the legislative, executive and judicial arms of government. At the same time, as far as possible government

20 See *Jubilee Manifesto* chapters 7 and 8.

functions, including defence roles, should be organised and delivered locally. Western states show increasing centralisation which is dangerous.

- *Government must be accountable.* Accountability consists of a requirement publicly to justify action and a ‘forum’ within which that justification takes place. By contrast, for example, the US President does not have to go to Congress to explain his decision to go to war.

Resources

People

People are, of course, any society’s greatest resource. In terms of the economy, they provide the initiative which combines the resources of land, capital and ‘labour’ (i.e. themselves and other people) into a productive enterprise. In many countries over 50 per cent of people are self-employed (if smallholders are included). A person’s ability and willingness to create wealth depends on access to land and capital, education and on other institutional factors such as the confidence that if successful a person will not have their earnings removed from them by organised crime. Biblical teaching – for example in the parable of the talents – encourages people to see that they have an obligation to use their abilities productively.²¹

A key factor determining productivity of the workforce is the ‘work ethic’, the belief that hard work is good, right and honourable. Historically, the work ethic has been associated with Christianity.²² In the Genesis creation account God gives humanity the mandate to steward the earth. To work hard is part of what it means to love God and neighbour, although to take this to an extreme can deny time, and thus love, to both God and neighbour. Society’s rules governing working hours and employee protection affect relationships across the community, but especially those in low-income households. The most significant such institution in OT law was the Sabbath.²³ In almost all societies today, the issue of a shared weekly day off is being contested as commercial interests seek to enlarge profits by trading seven days a week. Other employment protection included the requirement to pay wages promptly,²⁴ and, in the specific context of household bonded labour (an alternative to prison or homelessness), the right to run away and protection from physical abuse by the employer.²⁵ Protection of the dignity of the employee is the foundation of employer/employee and employee/community relationships.

Land and property

Land and property ownership patterns have a major impact on family and community structure, and thus on the potential for decentralising power without distorting political outcomes, as well as on the distribution of wealth and income. In India in the 1950s and 1960s, for example, while decentralisation of power to the states was a key factor in India’s post-independence political stability, distribution of project resources through the so-called ‘Panchayati Raj’ at the village level increased the power of local elites because generally a small number of wealthy farmers controlled the local ‘Panchayat’ (council). In an agricultural society, if land is widely held, as in Chile or Taiwan following land reform, there is a degree of equity in the community with far-reaching political and economic benefits. Equally, if the land-owning system facilitates and empowers collocation of relatives, there is likely to be greater family solidarity than where family

members are widely dispersed.

In the biblical paradigm, land was allocated fairly between tribes, clans and households, and the Jubilee legislation would have ensured that the fairness of that initial distribution was preserved through the generations. Land, a major productive asset in any society, could not accumulate in a few hands. At the same time, the role of land as a source of family roots took precedence over its role as productive asset. It was more important in God’s heart that families remained colocated, and thus connected and a source of mutual support and welfare, than that the most efficient farmers could get control of the land so as to maximise its productivity.

In most countries today, to enable almost every family or household to own a house or a piece of land, with the additional goal of enabling collocation of relatives, would require a massive land and property reform programme. Even in the UK, only 70 per cent of people own their own homes, and in most of sub-Saharan Africa smallholder ownership of land and collocation of relatives is under pressure as a result of centralised political power and urban-based enterprise. In HICs, given the increasing difficulties governments are facing in providing care for the elderly, collocation of relatives is likely to be of increasing importance for their well-being.

Capital²⁶

The way capital is mobilised and allocated has subtle and far-reaching effects on the way relationships operate. Money is a form of social glue, and people’s financial relationships are not only important in themselves but have a direct and indirect impact on other relationships.

In Israel’s social design, financial capital is used to build social capital. The main biblical rules to achieve this are the ban on interest (which covered all loans except those to foreigners) and the regular pattern of debt cancellation every seventh year.²⁷ The interest ban is reiterated in the Psalms and the Prophets, and reinforced in the teaching of Jesus.²⁸ Permissible alternatives to debt contracts included risk-sharing arrangements and the hiring out of land or animals. The goal seems to have been to encourage capital to be used in ways which promote an on-going relationship between the parties; in risk-sharing situations, the capital provider is incentivised to keep in touch with the capital user to advise and encourage, while the user keeps in touch with the provider to reduce problems if something goes wrong, and to ensure future access to capital.

The economic effects of giving significant advantages to risk-sharing over loan finance in society today would have a significant impact on family and community relationships. The current interest-based approach to finance in LICs results in rural savings being transferred by financial institutions to urban centres, so that most new enterprise and employment opportunities develop there.²⁹ This accelerates urbanisation, which results in long-term separation of many men from their wives, children, parents and extended families left behind in rural areas (e.g. Kenya, South Africa). In LICs, the effect of the biblical rules for land and capital taken together would be to strengthen smallholder agriculture and rural enterprise, to slow down urbanisation and to strengthen local and regional government over against central government. In HICs, the likely effects of a tax regime which favoured equity over debt finance would be to reduce corporate size, slow down concentration of economic power, and increase the role of local mutual organisations.

21 Matt. 25:14–30.

22 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Routledge, 2001 (first published 1904).

23 Exod. 20:8–11; Deut. 5:12–15. In the debate on the Shops Bill (1986) in the House of Lords, former Prime Minister Harold Macmillan (the Earl of Stockton) said: ‘Let us remember that the great commandment that was handed down to God’s chosen people was perhaps the greatest social reform in the history of civilisation; the concept that every man or woman, however humble, should have at least some period of rest.’ *Hansard*, Shops Bill, 21 January 1986, p.160.

24 Deut. 24:14–15, cf Jas. 5:4.

25 See *Jubilee Manifesto*, pp.193–195.

26 This section draws heavily on Paul Mills’s work in chapters 11 and 12 of *Jubilee Manifesto*.

27 Deut. 23:19–20; Deut. 15:1–6.

28 Ps. 15:5; Prov. 22:7; Ezek. 18:13,17; Matt. 25:26–27; Luke 6:34–35. For a fuller discussion, see Paul Mills, ‘The ban on interest: Dead letter or radical solution?’, *Cambridge Papers*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1993.

29 Sources of capital for LICs today also include foreign direct investment, foreign remittances and ‘aid’.

Processes

Three other areas that built up relationships in the life of Israelite society are concerned primarily with relational ‘processes’, which involve all citizens putting into practice biblical teaching and values.

*Criminal justice*³⁰

Biblical teaching assumes that everyone is to be engaged in the process of ensuring justice, so there is relatively little professionalisation of the system. There is no specialised law book or legal language; the law can be understood and applied by everyone, pointing to the importance of informal mechanisms of social control, community involvement and sentencer accountability. To achieve right relationships, the biblical emphasis is on putting things right between the offender and the victim, and the offender and society, rather than on inflicting retribution for its own sake. Key factors in achieving these objectives are proper regard for due process, deserts without degradation, and educative forms of punishment which avoid relational isolation and often have symbolic significance.

These principles have obvious application in Western countries today. This approach has been termed ‘Relational Justice’³¹ and echoes many concerns of the Restorative Justice movement.³² One key issue for Christian reform in Britain is the need for alternatives to prison. This requires the promotion of local accessibility and accountability in the criminal justice process so that the punishment can be more precisely tailored to fit the crime. Everyone affected by crime has an interest in the outcome, so there is a need to take account of the needs of the wider community in which the offence occurred. In addition, Western societies need to enable prisoners to maintain close relationships with partners and families while in prison, and welcome prisoners back into the community on release. The current use and practice of imprisonment in Britain where, for example, offenders are imprisoned without regard to the location of their families, is destructive from a relational perspective.

*Welfare*³³

A special concern in both Testaments was how the community could provide welfare support without undermining the family structures that were meant to take responsibility for it. Both Testaments assume an understanding of the rescue and on-going support guaranteed by God to his people as acts of grace which should prompt generosity towards those in need. Care for the vulnerable and disadvantaged is a central component of the Bible’s understanding of ‘righteousness’.

A primary focus of the welfare system in Israel was prevention. Each family was given land, and would have it restored every fiftieth year if it had been ‘sold’ (i.e. leased). Debt was written off every seventh year. Bonded service provided a way out of destitution. Relatives and neighbours were under strict instructions to step in to prevent vulnerable households being forced through poverty to move away. Immigrants, refugees, widows and orphans, who were likely to lack relational support, are repeatedly singled out for special attention and help. In contrast to Israel’s neighbours, the state in Israel had almost no role, presumably to preserve the networks of care at a family and community level. How such an emphasis can be applied in high-income societies today, where informal care networks have disintegrated largely as a result of state welfare, requires further research.

Education

The Bible emphasises the importance of wisdom, rather than knowledge, so that the goal is not to maximise the nation’s

economic performance, or develop the potential and freedom of the individual, although these may be by-products. Wisdom is about the handling of relationships, above all how a person relates to God.³⁴ The word of God is, therefore, the chief book for children to study and know thoroughly to achieve wisdom; universal literacy is a priority so all can read it for themselves. In Israel education was primarily the responsibility of the family, who are repeatedly commanded to teach their children the word of God.³⁵ The priests, too, had a role in education, with accountability to the temple authorities in Jerusalem rather than to Israel’s king.³⁶

The priority of wisdom should not be taken to diminish the importance of knowledge. This is celebrated in Solomon’s life of learning and implied in the benefits Moses gained from his Egyptian education. The accumulation of wisdom and knowledge should not end in teenage years. Involvement in local, political and judicial affairs, with responsibility to resolve neighbourhood disputes without going to court, ensured lifelong learning in Israel. However, the respect shown to older people reflected in part the recognition that the most important learning – how complex relational issues are resolved – comes from applying biblical teaching to the experience of life, rather than from reading technical textbooks of maths and science.

Institutions, intermediate goals and final outcomes

The final goal of the political, economic and social system is ‘righteousness’ (right relationships), defined throughout Scripture in terms of a set of values which are exemplified in the life of Jesus. These values come under the umbrella of love for God and neighbour,³⁷ and include respect for (fear of) God, justice, faithfulness, truth, forgiveness, hope, generosity and compassion. The structures, resources and processes noted above are the institutional foundations revealed by God to one particular society in one particular period of history to lead to these outcomes.

Table 2 sets out how we may trace the institutional structures through to the final goals for three aspects of social organisation – the (extended) family, economic life and criminal justice. To clarify how this works, there is an ‘intermediate goals’ column in the table. If there is obedience to God’s instructions in the ordering of family structure, for example, the intermediate goals of family welfare provision and gender co-operation are more likely to be achieved. If the rules for resources are followed, the atomisation and alienation currently being experienced in Western society can be avoided through the integration of business and community life where social capital is built up by financial capital. Shared financial interests contribute to building relationships in extended families and communities. In turn it is more likely that the final goal of right relationships will be realised.

Conclusions

- Each of the great themes of biblical social teaching can be shown to impact directly or indirectly on whether and how citizens relate to each other. It is impossible to trace here all the relational outcomes if these laws were followed, but benefits would include strong and stable families, decentralised government and an absence of material and relational poverty.
- Prosperity is a consequence, rather than a precondition, of relational well-being. So the focus of national Christians and those who seek to assist ‘development’ from outside should not be on producing wealth and then dealing with the symptoms of poverty, but on working to achieve an institutional framework which will help to prevent relational poverty, and contribute to bringing about right relationships.
- The environment, like prosperity, is a derivative rather than a primary issue. That is not to underestimate its immense significance. However, it is only through following biblical teaching

30 This section draws heavily on Jonathan Burnside’s work in ch. 13 of *Jubilee Manifesto*.

31 See Nicola Baker and Jonathan Burnside, *Relational Justice*, Waterside Press, 1994.

32 For a discussion of the differences between Relational Justice and Restorative Justice, see article by Adrian James in *Relational Justice Bulletin*, No. 2, April 1999.

33 For a fuller discussion, see *Jubilee Manifesto*, ch. 10.

34 Prov. 1:7.

35 E.g. Deut. 6:20ff.; Prov. 1:8–19, etc.

36 Deut. 17:8–13.

37 Matt. 22:34–40.

Table 2: Examples of the means and ends of achieving relational well-being in a society

Biblical norms for structures, resources, processes	Intermediate goals	Final goal/end
<p>Structure: the family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - priority of the marriage relationship over obligations to parents - a culture opposed to, and social constraints on, sex outside marriage - families to have long-term locational roots - wider family a financial, welfare and judicial role - critical importance of male headship based on commitment to love and service. <p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - towards universal ownership of family property - periodic debt cancellation system - ban on interest on loans between citizens - employer respect for dignity and family life of employees - employee safeguards for weekly rest day and timely remuneration - employment opportunities for the destitute on the land. <p>Processes: criminal justice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - community involvement in criminal justice process - widespread/universal knowledge of what the law says - the goal of putting things right between offender and victim, and between offender and community. 	<p>Family co-operation and welfare provision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - loyalty among members of extended family groups - low divorce rates, socially sustainable birth rate - gender co-operation inside and outside the family - effective family care for older members. <p>Integration of business and community life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - broad distribution of property assets - absence of persistent indebtedness - incentives for risk-sharing and direct financial relationships - high levels of family business/self-employment - a weekly shared day off - (close to) full employment. <p>Criminal justice system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - community courts and other forms of local justice - almost all punishment in the community - offender reintegration into society after punishment. 	<p>‘Righteousness’ (<i>tsdq</i>) in all relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - respect for God - love/empathy - justice, fairness, parity - faithfulness - truth - forgiveness - hope - generosity - compassion.

on family and love for neighbour that it will become possible to create the social solidarity required to persuade the complacent Western public, and ambitious Asian governments, to make the changes necessary to leave an inhabitable world to our children and distant neighbours.

- Some might see technology as the major driver of social change. However, Mumford and others have argued that technology is driven by the institutional context of the day.³⁸ Large companies, for example, seek new technology for large factories and large markets rather than innovations for efficient small-scale production; an individualistic culture seeks new forms of entertainment that do not require a second ‘player’.
- Christians have to weigh up tackling the *symptoms* of injustice and exploitation (e.g. hunger, ill-health, landlessness) with tackling the *causes* (e.g. skewed distribution of access to land, capital markets, concentration of political power, foreign debt). There is no single right solution. Each country needs a strategy for each of its regions, sectors and ethnic groups; each organisation needs its own package of relational reform proposals.
- To concentrate attention on economic growth, or even on the growth and distribution of income, is not enough. Reform of the markets for resources (e.g. land reform or opening wider access to capital) is vital for promoting positive relationships between rich and poor, and between different sections of society. Equity must be built into the economic system through safeguards in markets for resources rather than relying on a redistribution mechanism after a polarising growth process.

38 Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: its origins, its transformations, and its prospects*, Harcourt, 1961. For a fuller discussion of these issues, see *Jubilee Manifesto*, ch. 13.

- Christians should prioritise evangelism, discipling and church planting to restore each person’s relationship with God, to build the Christian community, and to increase a right ‘fear of God’ across society as a whole. But what about priorities for the wider agenda of social change? While Christians should agree on the goals and strategies for social change, they can legitimately disagree about the priorities and timetable of institutional reform. Scripture is not definitive in these areas but gives guidelines. Factors to consider will include the history of the nation, international agreements, the nature of current political arrangements, and feasibility of intervention.
- Christians need to develop new strategies, campaigns and initiatives to move their societies towards relational well-being; they also need to learn to evaluate them critically. This requires that they build up a body of knowledge drawn from international experience of interventions based on the biblical paradigm, and use it as a training resource for future generations of Christian reformers.

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Next issue: Islamism