



**Traidcraft**

Fighting poverty through trade

## Christianity in the Rich-Poor World

These reflections can be used as a starting point to a group discussion or Bible study.

### Justice and the church

As we look at biblical truth concerning just relationships then our first steps should be to apply them within the church.

**1 Peter 2:9-10:** Only as the church is transformed socially and economically will any appeal to governments to change laws and regulations possess integrity. Christian social action has to be lived by its members.

**Micah 6:8:** What does the Lord require...to act justly...

**James 2:14-17:** What good is it...if a man claims to have faith, but has no deeds?

The Old Testament reveals God's anger with societies of surrounding nations, not just the people of God (See Amos). Christians should exercise their political influence to make social systems more fair so that all of society benefits.

- How is our church involved in Christian social action?
- If a few members are involved, how does the rest of our church get to know?
- Are there areas in which we should be involved?
- How could that be brought about?

### Need or greed?

At present rates of consumption, we need the resources of three Planet Earths to give everyone the same lifestyle we enjoy in the UK.

Proverbs 23:4: A theology of 'enough' is expressed by the idea: Live simply so that others may simply live. Simpler lifestyles, policies that permit people to choose parenting or community service over maximising income, the scriptural call to consume responsibly, are issues we must consider as Christians. We must ask ourselves whether we consume more than we need and re-direct more of our wealth to the poor.

- How do we decide what is 'enough'?
- In what ways does our consumption deny resources to others?
- How do we raise these issues within the church?

### The plenty of a few

Throughout Scripture we are confronted by God's bias towards the poor and his anger at the way they are disregarded and their needs ignored. Jesus repeatedly makes the link between the plenty of a few and the lack of many to highlight the calling of his Gospel.



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In the Grove booklet *Globalization: Unravelling The New Capitalism* \* Peter Heslam, Director of the Capitalism Project at the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity, says:

“In some ways...it is the church and its impulse towards mission that has helped to facilitate globalization. This gives it a particular responsibility to use all the resources at its disposal...to ensure that globalization works as a blessing and not as a curse to humanity.

“It has been estimated that Christians control \$10 trillion around the world – about a quarter of the world’s annual production of wealth. If we were to decide to invest our wealth differently and shape institutions to achieve this goal, we could help to change the global economy.”

If those Christians shared only 1% of their disposable income with the poor annually it would amount to \$100 billion.

It costs roughly \$1,000 to create one job in small-scale industry in a developing world context. So \$100 billion = 100 million jobs and benefit to 500 million people (using the usual multiplier of a family of 5).

- Where do our priorities lie, and should we consider the impact of our lifestyle, as individuals and as a church?
- What are the practical steps we can take?

### **The love of money?**

Jesus illustrates the danger of being obsessed by wealth through a number of parables.

The rich fool (Luke 12: 16-21) focuses on the rich farmer who invested heavily in earthly possessions, only to lose them.

In the story of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31) Jesus confirms that those who serve mammon get their joy in a brief period of earthly existence.

The sower (Luke 8:14) illustrates how those who seem to welcome the Gospel are drawn away through love of money and the things of this world.

The rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-30) makes it clear that to Jesus, attitude to wealth is a matter of eternal salvation; not that sharing his possessions would save the young ruler, but rather that Jesus wants to be Lord over the whole of life.

\* *Globalization: Unravelling The New Capitalism* by Peter Heslam is published by Grove Books Ltd, Ridley Hall Road, Cambridge CB3 9HU. Price: £2.50. ISSN 1470-854X