

It Starts With Vision



restoring the connection
between lifestyle and policy

Tim Stacey



It Starts With Vision

restoring the connection
between lifestyle and policy

Tim Stacey



The Christian Socialist Movement is a movement of Christians with a radical commitment to social justice, to protecting the environment and to fostering peace and reconciliation. We believe that 'loving our neighbour' in the fullest sense involves struggling for a fair and just society, one in which all can enjoy the 'fullness of life' Jesus came to announce. And we want to work to make it happen.

The CSM offers space for Christians to come together to help shape the political agenda. Affiliated to the Labour Party and with members in the Commons, the Lords, on local councils and in trade unions and constituency Labour parties, the CSM makes sure the Christian voice is heard in politics. Through lobbying, publications, public meetings, local branch activities, media work and other ways we are an effective voice for social justice.. The Christian Socialist Movement's primary passions are seeing justice done and our default mode is to "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves".

About the Author

Tim Stacey is a Faiths & Civil Society Consultant and a Doctoral Candidate at the Faiths & Civil Society Unit, Goldsmiths. He is the Founding Director and Editor of the refounded College of Sociology. He is a trained community organiser and writes and directs theatre in his spare time

© Tim Stacey and the Christian Socialist Movement 2012

Published and Printed by
Christian Socialist Movement, PO Box 65108, London, SW1P 9PQ
www.theasm.org.uk

Designed by Scribo Communications Ltd

Contents

	Foreword	5
1	Introduction	6
2	History: The Fall of Teleology and the Rise of Liberalism	8
3	Contemporary Landscape: Adopting the discourses & practices of liberalism	11
4	Real World, Real Problems: Faults of today as faults of liberalism	15
5	Towards a Vision: The recent work & campaigns of the Christian Socialist Movement as a case study	19
6	Conclusion: "I imagine a future where..."	24

Foreword

The Christian Socialist Movement has a long history and complex origins. Many people have spent time recording that history and those origins, but few people have written about how CSM can take those deep roots and make them relevant in the 21st Century.

Both CSM's director, Andy Flannagan, and the chair, Stephen Timms MP, talk frequently about CSM being a place where policy meets lifestyle, and how important having a vision is to doing that.

I was personally delighted when Tim Stacey, who is not a CSM member, chose to write this pamphlet after spending some time with us at our offices and joining us as we went out and about at meetings and speaking engagements.

Here, Tim writes superbly about why that vision is important and what people and political parties need to do to make sure it continues to happen.

I hope you find it an interesting and thought-provoking read and look forward to hearing what conclusions people draw from this pamphlet.

Rob Carr

Communications Manager, CSM

1

Introduction

My background is in Philosophy and Theology. But I am currently a doctoral candidate in Social Policy at the Faiths and Civil Society Unit, Goldsmiths. This shift in direction has enabled me to do two things: to express the ideas I have been developing over the past four years in an accessible way; and to make those ideas politically relevant.

So what are those ideas? Foremost, my idea is that liberalism fails to provide a meaningful vision of the future which can provide the kind of critique necessary to hold off the forces of instrumentalisation. What do I mean by liberalism? I mean three ideas primarily: that all ideas of the good are equally valid; that politics therefore must be and can be undertaken without an understanding of what is good; and that in the absence of an idea of the good, instrumental factors such as wealth, power and pleasure become the best measures of both political success and individual happiness. What do I mean by instrumentalisation? I mean the orienting of our relationships with things and people as ones of user to resource.

This is a necessarily controversial argument. First of all liberalism tends to be associated with liberty, the premise of which must be that all ideas of the good are equally valid, but not with a lack of good. Second, liberalism is almost universally acknowledged as a force for good. Actually I agree that any laudable political philosophy requires a commitment to liberty. Yet it is my task to show that the assertion of this principle as an end in itself leads to all of the features I have just identified. We need something else that is prior and on the basis of which liberty is asserted. Today, perhaps more than ever before, we need vision.

I have spent the last two years while writing my doctoral thesis on a journey in search of such a vision today. I have explored multiple examples of such visions as they play out in contemporary politics. I have spent time exploring the work of London Citizens, Movement for Change, Christians in Politics, and the Christian Socialist Movement. I have had various discussions with MPs and Peers of all parties, and with activists, academics and think-tankers.

“Liberalism fails to provide a meaningful vision of the future”

The idea for the document at hand was born out of discussions with Andy Flannagan, director of the Christian Socialist Movement, concerning how instrumentalisation reveals itself in contemporary politics. The central way, we agreed, that instrumentalisation revealed itself, was as a disconnect between lifestyle and policy pervading politicians, what politicians expected of business, institutions and the public, and what individual members of the public expected of themselves.

The consequences of this disconnect are far reaching. Understanding its history and primary features can help us to see a commonality between a number of seemingly disparate problems: the increasing similarity between parties, the MPs expenses scandal, the banker bonus furor, and the combination of the media hacking scandal and the Murdoch BSkyB takeover bid. These events have been underscored by low levels of political engagement and riots. Actions to overcome these problems have often be derided as merely scratching the surface: attempts to look beyond old party divisions just seems to lead to shifts to the centre and populism; only a few MPs have been criminally charged over their expenses fiddling; the banks only received a levy while bankers continue to receive excessive bonuses; and the coalition government continues to avoid the full implications of the *Leveson Inquiry into the Culture, Practice and Ethics of the Press*.

The story of how lifestyle and policy became disconnected is complex. Foremost of course, is the simple point that hypocrisy is age-old. The Bible offers us a rich history of hypocritical leaders going back at least as far as the second millennium before Christ; leaders who lived their lives in one way but preached the virtues of life lived in a completely different way. But people in those times had neither the access nor the freedom to agitate that we have today. Ours is not a political barrier; it is a cultural barrier. We could change things if we cared enough. So rather than simply accepting that things will never change, it is important to interrogate the root of our complacency. My feeling is that there are multiple intertwining stories that bring us to where we are today.

2

History: The Fall of Teleology and the Rise of Liberalism

If hypocrisy is age old, the history of prophetic voices against hypocrisy is equally old. Two traditions stand out. The first is that told by the Bible. The Old Testament is full of prophetic voices warning of the dangers of hypocrisy. And the New Testament is the story of one such voice. These voices were not always calling for dissent, but just as often were whispering to rulers, personally pointing out their shortcomings. Amongst these voices there is an implicit conviction that if we can change peoples' hearts we can change politics. This was a tradition that stressed the importance of charity and justice. The second tradition is that of Plato and Aristotle. For Plato political justice is derived from the internal justice of those in charge¹. And for Aristotle, politics is not a process of formulating and delivering policies but a process of forming friendships towards a conception of the good. This tradition stressed the importance of teleology, of studying the highest end of humanity and exploring how best to bring about that end. For Plato the process of rational self-reform guides good policy, for Aristotle the process of building friendships does.

These two traditions, the Judeo-Christian and the Platonic-Aristotelian, converged in a long line of advisors to various political bodies from around the 3rd century BC to the end of the 16th century AD. The role of these advisors was to ensure that rulers were good Christians, practicing virtue in the way they carried out the duties of their office. In our contemporary climate where advisors can just as often be called "spin -doctors" this tradition of moral advice can be hard to imagine. So what changed?

The first thread was provided by Machiavelli. In his *The Prince*, published in 1532 ostensibly in the same tradition of offering political advice, Machiavelli did something entirely new. He argued that it was of no use having a conception of the good if one did not have power. Politics should therefore be the amoral task of gaining and maintaining power. And this task cannot be achieved by good action. This began a philosophy of what Pierre Manent has called 'the fecundity of evil'², whereby harnessing the power of evil is a necessary prerequisite of gaining power.

1 - Plato, Republic Book IV

2 - Manent 1996: 87 -93

It was Grotius, a Dutch legal philosopher who, with the publication of his *On the Law of War and Peace* in 1625, suggested politics could be a science much like physics, constructed without need of reference to God or any other teleological vision³. Grotius was seeking a way to denounce the religious violence rife in his time. There are two problems with this philosophy. The first is that it severs the link between lifestyle and policy. If policy is a science, its just execution has nothing to do with the lifestyle of the policy maker. The second problem is that it begins a process of forcing morality into the private sphere. If morality is not required in politics, then it follows that morality has no place in politics.

Similarly, Hobbes' *Leviathan*, published in 1651, sought a fair means of arbitrating between warring teleological visions. Hobbes posited a hypothetical social contract based on the notion that people wanted to avoid violent death. He said that people should offer allegiance to a leviathan with a monopoly of power. It is to this leviathan to dictate religious policy. Hobbes then, adds a further problem: apart from under the auspices of a leviathan, men cannot be trusted to act in a morally responsible manner. This notion is what John Milbank calls the 'ontology of evil'⁴. On the one hand individuals are expected to be privately corrupt. And on the other hand, and because of this, the state is given almost unlimited authority to intervene in the public sphere.

Later, keeping morality private becomes a right. John Locke tells us that we cannot impose issues of religion because no human can have access to universal laws and because anyway coercion leads to more violence than tolerance. Even further, similarly for J.S. Mill, one should be able to do whatever one pleases so long as it does not harm anyone else. A famous phrase sums up the principal "your liberty to swing your fist ends just where my nose begins". If lifestyle has nothing to do with public policy, the lifestyles of people in positions of public importance are inconsequential. In some ways this is a laudable cultural trend, allowing for people to be true to themselves in their private lives without worrying about public scrutiny. But it also lends to moral relativism. There is no longer a hierarchy of values but of rights. If we deem public discussions of private morality intrusive, we allow morally reprehensible behaviour to spread amongst those in positions of public importance, as well as potentially abandoning people without the education or strength to lead virtuous lives. Nor are these problems merely theoretical. We have seen examples of both in recent years, as well as of one informing the other.

3 - Milbank 2001

4 - Milbank 2001: 420

The MPs expenses scandal, the banker bonus furore, and the media hacking scandal were all offered as excuses for rioting amongst those involved.

The final thinker I want to mention is Adam Smith, who suggested that the telos could not be constructed and implemented but instead was a by-product of primarily selfish behaviour. Says Smith: 'By pursuing his own interest [one] frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good'⁵. Albeit in the interests of good, Smith embraced the fecundity of evil.

My purpose here has not been to undermine liberalism entirely; liberalism carries with it some important ideas concerning freedom and wealth creation. My concern is that the discourses and practices used to achieve these ends do more harm than the ends do good. The means lead to a disconnect between lifestyle and policy which is morally corrosive.

“Liberalism carries with it some important ideas concerning freedom and wealth creation.”

5 - Smith, Reprinted in 2012: 264, Book IV: Chapter 2

3

Contemporary Landscape: Adopting the discourses and practices of liberalism

In order to explain how adopting the discourses and practices of liberalism is morally corrosive, we need to look at the ways they have been adopted historically and how they are employed at present. Because the primary vision in Europe generally and the UK specifically is Christian, the story of how vision has been lost is synonymous with story of Christian decline, both in society at large and in the microcosm of Westminster politics. As shall be discussed in the next chapter, this does not necessarily mean that Christianity must be revived. Today there are many visions that offer a supporting logic to a more ethical lifestyle and politics.

Stephen Backhouse, Tutor for Social and Political Theology at St Mellitus College has explained that liberalism was first adopted as a creed in opposition to Christian authoritarianism¹. Liberals promoted the disestablishment of the Church of England in order to free the faith from political constraints and to promote freedom of religious expression. This marks the adoption of the Hobbes-Locke trend of thought. It is against this backdrop that most see liberalism today. In more recent history the opposition to authoritarianism plays a key part in defining what it means to be a liberal - as does the promotion of individual rights. But on the one hand social liberalism has been forever bound up with economic liberalism, and on the other liberalism is too often about negative freedom - freedom from - rather than positive freedom – freedom for.

Writing in the guardian John Milbank, Professor of Theology at the University of Nottingham and friend of both Phillip Blonde – Red Tory – and Maurice Glasman – Blue Labour, said “in the face of the secret alliance of cultural with economic liberalism, we need now to invent a new sort of politics which links egalitarianism to the pursuit of objective values and virtues”². What is this secret collusion he refers to? Cliff Alcock, Guy Daily and Edwin Griggs have described classical liberalism, stemming from Locke, Mill and Smith as suggesting that ‘the blindly self-interested

1 - Backhouse 2010

2 - Milbank 2008

behaviour of a myriad of individuals interacting as buyers and sellers in a variety of markets – for labour, capital and goods – results in beneficial ‘unintended consequences’ for all’ and that ‘individual action is deemed to be superior to collective action (at least in the form of government action)’³. In the interests of both social and economic freedom, classical liberals promoted a vision of a small state.

In the early to mid twentieth century, “New Liberals” such as Keynes and Beveridge associated individualism with ‘individual self-development rather than simply as assertion of individual rights and negative liberty’ and so increasingly the state had a moral and financial role in supporting self-development⁴. But this shift was bound up with pressure from the labour movement⁵. Unless liberalism is supplemented with discourses of equality and fraternity, it always eventually accepts that the best way to spread autonomy is to allow the rich to get rich and for the proceeds of their wealth to trickle down.

This latter argument was championed in neo-liberalism, adopted, and to some extent constructed, by successive Thatcher governments. It is returning today as in social policy value becomes equated with cost to the extent that Nicholas Boles MP suggested that any social spending that does not improve productivity should be cut. But socialism too is easily corroded once it accepts the premises and discourses of liberalism. Milbank has said that because Marxism and atheist socialism tend to accept liberalism’s premises, that the ends we seek are the maximisation of individual autonomy and wealth, they will always lose to liberalism, which wants the same and delivers them better⁶. And indeed we have seen this with New Labour who continued to promote individual wealth so long as it could be taxed *ex post facto*. In the words of Peter Mandelson in 1997, New Labour was ‘intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich as long as they pay their taxes’⁷. What this attitude fails to recognise is on the one hand the lack of solidarity that results from this relaxation concerning individualism; and on the other, the lack of social responsibility felt on the part of wealthy individuals when they are encouraged to see taxation as substituting for consciousness. Actually David McLellan predicted this would be a problem in 1996⁸.

3 - Alcock et al, 2008: 187

4 - Alcock et al, 2008

5 - Bickley, 2010

6 - Milbank, 2009

7 - Mandelson (quoted in Malik 2012), 1997

8 - McLellan 1996: 45

He foresaw that Tony Blair's stress on community was doomed to break down into instrumental factors since in order for a community to behave as a community it needs to stress a vision beyond itself: 'Tony Blair's Fabian pamphlet on Socialism talks of social justice, equality and community – but these ideas are left floating in a way that suggests they could be blown in almost any direction'⁹. For McLellan, as for Milbank, this is evidence of the need for Christian theology to underpin policy¹⁰. My own opinion is that we simply need to return to the notion of transcendent vision: vision that can never be reached and is always ahead of us; that cannot be fully defined and therefore cannot be exclusive and vision that is beyond material notions such as wealth. This vision can be Christian, but it can be many other things too.

The loss of such vision in liberal discourse often applies to civil society too. The *Occupy* movement is an excellent example. We saw in *Occupy* the unfortunate convergence of a genuine moral grievance with an inarticulate expression of that grievance. Many cynical observers put this inarticulacy down to inauthenticity. Instead, it seems more sensible to put it down to the lack of a discourse for discussing these ideas. Ironically, this discourse began to emerge as people attacked the church for not getting involved. People asked "whose side would Jesus be on?" With this question a vision was invoked – it placed an image in the mind of Christians, Muslims and others of how the world could be and against which the world as it is could be judged.

“We simply need a return to the notion of transcendent vision”

Perhaps proof that the inarticulacy was not down to inauthenticity can be found in the problem's being shared by more experienced activists. Many sources I have spoken to in Westminster and with whom I have put forward my ideas have pointed me in the direction of the *Compass* campaign against the *Commercialisation of childhood* as an example. Although encouraged by *Compass*' victory in receiving commitment from retailers to be more responsible in the way that they advertise to young people, especially with reference to their use of sex and sexuality, many are worried that if anyone had asked *Compass* just why they were against the commercialisation of childhood, why it was wrong, they would have struggled to provide an answer. Because really, to be against the commercialisation of childhood, we need to be against the commercialisation of life *per se*.

Of course there is an answer internal to liberalism here: in the interests of autonomy one should not encourage behaviour that has serious implications as to a person's identity unless they can

9 - McLellan 1996: 45

10 - McLellan 1996: 45-46, Milbank 2009: 315

reasonably be thought to have the critical awareness to see those implications. But this argument itself easily dissolves once we begin to interrogate a) what counts as critical awareness b) who gets to decide what a reasonable level of critical awareness is c) how laws based on undermining critical awareness will be enforced and d) whether critical awareness is acquired with age or whether we would consider it unacceptable to use sexually provocative material to advertise products to fully grown adults with a low IQ. This last point relates to a similar problem I was pointed to by Maurice Glasman; namely, Labour's inability to take a critical stance against pornography. From the liberal point of view, pornography, at least legal pornography, so long as it is produced by and with consenting adults and watched by consenting adults is not problematic enough to make into an issue. Specifically in this case what we require is a vision of the common good that does not accept the objectification of vulnerable people. More generally, we need vision.

Others have suggested a similar lack of substance could be found in a *Demos* report into the connection between faith and progressive policies and ideas. Although *Demos* made an important contribution to the wider public's acceptance of faith as contributing to progress, one might question what "progress" really intends. Because there is no particular vision from which the meaning of "progress" can be derived, the word sounds hollow. One can easily imagine "progress" being cited in the name of decreasing taxation and liberalising markets; for increasing equality of opportunity; or increasing equality of outcome.

The stress on negative freedom, freedom from political, social or economic constraints, is a laudable linchpin. But without something prior, it can equally be corrosive. Freedom must be sought with the goal of seeking a common good that affects the way we live our lives. This point has been explored in depth by Chiara Lubich in her aptly titled speech *Liberty, Equality, Whatever happened to Fraternity?*¹¹.

Negative freedom is also problematic because it gives us no standpoint from which to, in the words of London Citizens practitioners, move "from the world as it is to the world as it should be". If freedom simply means freedom from judgement of any kind, then we will lose the possibility of holding politicians, businesses and people to account.

11 - Lubich 2012

4

Real World, Real Problems: Faults of today as faults of liberalism

I will cover four concrete examples here with which many people will be familiar: the increasing similarity between parties, the MPs expenses scandal, the banker bonus furore, and the media hacking scandal. I will be taking a fresh look at these issues with a mind to understanding how they could have happened in what are still seen as some of our most cherished institutions.

Politics

The increasing similarity between parties directly betrays a lack of vision. If we look back to the mid-nineteenth century, even though each party drew from Christianity for inspiration, each party had a strong and unique vision. To some extent the alignment between parties shows a triumph of socialist principles: health, welfare, education. But there is a similar convergence around free market principles. Even the Labour Party now largely sees free market principles as integral to not only wealth creation but also public service delivery. The convergence around free market principles is most concerning because as much as being the result of intellectual or moral agreement, it is increasingly the result of weakness. As suggested in the discussion of Smith above, without vision it is difficult to stand up to instrumental arguments.

The MPs expenses scandal shed light on a corrosive disconnect between lifestyle and policy. But in order to understand this disconnect, we cannot naively regard the scandal as betraying an inflated sense of entitlement amongst politicians who are only out for themselves. Most people who get into politics do so because they believe in something, because they see an injustice, a problem that needs fixing or have a vision of something better. MPs, especially those representing constituencies outside of London, work hard and spend a lot of time away from their family and friends. When parliament is sitting it is thought that the average MP works 71 hours a week – or one and a half full-time jobs according to the EU Working Time Directive¹.

1 - Korris, Hansard Society 2005

But perhaps what the expenses scandal does betray is a loss of the importance of leading an exemplary lifestyle if one is to put forward policies that inspire public engagement. Nietzsche famously said that the early Christians managed to inspire so many converts because of their ascetic lifestyle. Seeing Christians living in poverty and abstaining from excesses of drink and promiscuity led people to surmise “all that suffering cannot be for nothing.” A similar suffering has to be undertaken for most great visions today. The artist, the civil society activist and (personal experience tells me!) the academic alike must undergo financial difficulty in order to work for what they believe in. Scott Atran has undertaken research to show that the same principle draws religious believers into great acts of personal sacrifice: the struggle is a sign of the virtue of the cause². Today we often hear arguments that if we want the best people to work in politics, we must pay them wages to compete with the private sector. Personally I do not see this. Suffering reminds us that we are doing something meaningful.

As the civil service *Standard of Conduct* suggests, as important as the self-understanding behind politicians' actions is the public perception of those actions. This idea is rooted in the notion that democracy functions on the basis of trust; that politicians and political institutions require at the very least fair, honest and legal behaviour in order to maintain their legitimacy. A recent report by a consortium of academics known collectively as PIDOP demonstrated that one of the key factors in disengagement with conventional politics, namely party membership, voting, and paying taxes, was a lack of trust in politicians or political institutions. Similarly, the Guardian/LSE Reading the Riots research saw rioters citing lack of trust in politicians and political institutions as an excuse for rioting.

“The struggle is a sign of the virtue of the cause”

Actually only around one hundred of six hundred and fifty MPs were involved in the expenses scandal and only three cases were deemed criminal. And indeed, one might even see the fact of MPs fiddling expenses having become a scandal at all demonstrates a level of press freedom and public accountability that we should be proud of. When asked why the scandal was not making headlines in India, a politician replied that “corruption is a way of life here”. My suspicion is that the attention the expenses scandal received and the emotional impact it had were down to its bringing to the surface a number of deeper underlying concerns regarding the disconnect between lifestyle and policy.

2 - Atran 2007

“It is becoming increasingly rare for people to rise up in an entirely separate industry before entering party politics”

The first concern is privilege. The stereotype of politicians is one of old white men, more specifically old white middle class men. Despite good efforts amongst the Labour party in particular, the stereotype is largely accurate. Moreover, as a Labour MP put it to me recently, Labour, historically the party of the working man and woman, is slowly catching up with the Tories and Liberal Democrats as a party of the professional middle class³. This trend is linked to the much maligned professionalization of politics whereby young people fresh out of a top university begin as researchers for MPs, then become advisors and eventually are selected by the party to become politicians in their own right. It is becoming increasingly rare for people to rise up in an entirely separate industry before entering party politics. People lose a sense of what it is like to be anything but a politician. On top of this there is a Catch 22 situation whereby people need experience before they can work as a researcher. What this usually entails is an unpaid internship, which itself tends to be a luxury of middle class children.

All of this creates a view amongst lower earners that politics is the way the middle class serves the middle class. This attitude goes back at least to Plato's *Republic* when Thrasymachus quipped to Socrates 'justice is the interest of the stronger' (Plato, *Republic*, Book IV). This suggestion is so offensive to politicians not only because they wish to serve everybody equally but more importantly because they think politics is more than merely looking out for interests, it is carving out a meaningful vision of the future – but is it any longer?

Economy

The third talking point is the furore surrounding banker bonuses and the unwillingness of banks to lend to small businesses. The surface concern is that the banks and bankers brought about our current economic woes and so banks and bankers should pay. But the deeper question to ask is why we have allowed banks to operate in the way, why we have substituted banking for manufacturing as opposed to complementing one with the other, and why the government fears putting on pressure to cut bonuses and force banks to lend to small businesses. We need the business of banking to be considered as moral at every step. Max Wind-Cowie, researcher at *Demos*, cites the US Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) to suggest that this kind of moralisation of banking would not be all that difficult⁵. The CRA 'imposes a statutory obligation, on retail banks, to provide credit services that meet the needs of low and moderate-income communities'⁶.

3 - Cruddas 2012; Glasman 2012

4 - Plato, reprinted 2007: 26, *Republic* Book IV

5 - Wind-Cowie 2009: 43

6 - Wind-Cowie 2009:43

By sharing social responsibility with the private sector in this way, we can restore a connection between wealth creation and moral action.

In their book *Crisis and Recovery: Ethics, Economics and Justice*, Larry Elliot and Rowan Williams suggest that the present economic crisis provides a tipping point for rethinking what is important, prioritising moral vision over economic success⁶. It is with this idea in mind that Ed Miliband's call for a more "responsible capitalism" should be and has been heeded. A good step in this direction is the move on the part of Vince Cable to make executive pay increases subject to shareholder scrutiny and sanction. We should consider how this idea will play out in majority state owned companies.

Media

Finally, the combination of the media hacking scandal and the Murdoch BSkyB takeover bid, which has evolved into a public debate about the appropriateness of relations between politicians and the press has as much as anything reminded us of the important role the media plays in holding politicians to account on the basis of lifestyle. Although the culture is changing on the continent, the UK has led the way in terms of holding our politicians to account for their moral decisions. In this sense the UK still has a strong anti-Nietzschean stance. Although some politicians might prefer it were otherwise, we expect a strong connection between the private morality of our politicians and their public policy.

6 - Elliot & Williams 2010

5

Towards a Vision: The recent work and campaigns of the Christian Socialist Movement

In the introduction I explained that I have been seeking an answer to the problems now discussed. For the last few months I have been undertaking practice-based research with the Christian Socialist Movement (CSM), trying to understand the way that they operate, especially with reference to how their theology, their vision, informs their practice and vice-versa. I have made regular visits to their offices in Labour HQ, where I undertook most of my writing. I have observed them at work, have involved myself in their teaching fellow Christians the importance of political engagement, and have played a part in their campaigns in order to get a feel of why and how they do what they do. I am extremely thankful for them putting their trust in me as a participant in their work so I could learn how they operate. In the following I will explain how their vision has helped them to restore the connection between lifestyle and policy. I will do so with reference to three key areas: politics, economy and media. Before I get underway, I want to give a brief intellectual history so that the reader has an understanding of what it means to be a Christian Socialist Movement.

History

Arguably the ideas underpinning Christian Socialism are as old as Christianity itself⁷. Stephen Beer, Political Communications Officer at the Christian Socialist Movement, points to how the Old Testament offers a radical agenda for redistributing wealth: 'In Deuteronomy 15 we find that every seven years the Israelites were required to cancel debts to each other. Every 50 years, the land was reallocated to its original owners (Leviticus 25)'⁸. And yet Robert Leach has quite correctly suggested that

“an obvious problem for those who would claim some mutual dependence between Christianity and socialism is that so many other Christians have derived quite different social, economic and political implications from the same source.”⁹

7 - Leach 2002:4

8 - Beer 2009

9 - Leach 2002:5

This point is ostensibly supported by the dual influence of John Milbank, arguably the greatest living intellectual influence on Christian Socialism, on Maurice Glasman's Blue Labour and Phillip Blonde's Red Tory. Yet to think this divergent appeal betrays a lack of substance is to miss the commonality between Glasman and Blonde and by extension what it means to be a Christian Socialist.

The best way to understand what it means to be a Christian Socialist is to focus on what the former take "socialism" to mean. For Christian Socialists, rather than intending state-sponsored community development, state ownership of industry, state regulation on business or the radical redistribution of resources, "socialism" refers to a political philosophy based on stressing social goals such as human dignity, friendship, reciprocity and empowerment. Now since capitalism is seen as undermining these social goals, Christian Socialism will likely adopt traditionally socialist agendas. But protecting against capitalism can also mean fighting seemingly conservative agendas such as rolling back the state to give communities the chance to take control of themselves or protecting local traders against the free market, and even conservative social agendas like taking a stance against pornography.

That it takes on agendas of both left and right does not make Christian Socialism all things for all people. It is not a populist movement. Indeed, while both parties seem to shift to the centre, succumbing to economic liberalism on the one hand and social liberalism on the other, Christian Socialism carves out a specifically unpopulist (though one hopes time will prove not unpopular!) centre, being neither economically nor socially liberal.

“That it takes on agendas of both left and right does not make Christian Socialism all things for all people”

Finally, it is important to stress what it means to be a movement. In the words of the current Director of the CSM, Andy Flannagan

“I have become more and more convinced that transformation in countries only happens through movements, and that movements only happen when folks with a passion for certain policies flesh them out in their lifestyle. Our nation has seen too much of those who espouse certain policies but whose lifestyles look no different to anyone else. There are also plenty of us who studiously model a different way of living, that springs from a different set of values, yet step back from arguing to see those values fleshed out in public policy. Both are required, and to be a movement, you need both.”¹⁰

10 - Flannagan 2012

So stressing that the CSM is a movement reminds us that politics is about getting together with people, creating a common good that influences the way people should live their lives, changing your own lifestyle first and creating policies that give people the power to change theirs.

Politics

Christian Socialism is unashamedly a politics concerned with lifestyle. Especially under the leadership of Andy Flanagan, the CSM stresses ethical practice at every step. *Labour Neighbours* is a programme that began in February 2010 proposing to 'model a new gateway for activism connected to the Labour movement, involving community service, social action, and local community organising'¹¹. The idea is to use the good name of the Labour Party as well as local Labour resources and people to galvanise local action. Labour would return to its roots in community organising – acting as a go-between for the groups that already exist – and community development – providing an opportunity for people with no organisational affiliation to get involved in their community. On the one hand, the idea is that to be a member of the Labour Party must mean more than devising policy – it must mean being involved in one's community; and on the other, to really change one's community, it is important to link up with organisations that have real power.

Now the work of linking community activists to party politics is not an easy task. In my role as an academic I have spoken at conferences in which I try to convince die-hard social scientists, almost drowning in evidence-based practice, that just as important as evidence is faith. I talk of the need for a decaying and increasingly alienating politics to adopt the practices and involve the people that can really inspire faith. And I insist that inspiring faith in politics is not limited but must include people of faith. And yet I make these arguments as though the "people of faith" were an army banging at the doors of parliament, demanding to be involved – indeed that's how many secularists suspiciously see "people of faith". In fact, the CSM involves itself in the opposite task; namely, convincing people of faith that it is not a betrayal of their faith to get involved in politics. Certainly a number of Christians worry that to 'render unto Caesar' means to stay out of politics (Matthew 22:21). And Muslims I have spoken with suggest that involving oneself in man's law may be seen as denying God's law.

11 - Geary 2010

The way that the people at the CSM convince people of faith to get involved in politics is to go into seminaries and schools and teach. They use a combination of Biblical argument and appeals to the power of Christian morals to alter action. The most convincing argument for me came from Rob Carr, Office and Communications Manager, who at a talk delivered to the Salvation Army, described the work of the CSM as putting “steel in the spines of politicians” by ‘whispering in their ear’, giving them the moral confidence to stand up for social issues¹². The phrase ‘putting steel in the spines of politicians’ rung true with me because it spoke to the idea of providing people with a vision beyond instrumentality. The CSM reminds its 48 MPs of a vision from which they can derive real-world principles. It does so through writing pamphlets, holding meetings and conferences and forming friendships with MPs.

Economy

The CSM approach to economy helps to distinguish them from the “third way” approach associated with New Labour whereby free markets are allowed to flourish so as to increase standard tax revenue for social spending, and from Fabian Orthodoxy whereby it is enough for socialism to be implemented from above via policy. The CSM idea is to be about both policy and personal action. So there are a number of policy initiatives such as the campaign for a financial transaction tax, based on the US *Robin Hood Tax* and aimed at charging banks for financial transactions so as to invest the money on social spending; the campaign to separate retail and investment banks so that people’s private savings are free from major risk; and the campaign to increase regulation on banking. More radically, there are personal action initiatives like *Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is*, which aims to make ordinary people move their money, to switch their bank accounts, to banks that invest in only ethical companies. The point here is to become an ethical consumer, forcing banks to alter their behaviour by voting with one’s feet. We have all of us grown tired of government inaction over banks. It is time for people to lead the way. This does not mean that government action will not be needed. Rather it means government action and individual action must go hand in hand.

“The CSM idea is to be about both policy and personal action”

12 - Carr 2012

Media

Because it is as much about lifestyle as it is about policy, the CSM has a strong focus on raising the profile of its campaigns in the media. It uses and reinforces the media as a tool for holding politicians to account and also as a moral force showing a way to do politics outside of Westminster. This strategy reminds us that the place of the public is not simply to pressure politicians to pass laws that will in their turn change our life choices; it is also, perhaps more fundamentally, about changing the world by gathering together with people to change our own and others' life choices. The media then is not simply a place to hold people to account but to inspire them to act differently. This CSM approach also seems like a far healthier relationship for politicians to have with the media. Rather than hiding from the media, politicians should feel comfortable to talk about lifestyle choices in the media. They do not only represent constituents through expressing the latter's wishes in policy formation but by leading exemplary lifestyles. And leading an exemplary lifestyle itself need not simply mean following tradition; it might mean carving out a new way of living honourably.

Getting down with Jesus

The CSM is, obviously, a Christian movement. But I hope it is clear from the foregoing discussion that I do not think only a Christian organisation could carve out the solutions I have been discussing. This is not a treatise seeking to bring people back to Jesus. Certain strands of Christian belief have been employed to drag us into these problems in the first place. And indeed, it is equally possible that any other faith or none could achieve the same outcomes. In my own research thus far I have explored other Abrahamic faiths, Buddhism, and Confucianism. But what I am asking for people to see is that some belief must hold priority over liberty in order for us to hold off the forces of instrumentalisation.

6

Conclusion: “I imagine a future where...”

Once upon a time holding off the forces of instrumentalisation was the place of ideology. Nowadays ideology is a dirty word: not only because of the Second World War and Cold War but also since the rise of public policy as a scientific discipline. As a friend put it to me recently, evidence-based practice is seen as a way of “avoiding ideology”. But some ideological position is at the heart of all that we do. So the choice between ideology and no ideology is a false one. Instead we must choose between good and bad ideologies; between ideologies that have people at their heart and those that have individual wealth or liberty at their heart.

Recommendations for individuals

Ideology is about vision. Politicians and people, especially with the introduction of the 24-hour media, can get so caught up in the day-to-day management of policies and people that they (and us too!) forget what they are aiming at, forget perhaps even to take the time to think of what they are aiming at. Are we simply looking to improve the economy? What for? To spread wealth? What for? We need to remember to take the time to part those clouds in our mind and look long into an imagined future. What does that future look like? I ask the reader to stop briefly and play this game with me. Close your eyes. See shimmers of blue seeping through tiny cracks in an otherwise cloudy sky. Behind those clouds is the perfect future. Now part those clouds. What do you see? If your answer is just “blue”, start again! And again. And again. Why not start each day like this as if it were a prayer. Why not do it on the underground?

Nor is there a choice between ideological politics and people-centred politics. Ideologies not only require people for their formation but, as Rob Carr's expression 'putting steel in the spines of politicians' reminds us, ideologies also require people, friends, to reinforce their principals. So just as important as having an ideological vision is forming friendships with real people, with community leaders to form and reinforce that vision, and to remind us when we have strayed from that vision.

This reminds us that our work is for people – not to make them more productive but to help them (and us too!) lead a fulfilling life.

Recommendations for parties

I have already mentioned the place of the CSM, a think-tank housed within the Labour Party to which MPs may or may not subscribe as members. A large part of my stress has been on how, when people become a member of the CSM, they can rely on the moral support of the central team to stand up for their

“rather than fearing the development of parties within parties, they should regard the creation of small ideological groupings as integral to the intellectual & moral health of the wider party itself”

convictions. In this situation, when it comes to votes on legislation, there is no longer a stark choice between following the party line and either placing faith in a few others or going it solo. Instead, in cases when the system works at its best, one can rely on a teleological allegiance with fellow members. This does not mean that the CSM acts as a contrary party within a party, a nuisance to whips. Instead, it means that when one feels a genuine moral conflict with certain policies, they will not necessarily or in all cases be alone.

As a recommendation for individuals I suggested that people be more proactive both in thinking teleologically, thinking about vision, and in forming friendships in order to explore that vision. My recommendation for parties then, is that rather than fearing the development of

parties within parties, they should regard the creation of small ideological groupings as integral to the intellectual and moral health of the wider party itself.

A second recommendation for parties is that the wider party needs to see building a vision in common with people on the ground as integral to the creation of its own vision. A lot of stress in recent years has been placed on community organising, the building of relational power within a community to simultaneously improve that community and build party support. But as much stress needs to be placed on community development: posing challenging questions to people in the community as to the ruling ideology and its limitations; as well as challenging people to construct alternatives. This is not a top-down educative role but a horizontal role akin to that of the midwife: we provide people with the tools to bring their ideas to fruition.

Now the reader may be experiencing a sense of disappointment as we approach the conclusion – the title suggests that I will restore the connection between lifestyle and policy but in fact all I have done is to lament the disconnect and describe an alternative. But a pamphlet such as this cannot on its own restore the connection between lifestyle and politics. The reader who has not taken the point of this essay will be disappointed to hear that there is no quick fix, no three-point plan, no five-year target. Restoring the connection between lifestyle and policy, since after all it is about lifestyle, takes slowly changing one's life step by step. The first step is recognising you have a problem. I have tried to usher you on to that first step.

References

- Alcock, Cliff & Daly, Guy & Griggs, Edwin *Introduction to Social Policy*, Longman, Harlow, 2008
- Atran, Scott, *Talking to the Enemy*, Penguin, London, 2011
- Backhouse, Stephen, *Experiments in Living: Christianity and the Liberal Democrat Party*, The British and Foreign Bible Society, 2010
- Beer, Stephen, 'Can we apply Jubilee Principles?' on CSM Online at http://www.theacsm.org.uk/Articles/160987/Christian_Socialist_Movement/Articles/The_Common_Good/Issue_200_Feeling/Can_we_apply.aspx, accessed 24/07/12
- Bickley, *Building Jerusalem: Christianity and the Labour Party*, The British and Foreign Bible Society, 2010
- Elliot, Larry & Williams, Rev. Rowan, *Crisis and Recovery: Ethics, Economics and Justice*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2010
- Flannagan, Andy, 'Put your money where your mouth is' on CSM Online at http://www.theacsm.org.uk/Articles/160987/Christian_Socialist_Movement/Articles/The_Common_Good/Issue_200_Feeling/Can_we_apply.aspx, accessed 24/07/12
- Geary, Ian, 'Labour Neighbours – The Plan' on CSM Online at http://www.theacsm.org.uk/Articles/160987/Christian_Socialist_Movement/Articles/The_Common_Good/Issue_200_Feeling/Can_we_apply.aspx, accessed 24/07/12
- Korris, Matt, *A Year in the Life: from a member of public to Member of Parliament*, Hansard Society, London, 2005
- Leach, Robert, *Christian Socialism*, Political Studies Association, Aberdeen, 2002
- Lubich, Chiara, 'Liberty, Equality...what happened to Fraternity?' on Focolare Movement at <http://www.focolare.org.uk/ArcLiberty.htm>, accessed 24/07/12
- Malik, Shiv, 'Peter Mandelson gets nervous about people getting filthy rich', *The Guardian*, 26/01/2012
- Manent, Pierre, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, 1996
- McLellan, David, 'A Catholic basis for socialism' in *Restoring Faith in Politics*, Christian Socialist Movement, London, 1996
- Milbank, John, *Theology and Social Theory*, 2001
 - , 'Red Toryism is the best hope of a new progressive politics', *The Guardian*, 22/05/2008
 - , *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology*, Cascade, London, 2009
- Plato, *Republic*, Penguin, London, 2007
- Smith, Adam, *The Wealth of Nations*, 2012
- Stacey, Timothy, 'Workers of the World...Love One Another?', *Telos*, Vol. 160
- Wind-Cowie, Max, *Recapitalising the Poor*, Demos, London, 2009