

PRINCIPLED ACCOMMODATION: A MORAL AND SPIRITUAL DIMENSION IN POLITICS

John Woods*

Training Director School of Preachers Trust, Chairman of the Board and Lecturer at the Latvian Biblical Centre, Riga, and Associate Tutor at Spurgeon's College, London, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

There are limits to what can be covered in this article. I will not explore the impact of the personal morality of politicians and whether it has an impact on their public life and credibility. This remains a contested issue, not least in ongoing investigations into the behaviour in the office of former Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Former US President Donald Trump. A recent book by Chris Bryant, who was formerly an Anglican vicar but now is an MP and Chair of the Commons Committee on Standards and Privileges, relates the various ways that MPs have failed to follow the code of ethics expected by those who hold this office.¹ This is a subject that is worthy of an article in its own right, but there is no space for that in this one.

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Also, worth an article but beyond the focus of this one is the question of the challenge of certain convictions held by evangelical Christians on issues such as abortion, same-sex relationships and transgender. Tim Farron, who has been the Liberal Democrat MP for Westmoreland and Lonsdale since 2005 and served as president of the party from 2011 to 2014 and the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party from 2015 to 2017, has encountered some pushback for his views. Farron has co-authored a book with a group of Christians active in politics, which contains contributions by politicians who represent most of the parties at Westminster and the devolved assemblies. The book with the provocative title, *A Mucky Business*, describes the challenges of being a Christian in politics today.² Both Tim Farron and Kate Forbes, who is a Member of the Scottish Parliament for the Scottish National Party, have encountered

*Corresponding author: e-mail: office@schoolofpreachers.org

¹ Bryant: 2023.

² Farron: 2022.

obstacles to their careers as a result of their stand on moral issues. Farron, while the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party found it difficult to get journalist to concentrate on much more than his attitudes to gay sex, and the pushback on Kate Forbes views on abortions and transgender led her to withdraw from the campaign to be successor to Nicola Sturgeon as the leader of the SNP. It would seem that it is becoming increasingly difficult for evangelical Christians holding traditional views on moral issues to achieve high political office in the United Kingdom.

Finally, this article is also limited in part by my background as an evangelical Christian. That is the worldview that has shaped my life and thinking. This is not to undermine the moral contribution to the national life of those of other faiths and none.

It does, however, acknowledge as historians like Tom Holland argues in his book *Dominion* that Christianity has been the predominant shaping influence in the history of the United Kingdom (Holland, 2019). This influence was on display at the funeral of our late Queen, Elizabeth II in 2022 and at the coronation of her heir King Charles III 2023, which were full of the language, ritual and symbolism of the Christian faith.

PRINCIPLED ACCOMMODATION?

Christian influence is reflected in the presence of 30 Church of England Bishops as permanent members of the House of Lords and the traditional practice of opening the daily proceeding of Parliament with Christian prayers. In the House of Commons, the Speaker's Chaplain prays the following prayer:

“Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our King and his government, to Members of Parliament and all in positions of responsibility, the guidance of your Spirit. May they never lead the nation wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but laying aside all private interests and prejudices keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all mankind; so may your kingdom come and your name be hallowed. Amen.”³

This prayer articulates well a Christian-shaped aspiration for our democracy to be directed by the highest principles for the greatest good to all. The prayer challenges our members of Parliament to examine the dominant forces that motivate their political careers and public policy.

Many would think of efficiency or electability as a motivation. There is clearly an attraction in getting the job done, retaining seats in Parliament and hanging on to the reins of power. The prayer hints at less worthy motives, “...love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals.” There is also the hope expressed in the prayer that parliamentarians might move beyond

³ <https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/business/prayers/> accessed 20/11/2023

getting the job done to doing the right thing. Seeking the common good in framing and implementing policy above party political advantage can be a worthy motivation.

In recent memory, we have had a brief example of this in the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition of 2010–15; the first such coalition in the United Kingdom since the end of the wartime coalition under Winston Churchill in 1945. That coalition was formed as an attempt to bring the best political talent into the government for the common good of defeating the threat of a Nazi takeover of the whole of Europe.

Some coalitions are less complex and more durable and effective than others. In theory, it is possible to have a multi-party coalition that is fragile because of the need to gain some sense of agreement between the parties to their approach to governing. Such an arrangement can also have an impact on the longevity of the coalition. Coalitions can be formed for all the for a variety of reasons. The 2010 coalition was the response to a hung parliament, where none of the political parties had an overall majority in parliament. Both parties would have preferred to have governed with their own majority. If politics is the art of the possible, the coalition was a variation on the theme of making the best of a bad job! It might be argued that there were some benefits for the nation that The Conservative Party with 306 seats and no overall majority in Parliament had to negotiate with another party about forming a coalition government, with all the give and take that this involves. The comparative weakness of the Conservative Party, with no overall majority in the House of Commons, meant that they needed to be humble enough to share the process of government with another party. There was also an advantage in entering a coalition with another party, that, although small, with only 57 MPs, was big enough to make a significant contribution to the government in ideas and talent. The coalition between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democratic Party was a great opportunity combined with a variety of challenges.

The great opportunity open to the coalition was to rise above the narrow demands of party politics by thinking hard about how to seek the common good of the nation by forming a government with a workable majority. In addition, the arrangement meant that the members of the smaller party of coalition, The Liberal Democratic Party, were given key ministerial roles in the government. The Liberal Democratic Leader, Nick Clegg, became Deputy Prime Minister, and other Liberal Democratic MPs, including David Laws, who is a contributor to this Journal, became ministers.

The great challenge was to negotiate what parts of each party's manifesto could be maintained and what needed to be adapted or scrapped. Perhaps one of the great achievements of the Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg was the retaining of their bold policy of a graduated increase in personal tax allowances, which had an immediate and significant impact on the spending power of the poorer segment of the workforce.

The most notable setback was the failure of the Liberal Democrats to deliver on their manifesto pledge to scrap increases to university tuition fees. This is the main reason cited for the party's electoral decimation in the 2015 election. Their share of the vote dropped from 23% to 8% and the number of their MPs fell from 8 to 57. Those who lost their seats included Nick Clegg himself.⁴

The coalition represented an attempt at a political accommodation between two contrasting political philosophies, which sought common ground for the common good. As we have seen this political project was not without merits, yet it could be suggested that it was weakened by a failure to be an entirely principled accommodation. Yet as Edward Hall concludes, assessments of such arrangements are difficult to make:

“Most of the time, politicians will engage in compromises on matters of principle in the hope that this will have fortuitous long-term consequences. For this reason, plausible assessments of political integrity will inevitably be messy, provisional, and highly controversial.”⁵

In an attempt to reflect on a moral and spiritual dimension of principled accommodation, we turn to a key biblical story and a biblical concept.

THE BIBLICAL STORY

The biblical story concerns the exile of Israel in Babylon during the ministry of Jeremiah the prophet. The exiles in Babylon struggled with an identity crisis as a result of being far away from home. This loss of identity brought with it a loss of purpose. It is interesting that the language of exile and wilderness is used to describe politicians and political parties that find themselves out of power and wondering about who they are and what they are for. There is a strong link between a group's sense of identity and their sense of purpose. When a group retains a strong sense of their identity, this tends to shape and direct what they choose to do.

The Babylonian exiles faced choices about how they were to view this time of exile.

They could choose to live in denial pretending that their lives in exile could be lived as if they were still back home. They could choose to live in rebellion against the government, refusing the status quo and agitating for change. Or they could respond with an exercise of principled accommodation; this third approach is what is advocated by Jeremiah. Jeremiah writes a letter to the exiles to orientate them to their new situation.

⁴ Harris: The Guardian: 2015.

⁵ Edward Hall: 2023, page 80.

“This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ‘Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.’ Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,’ declares the Lord.

This is what the Lord says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.’”⁶

Politicians lose credibility when they make misleading promises; one statement that comes to mind is the one allegedly uttered at the start of the First World War:

“It will all be over by Christmas.”

It is easy to see why such optimism is popular and effective in shaping the public’s perception of a situation in the short term, yet the promise wears thin by January or at the next Christmas, or the one after that.

Jeremiah’s approach, by contrast, offers a clear and honest timeframe and a detailed long-term agenda for the exiles that provides them with a fresh perspective on their new situation. Jeremiah also skilfully retains a sense of the people’s distinct identity and their ultimate purpose. Such focused hope was vital for sustaining this group during the long years of exile.

HOW TO ACT WITH PRINCIPLED ACCOMMODATION

Nomi Claire Lazar in her 2023 essay *Political Ethics in The State of Emergency* suggests that there are three things that need to be considered when making decisions about how to make good decisions in a political crisis.

⁶ Jeremiah 29:4–11.

First, Lazar reminds us of the importance of establishing, as far as it is possible, the facts about that situation, suggesting that: “Good Moral Decisions Requires Good Information. All decision making begins with ascertaining the facts.”⁷

Politicians often get into trouble for using unsubstantiated, misleading or patently false data. It is difficult to make an honest decision by dishonest means. One thinks of the 24 September 2002 dossier on Saddam Hussain’s alleged stockpile of weapons of mass destruction that formed a key plank in Tony Blair’s Government decision to join the United States in the Iraq war of 2003. Or there was the disputed claim made on adverts carried on the sides of buses by the Leave campaign during the EU Referendum that suggested that the £350 million sent by the United Kingdom to Europe each week could be used to fund the NHS. More recently, questions have been raised about the interpretation and use of data to make decisions about the measures taken by the UK government to control the Coronavirus in 2020–2021.

To be fair, some decisions need to be made quickly before all the facts become clear. It is possible for politicians to make decisions in good faith, based on the information that is to hand, that subsequently proves to be partially or completely untrue. Jeremiah’s letter seeks to lay the facts before the exiles in Babylon. He had the advantage of being a prophet, who was in receipt of a “word from the Lord,” and his instructions are based on this revelation.

Second, Lazar also suggests emergencies, “...seem to demand the violation of our most treasured moral principles,” something that Lazar describes as “conflicting norms.”⁸ Principled accommodation takes place when people act with integrity to establish a “new normal” in a time of crisis, which aims to retain a sense of identity and moral purpose. The exile was a huge crisis in Israel’s history. It is both a crisis of identity and purpose. Jeremiah addresses how the people can retain their distinctive identity and sense of purpose while adapting to the new situation in Babylon. The challenge of dealing with the circumstances of a community in exile presents a people the choice of embracing an approach of isolation, assimilation or engagement.

The first two of these choices are more straightforward, but they do involve a heavy cost. Choosing isolation enables a community to retain its sense of identity but at the cost of any meaningful contact with wider society. Choosing assimilation gives the exiled community a place at the table but at the cost of diluting or abandoning the group’s distinctiveness. Choosing engagement is much more complicated. It requires what I have called principled accommodation to exercise a faithful imagination that combines convictions shaped by identity with creativity in responding to the challenges and opportunities of operating in a fresh environment.

Like a political party that finds themselves shunted from government to opposition, the exiles in Babylon must face the cold fact that there are no quick

⁷ Lazar: 2023, p.215.

⁸ Lazar: 2023, p.223.

and easy ways of reversing their fortunes. For a political party in the United Kingdom, that generally means five years minimum but can mean more than a decade. As this paper is being written, the Labour Party has been in opposition for 13 years. Jeremiah tells the exiles that the timeframe for their exile will be 70 years. This in part shapes the agenda he gives them of settling down in Babylonian society and living for the common good of the whole of that society. This public policy of settlement in Babylon for the long term brings a renewed perspective on their role within that society. This is encapsulated by the words that Jeremiah writes in his letter:

“Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

(Jeremiah 29:7)

Christopher Watkins suggests in his book *Biblical Critical Theory* that the exiles:

“...are to be involved in the spheres of government and business, seeking to work for the good of the city in those domains.”⁹

The Hebrew word translated as peace or welfare is the Hebrew Shalom; Plantinga writes that “Shalom is the webbing together of God, humans and all creation in equity, fulfilment and delight.”¹⁰

Principled accommodation between different groups in the pursuit of the common good brings harmony, stability and flourishing to a society.

Third, Lazar suggests that there is a need to exercise discernment in decision-making that “may extend to the cultivation of civic virtue and to the banking of performance legitimacy.”¹¹

It takes wisdom to make decisions that are at the same time for the common good and are credible and workable. Such wise decision-making helps people inhabit a new normal with a measure of confidence that this is the best course of action in this set of circumstances. The wisdom of Jeremiah’s letter is that it manages to propose a new normal of creative engagement in their new surroundings whilst retaining the distinctive identity of Israel. Indeed, it is their distinctiveness that makes their actions more valuable. This point is articulated well by the distinguished Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann:

“There is no ‘separate peace’ for exiles, no private deals with God, no permitted withdrawal from the affairs of empire. The only *shalom* these

⁹ Watkins: 2023, p.484.

¹⁰ Plantinga: 1996, p.10.

¹¹ Lazar: 2023, p.232.

troubled Jews would know was the *shalom* wrought for Babylon. The letter implies that the exiled community of Jews can indeed impact Babylon with *shalom* through its active concern and prayer, but only as the community knows that it is not Babylon. The distance from Babylon makes possible an impacting nearness to Babylon.”¹²

Jeremiah appears to be advocating that the exiles operate within Babylon as resident aliens, a term coined by Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon in their book of the same title. This suggestive term is unpacked in the subtitle of the book: *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*. This is a reference to a statement made by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians:

“Our citizenship is in heaven,” or “We are a colony of heaven.”¹³

“There is a colony, an island of one culture in the middle of another.”¹⁴

What did it mean in practice for the exiles to live as resident aliens? The Old Testament provides a story of four young men who are part of an elite group taken from Israel to Babylon. The story of these four young men, called Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, is told in the Book of Daniel. They are chosen for training as high-ranking members of the Babylonian Civil Service. This involved a “free” education for three years in Babylonian literature and language. The young men were re-educated and renamed. All four Hebrew names contain a reference to their God; the names they are given erase these references and replace them with a reference to Babylonian gods. The four young men accept the “free scholarship,” although, of course, we know that there is no such thing as a free scholarship. The distinctive identity of Daniel and his friends was under threat. King Nebuchadnezzar knows that if he can take over the minds of the young elite from Israel, he will have achieved the real captivity.

The four young men recognising the danger of losing their sense of identity make an interesting request of the officer in charge of them. They ask to be excused from eating the rich food from the King’s table and to be given a diet of vegetables instead for 10 days. The outcome of the 10-day experiment is that they are healthier than all the other students and make straight as in their studies.

Daniel and his friends choose the “cuisine of resistance!” Why? We cannot be sure why – perhaps it is because eating implies a fellowship and relationship which was not in place “or maybe it symbolised a refusal of the claim that they were dependent on the King was their sole provider.”

The four young men manage to be different without being weird, they manage to object without being objectionable and they are able to be different with being difficult! It is particularly striking that the four young men go out of

¹² Brueggemann: 1997, pp. 13–14.

¹³ Philippians 3:20.

¹⁴ Hauerwas & Willimon Resident 2014.

their way to avoid giving the anxious official in charge of them a hard time. Humbly and gently, they suggest an alternative menu that reflects their own distinctive dietary requirements. They also wisely suggest the change be subject to a temporary ten-day trial! The rest of the first half of the book of Daniel relates how the four young men provide invaluable service in Babylon whilst retaining their spiritual distinctiveness. This is at times costly for the young men, but they manage to navigate the tight manoeuvres of being morally good men in the public square. Their careers in the public life of Babylon were not without incident. Some rivals seek to make trouble for the four young men, which led three of them to face a fiery furnace and the other to be thrown into the lion's den.

The experience of these four young men is a good example of principled accommodation. Compromise is sometimes seen as a dirty word in Christian circles, and it can be. Yet here is a model of how compromise can be shaped by wisdom, truth and love in pursuit of the common good of peace. I was interested that Alin Fumurescu in his article *Compromise* refers to “The Gospel of Principled Compromise.”¹⁵ The association of the Christian word gospel and the term principled compromise is close to the idea for which I am arguing in this article.

I was also interested to see what Fumurescu (2023) says about the type of people needed to engage in this principled compromise and the impact that the process of principled compromise has upon them.

“Yet if a principled compromise in politics calls for a certain type of character it may also shape one, thereby bringing compromise into the less explored field of virtue ethics ... adding that, ‘Virtue ethics does not weigh a single act – in this case, a single compromise – but instead looks at the life of a person as a whole series of choices that help to shape a character. This should not come as a surprise since any ethical decision not only reveals something about the moral character of the person involved but also modifies it ever so little by either strengthening some feats or weakening others.’”¹⁶

Contemporary governments would be wise if they cultivated public servants like the four young men in this story. Likewise, principled people getting involved in the “mucky business of politics” might find the process transformative, strengthening rather than undermining their distinctive identity.

The book of Daniel is also interesting because Daniel picks up Jeremiah's reference to 70 years:

In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom – in the first year of his reign, I,

¹⁵ Fumurescu: 2023, p.59.

¹⁶ Fumurescu: 2023, p.61.

Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.¹⁷

Part of the wisdom of principled accommodation is the discernment that is both flexibility in our response to changing circumstances and boundaries to that flexibility. The instructions contained in Jeremiah's letter had informed and shaped the exiles' approach to their time in Babylon but had also set clear time limits on them. Daniel in his prayer sets into motion a chain of events that leads to a wholesale return of exiles to the land and the beginning of a rebuilding project.

Such discernment concerning timing is invaluable in making the right choices about what is important in each season of life.

It is significant that the person who became the main agent for this rebuilding project that was prompted by Daniel's prayer, Nehemiah was also a high-ranking official in the King's Palace. He was able to use his position and connections to negotiate a leave of absence, the necessary resources and a security detail for the journey. It is not difficult to see a connection between the 70 years that the exiles had taken seriously and implemented Jeremiah's letter and the goodwill towards the exiles that is reflected in the granting of Nehemiah's request to rebuild his nation's religious and cultural centre.

Jeremiah's directive is not entirely devoid of self-interest, but it looks beyond self-interest to what will be of benefit to the whole of society. This attitude is reaffirmed in the New Testament when Paul urges Christians in Galatians to have an open-hearted attitude towards the place where they live:

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”¹⁸

The attitude is reflected in a more political context in the words spoken to Timothy:

“I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour...”¹⁹

Timothy is urged to engage prayerfully with his society for the pursuit of the common good. This is reiterated in the letter to Titus:

¹⁷ Daniel 9:1–3

¹⁸ Galatians 6:10.

¹⁹ 1 Timothy 2:1–3.

“This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone ... Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives.”²⁰

The theological master of the concept of dealing with the challenge of maintaining spiritual distinctiveness in a hostile environment is the North African theologian Augustine of Hippo. His major contribution in this area was his book *The City of God*, his last major work, composed sporadically between 413 and 426. The immediate occasion was the sack of Rome in 410 by the Visigoths that shocked the Roman Empire and marked the beginning of its slow decline – it was a 9/11 moment. Many Romans blamed the attack on the Christians, whose faith had only been legal for the last century. With robust and lengthy arguments, Augustine establishes that the rot at the heart of the Roman Empire was self-inflicted, her gods were inadequate and Christians far from damaging Roman society had made a positive contribution to it.

Augustine (2012, 2013) reflects deeply on the importance of goodness in human society:

“They are more distressed at having a bad house than at having a bad life, as if a person’s greatest good were to have everything except good himself.”²¹

BOOK 3

For Augustine, the nature of human life could be summed up in his concept of two loves. “Two loves,” Augustine writes, “have made two cities. Love of self, even to the point of contempt for God, made the earthly city; and love of God, even to the point of contempt for self, made the heavenly city.”²² For all its vast scale and intricate complexity, then, *The City of God* is a story of love.

The love of self, the pursuit of money, sex and power can have a corrosive impact on individuals and societies. For Augustine, the Christian message introduces another love that brings freedom from the desire to promote self. Augustine writes of the emperor Theodosius, who “took more joy in being a member of the church than in ruling the world.”²³

In his book *On Christian Teaching*, Augustine makes the point that the love of God and neighbour is at the heart of Scripture’s message.

²⁰ Titus 3:8, 14.

²¹ Augustine: 2012 p.71.

²² Augustine: 2013 p.238.

²³ Augustine: 2013, p.180.

“So, if it seems to you that you have understood the divine Scriptures, or any part of them, in such a way that by this understanding you do not build up this twin love of God and neighbour, then you have not understood them.”²⁴

Jesus described the commands to love God and love neighbour as the two greatest commandments.²⁵ The statement, “Love your neighbour as yourself,” is the seminal statement of ethics in both the Old and New Testaments. Originally part of the Old Testament Torah in Leviticus 19:18, it becomes the rule of thumb for all ethical thinking in the Bible.

WHAT MIGHT THIS MEAN FOR CONTEMPORARY POLITICS?

Luke Bretherton (2023) argues that there are four key Christian commitments flowing out of the demand for neighbour love that can shape a faithful approach to the democratic process.

1. The sanctity of every person as made in the image of God.
2. The commitment to loving strangers and enemies as neighbours marked through listening to and dialogue with them as the primary means of either resolving conflict or addressing problems rather than killing, coercing or causing them to flee.
3. The rule of law, a basic premise of which is that nobody is above the law and government is bound or limited by law and due process.
4. A commitment to democratic checks and balances to limit concentrations of power embodies a theological understanding that all human speech and action is finite and fallen and so requires structures that allow for contesting and changing unjust arrangements.²⁶

This approach first requires the courage to live in accordance with convictions. It is to act in faithfulness, to God, and our distinctive identity and purpose in society. Jesus speaks about the presence of his disciples as being both light and salt, for whom the disciples are able to have an impact on society only as far as they are – distinctive from society.²⁷ It is the disciples’ distinctiveness that makes their contribution to society clear, illuminating, piquant and potent.

This approach, second, is based on the law of love and also requires imagination, which is willing to explore what it means in practice to live for the common good by learning to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Third, this approach requires flexibility. This flexibility is not based on a willingness to ditch all our distinctive convictions to grasp a good outcome.

²⁴ Augustine: 1996, p.124.

²⁵ Matthew 22:37:40, Mark 12:29–31.

²⁶ Bretherton: 2023, p.p.348–349.

²⁷ Matthew 5:13–16.

Rather, this flexibility seeks to explore how faithfulness can stay in shape as it navigates a new situation. Such flexibility endeavours to engage in principled accommodation to achieve its goals without ditching its convictions.

Fourth, this approach requires the exercise of hope. The exiles in Jeremiah's time were urged to embrace what US President Barach Obama called: "The audacity of hope." Such a hope motivated those who because of their sense of the value of each human being, sought to abolish the slave trade in the 18th Century and fight for civil rights in the 1960s.

The fourth of Bretherton's key Christian commitment suggests that "all human speech and action is finite and fallen." Here is a vital reminder that Christians not only have a high view of the dignity and value of every human being but also have an honest view of the limitations of humans as fallen beings. Christian theology sees four vital stages of biblical revelations: Creation, Fall, Redemption and Glorification. These four words remind us that we are not what we once were, the noble creatures that the creator made, we are fallen, our intellects, desires and volitions distorted by human sinfulness. Neither are we despite the redemptive actions of Jesus on the cross what we are ultimately supposed to be, perfected by Christ in a final state of glory. Human beings and human societies are works in progress, which have about them the already and the not yet.

It might be helpful to conclude with a reference to a politician who has always been who has tried to work hopefully and honestly between the already and the not yet. Frank Field was Minister for Welfare Reform in Tony Blair's first government. He was a Labour MP for Birkenhead from 1979 to 2019. Brian Griffiths in the Introduction to Field's 2023 book *Politics, Poverty and Belief: A Political Memoir* describes Field in the following way:

"By the public he was generally seen as a model member of the House of Commons: totally committed to his constituents, with a modest lifestyle, total integrity and not a whiff of scandal or conflict of interest and committed to fighting for social justice, greater equality and the common good of society."²⁸

Field sums up his approach to political life, much of which concentrated on welfare reforms:

"My vision has been dominated by my views of human nature. We are all fallen creatures, but open to be redeemed. One role of politicians is to offer programmes that achieve this objective. Another way of seeing this Christian cornerstone to politics is in the creation of programmes that work with, rather than against, this grain of human nature."²⁹

²⁸ Field: 2023, p.p. 1–2.

²⁹ Field: 2023, p.189.

Field displayed courage, imagination and flexibility in the political process. He was not afraid to stick to his guns when fighting for a cause, but he was willing, even when it was unpopular with his own party to seek a fusion of cross-party wisdom to tackle issues that would promote the common good. Our fractured society desperately needs men and women who know what they believe and are willing to use faithful imagination to tackle a growing list of challenges that divide society and require principled accommodations to seek pathways to a solution.

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