

Welcome

*"In the unrighteousness of your trade, you profaned your sanctuaries."
Ezekiel 28:18 (NRSV)*

*"O, Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek... to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed."
Psalm 10:17-18 (NRSV)*

Christians have long been at the forefront of campaigning for trade justice. Churches from many different traditions have seen this as an important way of following Jesus' example of solidarity with the poor.

From the Fairtrade movement to the campaign for global debt cancellation, British Christians have for years joined with people of other religions and of none to challenge the unjust structures that keep millions in poverty.

Trade rules continue to harm millions as the US and EU prepare a new agreement that will remove protection for some of the poorest workers and give corporations power to stop measures that protect the planet and its people. Debt cancellation has become even more urgent and widespread need since the global crash and European nations have joined those of the global south in struggling under the weight of unjust debt. In a world in which everyone could have enough to eat, our unjust systems keep millions in hunger.

The good news is that there is a lot we can do to challenge this situation. We hope this pack will provide you with some starting points. It is aimed at Christians who want to join with others to promote trade justice. The pack can be used by individuals, churches, house groups, student Christian societies or any other group that finds it useful.

The pack has been produced by Global Justice Now with the support of Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network, Christian Aid, Commitment for Life (United Reformed Church), Green Christian, Jubilee Debt Campaign, Justice and Peace Network, One World Week and Trade Justice Movement. It incorporates prayers, writings and ideas by people from a range of Christian traditions who share a conviction that trade injustice is a barrier to the fullness of life promised by the kingdom of God.

The pack includes:

- An action sheet giving a brief summary of the issues, and suggestions for action, on trade and TTIP, the secretive trade deal that will harm the poor.
- A selection of prayers, poems and quotations that relate to trade justice.
- Three Bible-studies on passages relevant to trade justice (Ezekiel 28, Amos 8 and Luke 19). Each provides the text of the passage in question, a brief reflection and questions for discussion.
- Suggestions for other Bible passages that you may wish to read or discuss.
- A liturgy, that can be used as a whole or adapted, to facilitate prayer and reflection on trade justice.
- Two briefings for those interested in learning about TTIP and trade deals.

Please feel free to photocopy the sheets if you need to. If you wish to share your thoughts with us, have any questions or would like to order more copies, please contact Effie Jordan on 020 7820 4900 or effie.jordan@globaljustice.org.uk.

TTIP: A secretive trade deal that harms the poor

“Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right.”

Isaiah 10:1-2 (NRSV)

In secrecy and away from the front pages of the newspapers or the glare of TV cameras, officials from the USA and the European Union are negotiating a new trade deal which could spell disaster in many different ways. The deal is known as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, or TTIP.

Safety regulations, workers' rights, environmental protection rules and food standards are all threatened by TTIP.

Several churches and Christian campaigns have joined the criticisms of TTIP, along with aid agencies, charities and groups representing some of the world's poorest people.

What is TTIP?

TTIP is a deal that aims to remove 'non-tariff barriers to trade'. There's very little obstacle to trade between the EU and the US at present — tariffs are at an all-time low. But corporations, on both sides of the Atlantic, want to remove other rules and regulations that might be stopping them from making even bigger profits.

The prospects for countries in the global south are bleak. Many enjoy preferential access to the European Union market, but TTIP threatens to undermine the benefits of that access and make it more difficult to export to the EU. Worse will follow if the deal is agreed, as TTIP will become the global standard for trade deals in the future and more power will shift to corporations and away from elected governments.

Corporate courts

TTIP and similar deals give corporations a new way of imposing their will, called the Investor-State Dispute Settlement mechanism (ISDS).

ISDS is a legal system that allows corporations to sue governments if they think legislation will

damage future profits. It is a system that has been implemented in other trade deals previously and we can see the injustices it brings:

- Tobacco giant Philip Morris has sued Australia for introducing plain packaging on cigarettes. The same company sued Uruguay simply for printing a health warning on cigarette packets.
- Waste and energy company Veolia sued Egypt for introducing a minimum wage.
- Argentina was sued for freezing energy prices to protect consumers following the country's financial collapse.

Food and agricultural multinationals are spending more money than any other sector in lobbying for TTIP, while US food giants want EU legislation removed on many food safety rules – including the ban on meat raised using certain growth hormones and additives.

If TTIP is agreed, health, education and water will each face being opened up to private companies. Regulations on the financial sector introduced in the wake of the 2008 financial crash are also in the sights of big business, as are restrictions which protect the welfare of farm animals and protection for consumers' data online.

TTIP is less of a negotiation about trade and more of a shift in power, away from people and towards corporations on both sides of the Atlantic.

Why should Christians be worried?

The Bible calls on us to stand in solidarity with people in poverty. Several churches have suggested that TTIP will benefit the very wealthy at the expense of the rest. For example, the Church of Scotland has expressed concern that TTIP will lead to "increased inequality and further stratification

between communities". The Evangelische Kirche, one of the largest churches in Germany, has challenged the system of corporate courts.

The prophetic books of the Bible are full of comments about those who use legal mechanisms to exploit the poor. The prophet Isaiah is typical when he slams those who "write oppressive statutes" to "rob the poor of my people" (Isaiah 10:1-2).

It is worth noting that this is not a condemnation of illegal practices, but of those which are legal but immoral. It cannot be morally right to remove protection from the poorest to make profits for the richest. And as British Quakers put it when they condemned the slave trade two centuries ago, "What is morally wrong cannot be politically right".

What can Christians do about TTIP?

Challenging TTIP is not about being simplistic or objecting to change. It is part of our calling to stand alongside the poor in resisting injustice as we seek God's guidance for building a better society. We need to think carefully about how to act effectively. As Jesus said, we should be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

Here are some steps to get started:

- Pray about TTIP, asking that God will guide all those involved as well as those campaigning against TTIP. Encourage members of your church to pray too.
- Hold a discussion on TTIP in your church, house group or student society. You can invite a speaker from an organisation such as Global Justice Now, Christian Aid or other organisations working on the issue.
- Write to your local council asking them to declare their opposition to TTIP. Many local authorities in the UK have already declared themselves 'TTIP-free zones'. A letter from a local church may have more impact than a letter from an individual.
- Write to a local paper to express your concerns. A challenge to TTIP from a church or churches will make clear that this is not just a worry for only one or two individuals.
- Keep yourself informed and share ideas for action. Visit <http://www.globaljustice.org.uk/campaigns/trade>.

Please see other sheets in this pack for suggested prayers, Bible-studies and sources of information.

Bible-study: Individuals or systems?

*Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor of the land,
saying, "When will the new moon be over
so that we may sell grain;
and the sabbath,
so that we may offer wheat for sale?
We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,
and practise deceit with false balances,
buying the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of the wheat."*

*The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.
Shall not the land tremble on this account,
and everyone mourn who lives in it,
and all of it rise like the Nile,
and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile
of Egypt?*

Amos 8:4-8 (NRSV)

Reflection

by Amelia Sutcliffe, URC Commitment for Life programme

At the time of Amos the nation of Israel had become very rich, being its largest in size since under Solomon's rule. It was controlling trade routes in the area. This led to some of the people of Israel growing in their own personal wealth and getting used to this image of themselves.

It is not surprising therefore that the prophet Amos is called to address questions of trade injustice. In this passage we see that the nation of Israel has been growing in wealth but diminishing in its persistence of justice and moral trade practices. In order to increase their profits, traders are seen to be intentionally acting unjustly and causing further problems for their labourers and those less fortunate than themselves.

This image strongly links with many people's perspectives of big corporations' role in global wealth distribution and poverty today. This is what makes this an interesting passage as we reflect biblically on trade in today's world. This was a time when the rich among the Israelites believed

themselves to be in control of all the trade routes. Some thought they would always be rich. An image of their invincibility had taken over.

Prior to Chapter 8, it is obvious that the Lord God is becoming increasingly disappointed in this manner of acting and in his people's treatment of the poor among them. The message from Amos of punishment, while harsh, is understandable as it gives a clear indication of God's feelings of hurt and disappointment regarding the oppression of the poor.

A description of the mistreatment of the poor is followed by a statement on God's punishment. This reminds us that a passion for justice is at the forefront of God's teachings.

Sometimes words of wisdom need not be complicated but speak from the past to our everyday lives easily.

Verse 6 gives us vivid images of materialism and destructive trading practices through cheap labour, just as seen today across the world. This links to modern images regarding the trade in clothes, just as it describes silver and sandals.

Questions for discussion

1. What images or examples of companies or people "buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals" can you think of today?
2. What does it mean to practice "deceit with false balances"? Is this about the practices of individual traders or does it refer to economic systems?
3. How do you feel about God threatening punishment to these people abusing others through the rules of trade? What does this mean for how we as Christians react to the companies or systems that continue this abuse of the poor?
4. Reading parts of Amos, we seem to find actions and trade deals that we would read in a modern newspaper. What does this mean for our experience of reading the Bible or even indeed our experiences of reading the news?
5. Is there anything as a church we can do to challenge abusive trade practices such as those described here? You may wish to refer to the action sheet contained within this pack.

Bible-study: The right use of money?

Jesus said:

A nobleman went to a distant country to get royal power for himself and then return. He summoned ten of his slaves, and gave them ten pounds, and said to them, "Do business with these until I come back."

But the citizens of his country hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, "We do not want this man to rule over us."

When he returned, having received royal power, he ordered these slaves, to whom he had given the money, to be summoned so that he might find out what they had gained by trading.

The first came forward and said, "Lord, your pound has made ten more pounds." He said to him, "Well done, good slave! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of ten cities."

Then the second came, saying, "Lord, your pound has made five pounds." He said to him, "And you, rule over five cities."

Then the other came, saying, "Lord, here is your pound. I wrapped it up in a piece of cloth, for I was afraid of you, because you are a harsh man; you take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow."

He said to him, "I will judge you by your own words, you wicked slave! You knew, did you, that I was a harsh man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? Why then did you not put my money into the bank? Then when I returned, I could have collected it with interest."

He said to the bystanders, "Take the pound from him and give it to the one who has ten pounds." (And they said to him, "Lord, he has ten pounds!")

"I tell you, to all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and slaughter them in my presence."

Luke 19:12-27 (NRSV)

Reflection

by Symon Hill

Most Christian sermons on this parable suggest that the nobleman represents God. But if you show the passage to new readers who are unfamiliar with it, they are unlikely to have a positive view of this character. He comes across as a bully: throwing his power around, frightening the third servant and having his enemies killed.

Admittedly, in the version of the story that appears in Matthew's Gospel, the rich man is not quite as bad: he does not kill anyone, but he is still extremely unpleasant. What does it say about our theology if we think God is represented by such a figure? Perhaps we are remembering that God is all-powerful but forgetting that God is all-loving.

Let's remember that for centuries, interpretations of Jesus' teachings have been affected by churches' links with wealth and power, making it more likely that a nobleman will be identified with God. If we are seeking to follow Jesus' teaching, then how we read this story can have a big effect on our views of money.

Some say that the parable shows that God will reward those who use money well. A problem with this interpretation is that Jesus was Jewish. He lived at a time when devout Jews opposed usury (lending money with interest). It is difficult to imagine Jesus painting usury in a positive light, even by way of illustrating something else.

It is common these days for the parable to be used less literally. Rather than encouraging financial investment, we are told that the parable means we will be rewarded if we put our skills to good use. This is helped by the fact that Matthew's Gospel uses the currency unit 'talents' rather than pounds – which has a convenient double meaning in English. This does not, however, explain the nobleman's violent and tyrannical behaviour. So what is this story really about?

The parable may be a combination of two stories. Jesus' listeners are likely to have recognised the story of a nobleman going to a "distant country to be appointed king" as a reference to Herod Archelaus. He travelled to Rome to receive the

emperor's appointment to rule Judea, although his opponents sent a delegation after him. On this basis, we might assume that the story is a condemnation of the sins of a rich and powerful individual, but some commentators go further. A number of New Testament scholars see the parable as a comment on the sins of inequality. Although the third servant says he is afraid, this is not entirely borne out by his behaviour. He bluntly tells his violent master: "you are a harsh man; you take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow". Someone who speaks like this to a tyrant is hardly a coward!

Perhaps Jesus is challenging us to follow the third servant's example of speaking out against injustice, rather than colluding with it like the others. He is part of a society that operates on the basis of unjust practices, but he chooses to challenge them. This may sound familiar today, with many of us caught up in an unfair global economic system that we did not choose, but from which it sometimes seems that there is no escape.

This disagreement is far more than an academic exercise. How we read the parable affects how we live if we are trying to follow Jesus. It could affect our attitude towards banks, trade, capitalism and our own money.

It is clear that Jesus' parables were often intended as a challenge to his audience. The question is, which servant's example are we being called to follow?

Questions for discussion

1. With which character in this story do you find it easiest to identify? Be honest!
2. How does your choice of interpretation affect your use of money and talents today and our approach to financial practices?
3. Which servant's example should we seek to follow, if any? How should we seek to follow it?
4. How are your answers to these questions influenced by your own economic and social status?
5. If we want to challenge unfair practices, how should we go about it? You may wish to refer to the action sheet contained within this pack.

Bible-study: Unrighteous trade

The word of the LORD came to me: Mortal, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord God:

You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, carnelian, chrysolite, and moonstone, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald; and worked in gold were your settings and your engravings.

On the day that you were created they were prepared.

With an anointed cherub as guardian I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked among the stones of fire.

You were blameless in your ways from the day that you were created, until iniquity was found in you.

In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and the guardian cherub drove you out from among the stones of fire.

Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendour.

I cast you to the ground; I exposed you before kings, to feast their eyes on you.

By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade, you profaned your sanctuaries.

So I brought out fire from within you; it consumed you, and I turned you to ashes on the earth in the sight of all who saw you.

All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you; you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more for ever.

Ezekiel 28:11-19 (NRSV)

Reflection

by Rev Dr Susan Durber, Christian Aid

Tyre was one of the oldest and wealthiest city states in the ancient Near East, it lies in what is now Lebanon. It carried a reputation as a highly successful trading centre and a centre for shipping. It was particularly known for dyeing cloth in purple, the most prestigious cloth and the one worn by the elite. It was the economic heart of the famous Phoenician Empire and was admired and envied by many. Its great wealth as a trading centre, mainly focussed on an island, meant that many wanted to capture it and take it over. For example, King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon lay siege to it in the sixth century BCE.

For many centuries it had a very lucrative trading partnership with Israel, which for much of the time proved beneficial for everyone. It also developed trade routes right across the Mediterranean. It was the Greek commander Alexander the Great who finally took the city and destroyed it in the fourth century BCE – and its 30,000 inhabitants were then largely taken into slavery. Alexander resented the city because it had resisted his power for so long – he had even had to build a causeway from the mainland to the island in order to take it. It was annexed to the Roman Empire in 64 BCE and then rebuilt under the Romans, under whom it flourished again as a trade centre and port city.

Even now you can see impressive ruins in Tyre, showing what a wealthy and remarkable place it must have been. You can find a market place, the best preserved hippodrome in the world (think Ben Hur) and a huge bathhouse.

In the New Testament period, Jesus himself went to “the region of Tyre” (Mark 7:24) where he met a woman who pleaded with him to heal her daughter. In the exchange he had with her, some argue that you hear the echoes of an ancient resentment of Tyre as the place which imported all the bread from Palestine to feed its own people. It took “the children’s food”.

Tyre, at its peak, was something like an equivalent in the ancient world of Manhattan Island in today’s New York city; fashionable, wealthy, enviable. The

texts in Ezekiel 28 are almost certainly referring to the siege of it by Nebuchadnezzar, though we don't know precisely the details or outcome of that siege, and the verses describing it as "proud" and "filled with violence" reflect how this rich trading city state was seen.

It was regarded as complacent about its own wealth, unseeing of the needs of others, exploitative of surrounding communities and peoples. There is evidence too that it was taking over other cities and lands, developing the kind of economic colonialism that seems all too familiar from today's world.

Questions for discussion

1. The prophet Ezekiel condemns Tyre and foretells its destruction. What exactly does he condemn the city for?
2. Imagine that you are a citizen of Tyre – how do you want to respond to this passage? Imagine that you are a poor peasant from Israel – how do you want to respond to this passage?
3. Where can you find parallels in today's world? Where, in our world, does trade lead to pride and violence? What kind of trade and trading systems might prove fruitful, good and peaceful?
4. Think about the trading in which you participate. Think back over your various transactions this week: things you have purchased, sold, been involved in producing, investments you've made, etc. What impact have they made on the world? What might you want to do differently?
5. Can you find some 'good news' in this prophecy?

A liturgy on trade justice

This liturgy may be used as the basis for a short service in its own right, or as part of a longer service. You may wish to use parts of it without others. You are welcome to vary it as you see fit. Be creative!

All biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

Leader: Rise up, O Lord, lift up your hand.

Congregation: Do not forget the oppressed.

We listen to scripture

Leader: Loving God, you called your servant Moses to lead slaves to freedom.

Reader 1: *"I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them."* (Exodus 3:7-8)

Leader: Your prophets challenged those who use unjust trade to exploit the poor.

Reader 2: *"By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade, you profaned your sanctuaries."* (Ezekiel 28:18)

Leader: Your Son, Jesus, exposed the economic injustice that he found.

Reader 3: *"To all those who have more will be given, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."* (Luke 19:26)

Leader: Jesus was crucified by the powers he challenged, but God raised him from the dead to lead us, heal us and save us. He calls us to live in loyalty to the kingdom of God.

Reader 4: *Where "many who are first will be last, and the last will be first".* (Mark 10:31)

We pray for forgiveness

Leader: God of the slaves, you want us to be free. Yet many remain literally enslaved, treated as the property of others. We have created new forms of slavery, so millions are enslaved to debt and millions more are robbed and exploited by unjust trade practices.

Leader: For times when we have failed to challenge injustice,

Congregation: Father, forgive us.

Leader: When we have been too comfortable with the status quo,

Congregation: Father, forgive us.

Leader: When it has been too easy to believe that nothing can change, and too hard to trust in the power of your love,

Congregation: Father, forgive us.

Leader: When we have rushed in with our own favoured solutions, unwilling to hear the voices of those we say we want to help,

Congregation: Father, forgive us.

Leader: Father God, forgive our caution, cowardice and complacency. Thank you that you continue to work through us and use us to advance your kingdom.

We reflect on trade today

One of those present may wish to read something about trade. This could be based on the action sheet that can also be found in this pack, or from the sheet containing a selection of prayers and thoughts. Alternatively, they may prefer to choose something from elsewhere or to share a personal reflection. You may then wish to open up the topic for discussion.

We thank God and pray for guidance

Prayers may be offered freely, either out loud or inwardly. You may wish to ask those present to offer up prayers as they feel led, or you may prefer to go round in a circle, asking each person to pray if they wish to.

At the end of each prayer, the pray-er may wish to say "Rise up, O Lord, lift up your hand", to which the congregation reply "Do not forget the oppressed" (this is from Psalm 10:12).

Leader: For the millions of people around the world who are inspired to resist injustice,

Congregation: We thank you, God!

Leader: For every time love succeeds and injustice is defeated,

Congregation: We thank you, God!

Leader: For every unfair policy reversed, for every just cause advanced, for the freedoms we possess because our ancestors campaigned for them,

Congregation: We thank you, God!

Leader: For the ways in which you will use us to challenge injustice and to advance your kingdom, despite our own faults and hesitancy,

Congregation: We thank you, God!

Leader: Let us go from here, inspired by Moses and Jesus, by Amos and Ezekiel, by all who have followed God's call of solidarity with the poor.

Congregation: In the name of Christ. Amen!



Trade and justice in the Bible

“Those who gathered much had nothing over and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.”
Exodus 16:18 (NRSV)

The Bible has a great deal to say about money, wealth, poverty, power – and trade. Here we provide only a small selection of passages that you may find helpful to look at. On other sheets in this pack, you can find notes for Bible studies on three passages in particular.

Exodus 3:1-10

God hears the cries of the slaves and declares that their oppression will come to an end.

Exodus 16:1-30

God provides the Israelites with food that must be shared out between them.

Leviticus 25:1-55

God orders a regular jubilee – when debts will be cancelled, land redistributed and slaves freed.

Psalms 10:1-18

A prayer for an end to the exploitation of the poor by the rich.

Isaiah 10:1-4

The prophet denounces those who use law and power to rob the poor.

Ezekiel 28:1-26

A judgement on abusive trading practices (please see the separate sheet for a Bible-study on this passage, including a reflection and questions to ponder).

Amos 8:1-10

God condemns unjust practices that “trample on the needy” (please see the separate sheet for a Bible-study on this passage, including a reflection and questions to ponder).

Habakkuk 2:6-14

A challenge to those who grow rich at the expense of others.

Matthew 6:24

We cannot serve God if we are serving Mammon (the god of wealth), says Jesus.

Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus tells a story about workers receiving equal pay.

Mark 11:15-19

Jesus takes direct action against economic exploitation in the Jerusalem Temple.

Luke 4:16-21

The Nazareth Manifesto: Jesus invokes the idea that the day of jubilee is at hand, declaring good news to the poor and freedom for the oppressed.

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus challenges Zacchaeus, a wealthy and corrupt businessman. Zacchaeus agrees to give away half his wealth and pay back those he has defrauded four times over.

Luke 19:11-27

(equivalent to Matthew 25:14-30)

Jesus tells a story about a rich man who leaves his employees in charge of his money (please see the separate sheet for a Bible-study on this passage, including a reflection and questions to ponder).

James 5:1-6

The apostle James challenges rich people who hold back money from their workers.

Revelation 18:1-24

God will judge systems, governments and businesses that profit from violence and injustice.

“The last will be first, and the first will be last.”
Matthew 20:16 (NRSV)

Prayers

Here we offer a range of prayers, poems and quotations from various parts of the world and from different Christian traditions – Catholic, Evangelical, Liberal, Quaker and others.

The Holy Spirit resisting injustice

Lord,
Show me the pain of those who are most troubled
So that I can learn about the suffering of my people
Grant me the courage to serve others
Because in surrender there is eternal life
Illuminate us with song and celebration
And raise the Spirit amongst us
May the Spirit flower and grow
And give us strength to continue our struggle
May we remember those who have died from injustice
Because for us they have given their lives
Amen

Written by farmers in El Salvador working with the Jesuit Development Service. With thanks to CAFOD.

The cost of free trade

God of Compassion,
You look down on the global marketplace
and see the scales tipped by subsidies and tariffs.
The unsold milk in Jamaica draining away wasted.
The maize in Mexico rotting on the stalk.
And while the rich feast on the proceeds of their sales,
the poor count the cost of free trade.
God of justice,
Call us to account.
Inspire us, so that we may cast off our complacency and apathy
and joining hands with people at home and abroad,
we may make a stand for justice and righteousness,
for all who dwell on the earth.

Written by Sue Cooper for CAFOD. With thanks to CAFOD.

Martin Luther on theft and exploitation

Heathen were able, by the light of reason, to conclude that a usurer is a double-eyed thief and murderer. We Christians, however, hold them in such honour that we fairly worship them for the sake of their money... Meanwhile, we hang the small thieves... Little thieves are put in the stocks, great thieves go flaunting in gold and silk.

Martin Luther (Protestant reformer), sixteenth century

Scraps from the rich man's table

The efforts at debt cancellation that were made till now could be compared to the scraps that Lazarus hoped he could feed on at the rich man's table: they are illusory promises without real substances. ...Giving to others scraps rather than what they deserve means basically treating them in a sub-human way, not as human beings!

Statement by the Roman Catholic Bishops of Kenya

Let us see reality

O Lord, open my eyes that I may see the need of others.
Open my ears that I may hear their cries.
Open my heart so that they need not be without succour.
Let me not be afraid to defend the weak because of the anger of the strong, nor afraid to defend the poor because of the anger of the rich.
Show me where love and hope and faith are needed and use me to bring them to these places.
Open my eyes and ears that I may, this coming day, be able to do some work of peace for Thee.

Alan Paton, South African author

The Earth was made a common treasury

In the beginning of time, the great Creator... made the earth to be a common treasury... But since human flesh... did set up one man to teach and rule over another... that Earth that is within this creation, made a common storehouse for all, is bought and sold and kept in the hands of a few, whereby the great Creator is mightily dishonoured, as if he were a respecter of persons, delighting in the comfortable livelihood of some and the rejoicing in the miserable poverty and straits of others. From the beginning it was not so.

Gerard Winstanley (theologian, activist and later one of the first Quakers), 1649

The Pope challenges the power of the marketplace

While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation.

Pope Francis I

God can use our love to change the world

By fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, the poor, of the destitute... the rights of the worthy and the unworthy poor, in other words...we can, to a certain extent, change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world. We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever widening circle will reach around the world. We repeat, there is nothing we can do but love, and, dear God, please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbour, to love our enemy as our friend.

Dorothy Day

Prophets of hope

*Our choice could
tip the balance
in favour of the poor
and lighten the load
of those weighed down.
We could level inequality
and distribute warehouse mountains
Share out the wealth
that was never ours to hoard
Turn the tables
On those who play
the markets
We could stockpile generosity*

*And speculate in hope
Sell up our shares in selfishness
And settle for the dividends
of solidarity
For added value
build portfolios of justice
Or an ISA in the growth
of the kingdom of God
Buy shares in trust and act in faith
Risk our securities to find a richer life
May the percentage of our interest
In people rise,
And may we be the prophets
of hope*

Written by Sophie Stanes for CAFOD. With thanks to CAFOD.

A well-known prayer for debt cancellation

Forgive us our debts, as we forgive those indebted to us.

Jesus

Desmond Tutu wants us to be disturbed

*Disturb us, O Lord
when we are too well-pleased with ourselves
when our dreams have come true because we
dreamed too little,
because we sailed too close to the shore.
Disturb us, O Lord
when with the abundance of things we possess,
we have lost our thirst for the water of life
when, having fallen in love with time,
we have ceased to dream of eternity
and in our efforts to build a new earth,
we have allowed our vision of Heaven to grow dim.
Stir us, O Lord
to dare more boldly, to venture into wider seas
where storms show Thy mastery,
where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.
In the name of Him who pushed back the horizons
of our hopes
and invited the brave to follow.
Amen*

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu