

Your worship and your money

Worship is what we give to things that matter to us, things to which we assign worth and value. To the writers of scripture, money ranked high in their concerns. Despite the fact that many transactions were by barter or mutual service, there are more than 2,000 references to money in the Bible.

Money can be used or misused; Jesus threw the moneychangers out the Temple, yet many of the Biblical metaphors are based on money: redemption, wages of sin, ransom, debt, treasure in heaven, pearl of great price. They saw money as a means of exchange, yet today most money transactions are about money making money out of money.

And Christians who talk of being 'biblical' frequently choose to ignore the twelve clear prohibitions on usury (the giving or taking of interest) in Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Nehemiah. They do so despite church leaders' warnings; Pope Benedict spoke about the "false ways" of usury as recently as last November.

Islam has similar prohibitions but takes them more seriously; Islamic banking based on profit-sharing rather than interest is now available in this country and Christian as well as Islamic scholars are trying to work out a whole system of money that could reclaim the vision of the world's three great religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. They face an uphill task: like Herod's Temple the world's temples of money changing are solidly built over many years.

Money becomes a false god when we worship it as an end in itself rather than as a means of exchange. So Christians need to explore creatively the questions posed by Islamic banking. We may be deeper than we realise in the worship of money, and God is capable of overturning our tables of money changing just as Jesus overthrew those in Herod's temple.

Some key scripture references are Exodus 22: 25; Leviticus 25: 35; and Deuteronomy 23: 29. A resource is the Christian Council for Monetary Justice, 21 Bousfield Road, London SE14 5TP, email: Peterchallen@gmail.com. Pope Benedict's references to "false ways of life" based on usury and debt were in his 2 November 2005 general audience in Rome.

**Elizabeth Goodridge and Ian Yearsley of Southwark Diocese
continue a series on worship.**

JOHN BOWN

On Pentecost Sunday 4th June we welcome the Rev John Bown to preach for the last time at BPC as minister at Bromley Methodist Church.

John's been a good friend to BPC over his time here and I'm so grateful for his welcome when I came to Bromley. John always comes to the Tuesday morning Eucharist and we shall miss his fellowship at those services. We've shared with the Methodists at Common Ground and benefited greatly from John's wisdom in 'Churches Together....'

John shared some funny ideas about football with my predecessor and a certain former Churchwarden but in spite of that I shall miss him very much. We wish John and Merle a long and happy retirement in Canterbury. Do come on 4th June and bid them farewell.

Michael Camp