

- iii) *We will be concerned about justice*
 - Amnesty (www.amnesty.org)
 - International Justice Mission (www.ijm.org)
- iv) *We will be concerned for the environment*
 - Practical actions:
 - Save energy: Energy saving light bulbs, Loft insulation, Juice (green electricity), switch things off, don't fill kettles. (www.npower.com)
 - Fewer flights
 - Buses, bikes and trains (car best if 2+ people)
 - Be sparing with the right foot (www.fueleconomy.gov)
 - Recycling (www.recycle-more.co.uk)
 - Don't eat kiwi fruit! (local produce) (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4684693.stm>)
 - Reduce water consumption (bricks, tooth brushing, water meters, showers etc) (www.h2ouse.org)
 - v) *We will reject consumerism*
 - vi) *We will not just talk to our own friends at church*
 - vii) *We will participate actively in the life of the local church*
 - viii) *We will have a good set of mugs*
 - ix) *We will reorientate our understanding of stewardship*

Summer School of Theology August 2005

Evangelism & Social Action

Session 3: Moving Forward

Andrew Evans

1 What is poverty?

- How would you tell if a person is poor? What are the markers of poverty?

2.38 billion people (40% of the world's population) live on <\$2 per day.

A United Nations report on the situation of the world's children tells us that in 2005:

- 640 million children do not have adequate shelter
- 500 million children have no access to sanitation
- 400 million children do not have access to safe water
- 300 million children lack access to information
- 270 million children have no access to health care services
- 140 million children have never been to school
- 90 million children are severely food-deprived

As well as this directly economic poverty they noted that hundreds of thousands of children in conflict situations around the world are still:

- recruited or abducted as soldiers
- victims of landmines
- forced to witness violence and killing
- orphaned by violence
- targets of sexual violence
- nearly half of the 3.6 million people killed in war since 1990 have been children.

Imagine the whole world as a village with 100 people in it. In this village:

- 20 of the villagers would have 85% of the money
- 20 would have 1.3%
- 25 would not be able to read
- 18 would have inadequate housing
- 40 would have no clean water
- 50 would not have proper sewerage
- 7 of the women would be raped during their lifetime

- The rites of passage of Christianity (baptism and communion) were not only essential to membership of the church but to being a respectable citizen of the nation.
- The officers of the church (vicars, bishops and so on) were amongst the most privileged and wealthy members of the community.
- Churches met in special buildings and developed vast accumulations of capital assets – land, jewels, and cash.
- These special privileges often led to the corruption of the church.

Things like:

- Trying to prevent Sunday trading
- Attempting to enforce laws about blasphemy
- Wanting Christian assemblies in state schools
- Christian programming on state television
- are all examples of Christendom thinking.

4 How should we be socially involved?

Social involvement for a Christian is thinking in a cross-shaped way about the way everything we do or do not impacts on other people, especially the poor.

- i) *We will recognise that God is concerned about people eternally – and proclaim the gospel*
- ii) *We will recognise that God is concerned about people in this life – and develop "compassion permanence"*

The place of the local church:

"Our social and economic relationships are the place on earth where God's future can be seen. We are the light of the world, a city on a hill." (Tim Chester)

4 "Christendom" and the Cross

To think that power will solve our problems is to misunderstand both the nature of power and the nature of the human heart – even the regenerate heart of a Christian:

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" Jeremiah 17:9

"All power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men." (Lord Acton)

For 1,000 years something that claimed to be the Christian faith stood close to the centres of power and authority in the UK and across much of Europe. This interrelatedness of the church and the power of the state – is often referred to as "Christendom".

Characteristics of Christendom:

- The laws and morals of nations were strongly influenced by Christian virtues – so that being a witch, for example, was often a criminal offence.

GNP statistics

But GDP statistics are not the best way of working out poverty.

- 1 Some countries are more expensive to live in than others. A person with \$10,000 per year would be much poorer in Canada than they would, say, in India.

- 2 GDP doesn't include lots of things that are important to people's sense of well-being and participation in their communities – such as health and education.

The Bible's use of the word "poor" has a much larger range of meaning than simply describing people without very much money.

- Matthew 8. In what way are the following people poor:

The man with leprosy

The centurion

Peter's mother-in-law

The demon possessed men

On arriving in the UK, it is difficult at first for a visitor from a Third World country to immediately perceive that poverty exists at all. Everyone was better housed, clad and fed. Everyone seemed to have a television, a fridge – some even had cars – all items of luxury for the majority of people in India. But as the week went by we began to see beyond the televisions, refrigerators and cars. Amazingly, similarities between the people of Easterhouse and the [tribal people's of India] began to emerge. Though the face of poverty was completely different, the impact was exactly the same.

2 What causes poverty?

7 key factors that form an interlocking web binding people in poverty:

- i) Lack of Resources
- ii) Physical weakness
- iii) Isolation
- iv) Powerlessness
- v) Vulnerability
- vi) Cultural attitudes and expectations
- vii) Hopelessness and demotivation

These factors which operate at the level of individuals or communities can be exacerbated by problems in wider society such as:

- Weak social capital (no one to turn to for help, advice, job reference, loan etc)
- Weak civil society (no trade unions, co-ops, churches)
- Corruption and lack of accountability
- Economic mismanagement
- Poor governance (eg breakdown of law, poor human rights)

The fundamental cause – sin.

"This seems a cheerful world, Donatus, when I view it from this fair garden, under the shadow of these vines. But if I climbed some great mountain and looked out over the wide lands, you know very well what I would see – brigands on the high roads, pirates on the seas; in the amphitheatres men murdered to please applauding crowds; under all roofs misery and selfishness. It is really a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world." (Cyprian, C3rd)

In the end every cause of poverty in the world comes back to Adam and Eve and our rebellion against God. Examples:

1

2

3 Can poverty be cured?

- Mark 14:6-9. What does Jesus say about poverty? How does this fit in with what we have seen about poverty's causes?

The fact that poverty will continue until the end of the world is not a reason for Christians not to do anything about it. It is a reason to be **active realists**.