



which there are berries, vegetables and herbs growing. 2. The extension work to this building that has so far attracted £32 000 in pledges and £19 500 in grants. 3. The Chipping Barnet foodbank, run wholly by volunteers—including, notably, the Manager—who graciously give of their time to feed those who are hungry. 4. The Night Shelter, when volunteers give of their time to provide a place of safety, warmth and welcome to up to 17 homeless people each week. All of these, I would argue, are examples of the economy of grace. That is, they operate largely because people graciously and voluntarily giving of their time and energy to benefit others.

What about an historical example of transformation? Yesterday I represented the URC at the Induction Service of the new Minister, Ruth Moriarty, at Christ Church, New Southgate and Friern Barnet. She mentioned the example of one of her predecessor Ministers, Benjamin Waugh, Congregational Minister, who co-founded the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which was the predecessor of the NSPCC. When Waugh first ministered in the slums of Greenwich he was appalled at the deprivations and cruelties suffered by children. Critical of the workhouse system, the Poor Law, and aspects of the criminal justice system as it affected children, he wrote a book (*The Gaol Cradle, Who Rocks It?*, 1873) urging the creation of juvenile courts as a means of diverting children from a life of crime. What, in addition to the desire to prevent cruelty to children, motivated Waugh? It was his passionate conviction that God is good and loving. In his hymn, 'Now let us see Thy beauty, Lord', Waugh writes:

Our every feverish mood is cooled,  
and gone is every load,  
when we can lose the love of self,

and find the love of God.

Motivated by his belief in a loving God, Waugh, along with others such as Lord Shaftesbury, began an organisation that helped to bring about a transformation of adult attitudes to children. However, as we know from recent disclosures about child abuse, a further transformation is yet needed. This is why churches such as St John's need to put in place robust Safeguarding procedures to protect children and adults at risk. Regrettably, there are some who use the 'love of God' as a cloak beneath which they indulge the love of self and its selfish desires in ways that damage others.

Some of you may remember that I attended a Minister's Spring School in France in May, and that the Czech Pastor, David Nečil, attended the Spring School with me. One of the presentations we heard was from a Minister of the United Protestant Church in France. The UPCF has commemorated the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation by proposing some new 'Gospel Theses Today'. The following is one of them:

The dominant ideology of our time wants us to believe that reality is characterized by scarcity which fosters fear—fear of shortage. Meanwhile the gospel calls us to change the perspective and to make a distinction between our justified need and our limitless desires. Hence, being content with simply satisfying one's needs rather than [feeding one's] desires makes it possible for us to welcome all which sustains our living as an abundance given by God.

There are two points being made in this thesis. The first is about the fear that derives from a belief in scarcity; the second is about distinguishing justified need from limitless desire. The

second is something that confronts us all, not least through the barrage of advertising and marketing that it is difficult to avoid completely. Those who wish to sell us things play on our desire to look young, to appear successful, to enjoy intimacy with another person, etc. And those who try to sell us such things realise they are on to a winner, because, left unchecked, there is no limit to such desires, especially if it is the desire to attempt to turn back time by imagining that one can counteract the effects of ageing.

The first point of the thesis about scarcity is, arguably, more entrenched in our thinking. When life becomes an individual struggle for survival, we think, 'It's you or me pal. Money and resources are scarce so I'm going to hold on to what I've got. Hard luck.' This is a mind-set that derives from the economy of threat, scarcity and want. But the good news is that there is an alternative: God's gift of life and loving-kindness in Jesus Christ has the power to create a different economy and a transformed society.

For example, it challenges us to ask whether GDP is the best way to measure the health of a nation or society? Is competition to grab the largest market share, in which some are winners and therefore others are losers, the best way to organise our economic life? Why must the shareholders be the winners and the low-paid employees and zero hours contractors the losers? The co-operative movement would suggest that there is an alternative. I would point to the John Lewis Partnership as an example of a successful model of workers-as-partners who share in profitability. In other words, it is possible to be effective and successful while at the same time moving beyond a winners-and-losers default scenario.

The British and Irish Lions and the New Zealand All Blacks drew the recent rugby test series. It was a best-of-three series in which the All Blacks won the first test, the Lions won the second test, and the third test was drawn 15–all. For followers of most other sports (with the exception of Cricket) this probably seems a strange and unsatisfactory result. Indeed, it was apparent that the players of both teams at the end of the drawn match, and therefore drawn series, were not quite sure what to do, since the result did not evoke the usual reactions of the elation of winning or the disconsolation of losing. Because the series was drawn, both captains held the trophy aloft, both teams gathered round the podium and mixed in with one another. It was, arguably, a victory for sportsmanship, and both teams could justifiably share in it. The headline in the *Observer* was "Shared Glory". Both teams had given their utmost, and having done so, neither on the day was able to prevail against the other, and therefore both shared in the glory of the contest.

The Apostle Paul writes of the way in which God's grace in Jesus Christ overflows and increases, resulting in a greater glory:

...as the overflowing grace of God is shared by more and more people, the greater may be the chorus of thanksgiving that arises to the glory of God.

2 Cor. 4:15

When we give God the glory in gratitude and praise we are able to share in God's reflected glory. God's glory was both hidden and also manifest in the Cross of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, who in sacrificial love laid down his life for us. What prevents one's vainglorious tendency to take the glory all for oneself—and thereby stop the flow and exchange of grace—is

to "...carry in our bodies the death of Jesus in order that the life of Jesus will be revealed." (2 Cor. 4:11). Dying to vainglorious impulses through repentance and trust in Christ opens the self to share in the economy of God's grace, and thereby also to reflect God's glory. For, as Charles Wesley's reminds us, God's purpose for us is that we may be: "...changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place..."

Thanks be to God.