

Spiritual Capital?



Leviticus 25.23:

The land shall not be sold in perpetuity for the land is mine. With me you are but guest workers and leaseholders.

Tim Gorringe on Spiritual Capital

And then spiritual capital. Are Christians, are religious people, interested in spiritual matters? Is that what we're about? Is what we bring to the party a concern for a spiritual dimension where other people bring an interest in the physical or the natural dimension? I don't think so at all. There isn't a word for "spiritual" in the Hebrew bible, it doesn't exist. So, it seems to me that instead what we're concerned with is an understanding of all reality, all reality, from rocks and stones and trees, the ewes that I'm dealing with and their lambs and all the rest of it, all of that reality has caught up in the divine. It's coming from the divine, it's speaking to us of the divine. So, there isn't a part of reality which is spiritual as opposed to something else which is material or not spiritual. The whole bloody thing is spiritual. I'm a bit allergic to that idea, that there's some kind of realm which we, people of faith, have access to which others don't have access is not the case at all. We all share in the same world. And it's not that non-believers, our humanist friends, the people who don't go to church, who don't work, it's not that they don't actually have ultimates which function in the way that faith in God functions. Jonathon, actually, alluded to that when he said that faith underlies everything that we do whether or not we say that we believe in this or that. So, what we mean by the word "God" is that which underwrites, which underlies, any particular social structure. The word "God", it refers to that which legitimates any social structure. And we can understand that through the Christian narrative, through the narrative of Leviticus, which puts a question to any understanding of God which condones exploitation, and which does not think of social reality in terms of redistribution, because redistribution is at the heart of what Leviticus is about.

Jonathon Porritt Founder of Forum for the Future and CEL patron was the key note speaker at CEL's *Treasure in the Field* Conference

Professor **Tim Gorringe** and **Paul Bodenham** were asked to respond

I suppose all of us find our communities where we can. Sometimes they're local, made up of people who share experiences with us in the place where we live or where we worship or where we work, sometimes those communities are much more distant, they're communities of interest, shared interest, of purpose, of celebration, of protest which still unfortunately remains a pretty critical part of the work that we have to do today and I know that Paul wants us to come back and think about the role of protest in the world today as part of our wider discussion after our talks.

For me all of those communities have actually been the thing that made it possible to go on doing this work for more than 40 years because if you really go back to 1982 when CEL started or you go back to 1972 when I first started getting involved in Green issues and you just track the pattern of destruction and delirium and abandonment of everything that human kind really should be standing for in this world it is not difficult to get depressed. It is not difficult.

So I don't know any activists in my world who don't need to have a deep source of inspiration and hope and meaning and purpose that they can draw on constantly in the works that they do to nurture them, to help them withstand some of that constant barrage of what we learn about the state of the world and the trouble that our world is in.

So for me, the spiritual side of this, the community of spiritual practice and reflection has been an important part of the way I've been able to do my own advocacy work and it still is so I want to thank all of my colleagues in CEL for the inspiration you've given me over the years, you may not know I was kind of drawing on that as a source of inspiration but it's been very important to me.

Spiritual Capital

For many people the concept of spiritual capital is kind of just a little bit too difficult. A concept too far. We're used to financial capital, we're used to the idea of manufactured capital, the things that we use, the products, the manufactured infrastructure, all of these things, we're getting used to natural capital as an idea and obviously I'll come back and talk about that. And then people talk about social capital, what it is, the bonds that tie communities and society together and, of course, the concept of human capital, often used in companies to explain the genius that each employee contributes to the success of that company. All of

these things, the five capitals, natural, manufactured, financial, social and human, sort of people go along. Spiritual capital, that's much harder.

Actually for me spiritual capital is still a difficult concept so one of the books that I think is very relevant to this is a book called *spiritual capital, Wealth We Can Live By*, by Denise O'Hare and Ian Marshall which is the whole of thrust of what we're talking about today with two very good writers here, a husband and wife team, Denise O'Hare and Ian Marshall. Here is their definition of spiritual capital.

"We call spiritual capital as the capital earned from serving deep meaning in society, discovering that purpose, exploring fundamental human values. It's the kind of capital measured not in dollars and cents but rather in the achievement and the service that we can give on behalf of other people. It is the same kind of capital from a business perspective, earned by the great Quaker business, like Clarks shoes and Rowntrees chocolates who use large proportions of their profits to ensure safer working conditions for their employees, to build schools, hospitals and so on. It's the same kind of capital earned by Islamic bankers who refuse to charge interest for the money that they loan but instead share the risk with their borrowers to create different enterprises."

Probably so far so good with everybody here today. Now I'm going to challenge you a bit. This is their words NOT mine.

"And it's the same kind of capital earned by Coca Cola (laughter) when it offers the India government free use of its delivery trucks to distribute polio vaccine to the poor in isolated regions of the country."

So as you can see we are likely to have a little bit of argy bargy about what we mean by spiritual capital because I could go with all of that first part. I love the heritage of Quaker wealth creators in this country and elsewhere. One of the favourite companies we work with today in Forum for the Future is Unilever which still acknowledges and celebrates that culture, it's still part of the fabric of that company. I love the idea of the Islamic banking system being rather more fit for purpose in the world today than our own banking system. But the idea of Coca Cola as a creator of spiritual capital kind of sticks in my throat. That's the bit where

We are caught up in a growth spiral from which there seems to be no political acceptable exit

I begin to think come on guys, if that's the inclusive definition we're working to here we're probably in some kind of trouble. And I suspect that may well be the case that lies behind what I still see today as the relative ineffectiveness of many of the social movements of which I suspect you are all a part and which seek to change the nature of wealth creation, the nature of the economy today in such an important way. We're very good at analysis, we know what is going wrong out there but we find it quite difficult to bind people together in a different sense of purpose to change that as profoundly as it needs to be changed.

Technology

So why should we bother about looking at this through a spiritual perspective. We've got plenty of scientific technological evidence about the state of the earth and what we're doing to it. We're not short of good humanitarian humanist secular solutions to the world's problems today. Most of the good people with whom I share this world of sustainability activism come from that tradition. Most of them come from the humanist tradition, the secular tradition, the tradition of empirical rationalism. Just look at the state of the world today, gather the evidence we need about



Paul Bodenham on Capital and the Spiritual

One of the books that has already proved a turning point for me in my whole approach to this actually was one of yours Tim, *Education of Desire (The Education of Desire: Toward a Theology of the Senses (John Albert Hall Lecture Series))*. It's enabled me to carry on. What it gave me was a realisation that something has happened to our desire. In this consumer economy we no longer desire as human beings are made to desire. Desire has become a commodity, it's become something's that manipulated and used. We are no longer in command of our faculties, our God-given resources, our outlook. As a result of that we find it so difficult to make decisions that are good for the planet because we're only making decisions based on the requirements that are made of us by the market, by the growth economy. The insidious influence of growth economics is not just about the way corporations work. They're all geared to maximising shareholder return, and of course we will benefit from that in our pension funds – if we're lucky enough to have one. But there's a deleterious effect on our own spirits and on the way we are. It's as fundamental as that, and the recovery we need is from that kind of addiction.

Recovery is a very important word in this. It's a word that Alcoholics Anonymous use. It's something that I feel the church has to teach the world. The world, the culture that we live in has to learn how to desire again properly. To learn how to live with self giving. Perhaps one of the most valuable passages to me, the most important to me wouldn't necessarily be the Leviticus text (cited by Tim Gorrige above) but Philippians 2, the great song of Christ's Glory. Let your attitude be that of Jesus, that of Christ who emptied himself.

This is to be a self emptying person, to be a person who doesn't care about their capital but for whom capital is 'out there', something to be shared, something given, something to which everybody, all creation, is heir. That's a fundamental change to western consciousness as it has developed, but it's also the fundamental challenge that the gospel presents to us today.



Tim Gorrige on Technology and Vision

What Jonathon was saying about technology seems to me to be absolutely right.

If you come from our narratives, if you come from the Christian narrative, the idea that you can have a cheap fix, you can have a fix without redistributive economics, is fundamentally impossible because our narrative, this narrative, is a vision of the world otherwise. It's a vision of the world otherwise, because it's fundamentally founded on redistribution. That's what the temple was all about. The temple was a mechanism for redistributing wealth. And the story that we have, those of us who are preaching on Sunday, we've got to talk about John's version of the cleansing of the temple. And it's not because Jesus was cross about business activities in the temple, it's because that vision of a redistributive economic had been lost and essentially, that the religious people then, as today, have simply assimilated themselves to the ruling world view and they won't say anything different to what everybody else was saying. They were quite happy with the continued existence of a class society. That's not something which this narrative allows. This narrative calls for a world differently imagined – a world which comes out of redistribution. Then, the question which Jonathon raised, how do we make this vision cogent, fast enough, how do we do that fast enough? That's a profoundly difficult question. But if we ask ourselves that question as Christians, I would say that part of the response is to say we certainly won't do it by selling out by becoming an accommodationist church, by thinking that we can proceed purely through the conversion of individuals, by thinking that we can do it through conservation. We can only do it by nailing our colours to the mast, by confessing ourselves and asking people to respond to that confession.

the state of the world and the consequences of continuing to misuse the world in that way and use that to change the opinions and then the policies of the politicians on whom we depend. It's a classic route to rational decision making in society today.

Now, with the best will in the world you've got to be massively optimistic to assume that that route to transformation is the one that is going to get us to a process of change fast enough to make a difference. You've got to be a massive optimist. This morning's absolutely not the time to go in to a great long diatribe about what it is that we're doing wrong in the world today because otherwise we'd spend all the time doing that but very simply stated you all know what's happening today which is we are caught up in a growth spiral from which there seems to be no politically acceptable exit.

Population growth

And that growth spiral is driven by two things, one growing population, we have to mention it. I know it's difficult but you have to put it out there. Human numbers are still growing by around 75 to 80 million people every year, i.e. 75 to 80 million more people at the end of every year than at the start of the year. More and more of those people are hungry to have the material benefits that have been generated in western economies over the last 250 years, not shared very efficiently but nonetheless generated with great creativity. And in the phenomenon that is often called the hedonic treadmill, namely the idea that people want to find their lives permanently enriched by access to that consumer economy, essentially politicians the world over success or fail by virtue of their ability to give people a bigger spin on the hedonic treadmill.

So we're roughly seven billion today. We're heading towards nine billion by 2050. One billion people today are relatively rich, another One billion are doing okay. The rest are still living often in conditions of considerable poverty but every single person on this planet would like to be living like the rich bit and politicians see their principal purpose as making that possible.

The growth paradigm

Technology alone can't possibly do what we need it to do and yet there are a very large number of people in the sustainability world who put all of their faith, and it is faith, it is faith, all of their faith, in the notion that technology will get us to the point where we have to be.

The technology solution is so attractive because it doesn't challenge the growth paradigm head on. It allows you to maintain this commitment to, this belief in economic growth even as we bring forward different technologies. And that's where I think we need a very different way of looking at the world today. All of my progressive friends, in all of those mainstream parties whether we're talking about the Labour party or the Lib Dems and how many progressives there are left there, or even the sort of few people in the Conservative party over the years have actually understood there is a bit of a problem about this sustainability story. None of them... none of them want to move away from that growth parity. It's practically impossible for them to do that.

So a long time ago I came to the conclusion that the only way to achieve a different debate about growth was to think about it very differently, more from a values perspective, more from a perspective about what it is that human beings are trying to achieve in their own lives on this planet and collectively as a species. This is to think about it much more from a spiritual perspective where the growth that really matters is the growth in our understanding, in our insights, in our ability to celebrate this extraordinary planet that we are such an important part. Not a no-growth approach but growth of a different kind, growth that doesn't entail the destruction of the earth's natural capital.

Language and Servants of Creation

All of that means reinventing the words that we take for granted. I have a little truth test in my mind when I hear politicians use the word wealth. It really worries me because in 99.9 times out of 100 where they use the word wealth they basically mean money. They don't really mean wealth as the word ought to mean today. They don't actually mean that deeper sense of wellness and wellbeing, all words derived incidentally from the ancient... from the old English, Anglo Saxon word "welth", without the A in it, which simply meant wellness. Politicians never use the word wealth in that context. When they talk about sustainability they tend to mean sustainability of today's business model. This was an abuse of the

We've got the opportunity to bring people to a place of service and celebration

English language most effectively carried out by Gordon Brown who would allow people to think that he was really in to sustainability but what he really meant was keeping the growth model sustainable. When we talk about different patterns of capitalism we don't really challenge the capital that we're talking about, we still haven't got a proper deep understanding of nature capital for instance. So our language is prejudicial to the need to move people in to different states of mind. The language works against what we ought to be doing. It reinforced dangerously illusory mindsets rather than opens up a different way of doing things.

It does seem to me that one of our tasks as activists passionate about the earth, passionate about creation, passionate about the role of us as servants of that creation, one of the things we have to do is challenge language all the time. Never let people get away with statements about growth and wealth and competition all of these things, progress, without saying what do you mean by that. What do you mean by that? Where do you derive your understanding of what those words and concepts mean because we really have to dig deep now to challenge some of these interpretations of the way we use language in the world today. Not an easy thing. It may sound as if it will take far too long to get us to the point where the transformation that we need will really begin to impact on people's lives all around the world but I want to cheer you up on that score too, just to finish with.

Moving Mountains

Last year Forum for the Future brought out a special supplement on the spiritual dimension of sustainability, it was called *Moving Mountains* and we drew quite heavily on a lot of CEL's materials and the work of amazing people who've been out there talking about sustainability and spirituality for a very long time. We drew all of that together in a special supplement for Forum's audiences, that is our business audiences and all the decision makers and opinion formers that we work with. We weren't sure this would go down but we put it out to that community to see what the consequence of that would be. This has been the most enthusiastically, well received publication the Forum has ever produced. I want to send a little reminder to you that we've got power here in these ideas. We've got opportunities to inspire people differently, to bring them to a place of service and celebration that is different from the ways in which they think about those things in their normal lives so I don't want to talk this down. My feeling right now is that we're at the point where these ideas which have been materialising, for the best part of 40 to 50 years (and some, of course, would take it back even further than that) now have a chance to make a difference in people's lives, that they haven't done for a very long time and I think that's where our responsibilities, the service that we can offer comes in to play. ■

Tim Gorrige on Language

Jonathon ended by telling us that we need to pay attention to language, I absolutely agree with that. At the beginning of what he said, he intimated that he wasn't entirely happy with this metaphor of capital as applied to the spiritual dimension, so, just a word on that.

It seems to me that we do have to beware of the hegemony of capitalism. The idea that you can think about the world, you can think about every dimension of the world. You can think about natural resources, you can think about human resources, you can think about, let's say, spirituality, in terms of capital. That seems to me to be profoundly mistaken actually. And if one begins from Leviticus 25, you have a vision of the whole of reality, the whole of reality as gift. So, we're given the world, we're given our own lives, our neighbours are also gift for us. And if they're gift, then, according to Leviticus, they can't ever be capital, okay? So, what one does with a gift is cherish it, nurture it, look after it, use it for the sake of others. And this is a very different understanding from the idea of accruing capital and then, using it for other productive purposes. So, it seems to me that there is an important issue of how we think here. What metaphors we use and whether we buy into the idea that absolutely everything in our lives can be subsumed under this metaphor of capital. I disagree.

Paul Bodenham on Hope

I suppose the final thing I would say is about the language of hope, and I think the nature of hope. The hope that we cling to is probably where we are most deeply challenged as a faith, as Christians in our belief because there are two kinds of faith. There's the bright shiny hope that we maybe feel tempted by: salvation by technology, by those glittering machines, many of which will come on stream in time perhaps. But there is a darker form of hope. This hope is where it is okay to believe that things may not turn out as we hoped they would. It is nonetheless hope because it is hope in a sustaining power of spirit, of God within us, able to draw us to God's self through conversion. So I would like to offer the church a darker understanding of hope, one which has more light and shade rather than this gleaming, glittering aspiration that technology and the nostrums of neoliberal government will save us.

Sharing that kind of hope to me is evangelism.