

# Salt and Light

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How we can make a difference  
to overwhelming problems

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## Preface

This paper arises from my experience in a number of different areas: social action, commercial computing and evangelism. As I moved from one area to another, it became clear that ideas and principles that were commonsense and obvious in one context were considered unusual or revolutionary in another. This is an attempt to bring together a number of those commonsense ideas and form them into a coherent picture that will enable people to work together to transform society.

The original subtitle was 'The Big Local Picture' – which was slightly confusing. It was an attempt to suggest that we need to see the 'big picture' – to see what we are doing in a wider context than our usual horizons, and to acknowledge that the big picture we are talking about is still essentially a local one. We are not trying to address global issues of trade and injustice (important though those questions are) but we are trying to make a significant difference to the people we meet on our streets.

The next subtitle was 'Getting the other 90% involved in social action' – which was clearer, but a bit limited. One change we need to make is for social action to become a mainstream activity for Christians, but there are other essential changes we need to make: to our understanding of the issues and to the structures within society. Just getting more people involved is necessary but not sufficient.

I am writing as a Christian, and writing for Christians. If this message is to be effective, it will need to be communicated to and embraced by the wider community - but that is not the purpose of this current document.

The observant reader will notice that, in what follows, I do not talk about the need for prayer, Bible study and repenting from sin. Of course, all these things are vital. But we knew that already. And what the Christian world does not need is another book saying we ought to pray more.

If the Christian church were doing all the stuff the preachers talk about - praying, forgiving and being faithful to our partners - the question would still remain: how should we then live? How does a person live as a faithful follower of Jesus?

It is my conviction that the simple two-stage model most people appear to work with (get yourself straight, then engage in some worthwhile ministry) simply does not work. In order to get the social action right, we need to pray. But in order to learn to pray right, we need to be involved in social action.

To put it another way - being a Christian is all about following Jesus. Jesus did not organise prayer meetings for the hungry: He fed them. I have no objection to people organising prayer meetings - as long as prayer is not seen as an alternative to being obedient and following Jesus in His ministry to the poor and dispossessed.

# Introducing the Problem

## Background

### *Social Breakdown and Chaos*

Society, as we have known it for the last half-century, is breaking down. The National Health Service and the Welfare State were founded upon certain assumptions: the majority of people will be healthy and productive; a few people will be sick and unable to work; the majority can support the minority through times of difficulty and sickness.

These assumptions no longer work. With hindsight, it is clear they never could have worked for long. Just as antibiotics produce super-bugs, benefits produce dependency, and this dependency crushes people's lives as effectively as the evils the benefits were designed to overcome.

The basic problem is that there are too many needy people around today. We can describe them in various ways, stick various labels on them. They are sick, weak, damaged, lazy, selfish, insane and evil. Do we lock them up, heal them, forgive them, motivate them, or learn to accept them the way they are? Probably, we need to do all these things. We cannot assume that the problems will just get better, or they will be solved by building more hospitals and rehab clinics.

The status quo is no longer an option: it probably never was. We cannot go back – where would we go back to? The workhouse and lunatic asylum don't hold the answers we need. So we have to go forward and invent a new way of responding to needs within society. We have to find an approach that is not self-destructive.

I believe the answer is to be found in the church. There is a distinctive Christian approach to dealing with social evil. I believe that a society can only learn how to function in a healthy and sustainable way as the church takes on its God-given role of being salt and light within that society.

### *Spiritual Confusion and Conflict*

But to say that the answer is to be found in the church is deeply misleading. The church, or large portions of it, is part of the problem. The church, as an institution, is responsible for damaging and de-humanising practices.

I am not talking about problems such as child abuse by church leaders. This may have captured the headlines for a while, but it is not the real problem: everyone agrees that such things should not happen, and when they do happen they should be punished and prevented from happening again.

The real problem is the conflict between what we *say* we are as church (or, maybe more precisely, what we *believe* as a church) and how we *behave*. We call ourselves the Body of Christ, but act as divided institutions. We talk about the need for unity but organise competing charities. We believe in setting people free, but tie them up with rules and rigid expectations.

We are not only institutionally divided: we are theologically divided. There are the historic divides of Evangelical and Catholic and Liberal, and the practical divides between those who see social action as an essential feature of the gospel and those who see it as a distraction from the gospel.

The church will only function as salt and light if it is willing to put its energies into the important things, and allow some of the theological and procedural arguments to remain on the back burner. I believe that God is happy for us to sit down together over a cup of coffee and

argue about predestination and the second coming – as long as we keep our primary focus on the real work of the church: glorifying God in the way we live and playing our part in the building of His Kingdom.

### ***Social Action and Boundaries***

One of the biggest problems with any form of social action is the question of boundaries. Where do you draw them? How do you decide where to draw them?

In the early days of a project, this is generally not a problem. The project begins because someone wants to do something about a problem. The problem is obvious, the only question is: will we respond to it, or ignore it?

After the project has been running for a while, people will start to get dissatisfied: why do we help *this* person and not *that*? What happens *before*, to get them into this state? What happens *after* we help them? Who else is helping them alongside us, and how should we work together?

There are no easy answers to these questions. We need boundaries for our projects, because we cannot help everyone everywhere right now, but there is no good justification for the boundaries we work with. We work with boundaries, inadequate though they are, because it is better to do *something* for *someone* than to sit back and do nothing.

Consequently, each of us works within certain boundaries. Sometimes they are clear and obvious; sometimes they are unclear or unrecognised. But, for each of us, what we do only makes sense within a certain context. We trust – or maybe assume! – that someone else is doing the things we are not doing.

This document is an attempt to look at the bigger picture – to step outside the boundaries of my project, my interests and my responsibilities. It is an attempt to ask the question: does what we do make sense in the context of the bigger picture? Should we change what we do and how we do it? And, perhaps, does the bigger picture itself need to be challenged and changed?

# The Problem

## *The Cliff*

In order to talk about the problem we need to choose a picture. Imagine you live in a village located at the top of a cliff. Every now and then, someone gets careless and falls over the edge.

This is actually a very good picture of every one of us. We live our lives very close to the edge - in fact, we live very close to many different edges. For each of us, there are some we have very little danger of falling over, but some of those edges are far closer than we think.

For some, the cliff edge is alcohol: people who drink as a way of having fun with others, then drink to relax, to forget about their problems for a while... For others, the cliff edge is recreational drug use, or other addictive behaviour. Some people throw themselves into their work to ignore their crumbling marriage; some can't bring themselves to address the problem of their growing debts.

Each one of these people are living normal lives, but if one little thing goes wrong they can find the whole façade collapse, and their lives can turn upside-down in a few days or weeks. I am constantly meeting people who thought they were fine - until the day they went over the edge.

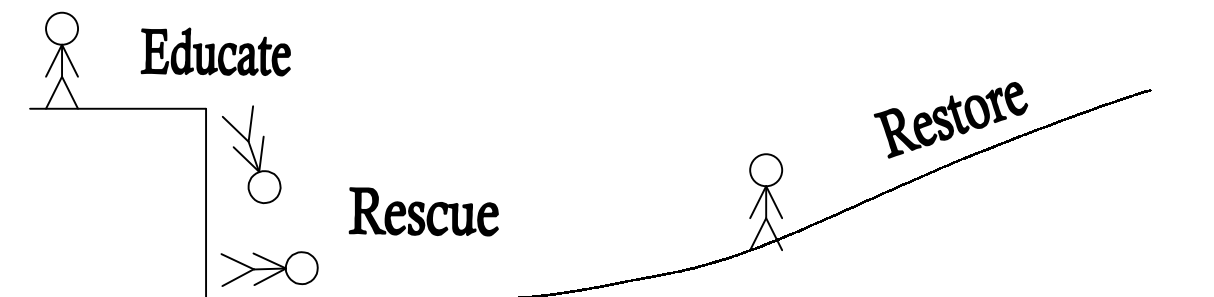
For others, the process is more like a slide. Perhaps one section of the cliff has a scree slope. It is possible to walk up the slope, but so, so much easier to slide down it. The marriage breaks up, they find themselves in a pokey bedsit, all their old friends are moved away or married, there is nothing to do in the evenings but drink, their work suffers, eventually they loose their job, loose the flat, and end up on the street.

Yet others were pushed over the cliff as young children, growing up in homes where violence and abuse were normal, and criminality a way of life.

Back to this village. The obvious question is: what should we do? Traditionally, there are two options: should we provide an ambulance service at the bottom of the cliff, or a fence at the top? The answer, of course, is 'both'. But in the real world, the ambulance does not solve the problem: it only takes the broken person to the place where they can be healed and restored. As well as a fence and an ambulance, we need a hospital.

The fence, the ambulance and the hospital are, of course, only analogies. I happen to think they are useful pictures of the three main areas we need to cover. Like all analogies, they break down if you push them too far, but they help us understand the three basic activities we must concentrate on if our society is to address the problems we have been talking about.

I would like to summarise these three basic activities in three words. There are three things we need to do: educate, rescue and restore. For the time being, please just accept these as three labels, describing a complex mixture of inter-related activities in each of the three places. Using these three labels, the picture is as follows:



## ***The Target***

What are we aiming for? This question is vital: unless we can agree on a target that is believable, nobody will work to make it happen; and unless the target is achievable, we are doomed to failure. To aim for a society in which there are no drunks or drug addicts is pointless – nobody has any idea how to achieve that while retaining the basic freedoms we take for granted. I would like to suggest the following.

We are aiming to be so good at educating people about the real dangers they face, and to be so good at rescuing and restoring them when they do fall pray to those dangers, that there are very few people being restored and even fewer needing to be rescued.

This target could, quite easily, be quantified: that there would be no more than x people in 10,000 undergoing the process of restoration, and y people in 10,000 needing to be rescued. Perhaps someone would like to suggest a way to determine achievable figures. But in the meantime, I believe the target as stated is specific enough, and understandable enough, to get us moving in a more productive direction than we have taken so far.

## ***What Must We Do?***

If this is our target, the crucial question is: what can we do *now* to move towards it?

Part of the answer, of course, is that in the short term, we must significantly increase the resources we put into these three areas. But just pumping in more money is not going to solve the problem. As well as working *harder*, we must work *smarter*. And that is where the picture comes in. It is a massive over-simplification, but we need an over-simplified picture to get people on board – as long as it is a helpful over-simplification.

In other words, if you get the big picture right, you have some hope of getting the small details right. If you get the big picture wrong, you have lost before you begin.

If you accept this picture, some fairly obvious points stand out.

- We must come communicate the big picture to people in a way that enables them to believe it is a viable approach and worth committing time and resources to.
- We must work at improving our understanding of what we need to do in each of these three areas.
- We must improve the way the three areas interact with each other.
- We must significantly increase the resources we put into these three areas.
- We must monitor the effects of the changes we introduce, to ensure we remain on track and don't introduce new problems to replace the ones we solve.

So how do we do this?



## **The Answer: A Brief Summary**

Before we go into lots of detail, a short overview of each of these areas might be helpful. Our natural tendency is to think about them in the sequence: educate, rescue, restore. But in talking with people, I have found it more helpful to put 'educate' at the end.

### ***Rescue***

There are a lot of groups like Crisis Centre Ministries working to rescue people – to pick them up and offer them some hope. We are all overwhelmed by the extent of the current need, and concerned that the needs we seek to address are still on the increase.

In the short term, the problem we all face is inadequate facilities (finance and buildings) and too few people to do the work.

In the long term, the problem is that too many people are pouring over the top of the cliff, too many people are only getting part way up the restoration slope before they slide back down again, and too few people are making it all the way back to the top.

No matter how good a job we do (and we could do much better!) the result is pointless unless we can also get the other two areas working well.

### ***Restore***

The major failure of CCM over the years has been in this area. We have helped many people in very significant ways. But far too few of them have had their lives restored. Many cycle around: getting help, then falling back again. Others have become stuck somewhere along the slope: they may not be sliding back, but they are not making much progress, either.

We have to be realistic about the amount of progress people are capable of making. Someone who has spent thirty years as an alcoholic is not likely to become a world-famous architect. But then, most non-alcoholics don't become world-famous architects, either. The question is not whether they reach some external standard, but whether they reach their potential as people, whether the quality of their lives and relationships matches God's plans and desires for them. And we should not under-estimate the power of God's Spirit to re-create and renew when we allow Him space to move.

A key aspect of restoration is community. People on the street enjoy a strong and supportive community life. Whatever we do to help, if their primary social network remains the same, and their peers are all taking drugs and engaging in criminal activity, there is very little we can do beyond patching up the pieces each time the lifestyle crashes.

For people to have a hope of a new life, they must discover a new social network. They must become accepted and integrated into a community where excessive drinking and violence are not normal behaviour.

While people on the uphill slope of restoration do need access to specialist support services, what they need most of all is access to normality. They need more than the trained social workers and psychotherapists: they need ordinary people to be ordinary friends. They need to learn how to live an ordinary life: shopping and housework, football matches and films. They need to be loved and valued. They need to belong.

This is one reason why I believe the church has a vital role to play. Where else are we going to find the numbers of people we will need?

## *Educate*

Academic education does not work, unless you are looking for an academic qualification.

We can tell people: don't take drugs; don't sleep around. Do they listen? Well, some do. But only a very few. Most people will listen to all you have to say about the dangers of alcohol, and then go out and get drunk anyway. Most people will only learn from their own mistakes – or the mistakes of people they really get to know.

The only way to educate people is by getting them involved in hands-on caring. This used to be called 'acts of mercy', but that phrase can have a dangerous 'Lady Bountiful' ring. The caring that makes a difference – to both parties – is the caring where you come alongside and really get to know each other.

One benefit of this is that people get cared for. Another benefit is that the people who do the caring learn something about the real world in the process. They start to realise that 'ordinary' people can have a problem with drink or gambling. They start to notice the danger signs in their friends and families. They get less uptight about these problems, and learn how to respond to people who have them, or who might be in danger from them, in a helpful and positive way. Their judgement improves as they become less judgemental. They realise that 'there, but for the grace of God, go I' – and recognising their own danger, become less likely to fall over the cliff themselves.

May I be permitted a quick digression? In the church, our problem is not the unsaved: our problem is those who are saved but half-hearted. Those who remain spiritual babies, convinced that the whole world (or, at least, the whole church) should revolve around their needs and preferences. Our response to this must be twofold.

Firstly, we must preach that following Jesus is not a matter of getting a ticket to Heaven, but of sacrificially laying down your life in order to be a blessing to others. This may not be a popular message, but it is the only one we are authorised to preach.

And secondly, we must invite everyone in the church, by word and by example, to care for other people in simple, practical and effective ways. For most, this will involve being a friend to someone who is struggling to rebuild his or her life. For a few, it will involve more 'cutting edge' specialist work, helping the homeless, drug addicts, alcoholics and gamblers in the rescue ministries.

All this is a response to local needs and concerns. The church must also respond to international needs and concerns. It is a question of priority: I put more time and energy into caring for my family than I do caring for my friends. I put more into my friends than I do into strangers. I put more into my street and my town than I do into other towns and other countries. We need to remember the starving children in Africa, but not at the expense of the homeless people in our own back yard.

The church is full of unmotivated, needy people. Put them into real contact with people whose lives have been really damaged, and they can start to see their own problems in perspective.

# Introducing the Answer

## Part One: Rescue

The first obvious part of the answer is an ambulance service waiting at the bottom of the cliff.

The nature of this work is mainly simple and straightforward. The details of how to do it can get horribly complicated – we are working with damaged people who often seem completely irrational – but the basic issues are easy to understand.

There are three main aspects to this work: physical contact, functional contact, and emotional contact.

### *Physical contact*

By ‘physical contact’ I don’t mean touching, although that can be included. To provide help to the people we are dealing with, you must be in contact with them. You must, at a basic level, be there for them.

- Accessible
- Available

### *Functional contact*

- Attractive
- Appropriate (not too much)

### *Emotional contact*

- Belonging
- Trust

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In the short term, the problem we all face is inadequate facilities (finance and buildings) and too few people to do the work. In the long term, the problem is too many people pouring over the top of the cliff, too many people getting part way up the restoration slope and sliding back down again, and too few people making it all the way back to the top of the restoration slope.

No matter how good a job we do (and we could do much better!) the result is pointless unless we can also get the other two areas working well.

## **Part Two: Restore**

The major failure of CCM over the years has been in this area. We have helped many people in very significant ways. But far too few of them have had their lives restored. Many cycle around: getting help, then falling back again. Others have become stuck somewhere along the slope: they may not be sliding back, but they are not making much progress, either.

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We also have to be realistic about people 'slipping back'. It is not the end of the world, and if the individual can learn from the experience, it can even be helpful in the long run. The only real failure is one you don't learn from.

### ***Community***

A key aspect of restoration is community. People on the street enjoy a strong and supportive community life. Whatever we do to help, if their primary social network remains the same, and their peers are all taking drugs and engaging in criminal activity, there is very little we can do beyond patching up the pieces each time the lifestyle crashes.

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This is one reason why I believe the church has a vital role to play. Where else are we going to find the numbers of people we will need?

### ***Emotional Growth***

One common feature of people who became stuck into addictive patterns of behaviour at a young age is the interruption of their emotional development. You can easily find yourself dealing with a 29 year-old who has the emotional resources and capacity of a 13 year-old. We don't have room here to spell out all that this means, but a major part of the recovery process for many people means that we need to help them discover an emotion al maturity they have never possessed.

What is needed here is for people to take on the role of substitute parents – not the authoritarian parent of the 5 year-old, but the nimble, flexible, negotiating and persuading parent of the 15 year-old. The job is almost impossible, perhaps it is never done well, but without it many people will, quite simply, never grow up.

## *Authority*

Another common element is an antagonistic attitude to authority. This is, perhaps, one aspect of growing up.

Many people lose their jobs because they say, in effect, “Who are you to boss me around?” and get the obvious reply, “I’m your boss. You’re fired.” A few highly talented individuals who are unable to respond in an acceptable way to authority will become celebrities, and serve as a role model for the vast majority of under-achieving rebellious losers. For the vast majority, if they don’t accept authority – whether it is the teacher, the employer or the lawmaker – they will be doomed to a life of frustration and failure.

## **Part Three: Educate**

The third part of the answer is that we need to educate people: help them to understand the dangers they face so those dangers can be avoided. We need to build a fence at the top of the cliff, to stop people falling over.

We have to be realistic here: no fence will stop everyone. No matter how big it is, no matter how many warning signs you place along the cliff edge, some people will ignore the signs and climb over the fence. And, sometimes, the cliff face will simply crumble unexpectedly, and careful, responsible people will find themselves falling over the edge. We are not aiming for perfection – simply a massive reduction in the number of crumpled bodies at the foot of the cliff.

### ***Academic Education***

Academic education does not work, unless you are looking for an academic qualification.

We can tell people: don't take drugs; don't sleep around. Do they listen? Well, some do. But only a very few. Most people will listen to all you have to say about the dangers of alcohol, and then go out and get drunk anyway. Most people will only learn from their own mistakes – or the mistakes of people they really get to know.

In fact, things are worse than this. If you tell the average teenager: don't do this because it is dangerous, what will they do? Nine out of ten will immediately think: wow! That sounds fun, let's try it! Warning people about the danger of things they have never experienced is a waste of time, and usually counter-productive. Warning them about things they have experienced is simply a waste of time.

### ***Hands-On Education***

The only way to educate people is by getting them involved in hands-on caring. This used to be called 'acts of mercy', but that phrase can have a dangerous 'Lady Bountiful' ring. The caring that makes a difference – to both parties – is the caring where you come alongside and really get to know each other.

One benefit of this is that people get cared for. Another benefit is that the people who do the caring learn something about the real world in the process. They start to realise that 'ordinary' people can have a problem with drink or gambling. They start to notice the danger signs in their friends and families. They get less uptight about these problems, and learn how to respond to people who have them, or who might be in danger from them, in a helpful and positive way. Their judgement improves as they become less judgemental. They realise that 'there, but for the grace of God, go I' – and recognising their own danger, become less likely to fall over the cliff themselves.

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specialist work, helping the homeless, drug addicts, alcoholics and gamblers in the rescue ministries.

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The church is full of unmotivated, needy people. Put them into real contact with people whose lives have been really damaged, and they can start to see their own problems in perspective.

What people need in their lives:

- Meaning
- Value
- Purpose

### ***Social Education***

The main reason why some people do not fall over the edge is the social relationship they maintain. A key need we all have is a social network – not just to help us recover a normal life, but in order to enjoy and maintain one.

# Exploring the Issues

## The Nature of the Problem

There is, of course, no one 'problem' that we are seeking to address, but a wide range of complex and inter-relating problems. These problems can be grouped into a few major types: organisational, structural and personal.

### *Organisational*

The first type is organisational problems – the problems you encounter when people are trying to do the right job – problems like complex and unnecessary paperwork, and unrealistic goals and expectations.

The answer to an organisational problem is, in essence, better education. People want to do the right thing, so all you need to do is show them how to improve.

### *Structural*

The second type is structural problems – the problems that remain when the organisational problems are solved: problems like insufficient housing, inappropriate jobs, and inadequate resources to do the job that is required.

The answer to structural problem is, generally, political. You have to persuade people that what they are trying to do is wrong, misguided. This often requires a bit of education, but the skills needed are in general quite different from those needed to deal with organisational problems.

### *Personal*

The final type is personal problems – the problems that stop a person from doing what is right, even when they know what they should do - problems like addiction, poor self-esteem, fear and paranoia.

Like it or not, the answer to personal problems is spiritual in nature. You may not subscribe to a specific religion, but whatever answer you find to these problems will have a spiritual basis. You cannot prove the value of a human life from any scientific theorem or mathematical formula: it must come down to a question of faith. But this does not have to be 'blind faith' – simply asserting that you believe a human life has value, whatever the evidence. Faith can be based on good evidence, and be a part of a wider conceptual framework that supports, validates and interprets it.

Personal problems themselves come in various types.

At the physical level, problems are almost too simple. If the problem is heroin in the bloodstream, just stop taking heroin and the problem will go away. If the problem is homelessness, put the person into a flat or a hostel.

Of course, this is far too simplistic. Addiction and homelessness are not problems – they are symptoms. The important question is: why is this person addicted or homeless – or both? Until you understand the reason and change it, a place in a hostel or detox unit will be no more than a sticking-plaster.

We said at the start that we put various labels on to individuals: sick, weak, damaged, lazy, selfish, insane and evil. Many, perhaps most, of these labels would fit most of the people we are trying to help to a significant degree. (All of them would fit all of us to some extent, but that is a



different subject!)

At the social level, problems are far more complex. To address them, we need a change in society: the way we organise work and the family, the way we require people to move away from family and friends if they are to pursue a successful career, the way in which boys at school are required to conform to female modes of behaviour and standards, the destructive individualism and crude measures of success that are accepted as normal.

It is at the level of the soul, the problems are most complex. Meaning, value, purpose, hope and love are the ingredients of a happy life, but how to achieve these things is difficult even if your beliefs are capable of delivering them. Sadly, many peoples' beliefs make the things we most desire almost impossible to gain. Again, we don't have room here to cover this topic in sufficient detail to be satisfying.

People have all these complex and inter-relating problems. Do we lock them up, heal them, forgive them, motivate them, or learn to accept them the way they are? Probably, we need to do all these things.

## The Nature of the Answer

### *Efficiency and Cost-Effectiveness*

We must significantly increase the resources we put into these three areas. But simply throwing money at complicated problems does not solve them. Sometimes, it even makes the problems worse.

One thing we need to do is to re-think what is meant by 'efficiency'. It is not always a virtue.

You want an ambulance service to be inefficient. You do not want all your ambulance drivers to be treating and transporting people all the time. You want some of them (enough of them!) to be doing nothing – to be available if they are needed. It is the nature of an ambulance service to be 'inefficient' in its use of resources. An ambulance system should be as efficient as possible, but you cannot evaluate the ambulance service by its efficiency. That is, you cannot evaluate the service *solely* or even *mainly* by its efficiency.

(To generalise this last point briefly – an ambulance service is part of a larger system. You cannot maximise the efficiency of the larger system by maximising the efficiency of the individual components. There is probably a posh name for this mistake, but, whatever you call it, an awful lot of government plans have never been the same since they crashed into this rock.)

(This is horribly counter-intuitive for many people. They believe that you can maximise a system by maximising its parts. Here are two simple examples to demonstrate that it often does not work this way. Firstly, a shop that maximises the profit it makes from each sale will make far fewer sales, and few people will want to return to buy from it again. The profit from individual sales will go up, but the weekly profit will go down. And, secondly – an issue that is very relevant as I write – you can maximise the safety of children at school by ensuring that all their teachers are thoroughly checked. But closing schools because some teachers have not been checked has the effect of reducing child safety, because they are more at risk on the streets than they would be in a school with unchecked teachers. A policy designed to increase child safety has the effect of decreasing it because it only increases safety within one part of a larger system, and it is only the larger system that matters in the long run.)

Another problematic concept is 'cost-effectiveness'. This is a concept taken from the world of management and accountancy but guess what? The concept falls apart when you try to apply it to the real world – to people, or anything useful.

You *can* measure cost-effectiveness, but only if you are only interested in things you can count and measure. You cannot measure the amount a person feels loved or valued. You cannot count self-esteem, or self-loathing. You cannot weigh fear or joy. Aspects of any activity will be measurable, and for these aspects, you can determine cost-effectiveness. But since we are interested in problems inside people, things that cannot be measured, any measure of cost-effectiveness can only be of limited value.

Some people disagree with this point: they say, for example, that you cannot measure self-worth, but you can measure the behaviour that expresses it or demonstrates its absence. This is only partly true, and is a very dangerous road to go down.

In brief, any measure you choose is culturally determined, so will be wrong for many people. And even when it is appropriate for an individual, the measure will not always indicate what you intend. And the thing you are measuring always gets distorted because (a) you are measuring it and (b) you are determining what you do in the light of that measurement.

## ***Learning from Experience***

We must monitor the effects of the changes we introduce, to ensure we remain on track and don't introduce new problems to replace the ones we solve. The solutions we adopt don't need to be perfect. They ought to be better than what was being done before, and they ought to be monitored.

The purpose of monitoring is to enable us to learn from experience. We are not very good at this, so we need to work at it and practice hard.

## ***Pulling the Three Areas Together***

It should be clear by now that each of these three areas needs the other two: not just because all three are necessary, but because the way in which they can best operate is as an integrated whole. The only way they can operate (that makes any sense!) is as an integrated whole.

The only people who can realistically educate are those with some experience of the rescue and recovery processes – possibly as a client, but certainly as a helper.

The rescue process is difficult and often intense. It requires a certain approach and a certain amount of experience to do successfully. The people who would best be fitted to this job are those who have been working in the recovery area. Not all of them will want to move on to rescue, but some of them will and should.

## **Conclusion**

### ***The Right Picture?***

It is a bit simplistic, this picture of people falling off a cliff and needing help. Is this picture correct?

No – but it is probably correct enough. It may not be the social equivalent of the Theory of Relativity, but it may well be the equivalent of Newton's Mechanics. Not absolutely true, but close enough to be useful.

We ignore all kinds of important things. The hope and intention is that everything of importance not mentioned here will fit naturally and easily into this picture, and fill out the detail in one or more of the parts.

So, for example, I do not describe explicitly how to address equalities issues: sex, race, disabilities, and so on. But it should be very obvious that the activities we undertake in each of the three areas must be done in a culturally relevant way so people are not excluded from the education, the rescue or the restoration.

### ***The Right Boundaries?***

What are the right boundaries? When you are seeking to help people, no boundaries are acceptable. But if each local area can and does help the people within its own area, there is no need to set boundaries to exclude anyone.

The areas that get their act together first will be helping people far outside their own area. But they will also be experiencing growth and blessing that far outweighs the extra burden. And the other places will become jealous of the blessing and seek to enjoy it for themselves.

This process will work if we all do what we should. Is that not hopelessly Utopian? Yes, to a degree. But this is why the church must be at the centre – to live out an impossible dream, to show people it is not impossible; to give them hope that the future can be better than the past.

# Appendices

## 1: A Refocused Church

What does it mean to be church?

### *Following Jesus*

Being a Christian is not about believing a set of doctrines, or about carrying out a set of rituals. It is about following Jesus. This simple statement turns much of what we are used to in the Christian Church upside down.

If you follow Jesus, some consequences are inevitable.

You become a part of the mission Jesus was engaged in. Your life is focussed on God's Kingdom. The purpose of meeting together is to enable us to live like Jesus when we are not meeting together. Our worship is primarily expressed through the way we serve God 'in the world'.

### *Social Justice*

The church is not just about personal holiness – it is also about social justice. Much of the Old Testament teaches us how a society can follow God's pattern of living. The church needs to understand this pattern and discover how to implement the principles here and now.

The Jubilee shows us that individual wealth is acceptable, that people should be allowed to enjoy the benefits of their work, that those who work harder should be rewarded more, but that this should not be allowed to continue unchecked for generation after generation. You also need a mechanism for returning wealth and the means of production to the poor and undeserving.

The Jubilee also shows us that the rich and powerful must, every now and then, have to use the systems they put in place to supply the needs of those who have nothing.

The Sabbath shows us that life must be more than just earning and spending. These are not bad activities, but you need a rest sometimes, even from good activities.

Gleaning shows us that the poor must be supplied with food, but that they must work for it. Nothing is just handed to people on a plate.

## 2: Church and Society

I have been talking about church, but the issues are too large to be handled by the church. The church needs to take a lead in solving these problems, but all of society needs to play a part.

This will involve society in a transformation as radical as that proposed for the church. Perhaps alongside *Educate, Rescue* and *Restore*, we should put *Campaign*?

### *From Welfare to Care*

Welfare involves giving people things. While this is necessary, if that is where we place the emphasis, then the process does not work. In the end, giving things as a solution to the problems people have means we treat the people as problems, and treat people as things. Giving a TV to a lonely person may help them feel less bad, but it does not solve the problem.

What matters more than anything else is that we care for people who are hurting. If we really care, everything else can (should, must) follow.

### *Value Systems*

Living in a homogenous society is easy – as long as you fit. Everyone believes the same things, has the same values, so you must all be right. Anyone who disagrees has to leave. We like living this way: it is easy, comfortable. You may know in your head that in other places different people believe different things, but that is not important – it's not real. Everybody you know, everybody you work with and live with and meet shares your beliefs, and you know you must all be right.

Western democracies are not homogenous. They are composed of many different people, who believe many different things. We don't know how to build a heterogenous society – or how to live in one. One of our greatest challenges is this: how do we build and maintain a society in which different value systems co-exist? We must address this question; we must solve this challenge, if we are to have any hope for a better future.

I believe that, as a society, we can agree on certain value systems being acceptable, even where they are not shared by the majority. We can also agree that other value systems are not acceptable, and do not form a part of our society.

'Acceptable but not shared' is a difficult concept. Many people struggle to get their minds around it. It means we allow other people to be different, to express and live according to values that we do not share, but it does not mean that they can expect us to behave as though we shared their values.

This is rather abstract. Some examples should help, but please recognise that they are my examples. You may disagree – you may want to suggest different lists of acceptable and non-acceptable value systems.

For me, acceptable value systems include the following.

- Materialism – the belief that nothing is real apart from the material world.
- Homosexuality – the belief that same-sex sexual relationships are not significantly different from relationships between the sexes.
- Racism – the belief that one race or ethnic group is better or superior to another.
- Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Baha'i – any religion that allows people to choose what they believe and practice, and to leave the religion without punishment.

Again for me, unacceptable value systems include the following.

- The National Front – any group that says some people should not be allowed to live in some places or work in some jobs because of their ethnic background.
- Terrorists – any group that seeks to impose its desires on other people by means of violence directed towards civilians.
- Sects and cults – any religious group that uses immoral means to gain and keep followers, or that punishes or prevents people who wish to leave.
- Any mono-cultural religion – one that imposes its way of life on people whether they follow that religion or not.

### ***Caring Responsibly***

There is always someone worse off than yourself. You need to both accept help and give it.

You are responsible for your own life. Family, friends, church and society can offer help, but in the end it is down to you and the life you choose to live.

You are responsible for the way you behave towards other people. The closer you are to them, the greater your impact on them.

The social contract says: if you behave responsibly, society will help when you cannot cope. You are free to be irresponsible, and you are free to suffer the consequences.

Paying people to do nothing encourages them to do nothing. People need to work, so society has an obligation to find them work they can do.

Life is tough. We shield children from some of life's rough edges, but adults have to put up with it. We will work to reduce pain and suffering, but we have to be realistic about what can be achieved in this area.

### ***Effectively channelled compassion***

Disease, old-age and death cannot be removed by legislation. The suffering they cause can, however, be made more bearable through compassionate social care.

These are increasingly the times of nuclear and single-parent families. Traditional patterns of community based care are fast disappearing and there is need of alternative systems. Given the extent of human suffering the mechanisms for providing adequate levels of care will have to be staffed by local volunteers if it is to be affordable. To be maximally efficient and effective such volunteering needs to be well managed.

Management options range from internally-led (bottom up) to externally-driven (top down) with partnership (middle in) at the counterpoint. The different options have implications concerning levels of 'participation' and thus for 'empowerment' and 'commitment' and thus, crucially, for 'sustainability'.

Across the range of options it is useful to think in terms of *agency* (those who feel the need and take the lead), *agenda* (the aims, objectives and implementation

plan) and *organisational structure*. If we are in search of excellence<sup>5</sup> there is presumably a preference for lean, flat hierarchies with power, responsibility and control of budget located as close as possible to the points of delivery.

### *Caring Communities*

In earlier times care in the community was part of what community meant. That spontaneous pattern has been shattered by the modern tendency towards selfish individualism. But this is a recent and reversible social phenomenon intimately linked to capitalist consumerism and the culture of self-centered independency which it creates.

We are conditioned into being selfish. Selfishness is not built into our genes. People are designed to be happy and to avoid suffering. The capacity for compassion is within us all<sup>6</sup>. The task is to revamp the conditioning process such that, at the community level, people are willing and able to move beyond childish dependency and selfish independency to a mature, compassionate and pro-active *interdependency*.

Interdependency demonstrates itself in the ability and willingness of people from different backgrounds and with different interests and priorities to work together in harmony for the common good. This road can be made only by walking it<sup>7</sup>.

(by George Clark

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