

Luther King House, Manchester

Centre for Theology and Justice – connecting faith and action

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SWEET CHARITY

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(David Goodbourn and Michael Taylor were close colleagues in Manchester during the 1970's and 80's)

1. Restoration and Rehabilitation

Over the past few years I have been drawn into charitable work on Restorative Justice. It is not easy to define and the term can be used in multiple ways. At its most focused, as you probably know, it offers an alternative to the criminal justice system and the courts. It brings together offenders and victims with a facilitator. Round a conference table it offers the offender the opportunity to express remorse and victims a chance to tell their stories and make clear the often traumatic effects of the harm that has been done. It offers both offender and victim a chance to understand each other better and discuss what might be done to heal the situation rather than hurt even more and make things worse. At its best, the outcome can be two restored lives: one regaining a sense of moral worth and self-respect, and the other able to 'move on'. In my limited experience there is often a moment when the tension between the two is relaxed and something that might be called 'forgiveness' occurs.

Restorative Justice has produced a mound of literature and is surrounded by a great deal of discussion, not to say controversy. Early on I became concerned about an issue strikingly similar to one I encountered when involved in international development with Christian Aid. In that setting it was attached to the word: 'rehabilitation'. In an emergency when people lost their homes and livelihoods and found themselves displaced, for example in refugee camps, there was no getting round the urgent need to 'rehabilitate' them. They needed enough security to go back home, and seeds and tools to start growing their crops again. The problem was however that, if nothing more was done and conflict, poverty and disease continued, they would be 'rehabilitated' into the same social and political context that had fostered the emergency in the first place and was likely to do so again.

In the setting of Restorative Justice the issue was attached not to the word 'rehabilitation' but 'restoration'. It conjures up pictures of getting things back to how they were – like restoring Notre Dame or, according to the Book of Common Prayer, restoring 'them that are penitent', only to have to plead for it again next Sunday since nothing had fundamentally changed. In the case of Restorative Justice, two lives may have been in some sense 'restored' as they regained their dignity, a sense of justice, and peace of mind but, as in international development, they were in danger of being restored into communities and social structures marred by inequality and deprivation that would continue to be the seed bed for crime. For me, and others, it raised concerns about the

relationship, if any, between Restorative Justice and Social Justice and the point at which 'sweet' charity risks turning 'sour'.

2. Charity and Social Justice

Let me be more specific. In the UK there are hundreds of charities. By law they must serve a charitable purpose which can mean anything from the relief of poverty and the advancement of education and religion to animal welfare and, surprisingly, the efficiency of the armed forces. They must be independent and act for the public good. I believe they include in their number all the signed-up members of the Centre for Theology and Justice here in Manchester (CA, CAP, CTBI, and LKH) together with the Centre for Restorative Justice based in Oxford.

Recently charities have been exposed to a number of criticisms relating, for example, to bad governance, high salaries for CEO's, the loss of the voluntary ethos, over dependence on government funding, the power of the white middle class, and sexual misconduct. The calamity that recently engulfed Oxfam is perhaps the most high profile of recent cases. Just as serious is the claim that some charities do not contribute to the public good but actually do harm. Among them, to take three examples, would be: public schools, recently described as 'Engines of Privilege' (by Frances Green and David Kynaston, Bloomsbury 2019) perpetuating elitism and social division; international capitalists and their undemocratic philanthropic foundations dictating their own terms; and divisive religious institutions including faith schools. Whilst recognising their force, none of these criticisms are of direct concern to me here.

My specific concern is not even the familiar Marxist-style one that 'charity' like 'religion' can be the 'opiate' of the people, skilfully dulling the pain and putting us to sleep when we should be wide awake and clamouring for radical change.

Despite the criticisms, I have nothing but admiration for the work of the vast majority of charities. I have been mixed up with a good many and for the time being chair two of them. Generally I am glad that they do what they do. My concern is the extent to which they contribute and have the capacity to contribute to structural change where the social structures aggravate the very problems they try to resolve. They may relieve, restore and rehabilitate, but do they redeem and make new?

By way of illustration, let me comment on the work of two charities in addition to those dealing with Restorative Justice and International Development. Both call themselves 'CAP'! I confess to be somewhat prejudiced against Christians Against Poverty because of the way its charismatic faith colours so much of its work and relationships to the extent that you wonder whether there is a hidden agenda. A recent television documentary did nothing to allay my fears. It may be a bad example of connecting faith and action! I admire however the compassion and expertise it extends to hundreds of desperate people which enable them to get the burden of debt off their backs; but it remains very much open to question whether it makes any significant difference to the social and economic realities that give rise to those debts in the first place and could land them in debt again. Individual problems are fixed but the system remains broken.

Church Action on Poverty takes a far more welcome approach in relation to how it handles its faith, how it works with people and how it looks for more radical change signalled by its determination to

end hunger in this country and loosen the grip of poverty. Supposing you do so however, by fixing the benefit system or so-called 'Universal Credit', CAP will be well aware that you still leave questions about adequate economic and social reform hanging in the air. A benefit system, however fair and necessary as a safety net, can come to look like a slice of statutory 'charity' if you like, where government is now the 'charity', 'restoring' and 'rehabilitating' desperate people into a structural reality fully capable of perpetuating the causes of their desperation. Put differently, and I quote: 'the welfare system is an acknowledgement and an indictment of the inadequacies of the market system' (Kenan Malik Observer, 16.09.18) which it does nothing to reform.

The Christian churches in this country have been in the front line of social reform just as they have been bastions against it. Today there are many highly committed change makers within its ranks. Rank and file Christians and church leaders have done their bit inside and outside the charitable sector. Nevertheless, would it be fair to say that, especially at the local level, the churches are often more at ease and better equipped to deal with needy individuals whilst steering clear of the charge levelled at bishops and archbishops when they speak out: that they should keep clear of politics and get on with their job?

There is an interesting illustration of how compassionate deeds can fall short of the radical social change they require in discussions about human rights and the charitable and non-charitable organisations that work for them. Human rights can be declared universally under the auspices of the United Nations whilst the circumstances within which human rights workers struggle to uphold them remain unchanged. Or again they can to some extent actually be upheld whilst those circumstances grow worse. Contrast two realities that existed side by side during the 1970's when for a time discussions about a New International Economic Order came to prominence. On the one hand basic provision against destitution and a greater measure of human dignity were being achieved as universal human rights. On the other hand and at the same time economic and social inequalities were widening and all too soon the debate about a new economic order was pushed to one side. Neo-liberalism and market-fundamentalism have changed the world whilst the human rights movement has posed no threat to it. It's a scenario which sits well with the familiar observation that human rights as we understand them are informed by individualism and too little by communitarianism. We protect the individual and fail to ensure collective welfare (cf: 'Are Human Rights Enough?', Samuel Moyn, New Humanist, Summer 2018).

3. In Defence of Charities

My concern so far is the capacity of charities to contribute to social justice with the implied criticism that too often they don't. The criticism may not however be fair. The word 'capacity', for one thing, should be taken seriously. Charities and those involved in them may be willing but lack the capacity to go deeper and further. They can't do everything and by overstretching themselves they may jeopardise the one thing they can do really well. They also act under constraints imposed by government and the Charity Commission which sometimes make it difficult to navigate between what is and is not regarded as acceptable 'political' activity. Questions have been raised recently about their freedom to campaign and the amount of money they can spend on campaigning

activities, not least during an election. Some may have to look over their shoulders at their supporters whether individuals, trusts or governments. Nevertheless, and again to be fair, it is not hard to find development charities for example which are not content with rehabilitation and speak the rhetoric of structural change. Health Poverty Action, for example, a small charity with which I was once involved, has this to say in its most recent annual review: 'We can't improve healthcare without dismantling the unjust policies that damage it in the first place. That's why we combine our healthcare work with global campaigns and advocacy training that ensure that we tackle the root causes of poverty and poor health'. Admirably spoken, though the rhetoric of advocacy and campaigning should not go untested.

There are other grounds for being cautious when criticising charities for failing to bring about structural change. Structural and social change, as against 'rehabilitation', isn't the sure-fire solution to problems it is sometimes made out to be, as if all the difficulties lie with those who shy away from it and not with those who embrace it. Similar to the eco-systems we are urged these days to understand better, the social context is a highly complex system of its own and intervening with the best of intentions can lead to unexpected consequences which can make matters worse or not much better. The Arab Spring is a shocking example; Southern Africa is not far behind along with Chavez's Venezuela. On the home front, the move to radically alter the benefits system was in some quarters a genuine attempt at social reform. Unforeseen however were the foodbanks sought out by people not out of work but in employment. And years ago Margaret Thatcher's sale of council houses, as they were then called, designed to create a healthy property owning society (as well as loyal Tory voters!) contributed to a general housing shortage, a lack of social and affordable housing and rising cases of homelessness on our streets.

Fair trade fortnight is observed every year in February and March, organised by the Fair Trade Foundation, another charity. It aims to ensure that governments, producers and retailers commit to policies which ensure that farmers receive a living income enabling them to live simply and pay for essentials such as clothing, medicines and school fees. Whilst the aims have won wide support, questions have also been raised about the possible negative effects on the market and on farmers who are not immediate beneficiaries. Overall what is required is not fairer wages for some but fairer rules and practices of world trade as a whole.

Talking of consequences, there is one consequence that should not be unforeseen because it is entirely predictable, and that is the kneejerk reaction of powerful vested interests which any attempt at radical reform will provoke and have to contend with.

My specific criticism of the apparent failure of Restorative Justice to contribute to social justice may also be unfair on grounds that could apply to other charitable causes as well. To begin with many of its advocates are as acutely aware of the point as I am and share the same concern! Going beyond that, its contributions may be described as 'incremental' or 'indirect' and none the worse for that. If, for example, Restorative Justice reduces the rate of re-offending, keeps people out of prison and restores to the community not offenders but responsible citizens, then it is contributing to social capital, and with increased social capital comes change for the better. The attempt to establish Restorative Cities also carries potential. Restorative Justice is usually narrowly associated with encounters between offenders and victims as an alternative to criminal court proceedings. Restorative Principles and Practices, which means going about things in a restorative rather than a

punitive way, can be adopted far more widely and can be embedded in every sector of a city's life from schools to workplaces to health care to local government departments. In the end and step by step a city could be transformed. The change could be regarded as a Gramsci-style alternative to 'revolution' where the hegemony of one culture or way of life gradually gives way to a better one.

These incremental aspects of Restorative Justice, transforming the context and not only restoring the individual, do exist though it has to be said that a great deal more research is needed into the claims made for them such as reducing re-offending and, along with Restorative Justice itself, they remain fairly fragile and vulnerable to changes in personnel and funding policies. A restorative culture can unfortunately be here today and gone tomorrow.

4. Four Requirements

To draw this part of the discussion together, I remain concerned when too much charitable activity is about restoration and rehabilitation rather than radical social reform, dealing with symptoms rather than causes. More overt efforts at social reform however are not without their own problems and the more indirect and incremental contributions of charities to reform should not be downplayed. Four requirements however can fairly be made of them.

First, charities must show themselves well aware of the need for social change which goes far beyond what they are capable of bringing about. Their perspective must be long and not myopic; their mood one of discontent with the 'not enough'.

Second, a charity must make sure of one thing that is well within its capabilities and that is that it does nothing knowingly to make matters worse, maintaining and deepening for example social inequalities. Here a number of charities should remain within our critical sights!

Third, charities that exist for 'the public benefit', or what I would call 'the common good', whilst accepting that they cannot do everything, must ensure that what they can do is in line with wider strategies for social reform.

Incidentally, recent criticism of celebrity 'white saviours' should probably be upheld insofar as they perpetuate dependency and disregard for the abilities of those they claim to help – a thoroughly unstrategic approach!

Fourth, charities must help to build and be part of networks and alliances and social movements which can significantly increase their potential. In my experience, the Southern Africa Alliance in the days of Apartheid, and the Jubilee Debt Campaign leading up to the Millennium, were good though not perfect examples. 'Extinction Rebellion' might well be another.

5. Religionless Christianity and the Incompetence of Theology

It may have struck you by now as odd that, in the setting of Luther King House and a Centre for Theology and Justice committed to 'connecting faith and action', I have talked a lot about justice but scarcely said anything about faith or theology. So where and how does this (Christian) faith 'connect' with my concern?

If Christianity – the `faith` in question – is what we believe, or say we believe, in response to the gospel stories in the context of Jewish history, then my Christianity (and I suspect yours) at least shares my concern. According to the Gospels, this faith goes in for charitable acts of kindness and compassion such as helping a penniless wayfarer, or a debtor, or the mentally or physically ill, or a sick or ostracised woman or man; but it also goes in for social justice when, for example, the rich are challenged to redistribute their wealth. Even more fundamentally it engages in revolutionary talk and actions which not only threaten the authorities, both Jewish and Roman, but promise to turn the economic, social and political order, upside down and so change everything. It resonates both with the individualism of the Western world and with the drumbeats of Liberation Theology. It is not content to `restore` or `save` individuals. Despite the enormous odds against it, it is out to refashion the social order in the shape of what it calls the Kingdom of God. It restores, redeems, re-imagines and re-creates. It is out to make all things new.

But when we get to the front line of this Kingdom building, to reshaping the social order, where ultimately Christians are called to go; and when it comes to informing and implementing policy, theology is not the discipline we require. Having accepted the claims of justice and the need to change the economic order to benefit the many and not just the few and make the political order here and round the globe more equitable and inclusive; once we get there and ask: well, what actually needs to be done and how, then Christianity, apart from some broad brush strokes, has very little to say.

The broad brush strokes or `criteria` include those of Christian Realism. They remind us not to expect too much or too little of human beings who can stubbornly cling to their self-interests but also rise generously to an occasion. In other words, don't design a utopian future which does not take our strengths and fallibilities into account. In addition there are the broad claims of justice, respect, human flourishing and inclusiveness, claims that at times Christianity, far from upholding, has had to learn. Others, including a Christian Aid report, have mentioned `creativity, gratuity (or generosity), solidarity and subsidiarity` as `hallmarks` of a good economic system. After that faith does not have the knowledge and skills required to fashion it.

Christianity with its theology and faith does not for example have the recipe for marrying full employment with meaningful work and decent wages. It does not know how to keep healthy competition alive in a co-operative society. It has no recipe for social mobility. It does not know how to distribute wealth or power or create a tax system whereby we look after one another and Universal Credit becomes redundant. It has no idea about how to harness artificial intelligence for the common good. It cannot roll out an adequate housing programme or access to equal educational opportunities for all, or devise a holistic, joined up health service. It has no insights into how to counteract the growing `surveillance economy` as it commodifies the data it surreptitiously gathers about our personal lives. It cannot design a New International Economic Order any more than devise a 10-point plan for a fair economy such as that put forward in 2018 by the IPPR (Institute for Public Policy Research) Commission on Economic Justice which includes increasing public investment and establishing a sovereign wealth fund. It cannot resolve the age-old debate which surrounds capitalism about the size of the state as against the private sector and the control and freedom of the market. It does not know how to save the planet or reduce emissions or feed a growing population in a sustainable way. And so we could go on.

Of course we can object that if Christianity does not know how, neither apparently does anybody else! No-one on earth knows the complete answer or is sufficiently competent to find it. Nevertheless what limited competence or capability is available to us does not lie in the Christian or any other faith (though Islam may well push the point further!). It lies in what might be called the secular disciplines or what I think of as the 'technologies of justice', such as economics, politics, sociology, behavioural studies, management, diplomacy, and of course scientific research and invention. Christian faith can but grant or withhold its imprimatur after the event.

Even if Christian faith had the competence to engage on this front line it should not do so in the language of faith. Every attempt at radical reform, whether of the social justice system by advocating a restorative approach or of the economic and social order as a whole, can only come about by way of co-operation between many disciplines and peoples of all faiths, religious or otherwise. The discourse and any agreements which follow belong to the public space, compatible with maybe, but not identified with any one faith. A colleague of mine, for example, writes persuasively in favour of Restorative Justice from the standpoint of his Catholic Christian tradition but his arguments completely lose their force once his assumptions are not shared. The language and the reasoning have to be secular not sacral.

On both these counts: first, that on the front line of structural change faith does not have the competence to contribute, and second, that in any case the discourse has to be secular, we are left with what might be called 'Religionless Christianity', not quite in the sense that Bonhoeffer had in mind though with the same awareness and acceptance of what we cannot have.

6. Five Connections

We have been discussing charity in relation to justice and, when it comes to Christian charities including churches, the primary importance of what might be called the 'Kingdom frontier' where Christians engage with others in fashioning a new social order; at which point we have recognised what for me is a very real 'disconnect' between theology and justice, faith and action. When we get to the frontier and begin to ask how justice can be implemented, Christianity has nothing to say! This conclusion in turn prompts a further question, especially in the context of a Centre aspiring to 'connect faith and action', namely, if I have highlighted a 'disconnect', what are the valid 'connections'? I want to look at five whilst discounting anything like a 'theocratic' one where a religious faith is so convinced it has the unqualified 'truth' that it has the right to impose its implications on the political, social and economic order – a 'right' that has been exercised by religion in the past and is, still, in the present.

The five connections have to do with: Integrity, broad Principles, Equipping and Training, Support, and the Reasons for doing what we do.

i) The first connection between faith and action as I see it is one of intellectual and moral INTEGRITY. It has at least two concerns; first to make sure that we do not say one thing as people of faith, about the priority of the poor or the claims of justice for example, and do another; or that we do not go along with a social order that is incompatible with what we say we believe. Prophecy and protest must have their day. Equally, on the intellectual level, we do not allow a faith or theology which

claims to make sense of our human experience to be at odds with that experience, such as clinging to rainbow dreams and insisting that all will be well whilst all appears to be heading for global disaster, or rejoicing in the final victory over sin and death whilst mourning over 200 lives taken on Easter Day (2019) in Sri Lanka!

ii) The second connection takes us back to the middle ground between faith and action already discussed. It has to do with broad PRINCIPLES such as the justice, dignity, generosity, realism and inclusiveness which should characterise any acceptable social order. We should note however that whilst these broad brush strokes may be compatible with Christian faith and, as we see things now, required by it, they are not always distinctively Christian, or derived from, or at times even upheld by the Christian tradition. They are recognised and upheld by others irrespective of any religious commitment. Christianity has often adopted them and been influenced by them rather than pioneered or inspired them in prophetic mode. At times it has stood for something akin to their opposites, for example when it comes to justice, it has been more punitive than restorative, and when it comes to gender and sexuality, far from inclusive. Faith has had to learn as well as inspire. One real advantage of the 'religionless' nature of these principles is that it enables people of faith to find the common ground with others which is so essential for social reform. We can respect the same values even if for different reasons.

iii) A third connection between faith and action has to do with EQUIPPING the saints – the obvious territory of training institutions. I have suggested that charities must at least place themselves strategically among the people and movements working for the kind of changes that could eventually put many of them happily out of business. I include in that charities like Restorative Justice and International Development NGO's such as Christian Aid. When it comes to Christian faith, I have suggested that it has little of substance to contribute to front line workers or Kingdom designers as they struggle to re-order our world for the better. As that point ours is a Religionless Christianity.

But where Christianity and 'faith-talk' will be absent as it were, Christian women and men will, or should, most certainly be present, since according to my understanding this is the most important place to which they are inspired by the gospel stories to go: beyond charity to where a just and humane social order is designed and built; all of which raises a question about equipping the saints, to which I do not pretend to know the answer.

What is on offer? At present in centres like this one at LKH and in local churches we provide training for ministry and discipleship within the church and beyond, in chaplaincies and the workplace for example, whether lay or ordained. We also provide theological and Christian education ranging from baptismal and confirmation classes to Lent courses and study groups and academic degrees. At best all of these will be contextual in character, based on action/reflection models, allowing faith and experience to interact. They will well understand that faith is but the historical and contemporary outcome of our human efforts to make sense of that experience and that where it no longer does so we need to think again.

But what of the 'front line' I have been discussing, or the 'coal face' (two equally unfortunate metaphors in a world where war and fossil fuels should be no more) or, rather, what of the 'frontier' where the Kingdom is designed and implemented, where it is not a matter of connecting

faith and action but of `disconnect` between the two, because the relevant disciplines are not so much faith and theology but economics, politics, sociology, diplomacy and science to name a few.

I suspect we should not make any further effort to equip what might be called the `professional` Kingdom builders who have been through their education and training and apprenticeships and should know what they are doing. The church should probably get off their backs as it were whilst honouring and supporting their work as a crucial part of Christian mission.

But what of the `rank and file` to which most of us belong?

In a centre for inter-faith community relations in Leicester (SPC) of which I am a member, there is much talk about `religious literacy`. It is not concerned with inter-faith dialogue as such but with working with diverse communities and peoples of different religious faiths as they learn how to live well together. Training in `religious literacy` is offered and accepted by church congregations but also by several other sectors of the community including teachers, nurses, the police and the army, amongst whom of course Christians can also be found. The aim is to create in them a better understanding of the diverse social realities, highly coloured by religious realities, within which they live and work so that they are better equipped to navigate them and contribute to their well-being.

The comparison may not be exact, but when we come to the task of designing and constructing a reformed social order which no longer aggravates the problems which charity tries to address and where theology and faith have little of substance to contribute, should those who set out to equip the saints try to promote not a greater degree of religious literacy or theological literacy but of economic and political and sociological literacy?

It could be important and constructive for a number of reasons, some of which mirror the arguments in favour of religious literacy. It could, for example, increase our understanding and our ability to navigate an increasingly fraught political and economic terrain and make a useful contribution. It could also help to overcome the fears and hesitations of many about getting involved in politics and matters which, as they say, they `do not understand` and are now tempted to `write off`. Of even more importance however is the recognition that if theology cannot be left to the theologians, so politics and economics cannot be left to the professionals. Theirs are not exact sciences. Like the theologians, they disagree amongst themselves; they get things wrong and the best of them know that they rarely get things exactly right. They are human beings and have their foibles and vested interests like the rest of us. For health's sake they need to be part of a participatory and democratic community. They need well-informed, critical companions along the way.

Agreed, it may be difficult to equip the saints in this way. They too may see it as yet another obligation on top of all the other demands that are made of them not least by churches and charities. Of more significance, the saints may not feel any urgent need for it in stark contrast to the way people feel an urgent need for religious literacy in communities where ethnic and religious minorities begin to add up to the majority and people feel threatened and sparks can fly and be fanned into flames; or again in contrast to the immediacy of poverty and injustice which drove people into the base Christian communities of Latin America to teach themselves about politics.. That may change as the rapidly increasing impact of global warming comes closer and closer to home and throws up more and more urgent questions about the economic order, migration, increasing conflict, and about our national and international political institutions.

One further difficulty may be the image of economic and political literacy as being too 'academic' and merely 'cerebral' for everyday citizens and activists and the challenge that presents to develop methodologies by which 'literacy' of this kind can be made accessible by ensuring that active involvement and learning go hand in hand.

Last but not least the saints may well feel that what the professionals most need to rub up against are experts of an entirely different kind rather than 'amateurs' in their field. An obvious example would be the expertise of those who have experienced the poverty and vulnerability that the professionals set out to eradicate. I well remember sitting in on a consultation between poor farmers in Ethiopia and visiting World Bank and IMF economists who dismissed the 'evidence' the farmers presented in support of changes in policy as merely 'anecdotal', when those so-called 'anecdotes' were exactly the 'expert' evidence, rooted in everyday realities, they needed to hear. Church Action on Poverty's 'hearings' underline the same point.

None of these hesitations however should be allowed to obscure a clear sense of priorities when it comes to preparing for Christian discipleship and Kingdom building. Understanding our faith and the visions and moral parameters it offers is of course important. Speaking truth to power and being prophetic about what will and will not do in the light of those visions and parameters is equally if not more important. But none of that is enough as the theology of justice must give way to the 'technology of justice' where, in days when we're told the institutions of governance are falling apart, we need to ask and teach one another at the cutting edge of our discipleship about how to be 'political': how to order the polis – this earthly city – in ways that are acceptable and effective: not to 'restore' but to fashion a just social order.

iv) A fourth connection between faith and action in addition to 'Integrity', broad 'Principles' and 'Equipping' the saints, might be called SUPPORTIVE. If Christian faith, though not of course Christians, is silent on the front line because it is not competent to speak, where is it competent to speak? Apart from the broad principles already referred to, for me its competence lies not in designing a new world but in supporting, if that is not too bland a word, those who design it and who struggle to implement their designs. Here behind the lines it breaks its silence; it finds its voice; it has something to say and begins to speak and reassure, above all when the saints gather to observe the one distinctive thing about them, namely the weekly ritual of Word and Sacrament.

Here are some examples of what Christian faith is competent enough to say and do in this supportive mode, all of them culled from the great creedal themes of Creation and Fall, Redemption, Forgiveness, Resurrection, Hope and Eschatology.

It can renew the spirits of those on the front line with enigmatic sayings and gospel stories that crack open the old world with a sighting of something better. It can uphold a compelling moral vision not of sexual hang-ups but of the attractiveness of love distributed as justice. It can be prophetic rather than prescriptive. When all seems negative it can insist that there is much about the world and its peoples that is good. It can suggest that the search for justice is so lofty that it has about it the aura of transcendence. It can warn the Kingdom designers that perfection cannot be had in this world (and probably not at all) and to guard themselves against disappointment and even despair when what they struggle so hard to achieve fails to come their way. It can reassure them when they fail that, bad as their failure may be, it does not rule them out of being part of the enterprise. It can speak of the creative energies of costly love. It can remind the saints that whilst nothing can be

perfect no situation is closed or devoid of possibilities for the future. It can offer companionship, sublime and mundane, along the road.

Here is the competence of Christianity to connect faith and practice. It is exercised primarily within the liturgical community. It is a human community which, with integrity, is aware of the inevitable gap between what it has to say and what it does. It does not practice what it preaches. It cannot model the Kingdom even if it does its best to show respect and compassion. It can only offer week in week out, word and sacrament, stories and memories, visions and values, bread and wine, prayer and song, blessing, absolving and signs of peace, so that Kingdom workers are fed and sent on their way. It can only lift their spirits rather than add to their burdens. It can only try to `support` instead of constantly asking to be supported.

v) A fifth and final connection, or possible connection, between faith and action is closely related to the fourth. The fourth had to do with where we find fresh energy and the renewal of our spirits. The fifth has more to do with the reasons for our commitment to the charitable activities that are only finally fulfilled in justice. The reasons lie in our faith. If, for example, we believe that we are all equally important (made in the divine image) then we work hard for a more equitable world. On a wider canvas, Christian faith offers a story or a `meta-narrative` about what life is all about within which our endeavours to create a new world make sense intellectually as well as emotionally. It provides the wellspring not just of energy but of moral commitment: the root from which it grows. An archetypal story, for example: of a good world marred by sin and disobedience, rescued by a saviour and set on a path towards a new creation, provides an account of the reality within which we live which makes sense of our lives and our endeavours to right wrongs - not only to love mercy but to do justly. The story answers the question: `Why behave like that`?

Why behave like that? Because we believe ourselves to be part of a greater story where the energies of love press on against all odds to create a new heaven and a new earth, and that we are invited to be partners in its endeavours.

Such a story, told by faith, frames and makes sense of our actions for justice. Faith and action here are closely connected and, incidentally, we can see just how potent that `connection` can be when we look at the Islamist extremists of today.

This sort of `reasoning` raises many questions, some of them philosophical, which we cannot pursue here. The most obvious implication is that where we no longer believe in this or some other story about the meaning and context of our lives, where faith fails and the wellspring dries up, then our sense of moral purpose will dry up with it. There are genuine anxieties that, in an increasingly secular or religionless society, that may well prove to be true. But without dismissing them we must be sensible enough to recognise just how many people are committed to struggling for justice who have good reasons for doing what they do but without any conscious connection to religious faith. I am not now thinking of the Dawkin`s of this world – that is another debate. I am simply recognising the impressive numbers of those who struggle for justice without connecting it to a religious faith or any meta-narrative to make sense of what they do and how that challenges us to an uncomfortable degree of self-awareness.

It prompts the question, for example, as to how aware we are of what exactly are we doing when we set out to make these connections between faith and action, Christian theology and justice? We

may be encouraging the church and its people to go beyond charity with the support of their faith and join everybody else on the front line of radical social change. Very well and good! However, we may also be trying to carve out a place for the faith and its institutions at a time when they are in danger of being squeezed out so that once again what we call 'mission' is in reality 'maintenance'. Our motivations may not be entirely beyond question. In these endeavours we may be 'restorers' after all.

7. Absent Friends

The bias (or biases?) of this lecture will be obvious: first, towards reforming and remaking the social structures, far and near, that perpetuate the pain and sorrow to which charities like Restorative Justice, Christian Aid, and Church Action on Poverty try to respond; second, towards reaffirming that the work of designing and building those new orders is what we mean by building the Kingdom on earth (I'm no longer sure there is anywhere else to build it!); third, a bias towards the relevance of secular disciplines such as economics, politics and sociology - the 'technologies of justice' - rather than theology when designing and constructing the Kingdom; fourth towards looking carefully and critically at the ways in which we 'connect' faith and action and how we might equip and support the saints on the frontline even better than we do. And I suppose there is another bias: in favour of the so-called 'laity'.

As I draw to a close a friendly (though at times not so friendly!) ghost from the past known to others of you here, looms into view. During the 70's and early 80's the colleges here were closely involved in the Lay Movement of the day which sadly faded as questions of survival and church maintenance pushed it aside. It was led by such luminaries as Sir John Lawrence who founded the journal 'Frontier': a word which resonates exactly with the 'front line', 'coal faces' and 'frontiers' of the Kingdom referred to in this lecture. Another prominent figure in the movement was Mark Gibbs. He was a frequent visitor to Brighton Grove. His extensive library on the laity and his archives and Audenshaw Papers are housed in the University Library. Mark was co-author with Ralph Morton (whose son was for a time the MP for Moss Side) of the best-known study book of the day called: 'God's Frozen People', encouraging the church to unfreeze, support and release them for precisely the secular tasks and professions we have been discussing as keys to the Kingdom.

Finally talking of friendly ghosts, or maybe better of an absent friend, I am reminded that David Goodbourn was of course a layman in what were, when he arrived here and in Whalley Range, almost exclusively ministerial training camps. He knew well the nourishing role the liturgical community needed to play and in his preaching contributed so memorably to it; but he also laid the ground for what we called the Christian Institute in the days before Luther King House, to support and equip the laity in their secular callings; and when it came to teaching, he taught not theology but sociology – one of the technologies of justice!

I wanted to come and give this lecture in his honour. I hope he might have regarded it, including its biases, as a fitting tribute - even though he would probably have argued over almost every blessed point I have made!

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