

## The Economics of Hope, 7 November 2015 Introductory speaker – Paul Bodenham

Apparently there is no patron saint of economists. Perhaps it is time there was – whom would you nominate? We could go for the patron saint of bankers – any guesses who that might be? (No, not Judas Iscariot)

Matthew 9.9: Jesus saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.



It must be the shortest conversion story in the Bible, but what a lot is packed in to that encounter. Of all the people milling around that Jesus could have called, he spotted Matthew and chose him. Here was someone in thrall to the economic system of his time, who had sold his soul to the Empire. So too had his tax-collecting colleagues – together they had become a byword for rapacious and treacherous self-interest.

But we don't escape Matthew's challenge. There is an empire in our midst today bent on eternal expansion. More than we are Jesus in this encounter, we are Matthew, exacting the empire's toll day in, day out, from the world in which we live, and of course taking our own commission, both in ways we are aware of, and in ways we are not.

But the foundations of this empire are beginning to crack and subside, even as Rome's were in Matthew's time (even if he little knew it). Since 2007 observers of the global economy seem to be living in permanent anxiety. As a society we are becoming increasingly aware of the compromises in which we are enmeshed. We, here today, are among the many who are uneasy that the economic powers and principalities care little or nothing for true humanity or the Earth's precious matrix. It's not just us – look at the Corbyn phenomenon, or read the Pope's encyclical *Laudato Si'*. We know it can't go on, and yet we go on, seemingly entranced by the social conventions of late consumerism, and captive to its most insidious strategem, peer pressure.

The call to the Matthew in us today is, as an Irish friend of mine would say, to 'catch yerself on', to discover that we are the ones busy at the tax-booth of empire, to realise that the empire has us just where it wants us. But then also it's an invitation to look up and be locked by Jesus' arresting eye, and hear him say 'follow me'. Even then, that's not all – we then must do the simplest and hardest thing, precisely as Matthew did – to get up and follow him.

Matthew the tax gatherer just 'got up and followed him'. But where? And how? Not much sign of a managed transition there. Matthew the evangelist – possibly the same Matthew, possibly not – leaves us to work it out for ourselves.

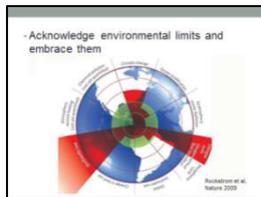


Welcome to this second conference for Joy in Enough. Some of us met in Birmingham 18 months ago, for an event which was sold out two months in advance. Some of us, before and since have been contributing to working groups to scout the terrain for a just and truly sustainable economics.

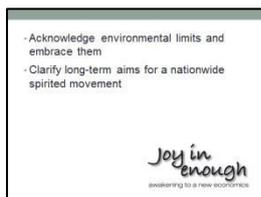
We have been learning that justice does not have to be merely about mitigating the harms being inflicted on planet, people and other species by a relentless and implacable economic machine. We are not content with merely adorning the dismal science with social graces. We have discovered something far more exciting: that economics can be a joyful art and a sacred enterprise. And we have learnt that for us and for our society, it can be, and indeed must be, the theatre of spiritual renewal, both in the churches and in society at large. Good economics can unleash a culture of hope, for humanity and the earth. That is our subject today.

Our intention is that today will be very far from just a one-off event, but only a milestone on a longer journey, a lifetime's journey, towards a world that finds Joy in Enough.

There has been a prophetic strand of witness for economic justice from the church's very earliest times, despite many compromises, but the churches have yet to fully recognise the implications of limits to growth, let alone use those limits as a starting point for creative advocacy and **salvific** story-telling. There is work to do that is both theological and political, but above all it is a task that is humane. And unless we do that work faith-led activism for economic justice will continue to collude with a system addicted to toxic growth and debt. Our campaigns may bring justice to the excluded of today, but it will be justice at the cost of violence to future generations. The communion of saints deserves better than that.



The first aim of Joy in Enough is therefore to build acceptance that faith-based economic advocacy must acknowledge and respond creatively to environmental limits. In fact it is within those limits, framed if you like by the margins in the book of creation, that the good news of our true humanity is written.



Secondly we need your help today to clarify long-term aims for a nationwide spirited movement to build a just economy within the ecological limits of the Earth. We envisage it as a movement energised by faith, wherever it is found, but it need not be the sole property of any faith or group. What we can do today is harness the transformative renewable energy laid down over

centuries of **Christian** tradition, and the prophetic impulse which rouses us in divine discontent.

As well as clarifying the aims for a movement we need to conceive what such a movement will look like in practice. How do you campaign for a one-planet



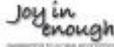
economy? What can we learn from experience, for instance from the Occupy movement. By many accounts that was a noble failure. Why? ...

Was it because it framed the struggle as between good (us, the 99%) and evil (them, the 1%), with a narrative of self-righteous victimhood, when in fact the same impulses are on manoeuvres

in us all? If that is the case the problem is not people or vested interests but cultural values and relationships, and the campaign objective must be that social awakening which Christians call repentance.

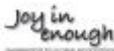
Campaigners generally endeavour to craft bite-size asks which can be put to politicians to act on within the parliamentary timetable. But whom do we tackle to shift values, and what do we ask? How do we campaign FOR positive values, rather than simply denounce an ethical demon? How do we own our own hypocrisy in a way that does not just wound us but empowers us? Are we just biting off more than we can chew?

Well, I'm here to look for answers, but I suspect we will need new approaches to finding them. Let's start today, by breaking the silence on growth and debt (or is it a taboo?). Let's conceive the possibility of change and help other people conceive of it, let's map the co-ordinates of an alternative in terms which will excite and inspire, and perhaps, if we get that far in one day, let's trace a common journey towards its realisation.

- Acknowledge environmental limits and embrace them as good news
  - Clarify long-term aims for a nationwide spirited movement
  - Conceive the infrastructure for the movement
  - Determine what to advocate, with whom and how
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All this will come down to real things being done with real funding by real people, like the real people here today. So one of the things we hope for from today is to conceive the organisational infrastructure to build, sustain and co-operate in the movement, and identify individuals and groups who are ready to contribute actively.

So we hope that 'you' will join the 'us' so that together we build a spirited movement for a just economy within the limits of the Earth's capacity. The most important piece of paper you have been given today is not the programme. It is the feedback form which asks **you** how that movement should take shape, and what part **you** might play.

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Crucially we need to make strategic choices, quite quickly, of the interests and actors, both friendly and hostile, with which Joy in Enough will engage and the policies and practices which we will advocate. That is why we have the wide range of workshops on offer this afternoon. They are not just for your entertainment – please tell us what you have learned from them for our next steps.

So let us work together to find how to form a culture for good lives. This ties us back to our point of origin today, the transformative role of spirituality, but it will be a spirituality rescued from its current captivity to individualism, and recognised as a public good, indeed the greatest conceivable force for public good.

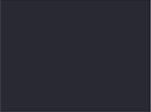
We will review everything you tell us in our sessions and on your feedback forms. Having absorbed what you tell us, we will consult early next year on how we propose to might rally our churches to answer the call of the gospel.



The foundation will be a new theological framework, one which proposes not only that we believe in one God, but that we believe in **one Earth**, and that we become truly human only at its scale and in its embrace. The road to joy draws us, intimately, into the incarnation, by which God

surrendered Godhead, took on the limits of God's own creation, and showed the way to true flourishing for ourselves and the whole creation.

The meeting at Matthew's cash till is a meeting not only of human beings, but of cosmic antitheses. One is an agent of the Roman Empire's relentless logic of expansion and growth, driven by extrinsic goals, striving on the upward path of supremacy and wealth at any cost. The other is sent on God's downward way, spending himself in the gift of creation, drawn by intrinsic values, seeking a home in the Earth he had given himself to make, and scarcely finding one. These two trajectories, upward and downward, accumulating and letting go, crossed paths at the tax booth, and the rest is history. Those two same trajectories meet in us who are here today, in each of us. Which one will you follow? And where?

 To help you find an answer, and to help you help us, we have two wonderful and important speakers. I am delighted that Molly and Jonathan accepted our invitation, themselves coming from two very divergent disciplines. The road between economics and spirituality has been little travelled. Few go that way, and those who do are still pioneers. But the road between economics and spirituality should be one of the richest intellectual trade routes a culture can have. We have work to do, Molly and Jonathan, and we look forward to the help you can give us.