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Involving Poverty, Dominance and Inequalities

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# A Theological Response to a Conflict of Values Involving Poverty, Dominance and Inequalities

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*Abstract: This paper analyzes conflicting aspects of individualism, egalitarianism and complex equality. In the course of our analysis, matters dealing with capitalism and neoclassical economics or economic rationalism are examined, as well as the related rise of individualism and policies emanating from proposals of Friedrich Hayek. Then a theological response to poverty, dominance and inequalities is outlined. Adherence to altruistic Christian teachings will help resolve the values' tensions faced by policymakers.*

Keywords: Dominance, Egalitarianism, Individualism, Inequalities, Poverty, Values

## Introduction

**A**LTHOUGH PRIVATE SECTOR decision and policymakers share many values with stakeholders, including shareholders, employees, customers and regulators, their interests and values are sometimes in conflict. Similar situations occur with providers of traditional government services. For example with the provision of library services Gasaway (2000) claims a conflict of values between librarians and authors and that of “publishers of copyrighted works”. Both parties share common core values as facilitators of knowledge but librarians as the providers of a public good will have values enabling them to provide knowledge at no cost or very little cost. Alternatively the holders of copyrights will have values that protect the interests of creators and transmitters of knowledge – the authors and the publishers - and will charge a fee for the knowledge they facilitate. Thus the knowledge dispensed by librarians is more egalitarian than that dispensed by copyright holders.

Likewise most government and corporate policymakers share some values with their stakeholders but there are many interests and values that are in conflict. The authors suggest these conflicts are between the interests of government or corporate policymakers and mainly less dominant stakeholders. However as these policymakers may also have personal values whether religious, for example Christian, or based upon secular humanism, that promote social justice issues, the authors suggest that such conflicting values being faced constantly by individual policymakers can be identified as a battle between altruism and egoism or between selflessness and selfishness.

The authors outline aspects of individualism as espoused by neo-classical or economic rationalistic scholars, such as Fredrick Hayek. Because not all economic rationalists or market fundamentalists accept the personal responsibility their so-called market driven freedom is claimed to bring, the authors argue a case for government intervention that should be directed at a more egalitarian distribution of the world's resources. This argument is illustrated by discussions on questions of social justice, egalitarianism, equality and complex equality and theological responses to poverty, dominance and inequalities.

For the sake of clarity, the concept ‘values’ refers to the priorities a person or an organization assigns to ethical qualities. Thus those wishing to dominate will place qualities, such as power and authority, efficiency, competence, achievement, and self-interest high on the list of qualities to which they aspire. Alternatively, people who value issues of social justice will tend to prioritize the ethical concepts of selflessness, public service, honesty, integrity and social responsibility derived from religious and/or humanistic beliefs. Individually these values could provide many areas for further research. Likewise by the term, ‘policies’, the authors mean deliberate plans of action to help in formulating decisions that achieve their desired rational outcomes and policymakers are the individuals, or groups of individuals, who create these plans. In the process of creating plans, policymakers face many conflicting values.

## A Conflict of Values

This conflict of values, or ethical priorities, faced by individual policymakers, and identified by the authors as a battle between altruism and egoism or selflessness and selfishness has been addressed by



many political leaders. For instance, in December 2006 the then new Leader of the Opposition in Australia – and now Prime Minister - upon reflecting on a cultural war that had arisen likened this conflict to a battle for ideas, “*the battle between free-market fundamentalism and the social democratic belief that individual reward can be balanced with social responsibility*” (Rudd 2006). In the process of this battle one side or the other may become dominant. If social responsibility dominates then the battle may be perceived by the social democrats to have achieved a just outcome. However if market fundamentalism dominates they would consider the outcome to be unjust. This raises the question, “What is justice?”

Thomas Aquinas understood justice to be a habit and a constant and perpetual act of the will, and virtuous in its relationship to God and in its extension outside of inner reflection, or mediation, towards other human beings. Thus it is distributive and therefore implies equality. Although Aquinas was not directly involved in politics because he emphasized the power of God rather than of human organizations, his concept of justice is aligned with a largely post Second Vatican II development of Liberation Theology. These theologians utilize sociology and economic sciences in their understanding of poverty and resort to political activism to assist in achieving their objectives. They portray Jesus Christ not only as the Redeemer but as the Liberator of the oppressed and the mission of the Church is to ensure that the poor and the oppressed are treated justly. Because of its similarities with Marxist activism and human materialism it has been opposed by some other Catholic theologians. Thus in line with Aquinas’ philosophies on justice as being social and egalitarian (see Aquinas 1955/1929), the major forms of the more contemporary liberation theology transcend both sacramentalism and secularism. Therefore their concerns relate to: the unjust distribution of goods and services; the oppression of women, the elderly and children; the repression of non-dominant races and ethnic groups; the exploitation of the ecology in which human nature is embedded; and injustices resulting from the violent use of power as expressed in militarism (Lamb 1985).

If such concepts are accepted, executives formulating a liberation theological approach to policies relating to the above issues should seek responsible solutions. These should more than immunise the target social group against the effect of secularisation (see Mol 1976, p.5) and outcomes of dominant and powerful government and corporate leaders. With reference to Rudd’s earlier statement, if market fundamentalism dominates, individualism becomes supreme.

## Individualism

Individualism is a term descriptive of moral, political or social ideologies that regards the individual as the primary unit of reality and the ultimate standard of value. Whilst promoting individual goals and desires, it opposes most interventions with the choices individuals make. This explains the liberal political theorist tendency to justify liberal practices by appealing to pluralistic ideals to justify individual rights and subsequently the absence from state interference in their personal choices (Anderson 1993, p.141). This concept of individualism was outlined in Weber’s analysis of ‘*The Protestant Work Ethic*’ (see Weber 1976). The ideology was based on the Calvinist doctrine of predestination and the idea that people could be included among ‘the chosen’ by engaging in unremitting work in a worldly calling. By accumulating money and wealth and not pursuing worldly enjoyments unduly they believed that they obtained favour in the sight of God (Lundberg and Young 2005, p.124). In matters concerning economics, individualism has its base in neo-classical or neo-liberal economics.

It can be argued that one of the sources of neo-liberal economics rests with the nineteenth century philosopher, William Stanley Jevons, who wrote his *Theory of Political Economy* in 1871. This expanded on the themes of his earlier 1866 paper and launched the *Marginalist Revolution* in the process. He began by outlining the principle of diminishing marginal utility and showed how it governed individual choice via the equimarginal principle (see Jevons 1913). As Chartrand (2006) claims the Classic Economic Model was concerned with the dynamics of growth through an ever increasing division and specialization of labour whilst the Neo-Classical or Marginalist Economists assumed fixed inputs and technology in their focus on comparatively stable societies. Blaug (1996) claims that, in contrast with classical economics, concern for growth in the Marginalist Revolution enabled economics to become “*the science that studies the relationship between given ends and given scarce means that have alternative uses for the achievement of those ends*” (p.278). In an equilibrium condition a consumer will be satisfied to spend his income on various priced goods so as to make his well-being, or utility, as favourable as possible. Samuelson et al (1970) claim that people arrange their consumption of goods to bring them a marginal utility that is exactly proportional to their prices. Thus “*the proportionality of marginal utilities to prices means that for different goods there must be exact equality among the ratios of their marginal utilities to their prices*” (Samuelson, Hancock, and Wallace 1970, p.471; see also Mansfield 1975, pp.127-130; Samuelson 1964, pp.419,427-429,598n).

Again, the concept of individualism was further expanded by Friedrich Hayek who believed that central economic planning was embodied in socialism and could lead to totalitarianism. He argued that the efficient use and exchange of resources could only be sustained by the utilization of price mechanisms in free markets. He considered that the main role of the state was to maintain the rule of law with as little intervention as possible. To Hayek, socialism's concept and goal of distributive justice cannot be reconciled with the rule of law or with freedom under the law, the security of which is a purpose of that law (see Hayek 1976, p.86). Hayek also held moral values shaped by these neo-liberal concepts which are described by McKnight as follows:

*Those attitudes that are necessary for, and developed within, the market ... These concern rules about private property, honesty, contract, exchange, trade, competition, gain and privacy. These are what Hayek understands by moral rules (see McKnight 2005; Rudd 2006, p.48)*

Rudd claims that Hayek attacked the 'atavism of social justice' in a lecture at Sydney University in 1976. Hayek argued that "notions of moral obligations were hangovers from an earlier evolutionary period". His ideas were propagated by the English Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher (Rudd 2006, p.49) in the reformist agenda identified with her administration. An alternative view to Hayek's is that of Walzer (1983) who argued that distributive justice is not only related to 'having' but also to 'being' and 'doing'. Likewise it is not only linked with useage of goods and services but also with the way these are produced. This links the possession of goods, land or capital to the individual person (Walzer 1983, p.3).

Hayek (1976) was emphatic about a social order in which the freedom of the individual is only restricted by general rules of what he considered just conduct. If organizations direct individuals to follow a single system of ends then the social order is not market spontaneity but the organizations' (p.85). But Walzer (1983) has another view that the struggle against capitalism and the tyranny of money has led to the rise of egalitarian politics, particularly in contemporary America where it has met with some resistance. It has not been power itself that has been resisted but the power of property. Just as tyrannical government policymakers need to have their power balanced with the power of money so there is a propensity for tyrannical capitalists to arise if strong government does not provide a balance for their wealth (Walzer 1983, pp.316-317). Galbraith developed this concept into his theory of 'countervailing powers' (Galbraith 1956, Chapter 9; see Stiglitz 2006).

The dominance of either market fundamentalism or social democratism could cause conflicts with the values taught by societal groups, such as Christians, who might prioritize other values.

### Christian Values

Many Christian countries claim that they follow Judeo-Christian values. However, as Cherry (2008) claims for America, these are dissimilar to the so-called Western values. Judeo-Christian values are derived from both Eastern and Western values, the latter having their genesis in Greece and Rome. Evidence of the merger of these values may be found in the writings of Augustine, Aquinas, Maimonides and Locke and in the American Declaration of Independence. In the early church the values were expressed mainly through faith in a Biblical God. Values began to change after the legal recognition of Christianity as a religion during the reign of Constantine that also resulted in the Church assuming 'spiritual leadership of the vast and powerful empire' (Shelley, 1995: 91). Entanglement with an authoritative empire contributed to an encroachment upon the Biblical morality of the Medieval European Christian Church (see Gates 2006, p.87). Pre-Constantine persecution of Christians by Romans and Jews was reversed in the eleventh century when, as bar Samson (1997) records, the Catholic Church instigated a crusade to rescue Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre from the Saracens (professors of Islam). In 1096, in the early stages of this first crusade, a band of some 12,000 crusaders, led by Emico, a German noble, swept into Mayence and the German Rhineland and along with other places in Germany killed thousands of Jews on their way to Jerusalem (see also Bronstein 2007; Marcus 1938).

Cherry claims that the Reformation brought a re-birth of Judeo-Christian values in the Eastern Church even though the humanistic concept of liberty still had strong support. After the Renaissance and the Reformation a theophobic ideology (abnormal fear of deity or divine punishment) based on Western Reason or Atheistic Faith, developed. This led to the rise of totalitarian regimes based on Communist and Nazi ideologies. Historically, there have been many events in the Western World that have challenged Biblical morality. Notable incidents include the Atlantic slave trade, operating from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, and the holocaust involving the mass slaughter of Jews during World War II. There are also many non Western World incidences of genocide, including Rwanda and Sudan that have occurred in recent years. The effects of these incidents provide opportunity for further research regarding their impact on societal values.

Just as Jesus outlined a number of values that bring happiness in what we now know as ‘The Beatitudes’ (Matthew 5:3-12), so modern church leaders attempt to codify core values for Christians to adopt. For instance, Edgar (2004) selects eight core values for society to live by. These are; grace – giving people more than they deserve; hope – conviction that God is always present; faith – a real depth in relationships; love – loving the unlovely; justice – for all; joy – an essential social value; service – meaning is service and not self-centredness; and peace – includes positive wellbeing. Even though each of the values listed have received attention by theological and other writers over the years there is still ample scope for further research and commentary. A recent contemplative commentary on ‘The Beatitudes’ by John Read (2008), a Salvation Army Officer currently operating from Oxford Street in the heart of London, classifies ‘The Beatitudes’ as “*The Pursuit of Happiness*”. With respect to the value of peacemaking (see Matthew 5:9), Read distinguishes between peacemaking – brokering peace between warring parties - and peacekeeping – as in United Nations forces standing between two warring armies. Read claims that many Christians value peace loving – peace at any price - ahead of peacemaking (p.51).

Many government and corporate decision and policymakers desire specific guidance about the way theologians’ responses to social issues of an economic and justice nature impact of the decisions and policies they adopt. Also they will be cognizant of Christian economic and justice values and the way they influence their decision and policymaking.

### Christian Economic and Justice Values

During the middle ages – AD 476-1453, social organization was based mainly upon a feudal contract from which many forms of political organization and social intercourse evolved. Thus social values were relative to a person’s position on the land. It was during this period that Aquinas’ (1955/1929) discussions on “*property, ‘just’ price, money and the condemnation of usury*” contributed to the development of economic values. Because, prior to 1500, economic transactions were guided by the church it is implied that Christian values guided decision and policymakers on economic issues. Gates and Steane (2007, p.332) claim that “*in 1500 typical decision making was infinitely linked to faith and church guidance*”. They cite Tawney (1938 [1926]) and Coleman and Hagger (2001):

*The typical economic systems [were] those of the Schoolmen; the typical popular teaching [was] that of the sermon, or of manuals such as Dives et Pauper; the typical appeal in difficult cases of conscience [was] to the Bible, the*

*Fathers, the canon law and its interpreters; the typical controversy [was] carried on in terms of morality and religion (Coleman and Hagger p.8; Tawney p.19).*

Rulers as well as servants, by following the church’s teachings on moral and social issues, accepted its economic and justice values and, so, for a thousand years there were no significant moves towards adopting new values for these issues.

For two centuries after 1500 economic thought and thus economic values moved towards a position of passionless objectivity. Along with these and subsequent changes, outlined by Gates and Steane (2007), economic values became embedded in the economic system of the day. At first the economic values of mercantilists governed policies and procedures around measuring increases in the circulation of state controlled stock such as silver and gold. Acceptance of new economic values followed successive changes in economic thought with a significant change occurring with the development of ‘classical economics’ in the eighteenth century. With the publication of Adam Smith’s (1976 [1776]) *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* came the linking of wealth to “*the division of labour, stock accumulation and profitability*”. Smith’s concept of an “*invisible hand*” refers to the invisible hand of God and Gates and Steane claim that Smith “*implies that in the divine design people will generally pursue their own self-interests without thinking about the macro*” (pp.334-335). According to Kilcullen (1996), Smith does not prove that such a pursuit of self interests by myriads of individuals will have better outcomes than those achieved by coordinating the policies and actions of government. Thus the “*Smithian Revolution*” attacked Mercantilism and an outcome of the assault was changed understandings of how wealth is generated and affluence is promoted (see Johnson 1971, p.1). The authors suggest that if Christians become embedded in capitalism, and the subsequent developments of neoclassical economics and economic rationalism, difficulties in reconciling selfish values with Biblical moral values of service to humans in need and to values promoting selflessness will become evident.

Therefore the authors argue that if people espouse Christianity then, *ipso facto*, they accept the doctrines and precepts taught by Jesus Christ, including parables and statements emphasizing the necessity and desirability of acting in an altruistic and just manner towards fellow human-beings. Mainstream Churches accept as authoritative the teachings recorded by the four Gospel writers which were interpreted and expounded by other Apostles such as Paul. Generally theologians and Church leaders have interpreted these teachings as supporting claims the pursuit of economic rationalistic policies and practices can lead

to unjust outcomes. There are many values that a society may consider desirable and some of these will be related to the faith of Christians today. However, there are some other professing ‘Christians’ who have sought to embrace significantly high levels of Christian commitment and philanthropic endeavour while, at the same time, embracing capitalistic free market philosophies. For instance, although the United States possibly has the highest levels of philanthropy and Church attendance in the Western World, it is deeply committed to capitalism and individualism (see Putnam 2001). Even though economic rationalism can be shown to be non-egalitarian, there are some professing ‘Christians’ who have defended it, such as Clarnette for instance, who argues that individualism was proclaimed in Jesus’ ‘Sermon on the Mount’ (Clarnette 1993 also Matthew 5:1–7:29 and Luke 6:17–49). Novak, a Catholic social theorist of the American Enterprise Institute, proposes that the ‘ideals and system’ of democratic capitalism are praise-worthy and argues that socialism has failed (see Novak 1982; and Younkins 1999, p.10). The purpose of his book was:

*to defend democratic capitalism from the utopian challenge of socialism; to demonstrate that democratic capitalism’s principles are not only practical, but that, even in the abstract, they are superior to the socialist vision; to provide a theoretical framework for democratic capitalism; to persuade theologians and others that the values of democratic capitalism are not only consistent with, but supportive of those of Christianity; and to begin the construction of a theology of capitalism (Younkins 1999, pp.9–10).*

If the above statements are true, this suggests that theologians may need to provide more answers to the apparent inequalities in the world resulting from capitalistic and economic rationalistic policies and practices. This paper aims to stimulate a theological response to poverty, dominance and inequalities and proposes that adherence to altruistic Christian teachings will help to resolve the values’ tensions faced by policymakers, and by so doing enable them to develop reform policies to assist underprivileged members of society.

### **Social Welfare Reform**

In countries such as the United States social policy advocates have sought to institute social welfare reform. As Silver (2001, p. 28) claims this was stimulated by President Bill Clinton’s call in 1996 to “*end welfare as we know it*”. This had followed a significant period of declining support of the poor by the US Federal Government. According to Rogers-Dillon

(2001, p.7) 6.8 million people had left the welfare rolls between 1993 and 1999. There had been a long standing gulf between liberals and conservatives prior to the 1996 legislation with the liberals focusing on poverty and the well-being of welfare recipients and conservatives being concerned about people becoming dependent on welfare and that “*too many recipients will never find their way off; nor will their children*” (Weicher 2001, p.16). Chaves (2001) advises that the 1996 Welfare Reform Legislation delegated more responsibility to the states and local governments to institute social welfare policies and programmes and it also “*imposed time limits and work requirements on recipients of public support*” (p.21). The charitable choice provisions in this legislation opened the way for an expanded involvement of religious organisations “*in publicly-funded anti-poverty work*” (p.21). Some evangelicals, such as Sherk (2003) argue against Christians using government assistance to help the poor. Others – not necessarily Christians – who contribute to journals, such as the ‘Strike The Root’ (STR) daily journal, seek to de-mystify and de-legitimise the State altogether. Some liberals, such as Locke (2006), an STR contributor, partly support their arguments against the welfare state by emphasising, out of context, Paul’s warnings against idleness in his statement, “*If a man will not work, he will not eat*” (2 Thessalonians 3:10 NIV). Others, such as the Reverend Robert A. Sirico, claim that the lazy servant in Jesus’ Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30) “*could have avoided his dismal fate by demonstrating more entrepreneurial initiative*” (Sirico 2000, p.18).

### **Market Fundamentalism Versus Altruism**

Such a conflict of values suggests a great divide between market fundamentalism – neoclassical economics or economic rationalism – and altruism. Even though some, such as Marsland (2001) suggest that supporters of the free-market consider markets to be “*morally neutral*” (p.33). Marsland claims that it is a clash between virtue and socialism. He states:

*Virtue is a function of freedom, of which the market is a key component. Socialists are in the business of restricting markets and thus of curtailing freedom. We must choose, therefore between socialism and virtue, between the liberty and morality of capitalism and the slavery and amorality of state domination, between the programmed condition of mere ants and a life of freedom and personal responsibility as human beings (Marsland 2001, p.38; see also Shils 1997).*

The writers of this paper suggest that not all economic rationalists or market fundamentalists have accep-

ted the personal responsibility that the so-called freedom attributed to the market implies. If they did we suggest there would not be so much disparity between the income levels of individuals within individual countries and throughout the world. Thus we contend there might be a case for government intervention to distribute wealth, more evenly, between individuals, communities and nations through taxation and international aid (see Gates and Steane 2007, pp.344-347). If this is achieved then a more just society might emerge and powerful political and corporate leaders become less dominant so that the wellbeing of underprivileged people might be advanced.

### Adam Smith's Concepts of Justice

In the eighteenth century, Adam Smith spoke of an '*Invisible Hand*' guiding people who pursue their own self-interest whilst making myriads of decisions that benefited the whole society (see Braham 2006, p.1; and Smith 1976 [1776]). Smith was a Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University, and was a real founding force in establishing the economic language of 'transactions' from which he was somewhat inspired by the guild systems of Europe. In summary, Smith considered that property was 'an acquired perfect right' (Verburg 2000, p.31) and isolated questions about social (or distributive) justice in his theories. Concern with the protection from injury by another party was incorporated in his concept of *commutative* justice. The exclusion of distributive justice from his theories, despite oppressive inequality generated by a commercial society, held the proviso that the needs of the poor should be accommodated adequately (Verburg 2000, p.23). The application of the social justice concepts of 'charity and generosity' was assessed on individual and/or 'merit' based criteria (Braham 2006, p.1). However, there still remains the question about whether policies and actions derived from his theories provide for a more egalitarian society or whether a few powerful people dominate the masses?

### Egalitarianism, Equality and Complex Equality!

Theoretically, individualism should provide a framework for individual altruistic acts towards the disadvantaged of society. While a number of wealthy people do make some significant contributions to charity these fall far short of the needs of a troubled world. For example, less than a quarter of US development aid goes to the poorest nations in the world and the remainder is directed at countries that best suit US strategic interests (Singer 2007).

Boosted by tsunami donations of AUD\$380 million, individual donations to non-government overseas aid amounted to AUD\$872 million in 2005. This placed Australia in fifth place on the Centre for Global Development's index for individuals making donations such as these. Despite this individual giving, more money is spent on chocolates than on helping people in poor countries. As a percentage of GNI only .25% is spent on development assistance as compared with a donor-country average of .47%, placing Australia 19<sup>th</sup> of the 22 rich countries in 2005 but little of this went to African countries, which are the poorest in the world (Lewis 2007).

Egalitarians advocating a notion of simple equality envisage a society in which all members enjoy equal benefits of commodities such as "*property, income, opportunity, rights, resources, capacities, and welfare*" (Miller 1995, p.197). However, once advocates of this ideal realise it cannot be attained, there seems to be a modifying and redefinition of this ideal, captured in the use of a term such as 'equality of resources'. Walzer (1983) advances a concept of '*complex equality*' and focuses on dominance rather than monopoly. In a *complex* egalitarian society, he envisages situations where many small inequalities exist but are not "*multiplied through the conversion process*" to another sphere. Whereas *simple* equality implies a situation that if person X has a number of a particular item and person Y has the same number of that item then they are equal. In such a situation a simple distribution process operates. Recognising that this was not common in real life, Walzer proposed that equality would occur if dominance in one sphere of justice did not extend across into another sphere (p.17-18). Hence, if citizen X is elected to political office over citizen Y he is dominant in the political sphere but X and Y will be equal if dominance does not extend to another sphere.

Walzer's (1983) basic argument implies that whereas inequalities are acceptable in one sphere they cannot be cumulative. Accumulation of inequalities can result: in influence in one sphere being used to obtain similar influence in another sphere; and from power positions in more than one different sphere having their genesis in a single common cause. The theory of complex inequalities is designed to eradicate the first position but it does not address the second position explicitly. Walzer implies that this position should not arise but, in the event it does, enough numbers of these people can constitute a dominant ruling class. Given plurality of talents and spheres, processes of exclusion are mitigated effectively and an underclass does not materialise (Hooghe 1999). The question remains, however, as to whether these theories adequately address problems of poverty, dominance and inequalities in society or whether a theological response is needed.



## A Theological Response to Poverty, Dominance and Inequalities

Policymakers endeavouring to provide solutions to poverty in third world countries are faced with numerous moral demands. However, if a dominant position must be taken then it should be altruistic and based on 'agape' love. Tillich wrote:

*The religious source of the moral demands is love under the domination of the agape quality, in unity with the imperative of justice to acknowledge every being with personal potential as a person, being guided by the divine-human wisdom embodied in moral laws of the past, listening to the concrete situation, and acting courageously on the basis of these principles* (Tillich 1964, p.41).

The Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council, stated that: "Every man has a right to a share of the earth's goods sufficient for himself and his family" (translation in Flannery 1992, p.975; Pope Paul VI 1965, §69). Despite this right and despite the efforts of Christian Churches everywhere, more than 50% of child deaths throughout the world are contributed to by malnutrition. Although many poor countries abound in natural resources and labour, government and multi-national action militates against trading out of poverty. It is a scandal that in the EU and the US, subsidies are paid to their home farmers. These subsidies are effectively protection barriers to trade. Market power increases when domestic markets in the industrialized world are protected by high tariffs so that many consumer goods produced in the poorest countries are unable to compete.

The Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible) recognises that, because of misfortune or unfairness, the goods of the land gravitate to one section of the population whilst another receives insufficient sustenance and may even become debt-slaves. In order that those with abundance could not exploit their situation at the expense of the poor, two main provisions were included in the Law (Torah). Firstly, usury was prohibited. Lending at interest to an Israelite in need was forbidden. Impoverished members of the community were to be lent money and food freely until they were re-established. "If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so he can continue to live among you" (Leviticus 25:35 NIV). Secondly, the periodic cancellation of debts, the release of debt-slaves and the return of property to those who lost it in the hard times was to be undertaken (Ruston 2004, p.41). This was to occur during the fiftieth year, the year of Jubilee, and was instituted to help abolish poverty; provide a mechanism to abolish slavery,

provide some increased leisure for 'an agricultural people', and preserve the distinctiveness of families and tribes through the application of the law of entail (Peloubet and Adams 1947, pp.333-334).

Ruston cites Thomas Aquinas, who defined 'usury' as 'taking interest of loan', as commenting that the rule of usury was being universalised for Christians who regard all human beings as their kin. However, usury is now understood to mean 'exorbitant interest', the kind that drives people to crime and takes food away from children (Aquinas 1955/1929, 2a 2ae Q.78, art 1 ad 2; Ruston 2004, pp.41 & 59). One response the Catholic Church has made to this problem has been the periodic reinstatement of the Levitical practice of Jubilee.

## The Christian Jubilee

Pope Boniface VIII instituted the first Christian Jubilee on 22 February 1300 when he appealed, somewhat vaguely, to the precedent of the past in "Antiquorum fida relatio", declaring:

*that he grants afresh and renews certain 'great remissions and indulgences for sins' which are to be obtained 'by visiting the city of Rome and the venerable basilica of the Prince of the Apostles'* (Wikipedia contributors 2006a).

Pope Clement VI instituted the second Christian Jubilee in 1350. Since that time there have been a further twenty-six known Christian Jubilees at irregular intervals. These have tended to be joyous events with an emphasis on the remission of sins and universal pardon (see Wikipedia contributors 2006a). Pope John Paul II instituted the last jubilee, the Great Jubilee, in 2000 (see Wikipedia contributors 2006b).

Today, although many people do endeavour to assist the needy, many others continuing to give precedence to their own self-interests, cleave to exclusive rather than inclusive policies, adhering to the laws of the market rather than laws of equality. As a result they promote leaders who will not thwart their economic and political rationalistic ideologies.

## Conclusion

In the political arena a battle of ideas is being fought out. These relate to distributive justice, oppression of women and ethnic groups, exploitation of the environment and the violent and inappropriate use of power by dominant political and corporate leaders. The social and economic values of some Christians have become embedded in prevailing economic ideologies of the period and these are a cause of tension. For instance, there are groups such as the religious right with their belief in individual morality and the social democrats who emphasize issues of

social justice that are debating points of view in political and religious circles. A theological response to poverty, dominance and inequalities has been addressed as have been some social scientists' theories of equality.

However the great divide between the rich and poor nations still remains and so this paper makes a case for adhering to 'fair trade' practises by governments and multi-national organizations and it has been implied that the Levitical practice of jubilee be re-introduced to help mitigate poverty. This would involve debt cancellation and avoidance of usury.

Organizations promoting development and combating poverty in third world countries could well adopt fundamental values proposed by a former Prime Minister of Norway:

*The first is respect for life and human dignity, which must underpin our efforts to protect and promote human rights.*

*The second is stewardship, which must underpin our efforts to safeguard the environment and ensure sound resource management.*

*The third is compassion and solidarity, which must underpin our efforts to promote justice, social and economic development, both nationally and internationally. We should remember the words of Martin Luther King: 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere' (Bondevik 2003).*

Individual policymakers might well heed Christian Scriptures, particularly the Parables of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46). Adherence to such teaching reinforces the value of altruism over egoism. The tension between these values remains evident as ambiguities and is persistently identified in scripture and theological teachings in church history. Resolving tensions between these values remains a challenge for policymakers today.

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