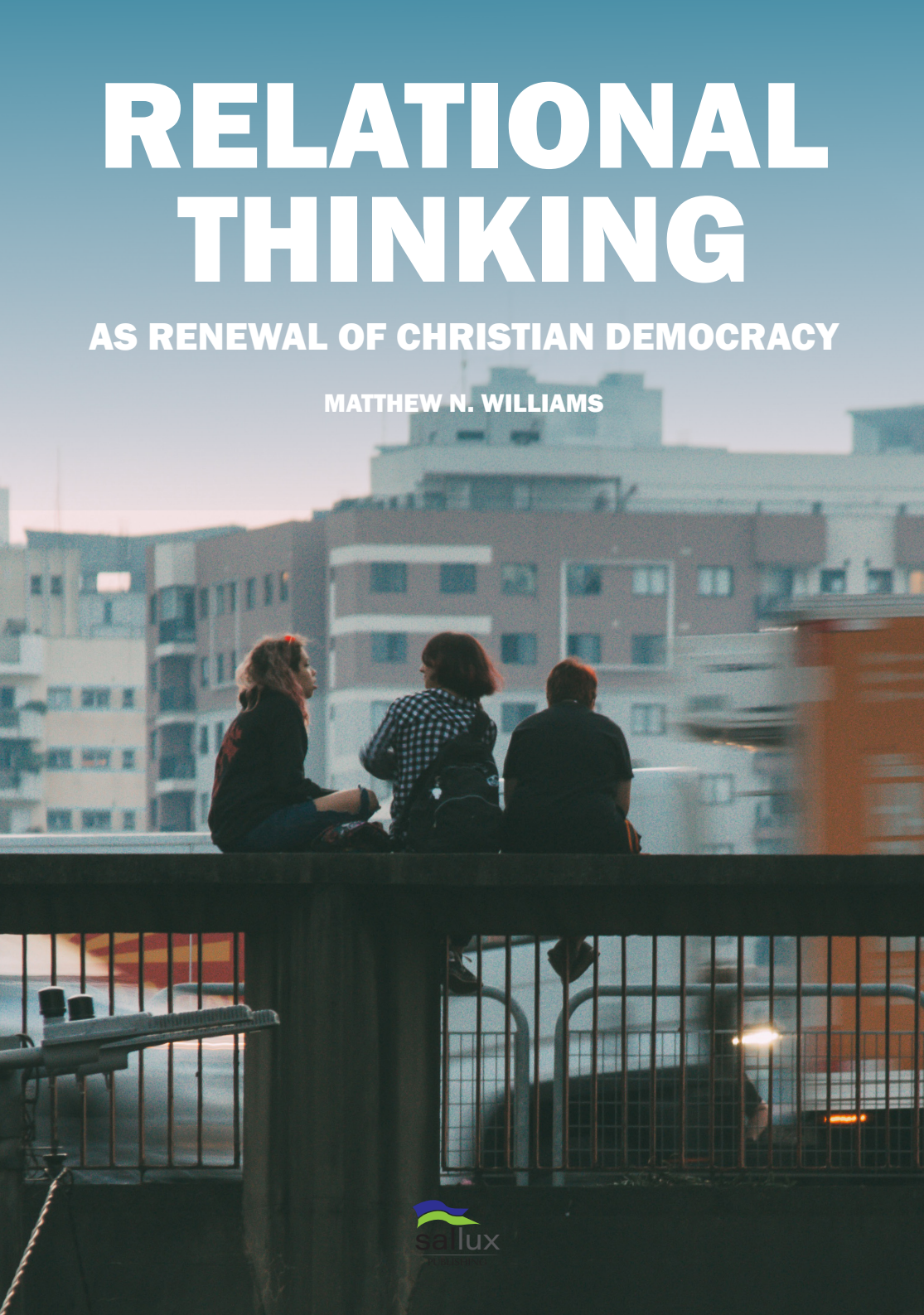
RELATIONAL THINKING

AS RENEWAL OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY

MATTHEW N. WILLIAMS



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Relational Thinking as Renewal of Christian Democracy

Matthew N. Williams

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A Relational Vision for Europe: Revitalising Christian Democracy Today

Matthew N. Williams

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About

Sallux | ECPM Foundation

Sallux is the political foundation for the European Christian Political Movement (ECPM). Sallux means “Salt and Light” and we want to spark a salted debate where needed and shed light on the issues we face. We present solutions by organising events and distributing relevant publications and will not stay on the safe side of the status quo.

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Dr Matt Williams is a theologian who has worked in Malawi, Northern Ireland and England. His main interest has been to establish a biblical approach to the issue of poverty in both theory and practice. He is currently the Head of Biblical Insight at the Jubilee Centre in Cambridge. Outside of professional work, he is involved in several social and environmental projects as well as his local church. Most of all, he has the pleasure of building home with his wife and raising their son as a disciple of Jesus.

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Introduction: A relational understanding of human dignity as basis for Christian Democracy

The crisis in European Christian Democracy is a fact that is practically never denied by any observer of the European political landscape. In most Western-European countries, the average age of the electorate of traditional centre-right and Christian-democrat parties is above 60. In Central Europe the situation may be slightly better on average but the question here is whether many of the parties concerned can be deemed Christian-democrat or rather pragmatic populist with Christian-democrat features.

This immediately raises the question: 'what is the core identity of Christian Democracy in the 21st century?'.

Sometimes it seems a mixture of references to tradition, pro-life standpoints, valuing family and free enterprise and variations of pro-Europeanism. One cannot deny that a sense of nostalgia seems one connecting factor in many occasions. Of course this generalised picture will vary from party to party and is different from country to country. Some Christian-democrat parties have moved closer to the right of the political spectrum, others decided to become more liberal and a small number of Christian-democrat parties chose for a 'social justice' profile. In some cases, there is a feeling that Christian-democrat parties try to be everything for everyone, which is difficult to maintain in political realities.

Reflections on Christian Democracy in Europe tend to have a sizeable focus on the past of the movement in the 19th and 20th century as Christian Democracy shaped the EU. This is especially true for the post-war Christian-democrat leaders who laid the foundations of the EU. In these reflections there are usually references to Catholic Social teaching, Protestant societal visions and philosophical personalism as sources of Christian-democrat ideology. Usually there is a reference to the current crisis in Christian Democracy but rarely a clear way forward is pointed out. It is difficult to discern a clear common understanding of Christian Democracy in Europe and an appealing message based on this understanding.

Our aim therefore is to attempt to formulate an understanding of Christian Democracy for the present that can be carried forward in this century.

Any such formulation of the core understanding of Christian Democracy will have to be clearly identifiable as Christian. Meaning inspired by the biblical gospel of Christ and rooted in Christian faith. Specifically, Christian Democracy needs to be ecumenical. It cannot be defined from one denominative tradition only. All four major Christian traditions in Europe (Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Reformed and Evangelical Protestantism) need to be able to recognise it as fitting with their tradition. Christian Democracy has to be rooted in an ecumenical sense of Christian tradition without becoming itself 'traditional' (in the sense of being mostly attached to the past). Moreover the Christians from outside Europe who became our fellow citizens will need to be able to see Christian Democracy as their common cause with all Christians in the EU. At the same time it needs to find (and be understood by) a sympathetic secular audience.

In our culture these two demands 'identifiably Christian' and 'sympathetic to a secular audience' are seen as mutually exclusive. This means usually that Christian-democrat parties either move 'to the right' and identify with a (culturally) conservative audience or they become more liberal in order to be able to reach out to broader audiences and younger generations.

This publication points to a direction that could enable Christian-democrat parties to maintain their core identity and reach out to new generations. We believe that human dignity as foundation of the EU legal order cannot be seen separately from the formative role of Christian faith in European history. At the same time human dignity offers a future-oriented and global outlook that can be understood and embraced by secular audiences and new generations.

To make that possible, our point of departure is a relational understanding of human dignity.

Article one of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union states

> "Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected."

Human dignity is a given and a goal at the same time. It offers a global outlook as human dignity is universal and encompasses all human beings. It is a goal in the sense that it is that what we want and need to achieve to be able to live as human beings. The new generations are less and less interested in material achievements and more focused at life (climate) and justice. They have a 'natural antennae' for human dignity as foundation and goal. Moreover they have a more relational outlook on life which rhymes naturally with the increased post-materialism of the younger generations.

While human dignity provides a moral basis and moral framework for politics and policies, it is in itself not an 'instrument' or 'tool' for actual policy making. The existence and knowledge of music is not the same as composing a symphony or playing an instrument. It is through using the properties of music (notes and instruments) that symphonies are made. It is through applying the relational dimension that the principle of human dignity can be translated into actual policies. It is in the relational understanding of human dignity where the philosophical approach of personalism can become applicable in policy making. The relational reality of the human being is the 'property of human dignity'.

Bishop Desmond Tutu said: "My humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in yours for we can only be human together." This is the idea of 'ubuntu', whereby we experience our humanity through our relations. The relational reality is shared by all and can be understood by everyone, which enables its translation into political relevance.

In our digital age, Christian Democracy needs a clear core message that guides its policies and can be understood and embraced by broad audiences. The relational understanding of human dignity is in our opinion that core message.

This publication will focus on the relational dimension as basis for policy making; the actual policy making (derived from this message) comes from the relational aspect of human dignity. It presents how relational thinking can renew Christian Democracy in Europe.

Johannes de Jong

Director Sallux

Relational Thinking as Renewal of Christian Democracy

Always a zero-sum game? Conflict in Europe today

Europe, like much of the world, has always experienced conflict. There has been war somewhere on the continent for nearly all of its history. At no time have all of us as Europeans held a united vision. Things are no better for those who identify with the label 'Christian'. But we cannot let this failure prevent us from cultivating a *vision of unity*. Human dignity demands that *every* person can live without fear and that none are excluded.

The problem with nearly any cause is that we are invited to identify with something that benefits some of society at the expense of others. We define ourselves in opposition to something else as if there is a zero-sum game where my gain is someone else's loss.

Such ideological incommensurability marks international relationships. Even though the invasion of Ukraine cannot be exclusively attributed to ideology, it exposes the tension between authoritarian Russia and the liberal West. This is connected to a larger division in which China and the USA represent opposing poles. At the same time, a 'soft', though vitriolic, 'culture war' is being fought at a more popular level, pitting 'progressive' against 'conservative'.

'Liberals' see no place at all for social structures that they see as repressive whilst 'conservatives' effectively struggle to give place in society to those who cannot easily fit within those traditional structures. More subtly, power continues to grow for an urban cognitive 'head-based' elite whose moral hegemony alienates much of rural life and keeps those whose work depends on 'heart' and 'hand' lower down the value chain. Many Europeans in the second group are already living in poverty.

Especially worrisome from a European perspective is the rise of a kind of nationalism that fails to give a positive account of how relationships with other nations should be conducted. We may sympathise with the concern to resist EU centralisation. But the answer cannot simply be 'pure freedom' if this means freedom *from* something. We must also be able to answer what freedom is *for*. Whether or not the UK's exit from the EU could ever have yielded a good result, the failure of Liz Truss's libertarian experiment exposes the myth that we can live as if we were free from interconnection to others.

At the same time, more 'moderate' European solutions can end up being equally exclusive. As one commentator recently pointed out, the old Christian Democracy centre-right has not much to offer to the youth who can see and are furious about its problems for people and planet. They want to go towards the left as a result. Political relationships in this continent expose a deep problem.

And that brings us to the subject of this short guide. When our starting point in politics is relationships between the whole populace, it shines light on some of our most difficult problems. Solutions remain covered in darkness when we start from specific entities (whether individual persons or groups) seen in isolation or, from the other side, when we start with bureaucratic structures. Relational Thinking brings a social vision that inspires a political philosophy grounded in real human relationships for humanity as a whole.

A gateway into relational thinking

This booklet gives an overview of how Relational Thinking (RT) works, from theory to practice. It touches on all of the main topics but does not get into details. For this, the reader is directed to *Sallux publications highlighted in green*. There are also in-text links to foundational research of the Jubilee Centre where RT originated and other useful references. So this publication functions as a gateway to RT and particularly to the work of Sallux in moving towards a relational Europe.

Because Sallux is committed to working within the political arena, a particular focus in this booklet will be given to politics. But it is suitable for *anyone* with *any* interest in political life, regardless of familiarity with the technicalities of the subject. For those who are already familiar with RT, this publication will provide a fresh presentation of what it is about, which also clarifies some of the points where there has been some ambiguity and points to further reading and action. It also combats the misperception that RT is about relationships in some vague way. 'Relationship' is a *general* term that RT employs in a *specific* way, as we will see.

There are two main sections: the first outlines the core features of Relational Thinking (1a) and gives an overview of its basics (1b). The second section shows how Relational Thinking is located in Europe today. It complements the central *principles* of Christian Democracy (2a), contributes to the development of *policy* (2b) and reframes the *process* of social change (2c).

To repeat: this booklet does not discuss every detail of RT or every topic that has been examined from this angle (for example technology and the 4th Industrial Revolution). It certainly does not locate RT within the academic discourse of po-

litical science or individual European nations' policy situations. But this account should communicate enough what RT is about to enable the reader to use it as a basis for political thought and action in their own contexts.

Part 1 - Relational Thinking: features and bases

'Relational Thinking' is sometimes known as 'Relationism' and could be understood as a 'social philosophy', a 'political philosophy', and a 'worldview'. So what exactly is RT? Fundamentally, it is an interpretative frame through which to see society: put simply, it's a **social vision** in light of which we see how things *ought to be* and can analyse how things *actually are*.

RT has never set out to be a comprehensive political philosophy; it has been developed in the context of *social reform* rather than *academic study*. Most of the work done within RT has been practically oriented rather than theoretically exhaustive. This includes both the original research by the Jubilee Centre in the UK (with the relational organisations that grew out of it) and bodies like Sallux that are inspired by RT to adopt *A Relational Agenda*. Whilst being practically oriented, RT has deliberately cultivated a macro-level vision so that it remains inclusive of the whole picture and can be applied in various contexts through diverse programmes and platforms. In this part we look at the **features** and **bases** of RT, which have been refined throughout the forty years of its development since the early 1980s.

1a – Key Features of Relational Thinking

RT has *four* main features to be explored in this section: its understanding of human nature (**anthropology**), **relationships** themselves, the **economy** and the centrality of **communication**.

Human nature: Relational anthropology

1. *Relationships at the heart of human nature*

RT starts from the premise that people are relational by nature. It is not that people *have* relationships; they actually *are* relationships. Humanity *is* a complex nexus of relationships and 'humanity' is the collective identity of 'people'. Therefore, what we mean by the word 'person' is always 'person-in-relationship'.

There is no 'pure individual' as if we have to strip the extraneous layers of human connections from any given person to reach the most fundamental reality. Individuals are vitally important, as we shall see, but they are never self-contained entities. Many aspects of my identity are simply given from birth through the

relational nexus of family, community and nation or ethnicity more widely.

When we recognise this, we can develop the idea of being 'persons-in-relationship'. It is not only that people are relational by nature in a general sense; humans are relational in a specific sense. They belong to family, wider community, nation and, ultimately, the global human family. Yes, one can physically exist after becoming detached from one or more of these relationships. But the trauma and damage to people that this causes indicates that a relational anthropology is not a *materialist* one: maintaining a society that facilitates people's connections to one another is not an optional extra.

We understand basic human nature to be defined by more than the minimum requirements for physical survival. Instead, a person is a human through their being part of the complex network of human relationships that exists (albeit in varying forms) as society the world over. In this view, death is not only the cessation of biological functioning but the severing of relationships with those who remain. At the same time, people cannot exist without the material conditions to sustain them, which brings us to our next point.

2. *Rooted in place*

Equally important to a person's humanity is the environment without which they could not live and which provides the only possible context for their life. Everyone is always *somewhere* – humans are not only people-in-relationship but people-in-place. Environmental location obviously involves different kinds of connections that are not mutual in the same way. Humans do not maintain the same level of active partnership with other organisms. For example, people depend directly on the death of individual plants (and animals for non-vegetarians) for them to live and there is also no verbal communication (a key component of relationship) with non-humans.

At the same time, there is between people and the natural world no other word than 'relationship' to describe the permanent interdependence, interconnectedness and interaction between people and the natural world. What is distinct about people is that they are *persons*, and that aspect has been the focus of RT. Therefore, humanity's relational nature includes an inseparable bond with the air, land, water and other creaturely life (including animals). RT looks to these relationships within the context of *personal* relationships, which is its focus. There is no relationship with the environment that is not at the same time a *social* relationship. This is why we need *A Relational Response to Climate Change*. We will see how this connects to institutional structures below.

Relationships themselves: three levels

For people to really flourish they must flourish not as individuals but as partners in relationship and as members of society and the world. This means that there are three levels at which Relational Thinking works: the individual, the interpersonal and the institutional.

1. *Individual: the call to love*

Much of the work on RT has assumed rather than stated that **individual choice** must play an active role in relationships. The motto that gives RT common ground with many other views on social ethics is 'love your neighbour as yourself'. Originally a biblical phrase, it expresses a basic level of morality to which *all* would voluntarily subscribe.

'Love' has generally been thought of as a private matter. As such, it is rarely used in reference to politics. However, if relationships make up the fabric of society and individuals choosing to love make up relationships, then love should really be seen as a public virtue. There are signs that this is already the case, whether in the world of business, politics, environment or theology.

Because individuals' decisions to love develop connections with others, we need to think specifically about the what needs to happen between two (or more) people for this connection to be sustained and healthy. This brings us to the second level at which RT works.

2. *Interpersonal: developing fraternity*

It is easy for people to talk about relationships as 'good' or 'bad'. But whilst we may have some instinctive idea of what 'good' or 'bad' mean, it's not easy to analyse the factors that determine quality. A distinctive contribution of RT is to build a framework within which the quality of **interpersonal relationships** can be measured.

Having been refined over the years, this framework can now be straightforwardly presented in the form of three questions:

> Do they know each other? (This is a question of direct, durable and diverse interaction.)
>
> Are their basic goals aligned? (This is a question of common purpose.)

Is the relationship fair to all involved? (This is a question of justice in the use of power, since power is often not equally distributed between parties.)

What we mean by a 'good relationship' is one where there is mutual knowledge, common purpose and justice. The word used in Relational Research to describe this quality of relationship is 'proximity', but this can come across as a cold, analytical and non-political term. Rather, the value that proximity cultivates is better described as *fraternity*.

Interpersonal relationships can happen at any level of society between any two members (or groups). But they never happen in a vacuum and always affect the other parties involved with them. So what about the shape of society itself? What relevance does it have to cultivating *fraternal relationships*? Here we move on to our third feature of RT.

3. *Institutional: structuring a flourishing society*

A relational anthropology recognises a basic universal fraternity because human nature is shared by humanity across history and space. But because humans are finite and bound to specific times and places, they can only experience quality relationships with a limited number of people. What can establish contexts within which relational flourishing can happen without becoming too static and limiting on the one hand or too transient and random on the other? This is not just an abstract problem. Loneliness is often most prevalent in cities; the sheer number of inhabitants gives a false hope of intimacy if there are no communities that people can be part of. A community with a specific role in the social structure can be termed an 'institution', which combines intimacy with structure, hence the need for **institutional relationships**.

RT prioritises good relationships, so the institution with greatest potential for mutual knowledge, common purpose and parity is prioritised. This is the **household**. It is strongest when it has family and marriage (itself an institution) at its heart. But its closeness cannot make it exclusive; it must be able to include others. These could be relatives (especially parents) and also non-family members, even if only temporarily. Households are communities where there is most natural proximity, giving them a unique capacity for intimacy and, conversely, for pain and abuse. They also share basic physical necessities of life - at least shelter and water, but often food and other resources too. As such, they are economic units and not just emotionally connected groups; this is part of why we need *Stronger Families for a Flourishing Society*.

For maximal communication, which is the key to good relationships, there must be opportunities to be involved in every aspect of society. The **local area** is the best context for this. That means that ideally (though hardly ever in reality), the infrastructure and employment opportunities that its inhabitants need should be within a locally governed area with responsibility for its own natural resources. There are several specific institutional forms combined within a local area, of course. But the key is that economic and political participation should be able to happen from one's home base. This does not mean that nobody ever travels or moves home. Rather, it means that they should not *be forced* to move in order to participate in these spheres.

Within this schema, **national government** has a more limited role than is true for most countries today. This is not about *small* state but about *decentralised* state and, as we will see below, this would require radical changes made via many different policy avenues. RT highlights three main functions of national government, where the role of state is to serve the nation. These functions are as follows:

- To promote societal coherence, both through celebrating culture (e.g. through sporting events, festivals and artistic collections) and through guaranteeing justice by ensuring standardised criminal law, healthcare and education. National government sets laws, but is not always (or even usually) responsible for executing it. In fact, RT emphasises the role of locally administered justice as much as possible. The same principle applies to its view of healthcare and education.

- To ensure that regions have the capacity to function well by monitoring and evaluating (rather than controls) these provisions at regional level. This means that citizens are not having to deal directly with a large, centralised, bureaucratic entity but with local agencies, which is relationally more healthy.

- To be responsible for external relationships, especially those with other nations. International relations start from the basis of a common human dignity, regardless of ethnicity or national allegiance. However, since relationships must always be two-way, actual co-operation on economic and security matters (which are the two key issues) can only be pursued between nations who share the same core values. The emphasis here is on establishing community with a confederal approach towards neighbours and as many nations as possible rather than alliances that dissolve national identity or reinforce regional hostility. This leaves the door open

for multi-national organisations of course. An RT framework can even be used in reunification efforts.

Having looked at institutional relationships, we can now see how understand engagement with the **environment** more clearly. The way people relate to the natural world depends on the place associated with their institutional relationships. Households, local areas, nations or even broader groups have different areas of responsibility and different levels of detail. Members of a household cannot be directly responsible for policies that keep oceans from being polluted, but they can keep their drains clean and use waste water sensibly. Likewise, international bodies cannot be responsible for maintaining the soil fertility of a household's garden, but they can legislate in favour of sustainable land use by multi-national corporations. How people relate to place depends on the relational structure within which they are acting.

Relational economy: strengthening society through economic activity

All resources ultimately depend on the natural world for their existence. Environmental reality cannot be separated from economics. But neither can *social* reality. Production, consumption and distribution of finite or 'scarce' resources both *depends* on society's institutional structure and should *support* this structure. Therefore, 'economy' is not a technical discipline for experts but a matter for the people. Everyone has equal stake and participation in the economy and it does not belong to the any institution. This includes households as much as the state or international organisations; basic work done in the home, though not paid (and thus not represented in GDP) is economically very significant indeed. This is why we can talk about *Economics of the Family*.

So the 'economy' is not a separate organism that must be kept 'growing' at all costs. 'Economy' is the way in which society relates to the natural resources needed. There can be no such thing as a strong economy in a politically or socially dysfunctional society. The primary function of economic activity is to strengthen relationships through producing, consuming and distributing every type of resource in a way that all can flourish – *In Essence, Economy is About Life!*

1. *Two enemies: abstraction and extraction*

There are two main forces that a relational economy must push against in today's world. The first of these is **abstraction**. People often talk about economics using terms and statistics that obscure the environmental and human reality underlying them. The 'market' has become a mythical being with a life of its own. But

the market is the aggregate result of billions of humans relating to one another in all kinds of different ways behind the units of exchange that show up in statistics. An increasingly complex electronic interface for most trade makes it easy to forget that there are people – individuals and institutions – on the other end of the computer. Likewise, lengthy supply chains make it easy to forget the person whose sweat gives us low-cost products. Being aware of this is part of what we mean by *Thoughtful Eating*.

If we are not faced with real people in front of us, it is easy to operate in a way that simply maximises our own benefit. This feeds into the second enemy to relational economy, which is **extraction**. When material self-interest is seen as a straightforwardly good thing then the goal of economic activity is to extract as much as possible. But RT does not distort humans into rational, autonomous consumers; because relational needs are as important as material ones, a person's self-interest must always be reconciled with the needs of others. Instead of operating on the basis of *extraction*, this mentality leads to the pursuit of mutual wealth creation, where wealth includes (but goes beyond) material prosperity; we must shift mindset *From Extraction to Creation*.

2. *One golden rule*

In order to guard against the relationally destructive patterns of abstraction and extraction, RT has established a golden rule for economic thinking:

> There should be a free market for goods and services but restrictions on trading factors of production (i.e. land, labour and capital).

We can break this down into its elements to explain the rationale at work in this rule:

A **free market** allows resources to be managed at an appropriate level. A state controlled economy may protect the vulnerable from extraction. However, it treats meaningful relationships between people as economically inconsequential. As a result, organised exchange at a household or local level is not allowed to strengthen the relationships that make up the fabric of society.

Anything that results directly from human productive activity can be classified as **goods and services**. This does not include those things that make these products possible in the first place, the **factors of production**. Everyone needs land, as we have seen. It is a source of life to which everyone has a right, and cannot be bought up by the most powerful buyer, leaving others with literally no living.

Likewise, labour is a part of human life and cannot be treated as a tradeable commodity without regard to its human value. Capital is more complex, but we are mainly talking about *financial* capital. Treating capital as a commodity through which to make money (through debt, interest and complex financial instruments) hides the human reality that produced it through labour and can suffer under the burden of bonded labour through debt. Recent history and current crises show how problematic the current treatment of capital as commodity is.

We can now see why RT is opposed to **abstraction**. When land, labour and capital are abstracted from the human reality underlying them, the weak end up suffering at the hands of the strong. This is especially true when economic behaviour is guided by the value and behavior of **extraction**. But what kind of alternative economy could embody this golden rule? If Corporate Capitalism is not the best we have to offer and state controlled solution is relationally problematic, then what comes *After Capitalism*?

3. *An alternative vision*

Instead of an economic paradigm that separates the management of resources from the society within which it takes place, RT holds out the vision of a **stakeholder economy**. This is a mode of operating whereby *every* relationship involved in economic activity is considered as part of the process.

This includes five primary stakeholders who are directly and actively involved: employees, suppliers, customers, directors (who are also employees but play a distinct role) and shareholders (or investors). It also includes secondary stakeholders, which are the local community and environment. These do not have an active role within an organisations' functioning but can be directly or indirectly involved by virtue of their being in the same locality. Not all economic activity involves all six stakeholders in the same way, of course. Agriculture, for example, has the natural world (animals and land) as a primary stakeholder along two or three others (director/employee – often the same person – and customers) and the secondary stakeholder of the local community, which is particularly important.

Communication: the mechanics of relationships

It should now be clear *what* RT means by good relationships. But we have not yet asked *how* relationships are strengthened. The basic answer is very simple: communication.

The value of conversation to interpersonal relationships needs no argument. But recognition of this value must also apply to public discourse. Structures that allow direct dialogue between citizens (as with more participatory forms of democracy) must inform the political organisation for which RT aims.

Equally important is non-verbal communication, which for many people (and for everyone for the first stage of their lives) is the only form of communication available. This is also the mode of engagement that non-human creatures use, which is another reason not to neglect it. However, electronically mediated interaction further minimises the role of non-verbal communication.

Communication also includes giving and receiving. This includes gifts of course, but is not restricted to 'pure gifts'. Even the way in which items are exchanged commercially can strengthen or weaken relationships, which is part of what makes the economy socially and politically important. Economy participates in the wider dynamic of giving and receiving that is more than the exact exchange of equivalents. Especially when done with a smile, a few friendly words, or extra care given to the presentation of a product, economic activity can be integrated within the communicative process of giving and receiving that forms the fabric of society.

1b – The sources of Relational Thinking

RT takes a view of relationships that is very distinctive. Social commitment is seen as *covenantal* rather than *contractual* or *transactional*. Both 'private' and 'public' relationships presuppose a permanent bond ('covenant') that underpins them rather than continuing only so long as people feel they are benefiting. This means that the contrast between private and public realms is relativised. Personal relationships turn out to have economic and political significance and vice versa – the social fabric consists of relationships within and between all institutional levels.

How can RT take such a radical view? What is its basis? There are actually three main bases for RT: Common sense, contemporary science and Christian Scriptures (which include the Hebrew Bible and Greek New Testament). The last of these is the most important for its *content* but not necessarily for its *communication*. Certainly the Bible is the chief source of inspiration and RT will have no force without direct biblical engagement. But RT is a social vision that is not restricted to Christians. Biblical revelation is in line with natural law and therefore can be supported by both science and common sense. It is indeed common sense in the most obvious and deepest sense of the term to structure society according to the relationships that we all know shape us. Therefore, RT appeals to shared knowl-

edge which helps communicate it to the majority of Europeans today.

Mentioning this wider context raises an important point about RT. Although RT has been developed primarily in reference to the biblical text itself rather than its historical interpretation, this has not happened in a cultural vacuum. RT has a lot of common ground with other European intellectual developments within Catholic Social Teaching, Kuyperian (protestant) thought and, in the UK, Postliberalism. These belong to the tradition of Christian Democracy, which has challenged the excesses of liberal individualism (in corporate capitalism) and state totalitarianism (in socialism).

Common sense

It may seem strange to advance an argument that is claiming to be unusual and alternative, and then to say that it's 'common sense'. However, most of the world already gives relationships the prominence that liberalism denies. The idea of 'ubuntu', which characterises the mentality in the sub-Sahara (where the seeds that grew into RT were sown) holds that 'I am because we are'. This gives rise to patterns of behaviour that are often more relationally healthy than behaviour in the 'more developed' West.

When we stop to think, it becomes obvious how relationships define us: this includes families (for good or ill), friends, educators, colleagues and authorities at local or national levels. Life not only begins and often ends in a state of total dependence on others, but we can *never* be in a situation where managing (or avoiding) relationships is not central to our experience. All of what we eat (including what farmers eat) comes through relationships with people and to the natural world with its creatures and resources. When we stop and think about it, there is no way in which to reasonably conceive of ourselves and the world around us without assuming inherent relational interconnection. Even so-called 'independent' characters are shaped relationally by reacting *against* these forces.

Liberalism, the dominant intellectual trend in modern Europe, has a human image of a rational autonomous individual. It obscures what should be common sense: we are relational beings.

Contemporary sciences

Contemporary scientific thought increasingly supports RT. Surprisingly for some, the natural has led the way to the social. This development has been recognised as theologically important from before the time when RT originated. As early as

1975, influential Scottish theologian Thomas Torrance insisted that *all thinking* (including theology and social sciences) had to contend with the new understanding of reality being developed in the natural sciences, heralded by relativity theory:

> 'This is a dynamic view of the world as a continuous integrated manifold of fields of force in which relations between bodies are just as ontologically real as the bodies themselves, for it is in their interrelations and transformations that things are found to be what and as and when they are'.

Quantum mechanics has taken us even further in this direction. Now, a thing only 'exists' insofar as it has relations with other things, including the person observing that thing. In a review of physicist Carlo Rovelli's recent book, this is described as

> '...the "relational" interpretation that maintains quantum theory does not describe the wa in which quantum objects manifest themselves to "observers", but describes how every physical object manifests itself to any other physical object. The world that we observe is continuously interacting; it is better understood as a web of interactions and relations rather than objects.'

Parallel theoretical moves are being made in scientific disciplines other than physics, especially in neuro-science. Leading psychiatrist Dan Siegel defines mind as 'a self-organizing, emergent process of both the "embodied brain" and relationships'. Because 'energy and information arise via the bodily mechanism of the "embodied brain" and are shared through patterns of communication within relationships'. We can go even further to look at subjects as diverse as dendrology or cosmology. Research in health confirms this need to assert the ontological reality of relationships with prominent studies showing the increased longevity from good relationships.

Christian Scripture and Tradition

The original impetus for RT was a search for a biblical social vision in response to the ideologies prevalent in East Africa during the 1970s. Michael Schluter, who was working on this problem in Kenya with Roy Clements, found such a vision in the Torah – generally overlooked in mainstream Christian ethics. He saw that in combination with Jesus' double "love command" it brought relationships to the heart of the discussion. With the help of many other activists and thinkers, especially the Old Testament scholarship of Chris Wright and Jonathan Burnside, RT established a biblical social vision. This has been discussed at length in *A Relational Vision for Europe* but it can be summarised here under three headings:

1. *Creation and fall*

A relational anthropology comes first of all from humans being created in the image of the Trinity, i.e. that God is Relational. In Genesis, male and female are given in a family relationship with the main task of expanding this relationship by having children and exercising mutually beneficial authority in relation the natural world. This universal mandate was not to be carried out randomly but starting in a single garden. However, the divine mandate was rejected, with severe relational consequences (hence the chaos that political engagement must still deal with).

2. *Israel and the Law*

Against this backdrop, God establishes the people of Israel to be a relational society that points towards the God-given ideal. The legal material in the Torah (especially Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy) sets out the shape of this society. RT derives special impetus from Leviticus 25, which establishes a fundamental order: each household is given its own place, which includes its own land to cultivate. 'Jubilee' laws ensure that this land is owned in perpetuity, which also abolishes the institution of slavery tied to landlessness. This structure makes rural areas relationally stable, with more flexibility in urban centres, and enables wider communities to be formed as a network of these relationally stable units.

Elsewhere in Torah the decentralisation necessary for this stability is set out, with national-level governmental function focused on international relations rather than domestic matters. But underlying this political structure is economic regulation that curtails the use of debt and interest for profit, hence the principle that you can freely make money from goods and services but cannot freely trade capital itself. Like land and labour, capital is subject to laws that maintain the relational fabric of society stably enough for relationships to flourish and not be subject to extreme inequality or endless flux.

From the rest of the Old Testament we get a sharper sense of what happens when the Law is ignored and everything goes wrong. This comes through historical accounts (starting with the political disaster in the latter years of Solomon) as well as denunciation of certain social practices by the prophets. At the same time, the future orientation of RT is made clear through prophetic visions of judgment (which were social critiques rather than abstract moralism) leading to the ultimate fraternity of all nations and corresponding harmony with all creation.

In all this, the crucial significance of relationships is emphasised by the fact that the worst possible punishment is to be 'cut off from Israel'. Here, exile and death

amount to much the same thing. Hence the servant who suffers for his people – later revealed to be Jesus – is separated from relationship; he is 'cut off from the land of the living' for others' sake (Isaiah 53:8).

3. *Jesus and the Church*

The New Testament does not question this basic social vision. Jesus Christ embodies the relational life that God's people were meant to embody. In the Gospels we find a person who relates perfectly (if controversially!) to others. This includes family, friends, local culture (often through parties!), local economy (through being a tradesman) and local worship, including Temple visits. Jesus was also embedded in political life; he is variously *discreet*, *disengaged* or *dissenting*. But finally, he is *defiant*: he refuses to endorse violence and submits instead to unjust and politically motivated execution.

With the resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit comes the hope and power needed to pioneer the ideal relational life. This ideal is always linked to the gospel in the earliest Church teaching; in the New Testament letters, social ethics are not optional. But in Revelation we learn of the persistence of evil and the impossibility of ethical perfection until Christ's second coming.

This is the biblical-historical juncture at which RT locates itself - in the time where all human life (not least political life) faces forces that militates against good relationships. God's people - the Church - has not always been on the right side of these forces. Because of this damaged credibility, RT has also developed bases that appeal to those with misgivings about Christianity.

At the same time it is hard to see how human dignity could have become the basis of the EU without its multifaceted Christian tradition. Even the existence of liberalism is ultimately derived from this history. So we should be aware of how a *biblical* basis also provides a *common* basis.

The clear link between RT and Personalism as well as its general similarity to Catholic Social Teaching will be recognisable for Roman Catholics in Europe. The basis in the Bible will be familiar for Protestants. Evangelicals and Pentecostals will find common ground in the notion that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit initiated and continues to inspire people to pioneer the relational life. And those who are rooted in the Orthodox tradition will understand that RT is ultimately rooted in the Christian understanding of the Trinity. Christians from outside Europe who became our fellow citizens may value the fact that RT as presented here was developed in Africa and has the power to transform Europe's future.

Section 2 – Relational Thinking in Europe Today

For RT to have any impact, it cannot just be a self-contained theory. It must interact with the political ideas and social reality of Europe. In particular, RT must contribute to the wider aims of Christian Democracy, which stands in need of revitalisation.

It has not always been recognised how closely related RT is to CD. This is because RT was, despite its origins in sub-Saharan Africa, initially developed in England, where CD does not have the same presence as it does in continental Europe. However, RT shares all of the most important principles of CD and moves towards similar policies, as well as working according to the same basic processes.

If RT and CD are really so closely related, then why do we need this new thinking at all? What can RT add to the rich, well-developed tradition of thought and political activity of CD? RT can contribute two main things, which may seem paradoxical: it is rooted in the Bible and it has universal relevance.

RT was initially developed from engagement with Christian Scripture, but it also *develops* from engagement with the same Scriptures. Because of this direct engagement and inspiration, it can maintain a spiritual power that propels it forward. Such power is easily lost with Christian movements for whom conserving tradition or staying relevant becomes the biggest concern. *Christian* power is rooted in love and does not depend on grasping *political* power.

A biblical basis also gives RT its focus on relationships, which makes it universally relevant. In contemporary European culture, traditional religious affiliation and political participation is proving less and less attractive to younger generations. So CD must find a way of engaging with what is most highly valued, such as the ideals of community (tradition), interconnectedness and social justice. Focusing on relationships engages with all these ideals, integrates them within a vision of society, and shows how they can be practiced equally through informal networks (bottom-up) as through formal processes (top-down).

It could be said that RT fits with CD like hand in glove. Perhaps like hand in a *boxing glove*, the two pack a greater punch together. In this section we will see how the **principles** of RT and CD are complementary and mutually informative (2a). We will then explore some of the core **policies** that RT implies (2b) before looking at the kind of **process** involved in moving towards a relational vision of society from where we are now (2c).

2a – Principles

Here we will look at how RT relates to six of the core principles of CD. In each sub-section below, we will follow the same pattern: describe a shared principle and then show how CD and RT are mutually informative of how this principle should be understood.

One prominent concept that *won't* be treated here is the 'common good'. This is because it functions as an overall orientation for CD than a distinct principle, making it equivalent to the meta-principle of 'relationships' in RT. It is worth bearing in mind that all of these principles are oriented towards 'the common good', just as RT is oriented towards 'good relationships'.

Personalism: the foundation of human dignity

Personalism lies at the very heart of CD. It gives an account of the human person as inherently valuable, making it foundational for the value of human dignity that united Western culture. Although the ideas of Personalist thinkers like Jacques Maritain have been taken up by liberal and socialist causes, Personalism rejects *both* individualism *and* collectivism, as well as materialism. In its account of human dignity, it is in harmony with RT's relational anthropology. What the CD understanding of human dignity adds to RT is the explicit statement of the *inviolability* of human dignity. What RT adds is an understanding of human relational nature and relationships that break down the distinction between 'public' and 'private', meaning that the *economic* and *political* structure of society becomes equally as important as its *social* makeup.

Popularism (not populism!): people before procedures

Popularism upholds the priority of *the people*. Instead of certain systems and groups determining the shape of society, this conviction ensures that civic participation is open to everyone regardless of demographic profile or structural status. This view of the people is essentially *pluralist*, involving every member of society rather than a single cultural or ethnic group (as is the case with *populism*). It is consonant with RT's view of relationships at every level being equally important for societal participation. What CD adds is the connection between popularism and certain systems of government, notably direct and participatory forms of democracy. RT shows how such forms are functions of *relationship*, which helps to ensure that people come before systems and not vice versa.

Progress: towards a better future, not an imaginary past

A common impression of CD is that it wants to revive a 'golden age' where Christians ruled the world and everything was in order. Often those who support CD strengthen this impression by trying to stick to "traditional" values. Those who are more progressively minded (especially among younger generations) reject such conservatism as illiberal. But in reality, CD has always been future-oriented, believing in God's provision through political developments towards the redemption of humanity. The social vision of both CD and RT is an *ideal*, not to be confused with a static or coercive *blueprint*. This *ideal* has yet to be fully realised, even if some of its elements have been realised in the past. CD helps strengthen RT with a philosophy of history that is teleological, where divine purposes announced in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament gospel eventually overcome humanity's destructive impulses. What RT does is to give us a realistic picture of how challenging this process is. It does this by a kind of socio-scientific approach to the story of biblical Israel, where the historical books and prophets demonstrate the interaction of positive forces in pursuing the relational social vision of Torah.

Solidarity: leaving no-one behind

'Solidarity' is the most frequently used concept of the six we are looking at in today's political discourse, as David McAllister's recent EPP speech illustrates. This concept is about binding society together, the one to the all, and the all to the one. It is not just an idealistic, subjective feeling but is rooted in the conviction that the common good is only served when everybody is included. Where RT focuses on the covenantal bond that binds society as a whole with *all* its relationships, the CD idea of solidarity is associated with justice for those who are excluded or marginalised. Of course, RT emphasises justice in its idea of 'right relationships', but the term 'solidarity' makes this more explicit. What RT adds is the definition of relational *quality* as that of *kinship* and *fraternity*, which prevents the idea of social solidarity becoming cold or abstract. It helps to clarify that inclusion means inclusion in relationship and not just inclusion in the equitable distribution of resources (though access to material resources is an essential part of it).

Subsidiarity: decentralising power

The most important structural principle in CD is subsidiarity, where no person or group should do for another person or group what that person or group can do themselves or restrict their power so to do. Underlying this concept is a belief that there is a certain order in creation and society. What makes it so hard to maintain is the constant threat of agency becoming centralised wherever there is most power. This is not only a problem at the macro-level of nations and supra-national organisations; it happens within highly patriarchal families, where women and children are given less agency than they should have. Therefore, subsidiarity involves not only establishing a constitution or a codified institutional order – it involves a constant effort of decentralisation.

CD has a rich and complex history of thought and action around this concept, both through Catholic Social Teaching (where the term subsidiarity comes from) and the Reformed perspective of Abraham Kuyper (who talks about the related idea of 'sphere sovereignty'). Subsidiarity is not only about groups and institutions. It incorporates individual freedom into a broad political scheme, since an 'individual' has his or her own sphere of authority just like any other collective or institution. Thus 'subsidiarity' adds to RT a logical basis for a social order where all are included. What RT adds is the insistence that the 'family' is not only a nuclear grouping but an extended, multi-generational institution rooted in a physical place (hence the term 'household'). This ensures that the smallest grouping of 'household' is maintained as an *economic* and not just a *social* entity.

Social Capitalism: economy that strengthens society

Ideological division goes hand-in-hand with over-simplification. Nowhere is that more obvious than with popular debates around economics framed as 'capitalism versus communism' or 'free market versus state control'. CD has never accepted this simplification; the 1891 papal encyclical by Leo XIII that has been so influential already sets out to argue against *both* extremes. 'Social capitalism' is the attempt to balance these impulses; it maintains individual freedom but regulates it so as to direct private enterprise towards the common good and avoid the disparities of power that are socially damaging. RT also has its genesis in trying to establish a Christian alternative to often selfish, abusive capitalism and authoritarian, dehumanising communism.

CD has a track record of wrestling with the challenges of establishing the balance needed for a 'social capitalism' in practice; the 'golden economic rule' of RT simplifies this complexity. But what RT also adds is the insistence that no principle or axiom will be beneficial without acknowledging that the economy is a function of *relationships* between real people. Every single person in society is involved in, and affected by, economy; each person involved in any specific economic activity must be taken into account in how it is conducted, hence the term 'stakeholder economy'. This is one of the most difficult but rewarding ideas to implement in practice, as we will see in our discussion of policy that follows.

2b – Policies

There is no point staying at the level of ideas. Certainly it is important to get our thinking straight, which is why this gateway to RT needs to be comprehensive enough to cover all of the relevant areas. But we need to show what these ideas look like in practice.

This section will give some indications of key policy implications of RT. Obviously it cannot provide a 'one-size-fits-all' list of policies that should be adopted in order to be in line with RT. A relational vision of society will look different from place to place and needs to be pursued with a variety of specific goals depending on circumstances.

However, there are core institutional features of RT that which imply certain policy aims, even if the specific policies required to achieve these aims vary from situation to situation. Therefore, this section identifies **seven** key policy areas. Each policy area will include an institutional **aim**, some indicative **policy applications** and a relevant contemporary **example**. Readers should be aware that other issues could have been added to these seven policy areas, but these seem to be the most immediately relevant and central to RT.

Before going further, our understanding of 'policy' should be clarified. It is *not* that the six principles each lead directly to policies. It is also *not* that 'policies' rely on a centralised power dictating everything. Each of these policies can be adopted to a greater or lesser extent by people or groups themselves, regardless of government legislation. Besides, the level of transformation required necessitates a gradualist approach rather than authoritarian, relationally destructive quick-fixes. That is why we begin by looking at the citizenry rather than administrative structures. Nevertheless, because this booklet is aimed at those who are interested and involved in politics, each area will be applied to a governmental policy aim for the sake of illustration.

Individual: every citizen engaged

1. *Aim: increase civic participation*

A relational society involves everybody participating in relationships. To some extent, it happens purely by virtue of being born. But this fundamental expression of human dignity includes participation in *public* relationships and not just *private* or *interpersonal* ones. RT therefore requires that people live out their relational identity as **citizens** as part of **civil society**. This means that conditions for civic participation should be enhanced by cultivating a space for engagement that is

neither subject to the domination of state or market forces. Without organising at the civil society level, there is a danger that people get organised exclusively by state and market as *voters* and *consumers*.

2. *Policy application: civic education*

Ignorance of civil processes and fundamental rights is a huge barrier to universal participation. Therefore, there needs to be a renewed commitment to often neglected process of **civic education** in homes, schools and community level as well as on a larger scale. This includes developing the understanding of human dignity and its implications as spelled out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights as well as more specifically relational rights. Improved engagement is manifest primarily in increased *communication*, which is the key mechanism of relationships as we have seen. Engagement with civic education should be mandatory, though ideological positions should not be so. When certain groups absent themselves (or are excluded) from this process, society as a whole suffers.

3 *Examples: Citizens assemblies and community organising*

At the European level, the development of citizens' assemblies could help create a better forum that can be accessed by anyone (including online), making it broadly inclusive. At local level, the community organising movement operates through a process of education, activism and assembly to create broad-based alliances across institutional and party lines. Such initiatives risk becoming ideologically monochrome if it is assumed that only certain types of people attend them and there is no reason why everyone should not be able to take part.

Households: holistic and strong

1. *Aim: establish rooted homes for all*

A household is the first community to which a person belongs and the most basic economic unit (more fundamental than the government or a firm). Instead of dividing these two functions from each other, households can be strengthened when their holistic nature is recognised. The social aspect benefits when the economic aspect is attended to, and vice versa. There are two basic elements that need to be addressed for households to flourish: the first is **place**. Households cannot exist without a place to live. Housing policy is crucial to households; when there is a scarcity of suitable and affordable houses, the formation of households suffers.

The second element of a household is the **people** traditional equation of a household with a nuclear family is problematic. It has tended to separate younger generations from older ones, when each are important to each other. A closed nuclear family also excludes potential non-familied household members, whether temporary or permanent. At the same time, families have their unique character because the strongest bonds between people are those that are multi-faceted and generative. This is why marriage, with its emotional, physical, legal, economic and procreational potential is so strong, as is the relationships between parents and children. Close families are, in turn, robust enough to welcome temporary and permanent members, whether part of the same extended family or not.

2. *Policy application: include households within community development budget*

Treating houses as 'homes' rather than commodities is a necessary first step, and governments can introduce measures to ensure that the best living space is not simply sold to the highest bidder. Likewise at the level of building and production, subsidising houses that enable multiple types of occupancy (children, elderly and/or infirm and semi-independent lodgers) or co-location of extended family benefits both for households and the wider community that they form. Of course, local availability of employment and services is equally important to enabling strong households as the physical houses themselves.

The second constituent element is people. Economic policies can directly support the formation of such households by subsidising childcare, adoption, care for the elderly and those otherwise in need. Methods of taxation can indirectly achieve the same goal, via household-based taxation and marriage allowance for example.

Often 'family' becomes an ideological football, which can obscure an obvious fact: cohesive families contribute to flourishing households, which in turn contribute to the development of flourishing communities. What this approach does is to treat the crucial issue of families within this larger economic and social aims. This does not solve the difficult problem of how 'family' should be understood and composed, and there is an intellectual and moral battle to be fought around this. But this question need not be a barrier to co-operation around the promotion of strong households.

3. *Examples: Vienna and Ukrainian refugee schemes*

Vienna's housing policies subsidise high-quality, mixed-occupancy dwellings in

a way that takes away the sigma of social housing. Residents are not in constant fear of being pushed out by rising prices and have access to 'clinics, shops, kindergartens and the city's first public libraries'. Numerous schemes encourage households to support the dependent or vulnerable. Most recently, the influx of refugees from Ukraine has led to innovation in this area. Financial support is given to those who host Ukrainians, who in turn are supported to join the workforce. Such schemes work best in already strong households, and it gives an insight into the mutual economic benefits of what may appear as 'charity' at first sight.

Local development: self-sustaining and interconnected

1. *Aim: develop regional cohesion*

Local areas provide the bridge between households and national (or supra-national) government in the social vision of RT. However, efforts towards regional development are often too weak in the face of the economic and political gravitational force towards the big European centres. The principle of subsidiarity necessitates the establishment of local areas comprised of interconnected communities within a region with sufficient public, private and civil society institutions to be self-sustaining.

2. *Policy application: public, private and third sector institutions based in local areas*

Looking at each of the main sectors in turn, we begin with the public sector. Distributing national government offices and civil servants around the country (as *is done* in Wales but *not done* in England) is a straightforward way to combat centralisation. But this must also be accompanied by an increase in the actual competencies of government at the most local levels (which varies across Europe, as shown by the 2011 Council of European Municipalities and Regions report). Budgetary control must obviously increase along with this.

In the private sector there must be a requirement for businesses to demonstrate positive local impact, going a step further than more general 'corporate social responsibility'. This applies especially to banks, whose congregation in a few capital cities concentrates financial capital as well as human resources. More will be said on this issue under the heading of 'stakeholder economy' (see below). The strengthening of civil society institutions achieved by strong individuals and households (see above) can be undone if third sector organisations all have their headquarters in the big urban centres. There is no reason why preferential business rate relief should not be given to locally based organisations.

3. *Examples: Switzerland and Cohesion Policy*

Switzerland is famous case-study for direct democracy, whereby the constitutional principle of subsidiarity ensures that participation in the smallest and most local level of government has an impact on the communities within which people live. In the European Union a more specifically economic cohesion policy is pursued. Here support is targeted, at least in theory, towards local regional development in a way that combines private, public and third-sector actors and diminishes the developmental disparity across the Union. The idea of self-sustainable local areas can sound utopian, but these major examples show how moves in this direction can be realistic.

National government: serving the people

1. *Aim: constantly decentralising governance*

The main political problem that RT needs to address is the centralisation of power, which weakens those local institutions that facilitate good relationships. Therefore, the main policy aim for national governmental functioning is that it works to move power outward to citizens, households and local areas. This does not make national government obsolete. Maintaining parity between regions and sections of society according to constitutional standards is best done from a body that is (theoretically) neutral with regards to regional alliance. In addition to this, national government serves its people through conducting international relations, which obviously need a central point of contact. Of course, international relationships can and should be developed at more local levels as well (as per town twinning programmes).

2. *Policy application: devolution of budgetary competence*

In order to move power outwards within the basic national structure as it exists, there must be an active policy of devolution (ore radical structural change - towards federalism, for example - would require constitutional reform). We should recall that citizens, households and local areas are not entirely dependent on national government to give them power. However, where centralisation has become a problem (as it has in much of Europe), then devolution must counteract this. A key measure of power is inevitably budgetary control; with welfare in particular, releasing funds for distribution and use at household and local level would increase the sense of mutual care and combat the problem of dependence on a state whose services can more easily become depersonalised. Increasing the proportion of regional, as opposed to national, tax is another concrete way to

devolve power and responsibility without constitutional reform.

3. *Examples: devolution in the UK*

The UK provides an example of devolution that is instructive both for what it achieves and for what it *fails* to achieve. One of the many ironies about Brexit is that 'leave' voters were often unhappy about the idea of being subject to decisions from other nations' politicians that they had not elected and could not remove. But the nations of Scotland and Northern Ireland voted 'remain' and found themselves in exactly this position: their fate was decided by Wales and (especially) England. Since 1998, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have their own parliamentary bodies, with varied powers. In many respects they are more like regions of the nation (UK) than separate nations, and are often treated that way from the centre of power in London. Many regions of England are calling for devolution (e.g. Yorkshire) that would give them budgetary competency comparable to the three 'devolved' parliaments.

What the example of the UK shows is that shared cultural and regional cohesion, which is part of what facilitates good relationships, does not automatically resist decentralisation. What is required is constant effort towards devolution *within* complex and unsatisfactory constitutional arrangements (as each one in Europe is, to some extent). In other words, devolution is never a straightforward solution but it involves constantly resisting the tendency of power to centralise and a commitment to constant negotiation and compromise with the rest of society. This is a much more relationally healthy process than believing the lie that 'independence' will solve every problem. Even if it is difficult and painful, wrestling with others towards a better balance of power is preferable to simply breaking relationships. This is the greatest challenge of the European Union, which brings us to our next topic.

Europe: a community of peoples

1. *Aim: an EU that is not 'Brussels' but instead 'our Europe'*

The EU has been a blessing for our continent in many ways. The EU has deep roots in CD and would not have existed without it. While the support of the EU is higher than before, we need to recognise that this support is fragile and uneven spread throughout populations.

There is a false dichotomy in the debate over the EU in which 'EU enthusiasts' are automatically in favour of centralising power in 'Brussels' and those who are

against that are automatically 'eurosceptics'. Being in favour of a different arrangement of the inner workings of the EU does not mean less enthusiasm for the EU itself. It is possible to be an 'EU enthusiast' and (for that reason) against the concentration of power in the EU apparatus for the sake of it. Embracing *both* national sovereignty *and* the EU is possible; acknowledging that would broaden the support for the EU. The EU needs a new self-understanding that does not make itself distant from all those who are not 'well-educated citizens of the world'. We need a more relational Europe.

A relational EU may be achieved by a more *Confederal Europe*. Or an EU that is able to accommodate confederal approach or elements. To be *confederal* means an institutional arrangement whereby political sovereignty remains with nations rather than being ceded to a central government as in a *federation* (which is more like the way EU operates mostly in practice). But this is not a mandate for separationism; on the contrary, *confederalism* necessitates a popular commitment from all the nations involved to each other. Because a confederal arrangement is *social* as much as *political* or *economic*, it reduces the extent to which positive relationships depend on specific institutional arrangements. It helps to facilitate sub-institutional relational engagement at every level as *Stakeholder Nations*, which is often hampered by centralised bureaucracy and, more generally, a culture of bureaucratised relationships. This also means that the relational quality enjoyed *within* the EU can be equally shared with neighbours *outside* it (especially within the same geographical area). Ultimately, the 'every closer union' heralded in the Treaty of Rome should be interpreted as deeper mutual co-operation. It is about us all forming *A Community of Peoples* rather than driving towards full political integration for the sake of it.

2. *Policy application: A single market with limited mobility*

Allowing confederal solutions might ultimately require treatise rewording that guarded against an integrationist approach to 'union', whilst the social decision for greater co-operation depends on the direction popular will. There is a whole range of different policies, at both national and EU level, that could combine to achieve this societal vision for stakeholder nations. But economic policy has a special role to help mediate these longer-term goals. It can do so first and foremost by disconnecting two things that are usually inseparable: the single market and the free movement of peoples. Instead, a single market should be for the free trade of goods, services and capital, but *not* for labour.

Free trading promotes growth, innovation and good relationships based on the meeting of reciprocal needs. However, nations need to retain control of immigration policies to suit their varying social and economic contexts. A free market for labour may sound good and seem to respect human rights and dignity, but it effectively treats workers as economic units rather than people. Workers become commodities rather than citizens (or potential citizens), which is their true relational identity in a national context.

3. *Example: the current debate in The Netherlands*

Since the EU has not adopted a confederal structure or the kind of single market proposed, no direct example can be given of these policies in action. However, there is a clear example of one EU Member State where there is growing political support for limiting the mobility in the single market.

The ChristianUnion and Socialist Party published in 2019 and 2022 a joint position with the specific aim to allow EU Member States to limit labour migration from one EU Member State to another. While it did not attract much attention in 2019, it clearly did in 2022. The main reason was that a consensus is emerging in Dutch society that the country can no longer balance protection of a liveable environment with an increased demand for housing. This is also related to the debate over emission of nitrogen in the Dutch economy (which also affects house building). For that reason, a clear majority of the Dutch political spectrum wants to limit migration which also affects labour migration from other EU Member States.

The (then) leader of the ChristianUnion, Gert-Jan Segers, stated "European free movement of people is not an article of faith". He elaborated this further in an interview:

> "Ideally, we would like to move towards a work permit. And if that is a bridge too far, you should make separate agreements with countries. For instance, with Baltic countries: they do everything they can to keep their young people there. How can we prevent societies there from being disrupted and avoid a division here?"

The debate over EU freedom of movement continues in The Netherlands and (in light of increased migration in 2022/2023) may become more prolific in other Member States as well.

If a stronger role for EU Member States over internal EU labour migration would be realised, it would be a de facto confederal solution. The deeper point behind this is that if the EU wants to retain sufficient popular support, it needs to be able

to maintain its relation with the citizens of the EU Member States. A 'one size fits all' federal approach may produce a resenting population in Member States where this does not work. Allowing confederal solutions may in that regard prove to be more supportive of the EU in the long run.

International relations: recognising universal human dignity[1]

1. *Aim: a foreign policy that supports fundamental freedoms*

The appeasement of totalitarian regimes has resulted in a much stronger authoritarian bloc at the global stage than otherwise would have been the case. In practice, foreign policy has put short-term export increases and import of cheap commodities above concern for fundamental freedoms and universally agreed human rights. The powerful position of multinationals and their shareholders has been a major factor behind this short-term approach to foreign policy. One example is how Putin's Russia has been strengthened over the years by those who prioritise cheap gas imports and connected business interests. Another example is Chinese power over production chains, including critical products such as medicine. This has been made possible due to outsourcing of production in order to increase shareholder profits. Similar to the trade with Russia, this was actively aided and abetted by EU governments. EU trade with Iran strengthened that regime. Years of EU Member States and connected business applying the 'economy of extraction' instead of investment in Africa has choked economic development of this continent.

This approach to foreign affairs has led to more oppression, violence and (civil) wars than might have been. The net result is an increase of migration which leads to more political and societal upheaval in European countries and more division within the EU. A foreign policy focused on short-term increase of profits has resulted in disproportionally higher costs for taxpayers.

We cannot make a distinction between human dignity within Europe and outside it. People from outside the Western world are of equal inherent value as those from within it. Therefore, they deserve equal opportunity for realising fundamental freedoms and universal human rights. This approach is not purely ideological; it will lead to a reduction of costs for taxpayers in Europe.

1 Thanks to Johannes de Jong, who contributed this section on international relations.

2. *Policy application: preferential treatment for the implementation of freedoms*

It is clear that the EU and EU Member States should not cut diplomatic relations with autocratic regimes or demand an end to all business ties with these regimes. However, there is a difference between having diplomatic relations and allowing trade on the one hand and giving preferential diplomatic treatment and encouraging trade on the other. The EU and EU Member States often give preferential diplomatic and economic treatment to totalitarian regimes and need to recognise the long-term costs for European taxpayers that result from this policy decision. The European Commission has taken a first step in the right direction by proposing a directive that will enforce due diligence on multinationals and clamp down on human rights violations and environmental destruction in the production chain. However more fundamental change is needed.

We need to redefine the purpose and conduct of international relations. Its main purpose must *not* be to support the continuing existence of the international status-quo or the increase of profits from trade. Its main purpose must be support for fundamental freedoms and (through that) the reduction of costs for taxpayers. Therefore, foreign policy needs to be implemented that gives preferential treatment to young democracies, areas with autonomous governance and entities that realise fundamental freedoms.

Sallux has formulated a set of benchmarks that have to be met (according to circumstances) in order to be able to recognise where fundamental freedoms are being realised:

- Equality and equal dignity and freedom of women.
- Freedom of religion and the freedom to change religion (or not practice religion).
- Personal freedom of choice for young people in terms of their lifestyle and future.
- Learning to live in democratic structures and with a diversity of opinions and ethnicities.
- Freedom for and from (organized) diversity within communities.
- Equal cooperation between ethnicities and equal support for ethnicities.

Those countries, areas and entities who realise, maintain and implement these fundamental freedoms will need preferential treatment and support as they realise the same values that enable the experience of human dignity. In this, international diplomacy needs to move beyond the borders on the map (many of which have been drawn by colonialism).

RT advocates for the recognition of the regional dimension and not to focus on the national capitals only. The reality of ethnic diversity and its role in conflicts in Sub-Sahara Africa and the MENA region means that the EU and EU Member States need to invest in engaging ethnic minorities. Key here is that the EU does not intervene in order 'to bring democracy' but builds relations and cooperation with those who realise fundamental freedoms and human dignity. Such cooperation in realising fundamental freedoms will allow democracy to grow 'bottom-up'.

3. *Example: Autonomous Administration of North-East Syria*

The Autonomous Administration of North-East Syria (AANES) is living evidence of how, without the influence of oppressive forces, people outside Europe can realise fundamental freedoms. When Assad withdrew his forces from North-East Syria in 2013, through a coalition of Kurdish parties, Syriac Union Party and Arab tribes, the people of North-East Syria established their own government and self-defense on a secular basis in which all ethnicities had a guaranteed place in the administration and military command. The military structure would later become known as Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

Not only was and is the multi-ethnic government unique in the region, but equality between men and women and freedom of religion has actually been introduced. All political and administrative positions are divided between ethnicities and promote the equality of men and women, achieving male/female balance. In addition, this equality is widely promoted via education and targeted policy. Religious freedom was realized and that means that not only the historical Syriac-Assyrian churches have complete freedom but that new churches of converted Muslims are also emerging. These are congregations that come together in all openness. A Sallux team visited the church of Kobane, which consists mainly of Kurdish converts and opened a larger church building in 2019. It is not without reason that USCIRF (official US body for assessing religious freedom worldwide) made recommendations to the US in 2020 and 2021 to strengthen AANES.

The International Coalition against ISIS has found in the SDF an indispensable ally in the removal of ISIS from its main bases in Syria and maintaining stability in one-third of Syria. Thanks to AANES and its SDF, Europe and the world are more

secure and even larger immigration streams have been prevented.

The disappointing reality is that when Turkey attacked AANES (without cause) in 2018 and 2019, Europe stood completely powerless on the sidelines. The appeasement of the Erdogan regime in Turkey was found more important than maintaining fundamental freedoms, prevention of terrorism and increase of migration to Europe. It is a jarring difference to the support that the EU has (rightly) given to Ukraine in the defense of its own freedom.

The defense of freedom against totalitarianism cannot be limited to Europe. Instead, the EU and EU Member States need to change direction and implement foreign and security policies that allow for the realization of cooperation with those who realise fundamental freedoms and therefore the real experience of human dignity. This will create more stability and peace.

Economy: just relationships between *all* stakeholders

1. *Aim: a stakeholder economy*

Neither local community and regional development nor bureaucratic decentralisation can be achieved politically if the economy pushes things in the opposite direction. Economic practice that prioritises *financial* over *social* capital results in an imbalance of power in favour of directors and major shareholders over other stakeholders. This contributes to the centralisation of economic power together with the political power that legitimises (and too often benefits from) such practice. As a result, there is a perpetuation of the false idea that meaningful public life happens 'somewhere else' in the big urban centres. But we have seen already that politics literally starts at home, with household and local community activity. It is a major shift in economic mindset to produce a societal shift in this direction. Therefore we have left this crucial section until last, since it helps to tie everything else together.

Relational division is always likely between those who control financial capital and those who sell their labour. Institutions in all three sectors (but especially businesses) increase the division when they make abstractions out of human actors, seeing 'labour' or 'supply' purely as numbers. The fact is that shareholders and directors are just two among a network of stakeholders who include lower ranked employees, suppliers and customers as well as (secondarily) the local community and the environment. All these stakeholders are in relationship with one another; when this reality is obscured, solidarity is neglected and the weakest end up suffering. A stakeholder economy is one in which the consideration of *every* stake-

holder is designed into the way that institutions function. Structures designed this way both depend on and facilitate good relationships so that economic development works for the flourishing of society as a whole.

As with all the institutions that we have looked at, it depends on a decentralisation of power that requires servant leadership. Doing so effectively creates a better civil society by more local companies, which are dependent on serving the range of communities' needs. This has a knock-on effect of requiring more well-rounded education in caring and manual skills. These skills then become more valued, better paid, and prevent the establishment of a 'cognitive elite' who flock to financial jobs that prop up government. In this situation, the biggest companies are less centralised, more rooted in communities, and not as close to the central organs of state. Economic power and political power tend to go together and the more centralised this is, the more problematic it becomes. It is especially urgent to address this today, for reasons explored in *A Just Economy in Times of Crisis*.

2. *Policy application: increased responsibility for those who control capital*

The economy is the most complex, all-embracing area of the six we have considered. Likewise, there is a huge number of potential policies that could contribute to a stakeholder economy. Increased responsibility may seem strange; does this not create further imbalance? No – it recognises that directors and major shareholders have a special responsibility but that it should be to *facilitate* rather than to *accumulate*. As is the case with national government, there are certain policies that can shape corporate behaviour to promote a culture of servant leadership in which all participate in the goods of society.

There are three main ways in which to justly increase responsibility of those who control capital (directors and major shareholders). Together these ensure that pursuit of enterprise growth happens within a more fundamental commitment to the people and place, which will make the economy less about short-term gain from the manipulation of capital (especially finance). This is not about stifling personal development of entrepreneurs or eliminating the whole idea of economic competition. Rather, it is about creating a level playing field within which people can compete fairly. At the moment, the situation is like a boxing match between a heavyweight and a lightweight (an illustration that Julius Nyerere famously used).

The three main ways to increase responsibility of those who control capital is as follows:

- Reward long-term shareholding: the average length of time that a share is held has decreased dramatically since the beginning of stock trading. Trading practice obscures the reality that holding a share represents a real relationship with a whole group of stakeholders. Longer-term shareholding moves from a 'gambling' model and joins reward with responsibility and investment with involvement. Taxation or direct regulation could help curtail a culture of short-term trading.

- Properly value labour: human dignity is disrespected when those who manipulate capital are rewarded so much more than those who work. Taxing income relatively less than capital gains or debt finance, setting maximum wage differentials (including bonuses and dividends!) and more realistic minimum wages curtail the working poverty that inevitably arises from imbalance in these areas.

- Consult stakeholder forums: establishing and running a business in a particular place must involve consultation between the directors (and shareholders they represent) and representatives of the other five stakeholders in any given enterprise. These are other employees, suppliers, customers and (secondarily) local community and environment (as represented by public or third sector bodies). Companies are already required by legislation to keep certain social and environmental standards, which often end up being tick-box exercises. But if they were required to respond to local concerns, the level of accountability and potential impact would dramatically increase. Such forums would also place communication at the heart of economic activity, which is the most vital ingredient for a more relational society.

3. *Examples: 21st Century Pioneers*

We have already seen how relational proximity – strong local communities and a flourishing society all come together. The economy has a vital role to play in this, but could it truly become a reality? There is at least a recognition that people and place are important in the language of 'stakeholder' from WEF and the ESG trend. However, as with many of the most hopeful developments, we have to look more locally to see this really being worked out. Close to the home of RT, The Jubilee Centre recently carried out research on conventional business and social enterprises in the UK, which looked at 40 '21st Century Pioneers' who demonstrated what a stakeholder economy might look like. It even gained the attention of the mainstream media. Similar stories from across the continent can be found in *Startup Europe*.

It is not enough to have relational policies and principles. There must be a relational way of moving towards our goal. Granted that we now have a better idea of what a relational society looks like, how can RT help us get there? What kind of social and political mechanisms would need to be employed? RT is not associated with one single detailed theory of change, but it contains the key aspects to help us move in the right direction.

A relational theory of change: three elements and one constant

1. *Cultivate vision*

There can be no change without a vision of what positive change looks like. Social reform has never been driven purely by a set of principles but by a vision of a better world. Inspiration comes through a variety of channels, including texts, artworks, conversations and, perhaps most of all, examples of people or groups who are already embodying some of what we are aiming for. But it is not enough to be inspired. A vision has to be cultivated through analysis and dialogue, sharpening it into focus and adjusting its problematic aspects. This process requires listening and responding not only to what is *said* but to what is *done*; deeds can be at least as informative as words! It also requires civic education that promotes a social vision, combats individualism or tribalism and promotes involvement with the various aspects of public life that need to be engaged with as the vision becomes reality.

2. *Commit to relationship*

A relational society requires the commitment of all its members. But it is not about committing to an ideology or signing up for membership of an organisation. Every person and group must make a decision to commit to the concrete relationships that make up the relational vision. Subsidiarity means that change does not happen by waiting for pronouncements from legislators; people can *be* the change they want to see. This involves the individual level but also the institutional one. Commitment to relationship includes the formation and development of communities, whether or not these are formalised in organisational structures, as well as the forging of alliances between these communities and organistions.

3. *Codify practice*

Our previous section assumes that policies are important for social change. But we should be clear that relationships cannot simply be imposed; this inevitably breeds cynical tick-boxing, finding loopholes or outright rebellion. At the same time, whilst inspiration and volition are crucial factors in social change, regulation still has a role within a relational vision. It helps to shape institutional culture whilst guarding against ignorance and deliberately anti-social practice. Therefore, ways of relating need to be codified into regulatory systems within the public, private and 'third' sectors at local, national and international level, up to and including constitutional reform. Making this codification public through meetings and communal events actually helps build relationships and a sense of social belonging, as it did within the Jewish tradition so crucial to RT (Nehemiah 8:1–18).

4. *Constantly communicate!*

Communication is the central practice that binds together these three elements of relational change. Crucially, this involves *listening* as much as *speaking*. It may be obvious that a social vision and the communal commitment needed to enact it can only be cultivated through dialogue and exchange at every level. Likewise, consultation is nearly always built into any legislative procedure. However, the reality is that people often fail to listen at any or all of these stages. Brexit is itself an example of the consequences of this; the weak strategy and misplaced confidence of David Cameron and others in his campaign stemmed from a failure to listen to the dissatisfaction felt by vast numbers of UK citizens.

Beyond top-down or bottom-up

It will be clear that RT does not completely depend on a specific form of government, though its emphasis on communication is certainly more compatible with decentralised and direct democracy than a centralised, representative model. But even without a specific structure required for a relational theory of change, how do the three elements happen? What direction do we move between cultivating a vision, committing to relationship and codifying practice?

The answer is *not* that codification is the chief goal, as if vision and relationship could be established through policy. We have focused on policies in this short guide because its aim within the work of Sallux is to fuel the efforts of political practitioners. Rob Nijhoff has already looked at the party political process itself through an RT lens in *Political Wisdom*. This shows how important the formal institutions of policy are. But he also notes that holistic social change necessitates the involvement of everyone at all levels. So if it is not all about a 'top-down' approach through legislative processes, again we ask: how do we move through the three elements of a relational theory of change?

Another option would be to move from the other direction and take a grassroots approach. Here we could insist that real change only happens when we move sequentially from individual action to interpersonal relationships and finally to establishing institutions who then codify their practice through regulation. However, this assumes that the individual person somehow has priority over the whole. It goes against our premise of a relational anthropology, which makes one's institutional or public identity (as a member of household, local community and nation) equally as authentic as their personal selves. Besides, it makes consensus very difficult and ends up allowing the most powerful figures in a group to have their way.

It makes more sense to think of addressing all these areas simultaneously within relational structures that operate horizontally as much as they do vertically. RT prioritises the agency of every person and institution, meaning that all are responsible for each of these three activities. They also feed into each other from different directions; for example, a vision can be cultivated through engaging with past codification (as it has with RT and biblical Israel); commitment to relationship helps to define the kind of practice that should be codified, and codification not only helps modify and develop the vision that gave rise to the institutional structures that needed regulation in the first place.

So the we cannot move from vision to relationship and codification in a linear way. This means that the order of 'principles, policies and processes' that we have followed in this section does not equate to a simplistic theory of change, as if we begin with a timeless truth (principle), work out what it means in practice (policy) and then try to implement it (process). Things are more complicated than this – practice influences theory and visions are developed through relational action in the world.

Pioneering a relational society

The one key thing about the order of vision, relationships and codified practice is that they are all ultimately dependent on what humanity is *given*; human society did not create itself and cannot therefore be self-sustaining. This is why RT is ultimately tied to theological belief; a relational society depends on revelation – God's communication of a social vision to humanity – and providence – God's ongoing action to make this vision happen. This is narrated through all Scripture but is consummated in the reconciliation of all things in Christ. Because of this, RT can be embodied most fully in the – eschatological – society built around Christ. Put another way, the Church must pioneer a relational society, not only as a visible pointer to God's future Kingdom, but also as an inspiring token or 'pilot community' for its actual local and national reality.

It is easy to be sceptical about 'Christian Democracy', where it has failed. Likewise, there have often been better relationships cultivated in non-Christian contexts.

But it should happen and can happen. To be 'Christian' is to love God and neighbour in the power of the Spirit and form interpersonal relationships that are organised (if not always institutionalised) at various levels within the Universal Church. Christians constitute a unique community who are empowered to enact a relational social vision through its strong, welcoming households, local communities that build long-term close relationships and cultivate the physical spaces they're in in sustainable and beautiful ways, as well as establishing fraternal relations with neighbouring churches.

Because there should be no external power other than the Spirit, a unique opportunity for subsidiarity/decentralisation with gradations of intimacy and economic interdependence, with universal fraternity at the same time.

This provides a model that can get into culture through various ways, as the UK-based Romanian theologian Nathan Mladin has written LICC. In the context, the most important one is by Christians involved in civil society groups (including church groups) that are engaged in local political life. The commission to be salt and light has been given, which means that social reform *should* happen and *can* happen.

Conclusion: towards a relational Europe

Moving beyond a zero-sum game to a relational Europe is only possible if everyone has their place within a social whole. RT opens a pathway to this by focusing on **relationships**, and being grounded in a relational view of human dignity. Through this, it offers us a **social vision**:

> A society where everyone has a home in a flourishing community, contributing to a nation that cultivates bonds of fraternity that are extended to international neighbours.

It is made out of three main **institutions**: households, communities and nation:

> Cohesive households whose members participate socially, economically and politically in a local community that cultivates its natural resources for the flourishing of all.
>
> Communities interconnected within regions that house the means by which citizens can engage with social, economic and political life within the network of local relationships.
>
> National governments that promote cultural unity, facilitate regional independence, and conduct confederal international relationships.

Finally, this vision must be grounded in a **stakeholder economy**, where everyone who is directly or indirectly involved in an organisation's economic activity is considered in the way that resources are produced, consumed and distributed in a local area.

All this may sound more like a fairy tale than a genuine political programme. But in certain quiet sections of society, this relational mandate is being taken seriously and is happening. Nearly always away from the spotlight and often among Christians who are not part of the Church's public face, there is pioneering work going on. It will increasingly happen if we dig deeper into the original biblical vision of RT so as to engage in every sphere of life, uniting Christians in Europe, many of whom are part of diaspora communities, and appealing to society as a whole that is made *In the Image of God*. This is what Sallux exists to catalyse.

Epilogue: Life & Ethics in Europe from a relational perspective

(by Johannes de Jong)

Few debates in Europe cause so much division and vitriolic debate as the issues touching life and ethics. When we finished this publication we felt that it was not complete with a short epilogue that may indicate a way forward in these debates from a RT perspective.

We base this epilogue on an article that was published in the Sallux newsletter and website in response to one of those debates in the European Parliament.

The controversial Matić report, which was voted through in the European Parliament at the end of June 2021, highlighted once again that issues of life & ethics are being debated at EU level. The Matić report went in a direction that was wholly insensitive to national competences, cultural values and fundamental freedoms (such as the freedom of conscience). It meant that the European Parliament did not apply the principle of subsidiarity and refused to allow Member States to have these debates on their own terms in their own national sphere. Regardless of one's opinion on sensitive issues as abortion and euthanasia, it may be clear that nobody is served with undue division and heated arguments that cannot even lead to EU legislation. Hence this and similar debates descend into political point-scoring through heated exchanges that stir emotion that make any attempt to find common ground even more difficult.

The Members of European Parliament of the ECPM opposed this report and stated (among others):

> 'ECPM believes in the protection of life from conception to natural death. We underscore Articles 1 & 2 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU which clearly state that human dignity and the right to life are the foundation of all our rights and freedoms. Therefore, while we respect the sensitivity of specific situations, we believe that the notion of self-determination cannot simply replace the principle of the right to life. An ideologically driven EP report is the wrong way to deal with such sensitive and personal issues.'

The main problem with this Matić report and similar reports is that they confuse self-determination and human dignity. This is the core of the debates on abortion and euthanasia as they take place in all EU Member States and even at the EU

level. While self-determination is a given that cannot be disputed (otherwise we end up in oppression), it is not the same as human dignity. Rather the reverse, human dignity is the foundation for self-determination.

The problem is that self-determination is only possible for those who have the capacity to act independently. It is possible for people who have the mental and physical ability to do so. But where does self-determination end and how far does it go? There are no legal or otherwise clear definitions on these questions. Nobody will claim that a baby is capable of self-determination so it is clear that this is something in which any human grows into. The question of self-determination gets more difficult when people have some form of disability or are suffering from Alzheimer's or simply in need of care because of old age. The dependence on others is then obvious and necessary.

However, during the pandemic we may have learned that we all are dependent on someone else. Nobody is a fully autonomous being. So our self-determination is never absolute and never constant during our whole life. If our self-worth would depend on our self-determination, our value as human being would increase and decrease. We would end up in thinking that the most valuable humans are those of between (roughly) 18 and 68 without any handicap or other impediment. So your value as human being would decrease immediately if you got a car accident at 40 and became handicapped as a result. We all can see that this would be very problematic thinking and very threatening for anyone in any vulnerable situation. In fact it would scare everyone as we all can be hit in life with something (as we have seen in the pandemic).

The only logical conclusion can be that our self-worth (human dignity) cannot be based on our degree of self-determination. That is why self-determination cannot replace human dignity. Moreover it shows that human dignity and human reality exists in relation to others and is not autonomous. We repeat the statement of Bishop Desmond Tutu: "My humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in yours for we can only be human together." The idea that humans are autonomous beings is harming the notion of our shared human dignity. If autonomous independency becomes the measurement, we separate those who are more dependent from those who are less dependent and start to consider the latter as 'better'. Few people will consciously really want to go in that direction.

However we can see how our economy and society is acting as if the degree of autonomy is determining our value. The economic and governing systems are sending the message that those who are 'strong and independent' are more valuable and should be listened to more than those who are dependent in some

way. Those who are 'strong and independent' have often not only most economic power but also more influence on government and policies tend strongly to favor them. A Dutch magazine described the life-story of someone who had wrestled with her own and her family's health all her life. She said: "our society is only fit for Young Urban Professionals with high incomes".

This whole fixation on autonomy is pushing more and more people to the edge of society, certainly in western Europe. However, for example in The Netherlands, we can see the negative backlash against this already. The Dutch government fell in 2021 over a scandal in which many people with low income and of non-western origin were unjustly pushed into poverty by the Tax authorities. They had no chance of fighting back as the whole system assumed a level of autonomy and self-determination and self-empowerment that they simply could not get access to. Those who could express themselves clearly and could afford a good lawyer got a settlement on the exact similar cases that others pushed in abject and unjust poverty. In this example we can see that once you take 'autonomy' as guiding principle, more and more people will ultimately be pushed aside. Those who have all the advantages (in health and background) get more and more preferential treatment and those who have not get pushed aside. It has an accumulative effect on both ends.

The only way to break that cycle is to turn back to human dignity and the right to life as expressed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU as foundational for all our rights and freedoms and our society and economy. Otherwise we create a huge inequality in our societies if the value of life depends on self-determination.

That is why abortion and euthanasia in the manner in which they are now being pushed through in many countries in Europe as well as being propagated in EP reports like the Matić report are inherently problematic. Human Dignity and the connected right to life cannot simply be abolished at the beginning and end of life in favor of self-determination. That does not mean that there are no questions left open and all situations answered. But we should not approach the debate over these sensitive and personal issues as a clash between self-determination vs right to life. Human dignity should be the common ground on which we try to answer these difficult questions together.

Human dignity expresses the intrinsic value of every human being in every stage of existence. In Christianity, this universal principle rests on the human being as created in the image and likeness of God. This defines the human being as a relational being. The Christian understanding of God is Trinitarian and therefore relational. This is reflected in human existence. And anyone, with or without re-

ligion, can see that life is relational. Human dignity is not fully realised as long as the value of committed relationships is not appreciated and cherished. This includes valuing relationships and striving for right and just relationships our society, international relations and the economy.

If we have human dignity as common ground it is possible to have a true conversation between those who oppose and those want to allow or maintain abortion and euthanasia. We can ask one another 'what does human dignity mean for you'? We will not agree on every outcome but we will be able to understand one another and have tried to find solutions for very difficult situations. Instead of pushing one perspective based on ideology we can try to understand one another in a truly democratic way. Democracy is not 'winner takes all'. Democracy means that we recognise one another as equally valuable human beings while we may (very deeply) disagree with one another and that therefore we try to find (if possible) a solution together before we vote ultimately by majority.

A more relational Europe is possible if we are prepared to find common ground in our common human dignity. This will give Europe a hopeful future.

European Christian Political Movement (ECPM)

In 2003 the ECPM was founded as organization that brings together Christian political parties who share this vision that Christian-democracy needs to be rooted in Christian faith on a biblical basis.

In 2010 it had grown to become a recognized European political party. In 2022 it is one of the 10 European political parties that is registered via Authority for European parties and foundations.

The ECPM is represented in the European Parliament with several MEP's. Parties and independents from all over the EU have joined the ECPM (www.ecpm.info). Parties and politicians who share the vision that Christian-democracy and Europe need a revitalization are welcome to be part of the ECPM. Sallux, the political foundation of the ECPM, brings together thinkers and thinktanks from across the continent. Sallux operates at the crossroad of Christian faith, society and economy. Its activities cover a broad range of issues in these fields.

www.ecpm.info

Advertisement

A relational vision for Europe

The political landscape of Europe is more fractured today than at any time since the Second World War. There are such strong polarising forces that the rhetoric of 'unity' sounds increasingly empty. At the same time, European Christian Democracy has lost its distinctive identity and it threatens to be incorporated into one or other of the competing sides. Is there a promising way forward?

This book sets out a relational vision that can act as a revitalising and unifying force. By reaching beyond the cultural and traditional roots of Christian division, we find in the biblical text a unique source for political common ground. So often the Bible has been used in a divisive way; but at its heart is a message that establishes and sustains relationships at every level of society. With this publication we can begin to see how this relational vision becomes reality.

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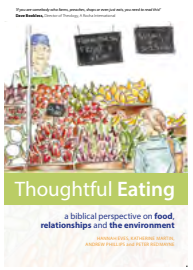

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David Quinn, Director, Iona Institute, Ireland

"Our collaboration with Sallux has been tremendously fruitful, and we commend them highly for their wise and strategic investment in helping Christians to be more effective as salt and light in the European public square".
Jonathan Tame, former Director, Jubilee Centre, UK

"Sallux has provided substantial and very valuable support to our promotion of the rights of the family in Europe at the Council of Europe, a 27 Member States wide European institution that rules over Human Rights in Europe."
Maria Hildingsson, former Director, FAFCE, Brussels

"Sallux has supported us to find our way in the European Union and to reach out to European decision makers, and to create our common declaration with the Yezidi and the Turkmen. We thank Sallux for their work."
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