



## Identity

The conversation usually goes something like this:

“Hi. You’re welcome to come in.”

“Thanks, but I’m not sure. I think I’ll just stay out here.”

“OK, but it really is alright to come in. You won’t burst into flames, I promise.”

“Are you sure about that? Maybe. Have a fire extinguisher ready just in case.”

It’s a light hearted way to try and reassure that the House of God is indeed a safe place for someone to be their true selves, with out fear. And it’s a conversation I have to have far too frequently. Some people have been given the impression that people of faith, or churches in general, are not safe to be around. Sadly, and increasingly, some people are beginning to feel that nowhere is safe. It is a miserable thing that in a modern, civilised society anyone should worry about being honest with themselves and with others regarding who they truly are, for fear of persecution and exclusion by others, born out of ignorance and prejudice.

Worse, from my point of view, there are those who look to the church to support and encourage such persecution and exclusion. We are supposedly followers of The Messiah who instructed us to “love one another as I have loved you”<sup>1</sup>, which doesn’t leave any room for persecution or rejection of others.

I know it’s a bit of a cliché for a Vicar to say, but I do think part of the problem is people don’t read the Bible enough, or give proper attention to the scriptures. If we

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Unsplash / Nick Fawings

did then perhaps we would be more aware of Jesus teaching, such as I just quoted. And we would be more aware, as the writer to Corinthians states, that “...anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old things have passed away; see they have become new.”<sup>2</sup> Identity is therefore really important to Christians; just not the puerile obsession of some of our current politicians and commentators. For Christians what is important is identity in Christ – our complete, authentic being, having put aside our ‘old self’ with it’s corruptions and dishonesty (what we call ‘sin’) and discovering anew our true being, at peace with ourselves and with God in Christ. Staying with the Bible, the writer of the letter to the Galatians observes that “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>3</sup> Secure in our own identity in Christ we have no need to concern ourselves with other peoples identity, we simply rejoice in another human being carrying the

image of God in whatever beautiful way God enables them to do so. All the pointless divisions we create, of race, wealth, gender, background, sexuality, education and so on are shown to be part of the “old things [that] have passed away”<sup>4</sup> and so are meaningless to those of us who are “one in Christ Jesus.”



*continued on Page 3*

1 John 13: 34 and John 15: 12 – so important Jesus said it twice!

2 2 Corinthians 5: 17


3 Galatians 3: 28

4 2 Corinthians 5: 17 again

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# From the Editor

Sometimes it's just great to walk from one place to another, listening to what is called the soundscape. You might hear the sound of traffic. Unsurprisingly different types or models of vehicles have their own sounds; especially now that many of them are electric. I am not sure whether the sound is added to the buses. Of course, there will be the screech of a motor bike or the roar of an old car with a muffler pushing out smoke. One sound that is always foreboding is a speeding car particularly when there is a heavy downpour of rain.

You experience a different soundscape walking in Wells Park. There is the sound of the leaves in the wind or a squirrel scrabbling up the rough bark of a tree. One might hear the woodpeckers although I think this might be an early morning experience. Not to mention the parakeets in flight over the tops of the trees. Sometimes the silence may be broken by the sounds of an excited dog barking as it wags its tail.

There is increasing use of earphones or buds with which I suppose individuals might choose the sounds they want to hear and cut themselves off from what is going on around them. I just like listening to other people talk in any number of situations.

I listened in to a conversation fairly recently on a bus where a family member, who may have been a grandson, was talking about someone who may have been a writer and apparently worked at the BBC. The grandmother commented that at least she had a steady income. The little boy read well and mentioned certain acronyms and the grandmother was very studious, asking him what they meant. I don't think he was able to answer them but still a fascinating conversation. Just before I disembarked from the bus the grandmother rang up her son and asked him to put the sausages and chips in the oven as they were approaching home.

I think that wearing these devices isolates us from our fellow citizens. There will be less communication and interaction between human beings, and we will be worse off for it. We would have lost an opportunity just to engage with each other and not be strangers.

Geoffrey Cave, Sydenham Life Editor

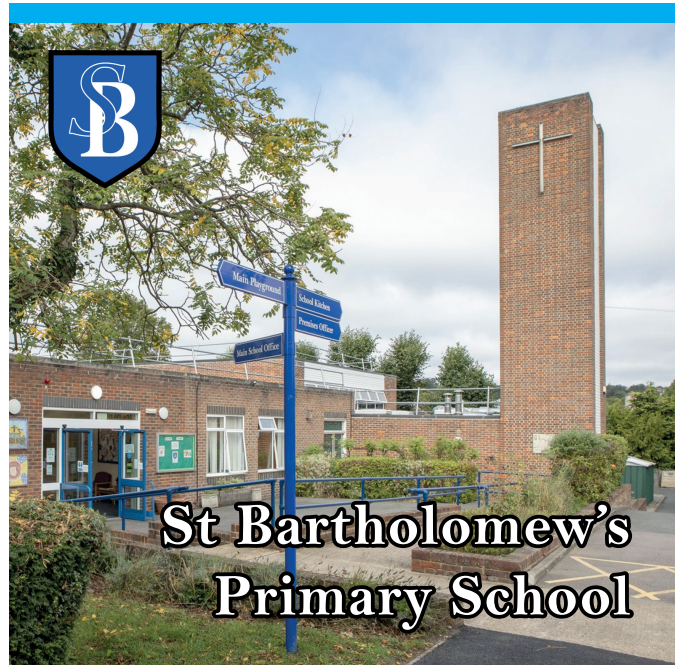
*continued from Page 1*

We do sometimes have a fire at church – at Easter when we first celebrate the Resurrection. From this 'new fire' we light the Paschal Candle which remains lit throughout the Easter season, and whenever anyone is Baptised, ie. when they "put on Christ" and become a "new creation". The Candle stands as a sign and symbol of the light of the resurrection, by which we are enabled to find our true identity in Christ.

At St Bart's we'll continue to do our best to open our doors to all who want to come in, and hope and pray that all who do will find it a welcoming, loving and safe place to truly be themselves, and be at peace with God in Christ.


Rev'd Jim

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# A take on the current economic situation, from a ‘biblical’ slant

On the morning of Donald Trump’s inauguration as president of the United States of America he attended a service of Christian worship at the national cathedral. In her sermon the Bishop, the Right Rev Mariann Edgar Budde, urged the new president to ‘have mercy’ on people in the country ‘who are scared now’, particularly LGBTQ and immigrants. A month later Trump announced cuts to USAid amounting to \$60bn in US assistance worldwide. As I write the UN Food Programme announces it is forced to halt treatment for more than 1/2m malnourished women and children in Ethiopia due to lack of funding.

I have been asked to offer a ‘Biblical take’ on the economics of trade and aid in light of current events. The short response is, there is no economic theory in the Bible as we would think of it. There are certainly a lot of people who think otherwise. Go to your search-engine of choice for advice on what the Bible says about money and you will find many people willing to reveal ‘13 secrets of wealth in the Bible’, ‘6 keys to guarantee Biblical wealth and prosperity’, or ‘5 biblical secrets to make you a millionaire!’. There are fewer who offer courses on a ‘Biblical Economics’, yet they select much the same Bible verses, scattered throughout the Bible, and develop ‘principles’ from them. Interestingly, most come solidly down on the side of the free market.

As in any discussion of a ‘biblical view’ on contemporary issues, the biggest question is the presuppositions of the interpreter. The websites just mentioned come to the Bible with a view that it consists of propositional truths that must be mined. One simply looks for verses that say something about money or finance, and derive ‘principles’ from them. Sayings in the Proverbs are favoured highly, then laws from Moses, then from the New Testament—leaning heavily on the letters of Paul. Context does not matter, whether historical or textual. Each text has its own principle. For example, one finds capitalism in the Proverbs: “The scriptures assume an understanding of supply and demand curves (Prov 11:26)”, which says ‘*The people curse those who hold back grain, but a blessing is on the head of those who sell it*’. It is possible to see this as an example of supply and demand, but it also an example of manipulation of supply which the Proverbs’ Wise One clearly disapproves. Is it a God-given principle?

Bible verses/contexts that contradict these principles are not difficult to find. From the Old Testament, e.g., Exodus 22:25, ‘If you lend money to my people...you shall not extract interest from them’; not good news capitalists. Studiously ignored are New Testament portrayals of some sort of communalism at the very beginning of the Jerusalem church, seen in Acts 2:44-45, ‘All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need’. A little later in Acts 4:32, ‘The whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions’ (NRSV translation).

In the years just after the fall of the Iron Curtain and Soviet-style Communism, I taught classes surveying the



Unsplash / Alexander Grey

Bible in both Kiev and Moscow to young people who had never read the Bible before. It was a fascinating learning experience for us all. But what startled me was the responses to reading these stories of the beginning of the Church; these youngsters who had lived their whole lives under Soviet-dictated atheism immediately began speaking heatedly amongst themselves. My interpreters got involved in the discussions as well, and it took me some time to learn what had sparked off the response—they recognized Acts as a description of the socialism they had just discarded. Interesting conversations followed.

The point is, one can find free market capitalism, and one can find socialism in the Bible.

The New Testament is written in a world of empire. Rome was an occupier in Judaea and derived heavy taxes from the occupied. The economy was largely agrarian, and the land owned by a very few. As many as a third of the population were slaves, affecting the labour economy. The upper 1.5% held 20% of the wealth. The cost of military security was the largest budgetary item. Jesus was born into a low-economic status household in an occupied state. How do we apply this to our time?

It is reasonable, I think, to look at the history of Christianity as successive-if-not-successful experiments in engaging scripture with the politics of the day. We are now witnessing the collapse of the attempt to match democracy with capitalism. In the chaos that is the world of Trump we do not yet know what will be next. In 1921 R H Tawney, an economic historian at the University of London, delivered a series of lectures titled, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. He shared with Max Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, attribution of the rise of capitalism to late-17<sup>th</sup> C Puritanism (there is another article in this!). Tawney lists four main attitudes toward economic relations by religious opinion which remain insightful today:

1. Ascetic aloofness and escape; exemplified in monasticism, and such as the Amish.
2. Ignore them as worldly matters of no concern to religion; seen in much of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Evangelicalism.
3. Throw itself into agitation for some particular reform or revolution; found in every era of Christian history, with Christian Socialists (e.g., Methodist chapels and Labour), a British example.
4. Accept and criticize, tolerate and amend; probably the majority attitude throughout history.



It is time to look directly at the Bible, limited by space here to the Gospels, source of the teaching of Jesus, to see how money and the economy of its time is portrayed. Three Gospels—Matthew (Mt), Mark (Mk), and Luke (Lk)—share most of the examples, so I will illustrate from Matthew.

### **Firstly, the Gospels are non-committal on the economic system of the day.**

In Mt 18 the parable is told of a steward to a king owed 10,000 talents (a talent of silver was equal to 6,000 denarii, which was the standard day-rate for labour) and could not repay it, so was to be thrown into debtor's prison. The king forgave the debt. The steward then went out and found a co-worker who owed 100 denarii (three months' minimum wage), could not pay, and had him thrown into prison. When this was reported to the king he had that steward handed over to the torturers until he paid his whole debt. (I know, how can you repay money while be tortured in prison?) Jesus does not comment on the system of debtors prisons, but the common practice is used as an illustration of forgiveness/remission of debts.

Mt 20 describes the Day-workers system, still found today, where men wait on street-corners for prospective work for the day. An employer cannot find enough workers at the start of the day, so returns several times to find more workers. At the end of the day he gives all the workers the full day's wage (a denarius). Again, the system is not commented on, but the justice of giving a daily wage sufficient for the day's needs (daily bread), regardless of circumstances, is argued.

Mt 21 tells the story of a landowner who plants a vineyard and lets it out to tenants. The tenants refuse to pay their rent, and ultimately kill the landowner's son who is sent to persuade them. Jesus asks his listeners what they think the landowner would do; the answer given is 'the would put the wretches to a miserable death'. The reader is left in no doubt that the landlord represents God. Jesus makes no comment on the answer given.

Perhaps most famous is the parable of the talents, in Mt 25 and Lk 19. A Master entrusts his wealth to three aides while he takes a long journey. They are given varying amounts of money (5, 2, and 1 talents), according to their abilities. Two invest theirs and double their principal. The third buries his money in the ground (no banks available, apparently). When the Master (God?) returns he rebukes this one and gives his money to the first one. There is no criticism of the system; the issue is being trustworthy of their stewardship.

### **Secondly, the Gospels say a lot about taxes**

Tales about tax-collectors are numerous, clearly as the bad guys. We know from other sources that the tax burden was crippling to the Judaeen economy—privatized by Rome, with local tax-collectors (tax farming) given license to raise money as they saw possible.

In some places tax-collectors are grouped with 'sinners' (Mt 9:9, Lk 5:29-32), who, whatever the nature of their sinning are clearly disapproved of. In one story a tax-collector called Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see Jesus pass by. Jesus saw him, and invited himself to dinner at this rich man's house. Zacchaeus becomes a disciple of Jesus – and makes 400% restitution to all those he had defrauded (Lk

19:1-10). It is understandable why tax-collectors were hated – but Jesus shows that they are redeemable. Indeed, we know that he made one of them a disciple, Matthew!

### **3. A bias to the poor**

Jesus doesn't have much good to say about the rich and powerful:

Mary's song in Luke 1 (commonly called the *Magnificat*) rejoices in a coming Kingdom reversal that her child will bring – the powerful are brought down from their thrones and the lowly are lifted up; the poor are filled with good things, the rich sent away empty.

Lk 16:20-25 tells of a rich man who banqueted every day, and a starving poor man named Lazarus who sat, ignored, at his gate and lived off food rescued from the dumpster. Both die, and Lazarus is seen in Paradise by the rich man, who now languishes in Hades. He begs for Lazarus to be allowed to bring him a sip of water, but there is 'a gulf fixed between'.

All three Gospels tell the tale of a rich young man who comes to Jesus seeking the secret to eternal life, but goes away grieving over the personal cost when Jesus tells him to give all his wealth to the poor. It is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God (harder than a camel going through the eye of a needle) but, Jesus says, 'with God all things are possible'.

It is hard for the rich, but not impossible. It is not that being rich is sinful, but about how wealth is used—and is judged by care for the poor.

### **The Gospel of release: Jesus at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21)**

In sum, the Gospels often depict the economic system of the day, but do not comment on the system. This is not an implicit endorsement of the system, but rather the use of common situations to illustrate the gospel response. As already said, there is no prescribed economic theory in the Bible.

But there is a vision of a better world. There is no single prescription, but there is an ordering of priorities. The Gospel priorities can be seen in the very first words of Jesus in Luke 4, sometimes called his 'Nazareth Manifesto'. Jesus reads the Sabbath text from Isaiah 61 in his home synagogue: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour'. The 'year of the Lord's favour' refers to a provision of the law set out in two places: Deuteronomy 15, which calls for the remission of debts every 7 years; and Leviticus 25, which calls for a Jubilee every 50 years in which all property reverts to the original owners.

As Jesus' first public sermon in Luke it has to be read as the template of his coming ministry, and for the community of his followers. We have seen this in Acts 2 and 4 (the Acts of the Apostles being the sequel to the Gospel of Luke). Whatever economic framework we live in, for the family of believers who follow Jesus the question will always be, 'How does the system provide for the needy?' It is by the measure to which the society succeeds in such provision that it is to be judged.

Readers may decide an appropriate response.

*Dwight D Swanson, PhD*  
Research Fellow in Biblical Studies

# The world of Cézanne and Renoir

Fifty-two masterpieces by Paul Cézanne (1893-1906) and Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) are on loan from the Musée de l'Orangerie and Musée d'Orsay in France and currently being exhibited at the Hong Kong Museum of Art. This large-scale exhibition is entitled Cézanne and Renoir: Looking at the World. These exceptional loans from the two museums highlight the intersections in their careers and provides a broad panorama of the two artists' world. It enables visitors to enjoy a brilliant and creative interplay between art and life. Cézanne and Renoir's paths frequently converged through their enduring friendship and mutual admiration. They maintained their dialogue and supported each other throughout their artistic careers. During 1880 and 1890, Renoir stayed in the south of France at Cézanne's home where they painted together.

The 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period of unprecedented societal prosperity in France with industrialisation and modernisation. A group of artists wanted to escape the confines of classicism in the tradition of art and they opted instead to capture fleeting moments of everyday life in response to the rapid developments in society. Cézanne and Renoir, icons of this art movement were both influenced by Impressionism. Impressionism is an art movement originated in France in the 1860s. It is characterised by loose visible brush strokes, vibrant colours and a focus on capturing light and movement in every scene. Cézanne and Renoir express themselves in different styles with Cézanne using rigour and geometric designs and Renoir delicacy and harmony. Both artists' observation of the subject matter combined with the aspiration to release a timeless essence allowed them to embody a form of classic modernity. Landscape, still life, portraits and nudes constituted common fields of experimentation for the two painters, all in the quest to capture the essence of both objects and individuals. Both artists explored the theme of the outdoors and landscapes throughout their lives. They strived to render the ephemeral, the time of day, the season and the weather. The invention of portable metal paint tubes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century made outdoor painting (En plein air) possible, capturing fleeting visual moments of sensation. Cézanne and Renoir excelled in their attention to the genres of landscapes, scenes of modern life and portraits. Although their approach seems diametrically opposed, their portrayals of ordinary scenes celebrates the timeless beauty of everyday life. Their paintings express a sense of permanence and tranquillity.

Cézanne's artistic vision was to simplifying subject matter into basic geometric forms; he was able to explore new ways of seeing and representing reality with multiple perspectives. He sought to capture the essence of his subjects through geometric shapes and a unique method of brushwork. His styled

form can be seen in his rendering of volume through colour gradation in the apples. The apples symbolised his friendship with writer Emile Zola (1840-1902) and they were a gift to Zola as thanks for a favour during their school days. Cézanne's portraits reveal his interest in the interplay of colour and light, leading to a sense of depth and volume and captured his contemplative sitter in solitary sedated poses

Renoir made use of broken brushwork technique to capture light, movement in subject matter. He put emphasis on touch, colour and light. He gave his painting a defining touch of sensuality and warmth; established himself as a key figure in the impressionism movement. He captured intimate yet lively moments of his models actively participating in the bourgeois life. He celebrated his vibrant use of colour and light, his work often depicts scenes of leisure, focusing on the joy of life and human relationships.

Cézanne's steadfast interest in geometric forms in subjects set the foundation for the modern art movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The most iconic of which was cubism. Both Cézanne and Renoir played pivotal roles in the evolution of pictorial modernity. Their distinctive styles left a profound influence on the next generation of avant-garde artists which including Spanish art master Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). Picasso once said that Cézanne was 'the father of us all' and thought of himself as Cézanne's 'artistic grandson'. He succeeded Cézanne's avant-garde arrangement of still life objects and his pioneering with a synthesis of viewpoints involved depicting subjects from multiple angles simultaneously. Two of Picasso's paintings, Large still life (1917) and Large nude with drapery (1923) were displayed in this exhibition.

Renoir enjoyed considerable financial success during his life, his vibrant and joyous depictions of everyday life resonated with the public. His ability to convey



Apples and biscuits (1880) by Paul Cézanne





Claude Renoir playing (1905) by Pierre-Auguste Renoir

emotion and beauty in everyday moments has made his art timeless and his paintings became highly sought after and commanded high prices. While Renoir thrived in the art

influencing future generations and reshaping artistic expression.

*Dr Jitna Por*

## Cecily Louise Smith

Last year Sydenham Life ran a piece about Cecily being 101 years old. Sadly, she passed away peacefully on V.E day, overnight, in her sleep and the age of 101 years and 10 months.

Cecily Louise Smith was born at Percy Cottage Charlcombe Grove in 1923, and returned to Sydenham, when she remarried later in life and lived at 45 Kirkdale. She moved to be nearer family, in Nuneaton, in later life in 2017 at the age of 93.

She was well known for her watercolours and was an avid artist from the age of 15 or so until giving up in her mid 90's. She did however continue to draw showing her two great granddaughters (aged 6 and 2) how to paint and to hold brushes correctly.

Sydenham was her home for a considerable length of time, albeit spilt into two different parts of her life. Many people may well remember her as well as the congregation at St Barts where she worshipped between circa 1930 to 1957 and then again 1981 to 2017.

Cecily Louise Foulger (Maiden



name Smith, 1st marriage Pearson, 2nd marriage Foulger): born 30th June 1923, died 8th May 2025. She leaves behind daughter Louise Lingard, granddaughters Frances Lingard and Alicia Hodson, great

granddaughters Keira Hodson (6) and Eliza Hodson (2), ex-son-in-law Robert Lingard, grandson-in-law Brendan Hodson and Frances's long term partner Bruno Rondeau.

*Robert Lingard*



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### Floodlighting

Anniversary, Birthday or Special Event?  
You can sponsor the floodlighting of  
St. Bartholomew's church for  
one whole week for **£10**.

Contact Claire Adams 07813 989668

**St. Bart's Church Hall** is available to hire for regular  
classes, children's birthday parties, Baptism parties  
and other family celebrations and events. There is a  
well-equipped kitchen and rates are reasonable. The  
church, which has a lovely acoustic, can also be hired  
for concerts. We currently have availability on several  
evenings in the week for regular bookings and on weekend  
afternoons for one-off bookings.

**To discuss your requirements, please call Lesley on  
07785 905355, or email her at l.khatibi@outlook.com**

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**Distribution assistant:** Yvonne Springer – yvonespringer@hotmail.co.uk  
**Design and Layout:** Hal Bannister – info@ebonwavedesign.co.uk