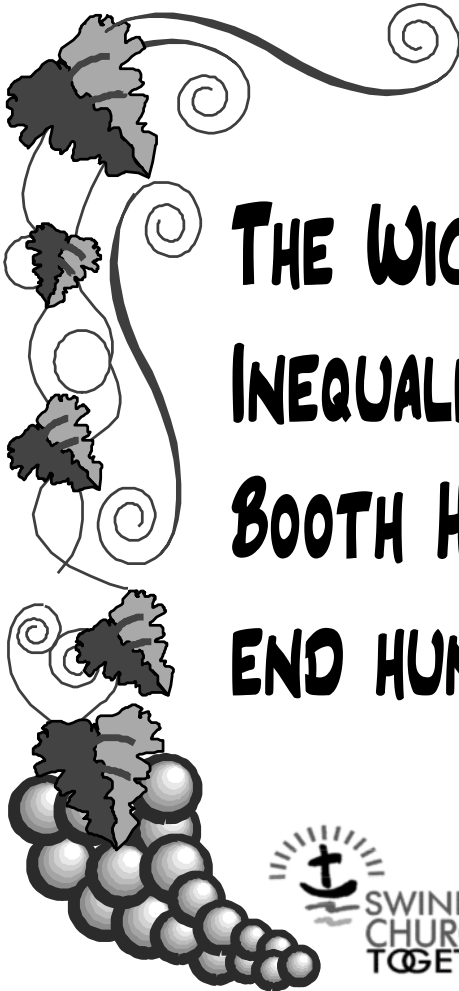
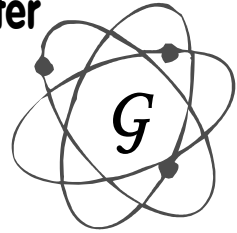


Promoting justice, peace & the integrity of creation

Grapevine

SC4J Newsletter

Issue No. 62
Autumn 2018



THE WICKED BIBLE
INEQUALITY IN SWINDON
BOOTH HOUSE
END HUNGER UK



Letter from the Editor

Welcome to issue 62 of Grapevine, bringing you writing on a variety of subjects relating to social and economic justice.

We open with an article on The ‘Wicked Bible’! The author challenges us to think carefully about how we use Scripture. Connected with a theme of this article is the famous poem engraved on the Statue of Liberty.

I am grateful to have received accounts of two organisations offering valuable services to the people of Swindon. The Service Manager of Booth House describes projects that support people experiencing homelessness and loss of self esteem. The Training and Development Support Officer of Citizens Advice tells us what this organisation offers, and appeals for more volunteers.

If you have heard of The Spirit Level by Wilkinson and Pickett, you will be interested in the review of their new book, The Inner Level, which shows how living in a very unequal society impacts on individuals. After a look at a campaign of Hunger UK, we end with an extract from the Archbishop of Canterbury’s recent address to the TUC.

It is good to know that Grapevine is still valued and thank you for donations received.

Elsbeth Wollen

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The Wicked Bible

Subsequently known as the ‘Wicked Bible’, a reprint in 1631 of the Authorised Version of the Old and New Testaments was damned not for what it included, but rather omitted. The omission was just one, three letter word, but critical to the meaning of the text. In ‘The Wicked Bible’ the seventh of the Ten Commandments as they appear in the book of Exodus, encouraged the English speaking, Christian world, Thou shalt * commit adultery. There were no reports of breakdown in the social order of the land. The royal printers, Robert Barker and Martin Lucas, were fined the equivalent in today’s monetary value of just over £45,000 and most copies of the offending volume were committed to the fire.

Not that anyone reading this part of Exodus for the first time, and in this flawed version, would have been led astray, unless of course they wanted to be! The context is a bit of a giveaway: Thou shalt not kill.....Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. Thou shalt not covet.....

Unfaithfulness to your spouse does not sit easily here or in the general, ethical, social order that is being proposed. As ever with sacred text, always be sure to comprehend the whole picture, and especially when you quote it to support a case you wish to make.

On 15th June 2018, the Attorney General of the United States of America, Jeff Sessions, a Christian, defending to other Christian friends his government’s policy of forced removal of children from their parents or guardians at the US-Mexico border, cited these words from the Apostle Paul:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval. (Romans 13:1-3)

This is what Sessions said:

I would cite to you the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13, to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained them for the purpose of order. Orderly and lawful processes are good in themselves and protect the weak and lawful.

Unless I am misunderstanding him, and I apologise if I am, I assume the following to be the substance of Jeff Session's argument as he makes reference to the thirteenth chapter of Romans. The US government, through its appointed officials on the Mexico-US border, has the God-given right, enshrined in Christian scriptures, to take those infants from their parents or guardians and to put them together in cages before transporting them to homes far from their loved ones.

(By the way, if you have access to the internet and want to hear two or three of those youngsters incurring this 'just' punishment for the sins of their mothers and fathers, then just type Children separated from parents cry at US detention centre into your search engine.)

I should say that this policy was officially abandoned by the US government shortly after news of its consequence went viral.

Now going back to the 'Wicked Bible' and how we need to read fragments of holy writ in the light of the whole, I wonder what bits of this teaching from the Apostle Paul should be more particularly considered, as we seek the wider force of his teaching. Did Jeff Sessions read just a few verses before the beginning of chapter thirteen, Paul's admonition to the faithful to, I quote,extend hospitality to strangers (Romans 12:13b), or a sentence or two later,weep with those who weep (Romans 12: 15b), and right after that,do not be haughty but associate with the lowly;.....Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all (Romans 12:16,17)?

Did Sessions get as far as verses eight to ten in the chapter he quotes, where Paul sums up his message: Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments.....are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:8-10)

Maybe he did, but I find it impossible to see any warrant in Paul's broader text for the kind of harrowing treatment meted out to children at the border between Mexico and the USA.

Explore the Biblical terrain thoroughly, both Old and New Testaments, and we will not lose sight of an arc of travel towards welcoming and including as equals those who come into our midst from beyond our geographical or cultural shores seeking shelter and freedom from poverty or persecution or both. Jesus famously makes clear that our 'neighbour(s)' include those of other regions, religions and cultures than our own, as he tells a parabolic tale to focus the great Biblical Story. (Luke: 10:25-36)

This prayer appears in the September issue of the Old Town Partnership of Churches' magazine, and I commend it to our lips and hearts:

God of Life, who shares life with all of creation, who transgresses time and space to incarnate in and among humanity, enable us to share, to open boundaries and borders and to love, radically and deeply. Amen.

Tony Barnes

Engraved on a plaque within the pedestal on which stands the famous Statue of Liberty, which has greeted millions of immigrants into the United States as they sailed into New York, are these words of the poet Emma Lazarus:

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Booth House

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms round him and kissed him.” (Luke 15: 20)



This is, of course, a well known passage about the prodigal son returning home. At Booth House we support people who do not have a home to return to: men and women experiencing homelessness, who may have come from broken relationships or damaged home lives. Some will have difficulty understanding the idea of a loving father.

We are not just about providing a bed; we also aim to demonstrate God’s unconditional love in a practical way. Firstly, we accept people as they come to us and listen to what they need and want from life. We run Goals courses, a motivational course to help identify what is important to you and how you can get more of what you want from life. We also provide a wide range of training including first aid, health and safety, tenancy management, food safety and the ever popular cooking club.

Each resident has a support worker to provide motivation, encouragement, advice and practical help where it’s needed. Our Chaplain provides space for people to explore their spirituality and talk about those things which are important to them.

Recycles, our bike shop, and The Sandwich People, our catering business, both provide residents with the opportunity to discover new and existing skills, gain confidence and achieve qualifications ready to move on to employment and independence. These operate as social enterprises with any income going straight back into the business.



To find out more see our websites:

www.thesandwichpeople.co.uk

www.recycles-swindon.co.uk

Accepting each other where we are and building relationships of trust so that we can support each other to make positive changes in our lives is a true reflection of God's kingdom in action here in Swindon.

*Liz Osborne
Service Manager, Booth House*

Volunteering with CAS

Citizens Advice Swindon (CAS) provides advice to people for the problems they face and to improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives. Our service is free, independent and confidential and available to all. We value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination.



Our three sites are:

Sanford House, open Mondays & Wednesdays from 9.30am - 4pm;

Tuesdays, Thursdays & Fridays from 9.30am - 1 pm

North Swindon at Pinetrees Community Centre, open Mondays &

Wednesdays from 10am - 1 pm

East Swindon at Cavendish Square on Tuesdays & Thursdays 10am - 1pm.

Our Adviceline (Tel: 03444994114) is available Monday - Friday from 10am - 4pm and we answer queries via email:

advice@swindon.cabnet.org.uk

Our dedicated team of volunteers carries out a variety of roles delivering our much needed service, and includes Advisers, Information Guides, Telephone Assessors, Receptionists and Administrators.

Our friendly and diverse volunteer team assisted clients with 22,424 different issues in 2016/17 and demand for our service continues. We need more volunteers to help clients - would you like to join our team? If you are interested and want to use current skills, develop new ones, try something new, and be a part of an enthusiastic team aspiring to deliver a first class service to the people of Swindon, then please get in touch with our Training & Development Support Officer (TDSO).

Currently, we are also seeking Telephone Assessors for our helpline, so if you enjoy listening to people please email for more information or call us for an informal chat.

We are always happy to meet groups and give talks on our service and how you can benefit from Citizens Advice.

Frances Barrone - TDSO

Email: tds@swindon.cabnet.org.uk

Telephone: 01793 402106

Help to reduce inequality in Swindon

Many readers will recall the seminal work *The Spirit Level* from Wilkinson and Pickett in 2009. This book changed the political discourse around economic inequality as it demonstrated the damage caused to all of us by living in an unequal society. The book showed very clearly how inequality impacts negatively on a range of health and social issues and how the UK is, still, at the wrong end of this scale.

From The Spirit Level we know that economic inequality was caused by political decisions taken mainly throughout the 1970's and 80's. We also know that there has been a lack of political will to reverse those decisions, leaving us with many of the problems we face today.

Now Wilkinson and Pickett have produced their follow up book, The Inner Level. This new work shows how living in an unequal society impacts heavily on individuals. Again using impeccable and comprehensive data, they establish how material inequalities raise levels of anxiety and stress, damaging well-being and cause undeniable problems for all of us.

Fair pay, fair policies and fair leadership will all help to reduce economic and social inequality. That is the message from The Equality Trust, established to campaign for a fairer society. Find out what you can do by reading the new book and visiting the web site.

<https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/inner-level>

Tom Wilkes

End Hunger UK

“Everyone should have access to good food.
No one should have to go to bed hungry.”

The previous issue of Grapevine included an article on the shocking situation of children going hungry in 21st century Britain.

End Hunger UK is a campaign to combat some of the worst effects of economic inequality in our country. It is supported by many national organisations, including: Baptists Together; Church Action on Poverty; the Church of England; the Church of Scotland; FareShare; Food Bank As It Is; Magic Breakfast; the Methodist Church; Oxfam; Quaker Peace and Social Witness; The Trussell Trust and the United Reformed Church.

Recently, End Hunger UK has coordinated a national petition calling on the Prime Minister to “Fix Universal Credit” to prevent people going hungry. Evidence from frontline food aid providers across the UK is that the roll out of Universal Credit is causing hardship to vulnerable people, resulting in increased pressure on food banks. While some of the principles behind Universal Credit may be supported, delays, errors, lack of flexibility and poor administration are pushing people into greater debt, destitution and hunger.

End Hunger UK is asking the Government to make a number of changes to the way Universal Credit operates, for example providing debt advice, reducing the level of loan repayments from 40 per cent to 10 per cent, and reducing waiting times for payments from five weeks to two. Universal Credit levels need to be raised to 'the real cost of living.'

One of the signatories to the petition is The Bishop of Durham, Paul Butler. He has reported that, over the summer, many churches in the Diocese of Durham were helping struggling families by running holiday clubs that provided food, as well as fun activities, for children. In addition to adding his own name to the petition, Bishop Butler has written to all bishops in the Church of England encouraging them to do the same.

More information can be found at
www.endhungeruk.org

Elspeth Wollen



Let justice roll down

“Two thousand five hundred years ago, the Prophet Amos, speaking into a society divided between rich and poor, which had forgotten the values which alone could establish stability in a hostile world, cried out but let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.



Five years ago, I said to the Chief Executive of Wonga that I wanted credit unions to compete him out of business. Well he’s gone! Today I dream that governments, now and in the future, put church-run food banks out of business. I dream of empty night shelters. I dream of debt advice

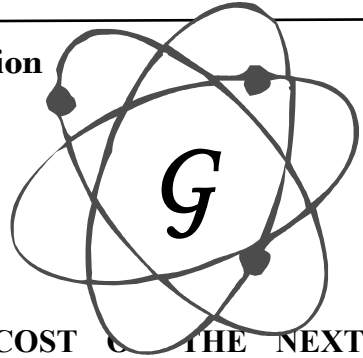
charities without clients. When justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream, the food banks close, the night shelters are empty, families and households are hopeful of better lives for themselves and their children, money is not a tyrant, and justice is seen.

But this not a vision for government alone. Governments of any party, all parties, will fail, act foolishly, be far away. Only partnership between governments, civil society - including unions and churches - business and community, can heal the sicknesses of society now and in the future.”

Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury: extract from speech at the Trades Union Congress conference, 9 September 2018

Social Action

Published by **Swindon Churches Action for Justice** because *‘Peace will follow when Justice prevails’*.



CAN YOU HELP COVER THE COST OF THE NEXT PUBLICATION?

50 donations of £5 would cover the cost to produce our next edition.



Any donation, however large or small, will be gratefully received and will enable us to continue publishing this magazine. Please send your gift to Martyn Cook, Treasurer, SCT, 26 St Philip’s Road, Upper Stratton, SN2 7QH. Cheques should be made payable to ‘Swindon

Churches Together’ please and it would help if you could mark your donation “for Grapevine”.

The Editor is always pleased to receive articles for publication in the magazine which has a widespread readership with 1,200 copies being distributed across Swindon, Marlborough, Highworth, Wroughton and various places in between! Plus it is available on the SCT website.

www.swindonchurches.org

Views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily the views held by the majority of the members of SC4J or the Editor.

This is what the Lord requires of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8

