

'THE R FACTOR' Part 1:

Where do we find a Framework and an Agenda to bring hope to Europe?

1. The Context: Christianity in Europe today

- Where it started. Paul's call to Europe (Acts 16)
- Athens vs Jerusalem in European cultural history
- Declining trends in church attendance
- Direction of cultural change (individualism/postmodernism, rights, diversity, materialism ...)
- Political and economic danger signals

2. Christian Responses to the Spiritual Crisis and Moral Decline:

- Focus only on individual salvation through evangelism
- Dream of a return to 'the good old days' of Christian majorities
- Demonstrate social concern through social action initiatives (but ignore the wider policy environment)
- Continue trying to reform the political agenda by adding a Christian perspective (Christian Democracy, Christian Socialism, Christian Capitalism)

Is there a fresh and more comprehensive biblical vision which Christians can draw upon to bring hope to individuals, cities and wider society?

3. The Foundation: Christianity is a 'relational religion'

- Trinity as an understanding of God in terms of relationships (Jn 1:1)
- Covenant is a word which describes a particular kind of long-term, committed, faithful relationship (Genesis 15: 4,5)
- The meaning of 'righteousness' in the OT (tsdq) is primarily 'right relationships' rather than only absence of guilt in a judicial sense
- The Cross is about reconciliation, a relational term (2 Cor 5: 17-18)
- Eternal life is about 'knowing God' (Jn 17: 3)
- Ethics is summarised by the word 'love', which perhaps in this context means 'other-person-centredness' (Matt 22: 34-40)
- Lifestyle: Christian lifestyle is not primarily concerned with prophetic gifts, financial sacrifice or even being martyred for the faith; it is about the quality of relationships. (1 Cor 13: 1-3)
- Personal goals. Paul describes his own goals and the goals he believes that other Christians should aspire to in terms of relationships (Eph 1: 17, Phil 3: 7-10)
- Jesus is our role model for perfect relationships

Some implications:

- (a) this distinguishes Christianity from other religions
- (b) this provides a basis for a critique of our culture

- (c) we need to learn to recognise this 'alternative reality'
- (d) a wider concept than Personalism
- (e) the basis for the evaluation of our own lives on the day of judgement.

4. Which relationships are of interest to God?

- (a) Each person's relationship with God (e.g. Jn 1: 12) and with other people (e.g. Rom 13: 9-10)
- (b) Relationships within and between groups, churches, cities, and nations, and these groups' relationships with God (e.g. Gen 19: 1-29; Is 58: 6-9; Ezek 16: 19-52; Amos chs 1&2; Lk 11: 37-53; Lk 13: 34; Rev chs 2 & 3, etc)

5. The relational dynamic

- (a) To long to know Christ better (Eph 1: 17; Phil 3: 7-10 etc)
- (b) To love one another as Christians (e.g. Jn 15: 12; Col 3: 13-14; 1 Jn 3: 11, etc)
- (c) To love our neighbour as we love ourselves (e.g. Matt 5: 43-48; Matt 22: 34-40; Rom 13: 9-10; Jas 2:8, etc)
- (d) To long for righteousness/justice/the good in public life (e.g. Is 59: 1-21; Jer 9: 22-24; Amos 5: 24; Mic 6:8; Matt 12: 15-24; Matt 23: 23; Titus 3: 1; 1 Peter 2: 11-15)

N.B. Jesus is our model for what perfect relationships look like in practice.

6. What constitutes right relationships in both public and private life?

Not priorities such as:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| (a) holiness | (a) choice |
| (b) justice and righteousness | (b) freedom |
| (c) shalom (peace/harmony) | (c) 'cultural liberty' |
| (d) forgiveness | (d) equality |
| (e) faithfulness/truth | (e) economic growth |
| (f) hope | (f) security |
| (g) love (opc + emotional engagement) | |

(g) personal rights

7. How do we structure institutions/public life to create a 'relational environment'?

Look to God's law/word as understood/interpreted/fulfilled in Christ.

Some interpretative principles:

- (a) The intention, not the letter ... (Mk 3: 1-6)
- (b) Expansive imitation, not limiting literalism (a 'semiotic approach'), e.g. Lk 10: 37.
- (c) Distinguish personal and institutional norms (e.g. 'turn the other cheek' is not an injunction for the law courts)

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- (d) See biblical teaching as coherent – Israel as a 'paradigm' (see table 1 attached)
- (e) The key OT interpretative principle is love = relationship (Matt 22: 34-40)
- (f) Principles to be seen as provisional – NOT as having the authority of Scripture
- (g) For application, distinguish principle and policy

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'THE R FACTOR' Part 2:

An Agenda and a strategy for changing Europe

1. The Agenda for Private Life: Application of Relational Ideas to:

- TV
- Microwaves
- Health
- Meals
- Friendship

2. Learning to see Public Life in Relational terms. Some examples:

- (a) 'Development' and international peace (see www.concordis-international.org)
- (b) Economics/finance/company structure (e.g. see Cambridge Papers on the interest ban and limited liability)
- (c) The Law/criminal justice (e.g. see book on 'THE R FACTOR')
- (d) Relational Justice and Relational Justice Bulletin on RF website listed below)
- (e) Health and healthcare (e.g. see Relationships in the NHS, published by the Royal Society of Medicine and Jubilee Centre paper on Christian Principles for Health and Healthcare)
- (f) Urban unemployment (see www.citylifeld.org)
- (g) Family policy (e.g. see www.keeptimeforchildren.org.uk)
- (h) Education (e.g. see issues raised in The R Option)
- (h) Business/Management (e.g. see http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org/relational_health_audit/Index.html)

4. A model for 'deconstructing' relationships and a language for discussing relationships in the workplace

- **Directness** Proximity of contact
- *quality of communication in the relationship*
- **Continuity** Proximity through time
- *length and stability of the relationship*
- **Multiplexity** Proximity in diverse situations
- *breadth and scope of the relationship*
- **Parity** Proximity in mutual respect and involvement
- *the balance of power in the relationship*
- **Commonality** Proximity of purpose
- *motivation driving the relationship*
(See Table 2)

5. Fresh Vision 1: Hope for the workplace

- E.g.
- the message for business
 - the message for teachers
 - the message for lawyers
- '... today's wisest firms, it seems, are those that are tops at consciously investing in

relationships - steadily, over time, with purpose and passion. But even the stellar, pioneering outfits don't try to measure it and that is a mistake.'

(Tom Peters, Liberation Management)

6. Fresh Vision 2: Hope in the home

E.g.

- review family structure in the light of biblical norms
- not gender wars, but gender co-operation
- increase time for conversation

7. Fresh Vision 3: Hope for politics

A radical agenda for national and city politics, e.g.:

- new priorities for public services
 - family role and roots vs individual freedoms
 - re-evaluation of fiscal policy from an R perspective
 - reservations about the human rights agenda
- N.B. The main differences between **Relationism** and **Personalism**:
- a different theological starting point so a more systematic agenda
 - a different understanding of the word 'relationship'

8. Application 3: Hope for the churches

- a fresh appraisal of how close relationships should be in the church (see Col 3: 13)
- a fresh perspective on the purpose of social action (i.e. seeing provision of opportunity, skills, practical support, emotional support and forgiveness as ways of giving hope to disadvantaged groups such as the unemployed, prisoners, those with disability or sickness, those in debt, asylum seekers, etc)
- a fresh approach to money issues in the church
- a new tool for evangelism.

9. Application 4: Hope for our personal lives

- a fresh appreciation of relational delights
- a fresh appraisal of relational priorities and time allocation
- a challenge to be 'transformed by the renewing of our minds' (Rom 12: 1-2)

10. Postscript: So what is the JC/RF strategy for national renewal in the UK

- (a) Set up the **Rnetwork** to provide vision, insights, connections, opportunities to make a difference.
- (b) R1 groups to tackle national policy issues
- (c) R2 groups to apply R ideas in churches, schools, hospitals, PCTs, companies ...
- (d) RF to provide the secretariat and resources for the Rnetwork

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JC to maintain the Christian values and roots of the **Rnetwork** and RF.

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