

From the squatter camps, to the rundown ghettos, to the refugee camps, Christians are struggling to respond to suffering with practical love.

The difference of productivity and income per person in the Western world compared to the so called "developing" or "third" world was 2 to 1 last century. Now it is 70 to 1. This escalating disparity, along with the impact of natural and man-made disasters, has greatly increased the flow of refugees and "illegal aliens" into Western nations. It has also greatly aggravated the spread of diseases, environmental degradation, the escalation of crime and the possibilities of conflict.

One of the main responses of the industrial nations has been to supply generous amounts of foreign aid to the poorer nations. However, foreign aid has been accused of denying the poorer nations the chance to develop their economies to viability. Most aid does not encourage self sufficiency and growth. The dumping of food-surplus aid has damaged local agriculture in the long term. It is hard for farmers to sell what is being given away.

While we must most certainly love our neighbour, especially the deserving poor, we need to be wise and discerning in our aid so as to encourage responsibility and rehabilitation.

The Abuse of Relief Aid

Since 1954 the USA has shipped millions of tonnes of food aid to India - to the Indian government (not private businesses or agencies). Rats have consumed more than half of this food at the docks and storage facilities! Because of Hinduism's belief in reincarnation, rats and sacred cows may not be killed! It would take a train 3000 miles long to haul the grain eaten by Indian rats in a single year! Also, the sacred cows in India eat enough food to feed most of Asia! And the Hindu temples contain a vast fortune of gold, rubies, sapphires and other precious stones in their statues - which are worshipped as idols.

It is actually Hinduism's re-incarnation beliefs, its' sacred cows, protected rats, idols made of gold and jewels, wasted resources and superstition that are causing the poverty and starvation in India.

Ethiopia in the 1980's was a classic example of a man-made famine. Socialism, confiscations and nationalisations, the abolishment of incentive, the punishment of productivity and subsidising of irresponsibility caused the starvation in what used to be called "the breadbasket of Africa." The "Red Terror" mass executions, forced removals of millions of people and destruction of crops by the government further aggravated the famine.

The corruption and abuse of the relief aid in Ethiopia was the ultimate scandal: 100% import tax was charged on all free relief aid! Brand new Mercedes Benz trucks were required with 100% import tax imposed on all these trucks for transporting the food. All these trucks had to be signed over to the marxist government of Ethiopia! (And all this while US\$70 million was spent on the "Anniversary of the Revolution" celebrations in 1984 - ½ for alcohol!). In fact, much of the relief aid and food was used for the many Cuban, Soviet and East German military who were involved in causing the famine. Some of the food was actually exported in payment for weapons!

In the 1980's Mozambique was another example of a man-made famine in a country which used to export food. After the marxist revolution of 1975 a socialist economy was imposed upon the people. Farms were confiscated. Factories were nationalised. Hundreds of thousands of people were incarcerated in concentrated camps. Over 75000 people were accused of being "black marketeers", "reactionaries" and "counter revolutionaries" and publically executed. Food was exported to the Soviet bloc in exchange for weapons. A scorched earth policy was later launched to starve out the resistance to the Frelimo government by burning down crops and villages. Bureaucratic wastage and corruption became a growth industry. Economic poverty and social chaos resulted.

However, in Mozambique it was not only marxism that caused the starvation but also animism. The widespread practise of ancestral worship led many poor families to sacrifice their last goat or chicken to appease the "ancestral spirits"!

In Albania and Romania I have come across Gypsies deliberately starving their babies and then laying these malnourished infants out on sidewalks with a hat next to them to beg for money. Any money received was used for cigarettes and alcohol. In India some street people have

actually maimed or mutilated their own children to make them more pitiful, and therefore effective, in begging.

In South Africa, having spent many months on the streets of Hillbrow and Durban doing street evangelism, I have seen professional beggars at work. I have seen "cripples" letting down their strapped leg and stretching and walking unaided without their crutches; and I've seen the "blind" lift up their dark glasses to count the money in their hat. Some street children have told me that they can make an average of R200 a day from begging! In all too many cases our casual and spontaneous handing over of some coins to strangers begging on the streets does more harm than good. Giving to beggars on the streets often goes to subsidising drunkenness, smoking, drugs, prostitution and gambling. Some of the beggars are child prostitutes and thieves using begging as a cover while looking for opportunities.

Then there are the "religious" con-men who know the terminology and can deceive and manipulate the unsuspecting into handing over large quantities of cash for spurious causes. I have also been one of those deceived by professional "converts" who let themselves be counselled to Christ only to "borrow" money from the well meaning evangelist.

Multiple millions of rands are squandered by guilt-manipulated Christians giving to beggars at traffic lights, at their front door and on the streets. At the same time good ministries like the Salvation Army, the Docks Mission, the Ark, Cape Town City Mission, Love in Action and others are struggling for lack of support.

There is a desperate need for good stewardship of our limited resources. It would be more responsible to channel our compassion to supporting Christian ministries which have proven their effectiveness in reaching out in love to help the poor. Biblical charity does not subsidise sin nor should it encourage irresponsibility.

So before we get down to practical strategies to care for the poor, and to eradicate poverty, let us define poverty and consider what causes poverty.

What Causes Poverty?

A definition of poverty could be: "an insufficiency of the material necessities of life."

The poor could be described as: "Persons who do not have, and are unable to obtain, the means for sustaining life. If they are to survive they are thus dependant upon the resources of other people."

The Biblical definition of the poor could be: "Those who cannot sustain themselves because they are too old, too young or too handicapped to work."

There are four broad categories under which all causes of poverty could be grouped:

Personal sacrifice, slothfulness, calamity (earthquakes, floods, wars, etc.), or exploitation.

Self-imposed Poverty

The lazy and indolent (slothful) inevitably suffer the consequences of their sin:

"He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer" Proverbs 18:9.

"How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep - so shall your poverty come on you like a robber . . ." Proverbs 6:9-11.

"Because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness of hands, the house leaks . . ." Eccl 10:18.

It is a disgrace to be lazy (Prov 10:5). Lazy people always find excuses not to work. (Prov 15:19; 26:13-16).

Those who love sleep will grow poor (Prov 19:15; 20:13). *"If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat."*
2Thess 3:10

Moral poverty often dooms its people to ongoing material poverty. Selfishness, greed, laziness, immorality, short-sightedness, gambling, alcohol abuse, addiction to pornography, indulging in prostitution, drug abuse and other sins are symptoms of rebellion against the Law of God. Such evils inevitably lead to poverty.

Victims of self imposed poverty need the Gospel and discipleship to free them from their lifestyle of sin.

Imposed Poverty

The main causes of imposed poverty are: oppression and religious error. Oppression consists in governments or individuals violating others' God given rights' to life, property and liberty. This takes the forms of fraud, theft and violence. (Inflation/unbacked currencies/counterfeiting; socialism; excessive taxation; corruption; wastage; inefficiency; etc.).

UnBiblical worldviews underlie the poverty of the third world. The fatalism and re-incarnation beliefs of Hinduism and Buddhism, where the material world is not perceived as real and difficulties are understood as a result of the deeds of a previous life ("my Karma is bad") are paralysing to progress. The Animist worldview which sees man at the mercy of outside forces - the spirits - lead people to be shackled by superstition and fear. The fatalism of Islam is also not conducive to productive planning and innovation.

The poor-by-exploitation need both direct charity to meet immediate needs and justice in the form of restitution from those who exploited them, and freedom from false religions.

The poor-by-calamity (victims of floods, earthquakes, wars, etc.) are the most appropriate recipients of charity - though the aim is always to help them become self-supporting again.

Poverty in History

The key question when faced by the disparity between rich and poor individuals and societies is not "How did this man/society become poor?" Poverty is the natural condition of man. The question is: "How did anyone become rich?"

Poverty is a consequence of the Fall (Gen 3:17-19). Famines were commonplace before the Industrial Revolution. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, England suffered famines an average of 7 times per century. A third of the population died in the province of Bengal in the great Indian famine of 1769-1770. Similar losses were experienced in India in 1783 and 1790-1792. India suffered a further 8 famines from 1838 to 1901 with well over 9 million dying of starvation. In a single famine in North China from 1877 to 1878 over 9,5 million died. Only the Christian work ethic and the resultant industrial revolution brought the West out of the recurring horror of famine. A wooden plough drawn by oxen can provide food for one large family. By the 18th Century, the new iron plough drawn by a horse could provide food for 3 families. By the 1940's a tractor pulling a plough could feed 14 families. Now advanced tractors, tools and techniques can enable one farmer to produce enough food for 60 families.

It is an observable fact that the most efficient economies in the world are based upon private ownership of property, honest money, free enterprise and a Christian work ethic.

Is Colonialism Responsible?

Much of the Third World is definitely in a shocking mess. One-party dictatorships, economic chaos, malnutrition, famines, civil wars, massacres and abject poverty are the norm in most of Africa. But who is responsible?

The notion that colonialism is the major cause of world poverty was popularised by Vladimir Lenin, and his disciples have faithfully repeated it ever since. However, contrary to the

ahistorical mumblings of the coloniphobics, some of the most poverty-stricken and backward lands imaginable - Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Nepal, Tibet and Liberia - never fell under Western colonial control. Some colonies - like Hong Kong - became very prosperous. And some of the richest and most advanced Western lands, such as Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland, never controlled any colonies. Other advanced countries such as the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Canada were themselves colonies. Actually, contact with the West brought far more benefits than disadvantages. Tea and rubber trees, for example, were foreign to Asia, as was mealie meal in Africa. Such blessings were the results of colonialism.

Some of the main "Scars of Colonialism" include roads, railways, schools, hospitals, the wheel, written languages, the Bible and churches.

The ancestor-worshipping and idolatrous religions have rendered whole civilisations powerless in the face of "nature". "Unquestioning acceptance of nature and its vagaries is widespread in Africa", declares Bishop Bududira of Burundi, who maintains that local cultures obstruct material progress by wrong mental attitudes, seeing themselves as suffering history rather than in making it. He concludes that: "The message of Christ frees people from the shackles of tribal thinking, and leads to a greater sense of personal responsibility." - Reality and Rhetoric, Lord Bauer

The tribalistic philosophies inhibit productivity, penalise accomplishment and confiscate what little is produced. Animism teaches its adherents to regard themselves as helpless in the face of their surroundings - assuming "that the opportunities and the resources for the economic advance of oneself or one's family have to be provided by someone else - by the state, by one's superiors, by richer people, or from abroad. This attitude is in turn an aspect of the belief of the efficacy of external forces over one's destiny . . . It is an attitude plainly unfavourable to material progress." - Dissent on Development, P. T. Bauer

"The idea that it is evil to make personal economic progress takes hold of the people and fear of being envied prohibits growth and encourages poverty." - Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt Manipulators, David Chilton

"One of the decisive factors in understanding development or non-development is the `envy barrier' or institutionalised envy among the population." - Envy: A Theory of Social Behaviour, Helmut Schoeck

Into this unhealthy situation comes Foreign Aid, which only increases dependence, corruption and greed, rather than developing responsibility.

The problems in the Third World are not primarily political or economic. The problem is false religion and the resultant pagan philosophies/worldview. The solution is therefore also primarily religious - the world needs to be converted to and disciplined in the Christian Faith. Church and mission based relief would not only be more efficient but would inspire greater personal responsibility and economic productivity.

Is Socialism Biblical?

Despite exhaustive and imaginative efforts by so-called "Christian Socialists" to promote socialism as "true Christian love and sharing" - the Ten Commandments still stand: "Thou shalt not steal" and "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods."

Socialism is legalised theft. It is institutionalised envy. It is the use of envy and guilt to manipulate productive Christians into committing economic suicide. The socialist doctrine of economic equality requires the stealing of property and the prohibition of economic freedoms. - Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt Manipulators - David Chilton

"Socialism is not the pioneer of a better and finer world, but the spoiler of what thousands of years of civilisation have created. It does not build; it destroys. For destruction is the essence of it. It produces nothing, it only consumes what the social order based on private ownership of the means of production has created . . ." - Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis - Ludwig von Mises

To almost every problem in the world, Socialism advocates state intervention. In this way socialists insist on unBiblical powers for the government to interfere with, or control, prices, markets, wages, jobs, profits, population control, education, movement, etc. The inevitable end of increasing government intervention is the erosion of personal freedom.

Socialism destroys incentive, initiative and productivity. Socialists are parasites who consume what others have earned by hard work and ingenuity. Socialists try to cut up "the pie" to the advantage of their supporters, free enterprise just makes more pies for everyone.

Price controls create an imbalanced, chaotic market, minimum wage laws result in unemployment, profit restrictions increase consumer costs, enforced economic equality leads to stagnation, destruction of initiative and more poverty.

Concern for the poor has long been used as a justification for all sorts of crime - Judas Iscariot, who was a thief, is a prime example (John 12:4-6).

Envy is the greatest disease of our age. Envy is the feeling that because someone else has something he is to blame for my not having it! The main motive behind envy is not so much to take as to destroy. Envy and malice are inseparable. "Peace of mind makes the body healthy, but jealousy is like a cancer." Proverbs 14:30

"Rather than wealth causing poverty, it is far more true to say that what causes poverty is the widespread belief that wealth does!" - Wealth and Poverty - George Gilder

If we have needs, the Bible commands us to: Pray (Phil 4:6-7), to Work (1 Thess 4:11), to Trust God (Phil 4:19) and to Be Content (Phil 4:12).

The only thing Socialism has ever been able to provide its adherents with is the "guaranteed income" of Romans 6:23: "The wages of sin is death."

Biblical Principles for Economics

1. **HONEST MONEY.** Throughout the Bible money is spoken of by weight. God's Law requires that financial transactions be made in terms of honest measures. God hates and forbids unjust weights and measures, inflation, fractional reserve banking, unbacked currencies, and multiple

indebtedness (Lev 19:35-36; Prov 11:1;20:10; 20:23; Amos 8:5-7; Micah 6:11-12). In 1982 you could post a letter in South Africa for 4 cents. In 1970 you could buy a new car for R1000. The devastating impact of unbacked currency/inflation on pensions and savings is criminal. Biblical Law requires honest money backed up by real constant value.

2. FREE ENTERPRISE. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods. God blesses productivity, incentive, initiative and hard work (Ex 20:15-17; 30:14-15; Lev 19:15; 1 Sam 8:10-18; 1 Kings 21:3; Ezra 7:23-24; Prov 10:2-4; 12:24; 13:4,11). Private ownership of property and of the means of production is Biblical. It is also foundational for freedom and prosperity.

3. LIMITED (CONSTITUTIONAL) GOVERNMENT. Any taxation of 10% or higher is defined in the Bible as oppression. And any taxation of property or inheritance is strictly forbidden. Institutions and individuals involved in the fulltime service of the Lord may not be taxed. All their income comes from free will offerings made unto the Lord by people who have already paid tax on their incomes (Ezra 7:23-24). Less government means more freedom and more personal responsibility (1 Pet 2:13-14; Rom 13:3-4; Eccl 8:11; Ps 19:7-9; Prov 14:34; Ps 9:17).

4. GOD HONOURING CHARITY. The Biblical principle is that we are responsible to care for our family first and then through the church, community and missionary organisations express love for our neighbour in action. Person to person, church to church, mission to community direct aid based upon evangelism and discipleship. All this is aimed to encourage responsibility and productivity. It is short term aid aimed at long term (eternal) benefits. The goal is to help the victims of poverty back onto their own two feet - where they can, in turn, help others (Isaiah 58:7; James 1:27).

Matthew 25:35-36 and Ezekiel 34:2-4 teach us to: Strengthen the weak, bind up the injured, care for the sick, share your food with the hungry, clothe the naked, invite in the stranger and look after widows and orphans.

The Christian Foundations for prosperity are laid with these basic principles: Christians must respect one another's property, never steal or cheat, always abide by contracts, be industrious in earning money, be disciplined in saving money, be wise in investing money, be obedient to God in tithing to Christian ministries, be discerning in sharing with those in need. Work all you can, earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can.

Biblical charity is to be primarily directed to widows, orphans and the handicapped - the deserving poor (1Tim 5:3-16). Biblical methods of charity include: gleaning, lending, labour and tithes through the local church. Are you supporting a Biblical ministry to the poor? We are our brother's keeper (Genesis 4:9). Don't just give food or money - also give of your time to share the love and Gospel of Christ personally.

Love is something you do, not just something you feel. Regardless of what the government does, regardless of what the church does, families and individuals have a responsibility to obey God. Since charity is primarily a function of the Christian family, working in concert with other Christian families, it is essential that each of those Christian families begin to implement the love of God practically. Charity begins at home: educating children, caring for the helpless, and strengthening the weak. It begins as we encourage others, co-ordinate resources, network with existing programs, and spearhead new efforts - Bringing in the Sheaves, George Grant.

Every South African cent has the sparrows to remind us that God cares for the very least (Matthew 10:29). And every Rand coin has inscribed: Soli Deo Gloria _ every Rand we spend should be to the glory of God alone! God cares about every cent. Every rand we spend must be to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Pray (Phil 4:6-7), Work (1 Thess 4:11), Trust God (Phil 4:19), Be content (Phil 4:12), Be generous (2 Cor 9:6-12).

"God loves a cheerful giver, and God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." 2 Cor 9:7-8

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For further reading on this subject I recommend that you obtain: Bringing in the Sheaves - Transforming Poverty into Productivity by George Grant and The Samaritan Strategy by Colonel Doner - available from UCA, PO Box 23632, Claremont 7735, Cape Town.

BIBLE VERSES TO MEDITATE ON

"If there is a poor man among your brothers at any of the towns in the land that the Lord your God has given you, do not be hardhearted or tight-fisted toward your poor brother."
Deuteronomy 15:7

"Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the Lord delivers him in times of trouble." Psalm 41:1

"Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed."
Psalm 82:3

"He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me? declares the Lord." Jeremiah 22:16

"He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward him for what he has done."
Proverbs 19:11

"If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered." Psalm 21:13

"If the king judges the poor with fairness, his throne will always be secure." Psalm 29:14

"Is it not to share your food with the hungry, and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter - when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"
Isaiah 58:7

"I was a stranger and you did not invite Me in. I needed clothes and you did not clothe Me. I was

sick and in prison and you did not look after Me." Matthew 25:43

"In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus Himself said: `It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Acts 20:34

"He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him... Go and do likewise." Luke 10:34-37

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the Law of Christ." Galatians 6:2

"Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering." Hebrews 13:3

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep yourself from being polluted by the world." James 1:27

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