

Applied Ethics (Christianity)

9. Religion, poverty and wealth

Background

- 3.8 million children in the UK live in poverty.
- 25,000 people die of hunger every day.
- Christian Aid gives more than £66 million in aid to more than 50 countries, including the UK, every year.
- Christian charities such as CAFOD and Christian Aid help people of any religion and those who do not follow a religion.
- 85% of the world wealth is owned by 10% of the world's population (World Institute for Development Economics Research).
- Less economically developed countries (LEDCs) is the name given to a countries which, according to the United Nations, exhibits the lowest indicators of socioeconomic development. Sometimes the outdated 'Third World' term is used.
- The term more economically developed countries (MEDCs) is the term used by modern geographers to describe wealthy industrialised countries.

Causes of global poverty

- Many MEDC have trade restrictions which prevent LEDCs from selling high value processed goods to them.
- LEDCs are forced to sell raw coffee beans to MEDCs at a low price.
- MEDCs process the coffee and sell it at a much higher price.
- Many large companies based in MEDCs set up factories in LEDCs. The company pays low wages. Often these factories have poor working conditions (see Shell in Nigeria).
- MEDCs often encourage LEDCs to focus on one cash crop (e.g. coffee, tobacco...etc.). The LEDC then become vulnerable to global market forces.

Fairtrade and Traidcraft

- Traidcraft is a Christian organisation which aims to bring about fairer trading practices and thereby reduce poverty.
- Fairtrade seeks to transform the lives of poor producers in the developing world by enabling them to use their skills and resources to trade their way out of poverty.

Parable of the Sheep and Goats

- The Sheep and the Goats was a parable told by Jesus.
- Christians look to the parable for teaching on what their attitude should be towards the poor.
- It tells of the Last Judgment, and the division of all the world's people into the blessed, on the Right Hand of God, who are welcomed by the Father to inherit the Kingdom and eternal life, and the cursed, who are cast into the eternal fire with the Devil.
- The division is entirely based on the acts of kindness and mercy done by people to their disadvantaged fellow people.
- Jesus identifies such kindness with kindness towards himself.

Own point of view and different points of views

- In order to get full marks on the last 12 mark question it is necessary to give another point of view, your own point of view as well as references to Christianity in your answer.
- Important to remember that you don't need to be religious or believe in God to be concerned about the poor. Many atheist give money to charities for humanitarian reasons.
- Muslims look to the Qur'an for teachings about their attitude towards the poor - Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) is an international relief and development that aims to alleviate the suffering of the world's poorest people. They are inspired by their Islamic values, and envisage a world where communities are empowered, social obligations are fulfilled, and people respond as one to the suffering of others.
- Buddhists look to the Noble Eightfold Path as to how they should live their lives. One of the precepts is 'Right Livelihood'. Buddhists think very carefully about the type of work they do. They would not want to do work that harmed or exploited others or damaged the environment.

Third World debt

- In the early 1970s MEDCs encouraged LEDCs to borrow money at low interest rates.
- The aim was to encourage investment in agriculture and industry.
- During the 1970s interest rates increased mainly due to the rising cost of oil.
- Many of the LEDCs invested the money badly and have been unable to pay their loans back.
- In many cases the original loan has been paid back several times but because of the interest added, the loans have still to be paid off.
- Many of these countries pay more back in loan repayments than they get from overseas aid.
- Jubilee 2000 was a campaign backed by many Christian aid organisations which argued that all Third World debt should be cancelled to mark the new millennium.
- In the Old Testament debts had to be cancelled and land returned to its original owner every fifty years.
- In Old Testament times lending money was condemned as 'usury'. The prophet Ezekiel considered it as bad a robbery (Ezekiel 22:12).

Natural disasters

- People living in LEDCs are more likely to die from floods, droughts, hurricanes and volcanic eruptions because these countries cannot afford to take the same kind of preventative measures as MEDCs and do not have the same emergency services.
- Many of these LEDCs lie along fault lines or in regions which have extreme weather conditions.
- Many Christians point to the role humans play in changing the environment e.g. deforestation, global warming and ozone depletion.

Disease

- Many of the LEDCs cannot afford vaccination programmes and basic medicines.
- Clean water is often a problem resulting in diseases such as cholera.
- AIDS and HIV are prevalent in LEDCs because of lack of access to condoms and education programmes.
- Many Christians feel that it is unacceptable that poverty prevents people from accessing basic medical care.
- They argue that drug companies should make their products available more cheaply in poorer countries.

Poverty and the Bible

- The Bible is clear about a Christian's duty to the poor:

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

Proverbs 21:13

"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?"

1 John 3:17-18

Christian attitude towards charity

- In the Old Testament a tenth (or tithe) of the harvest was given to God's work.
- Christians today still think it is important to donate money to the church and charities such as Christian Aid or CAFOD.
- Some Christians donate their time helping others by doing voluntary work e.g. working in a charity shop or helping in a homeless shelter.
- The Salvation Army is a Christian denomination which places greatest emphasis on helping those in need by running soup kitchens and sheltered accommodation.
- Jackie Pullinger was a Christian who went to Hong Kong as a missionary. Distressed by the condition of drug addicts she helped to set up homes to enable the addicts to overcome their addictions.
- Some Christians feel called to politics in order to bring about change.

Christian Aid

- Christian Aid is the official relief and development agency of the 40 British and Irish churches.
- It works to support sustainable development, alleviate poverty, support civil society and provide disaster relief.
- It campaigns to change the rules and systems that keep people poor, speaking out on issues such as trade justice and Third World debt.
- Christian Aid's essential belief is "We believe in life before death".
- Christian Aid also organises the UK's largest door-to-door collection, Christian Aid Week.
- In 2009/10 it raised £104.6 million.

CAFOD

- The Catholic Agency For Overseas Development is the Catholic aid agency for England and Wales.
- It is funded by the Catholic community, the UK government and the general public by donations.
- CAFOD's aims are to promote long-term development; respond to emergencies; raise public awareness of the causes of poverty; speak out on behalf of the poor; and promote social justice in witness to Christian faith and gospel values.
- It is also involved in short-term relief.
- In 2010/11 it raised £56 million.

Immoral occupations

- Many would not consider doing work which hurt or exploited others.
- They might apply the second of the 'Two Great Commandments' – love your neighbour as yourself.
- Some Christians would not work for a debt consolidation company because of what the Bible says about usury.
- Many Christians would not become involved in companies that deal with pornography or gambling.
- It might be difficult to distinguish between companies who have good and bad practices:
 - A chocolate manufacturer might buy cocoa beans that aren't fair-trade.
 - Drug companies might test their drugs in LEDCs.
 - Some food manufacturers encourage women with new born babies in LEDCs to try their formula milk. The women are then forced to buy the milk they can't afford.

Christian vocations

- A 'vocation' is a calling. Some Christians believe they have a particular calling by God to do a particular type of work.
- A vocation might be to become a priest, minister or join a religious order e.g. become a monk or nun.
- Some Christians feel drawn to 'caring' professions.
- Caring professions might include: teaching, nursing, care assistants, medicine, social work and charity work.