GREETINGS FROM THE ACTING DIRECTOR, JONATHAN TAME.

This is a challenging and yet exciting time to be taking on the leadership of the Jubilee Centre. It’s a great privilege to have joined an organisation I first came across in 1986, when Michael Schluter spoke at a church event in Reading where I was a postgraduate student. One thing that stood out to me was the fact he was an agricultural economist, as I was, and he wanted to see the world transformed through Christ, as I did!

In watching the Jubilee Centre develop over the years, I have been deeply impressed by its breadth of engagement in social transformation. By this I mean it is committed to careful and thorough biblical research, then to publishing thoughtful responses to a wide range of issues in society from a biblical perspective; but rather than stopping there, it often takes this further by launching a project or campaign, or spinning off an organisation to engage with one of these issues in a practical and focused way. So I count it a privilege to take on the leadership of this inspirational organisation.

I hope we can maintain this breadth of involvement in social reform, so that the Jubilee Centre will avoid the twin pitfalls of being an overly theoretical think tank, pontificating from its ivory tower, or else a bunch of enthusiastic but poorly thought-through activists. My prayer and intention is that we will grow in our calling to be a major source of biblical thinking, inspiration and ideas for how God’s people can be salt and light in a society that would otherwise veer towards darkness and decay.

My predecessor, John Hayward, did a fantastic job of expanding the Jubilee Centre’s influence on the internet. The fact that a Google search for “Christian social reform” puts the Jubilee Centre on the first page, in 3rd place out of 156,000 listings, is testimony to his efforts. The website contains a rich library of resources, including our Cambridge Papers, briefings on a variety of issues, the Jubilee Centre blog, various videos, a number of bible studies and a catalogue of books for sale.

Personally, I want to bring into the Jubilee Centre a renewed focus on helping people engage with our ideas in a more direct way. When we launch a report or a paper, we would like to encourage people to get together with others who share the same concerns and grapple with the issues raised. This is because we seek to do much more than provide cognitive materials to inform or challenge our readers - we want to help them “not to be conformed to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds” as St. Paul wrote so powerfully in Romans 12:1-2.

We are starting to try this out ourselves in the Jubilee Centre with something called Areopagus (from Acts 17). Over lunch, usually on the last Tuesday of each month, one of our colleagues in Jubilee Centre or the related organisations in Jubilee House (that is Relationships Foundation, Relationships Global, Concordis International and Allia) will introduce some of their new research findings or a report they have written, for the rest of us to discuss and learn from. If you live or work locally and would like to attend, you are welcome.

In 2012 and beyond, as major financial, social and environmental challenges are a growing threat in many nations, it is imperative that Christians take their place in the public square, being able to think biblically about all of life, responding to practical and policy dilemmas with wisdom and compassion, and living their lives at home, in the workplace and in wider society as ambassadors for Christ.

This sums up our vision: to see a movement of Christians increasingly engaged in social reform at all levels of society, thus strengthening the witness of the church in Britain and other nations globally. Thank you for your prayers, involvement and support!
In January the explicitly Christian activities of Relationships Global, under the banner of the Relational Studies Institute (RSI), were merged into the Jubilee Centre. The RSI is now a second ‘brand’ of Jubilee Centre alongside Cambridge Papers.

This has opened up the potential for several new partnerships with organisations in other countries which share the Jubilee Centre’s vision for Christian social transformation.

One of these is the Centre for Faith and Public Values in Hong Kong, part of the Chinese Graduate School of Theology. Its director, Dr Kang Phee-Seng, organised an international conference last May on ‘The Family and Sexual Ethics: Christian Foundations and Public Values’.

Michael Schluter assembled a team including Jeremy Ives, Jonathan Burnside and Dale Kuehne – names familiar to Jubilee Centre readers. Together with eight Chinese scholars they presented papers on a range of issues which are of major importance to the changing cultural landscape in China. We hope the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences will publish the conference proceedings, and some of the papers will be published in English by the Jubilee Centre also.

Another partner is Relationships First in Singapore. They are running “R-Work”, one of the RSI courses piloted last year, which explores ways for Christians to express their faith at work through promoting just and healthy relationships. The Johannesburg Bible College in South Africa is running another 24 session course, “R-Vision: Transforming Relationships in Public Life”, for a second year.

Lastly, we are supporting Animato, a new initiative in Australia launched by the former industrial chaplaincy Converge International, as it seeks to apply Christian principles to the world of work. Alongside promoting a vision for healthy, life-giving workplaces, Animato is also considering starting a similar initiative to Cambridge Papers in Australia.

We will bring news of our international activities and partners regularly through the pages of Engage; please pray in the meantime that our relationships with key leaders in these countries will be forged on a strong foundation.

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A GOOD MONTH FOR MARRIAGE

It seems that marriage has never been in the news more than over the past few weeks.

After a consistent pattern of decline since the 1970s, marriage rates have risen by 3.7 percent since last year – something analysts put down to a return to family values brought about by the economic downturn. Iain Duncan Smith recently launched a Social Justice Strategy paper stressing the importance of marriage, and the government’s support for it. ‘Given that married relationships tend to have greater longevity and stability than other forms, this Government believes marriage often provides an excellent environment in which to bring up children,’ the report states.

Similarly, the Jubilee Centre’s sister organisation the Relationships Foundation is working hard to launch the Marriage Foundation (www.marriagefoundation.org.uk) on May 1. The Marriage Foundation is rooted in the experiences of High Court Judge Paul Coleridge, who has spent 40 years working in the family court system. Around 3.8 million children are involved in the family justice system at any one time. Justice Coleridge has been an outspoken advocate of marriage for many years, and the Marriage Foundation will raise awareness of the advantages of marriage for individuals, families and the nation as a whole.

Lastly, the Coalition for Marriage (www.c4m.org.uk) launched its campaign to support the traditional definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman in the face of the government’s consultation process to redefine it. Since its launch on 20 February, the campaign has attracted exceptional public and media interest from both sides of the debate. The petition has attracted 250,000 signatures in the first month, far exceeding expectations, as well as regularly featuring in the national news. Please sign this petition if you feel strongly about it, and let us know your thoughts on the subject on the Jubilee Centre website’s blog: http://www.jubilee-centre.org/jubilee/blogs.php
puts forward a radical yet coherent alternative set of principles. This book seeks to rethink the foundations of a market economy and argues that the Bible's central theme of relationships is the key to rebuilding a system that promotes economic well-being, financial stability and social cohesion.

None of these things can be viewed in isolation. But that is the basis on which public policy - so often short-term, single-issue and fragmentary - tends to operate.

This is one of the unique contributions that the Bible has to offer in answering the untidy collection of interconnected problems we face. If we really want to address our social and economic challenges in a lasting and meaningful way, rather than just superficially and temporarily, we need a holistic solution. We believe that the model of society described in the Bible demonstrates such joined-up thinking, and consequently has much to teach us about how we can go about changing society for the better. Properly understood, the Bible has answers we badly need.

The Jubilee Centre ‘Primer’ will explore the core ideas that inform our work, including the Jubilee legislation in Leviticus 25, approaches to debt and interest, rootedness, family, decentralised government and relationships as the framework that underpins everything in the Old and New Testaments.

We hope that this will be a useful tool for years to come in explaining the continuing relevance of the Bible to modern society and equipping Christians to be salt and light to those around them.

AFTER CAPITALISM

THE WORLD IS SET TO BE IN FINANCIAL TURMOIL FOR SOME YEARS TO COME.

Searching questions are being asked about the future of capitalism in the light of the European debt crisis, exorbitant levels of executive pay, short-termism in share trading, and the dominance of the financial economy over the real economy of goods and services. The fall of communism left capitalism as the only show in town; as it grows increasingly unfit for purpose, where do we go next without returning to socialism?

“AFTER CAPITALISM: RETHINKING ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIPS” by Paul Mills and Michael Schluter

DO WE VALUE MOBILITY...

...OR ROOTS?

(After almost 30 years, we felt it was time to produce a simple, accessible guide to Jubilee Centre thinking.

The immediate context of this is the financial crisis, and the accusation that the Church has not been able to offer coherent answers to the problems facing our society.

It is tempting to think that these problems can be addressed with a range of simple solutions.

Lowering interest rates will stimulate the economy.

Raising the retirement age will mean more taxes are generated. Increasing child benefit will encourage more parents back into work. In theory, these make some sense.

The catch is that society is a complex system. Every problem we fix by these means creates a range of side-effects, which may need addressing themselves. Like bubbles under the wallpaper, if we push one down it often leads to unintended - and sometimes undesirable - consequences elsewhere.

Policies that affect employment also impact couples and families, since they influence who works where, for how long, and for how much. Family structure affects the welfare budget, which picks up the costs of broken and struggling families. Interest rates impact employment, but they also affect how much families borrow on their mortgages and credit cards and the financial problems or freedom they experience as a result - either at the time or later.

The messages we receive about these interlocking aspects of society also play a role in shaping our cultural standards, what and who we value and prioritise: whether the opportunity to move for work is more important than stable, rooted communities; whether sexual freedom is more important than strong families; whether my personal choices are more important than the welfare of society as a whole.

None of these things can be viewed in isolation. But that is the basis on which public policy - so often short-term, single-issue and fragmentary - tends to operate.

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FROM GENERATION 2 GENERATION

IN 1990 THE JUBILEE CENTRE published JULIA BURTON-JONES’ GROUND-BREAKING BOOK, FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION, WHICH EXPLORED BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE AND CARE OF OLDER PEOPLE. Today, more than 20 years later, the issues she unpacked have become even more relevant. A combination of factors – including government spending cuts, higher family breakdown and the retirement of the Baby Boom generation – is pointing towards a serious shortfall in care provision over the coming years. Work on a fully updated and rewritten edition of the book has been made possible by a generous donation from Pramacare, a Christian company based in Dorset that specialises in providing care for older people in their homes. Much of the work has been carried out by an external research team organised by Jonathan Martin from No Boundaries, overseen by Guy Brandon as editor in Jubilee Centre. The book is being prepared for printing and will be launched at an event celebrating 30 years of Pramacare’s work on May 17. The programme includes speeches and a panel session with Nick Hurd MP, Rev Dr Steve Brady (Principal of Moorlands College), Rev Peter Southcombe (Minister Immanuel URC Southborne), and Guy Brandon.

LIFE WITHOUT CERTAINTY

“I believe that much of the church’s behaviour and doctrine during its two-millennia-long existence as a social and political organisation would have been abhorrent to the person after whom it is named” says Margaret Atwood, Booker Prize-winning author, poet and commentator. Her best known novel is The Handmaid’s Tale, which the American Library Association lists as number 37 on the “100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990–2000”. (Interestingly, she has also written a non-fiction work on debt.) Often described as a feminist writer or an author of science fiction, she resists being confined to such labels, preferring the description of being an author of “speculative fiction”. She does, however, own the label ‘strict agnostic’.

The latest Cambridge Paper, by guest writer Rachel Thorpe, entitled Life without certainty: Margaret Atwood’s ambiguous worlds is one of the occasional series of papers that engages with the arts. Rachel reviews the dystopian world(s) created in Margaret Atwood’s novels and highlights the tension between the post-modern rejection of “tyrannical” objective truth and the unsatisfactory substitute of “true for me”. In The Handmaid’s Tale an oppressive regime relies on a distorted use of biblical proof texts in its subjugation of both sexes, but particularly of women. This is meant to echo the Puritan New England of the seventeenth century, or as Rachel Thorpe points out, the popular stereotypes of Puritan New England as filtered through the popular writings of Hawthorne and Miller.

Margaret Atwood’s distorted use of biblical quotations and themes is part of our society’s exchange of the truth for a lie. Younger generations studying her novels at school are unlikely to have much idea of what the Bible actually says and may well miss the point that it’s the novels’ distortion that makes the bible seem oppressive. Rachel’s paper shows that Atwood’s “speculative fiction” not only uncovers our deep human need for certainty and sense of self but also points to society’s insatiable longing for the God from whom it has turned away.

The paper is free to download from our website. Paper copies can also be ordered.

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MOST OF US HAVE A REASONABLE IDEA OF THE BEST WAY TO GIVE TO THE CHARITIES THAT WE CHOOSE TO SUPPORT.

‘Gift Aiding’ your gift enables charities to reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 donated. From time to time, HM Revenue & Customs like to remind us that we need to pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax that is at least equal to the amount of tax reclaimed by all charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs) from our gifts to them in any particular tax year. (It’s only Income Tax and CGT that counts for this. It doesn’t include other taxes such as VAT or Council Tax.)

If your donations to any charity are not ‘gift-aided’, and you are a UK tax payer, then please do consider completing a Gift Aid declaration. Drop us an email or call if you’d like help with this for your gifts to Jubilee Centre.