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Submitting to Justice?: Christian and New Labour Visions of Global Economic Justice

In the context of global poverty and inequality, Rob Saner-Haigh offers an introduction to the riches of the tradition of Catholic Social Thought in relation to economic justice. He then provides a survey of the Blair government's policy vision in relation to international development and trade and offers an evaluation of it in the light of the Christian vision. He finds many commonalities to welcome but ultimately some challenging and fundamental differences and incompatibility between the two visions.

This is a moment to seize. The kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us reorder this world around us...if globalisation works only for the benefit of the few then it will fail and will deserve to fail.¹

In typically rhetorical tones, Tony Blair committed his government to the championing of the world's poor and marginalised. The Labour government regularly uses morality as motivation and justification for its foreign policy.² On election, the Department for International Development (DFID) was founded to oversee Britain's part in the development of poorer countries and the Foreign Secretary announced an 'ethical' foreign policy, weighing the concerns of the poor and the environment. It seemed as if, under New Labour, foreign policy would be used not only to protect Britain's interests but those of humanity. Although this ideal became tarnished, in 2000 Blair described eliminating poverty as, 'the greatest moral challenge facing our generation'³ and his 2001 party conference speech restated a moral dimension to British foreign policy.

But what vision lies behind these words and how does it compare with a Christian vision? Christianity has a strong tradition regarding economic justice and relief for the oppressed. This article introduces one such Christian account and sets this alongside the government's 'moral' foreign policy. Our focus here is on official Roman Catholic Social Teaching (CST hereafter), particularly the papal

1 Tony Blair, Speech to Labour Party Conference, Brighton, 2nd October 2001.

2 The main documents are listed below in note 28.

3 *Making Globalisation Work for the World's Poor*, HMSO, London 2000, Foreword.

encyclicals since *Rerum Novarum*⁴ whose use of Scripture, reason and tradition merits such emphasis. It has historical development, strong theological roots and contemporary application, and thus provides a solid, grounded, holistic and widely accepted Christian account of economic justice that resonates with many other Christian accounts. It builds a vision of economic justice from basic principles of human dignity and community. In the light of this, British development policy is outlined and an assessment offered of how consistent the government's vision is with this Christian understanding of economic justice.

A World of Inequality

The United Nations reports that the twenty five richest Americans receive an income equal to that of two billion of the world's poorest people,⁵ one third of the world's entire population. One group would overcrowd the British mainland, the other would fit comfortably into a small restaurant.

Other statistics are no less frightening. Every day 30,000 children die of preventable diseases.⁶ Nearly half of the world's population lives on less than \$2 per day, a significant number on less than \$1.⁷ While Canada spends \$2,534 per person on healthcare every year, Mali will spend just \$1 per person. Four and a half million children under the age of five die in Africa every year.⁸ While many in developed countries worry about which pair of shoes to buy for a new outfit, which resort to visit this summer, or whether to buy a new car, billions go to bed without their basic needs being met. We live in a world where the majority lack things their human dignity demands while we in the wealthy nations have a bewildering myriad of choice in food, clothing, housing, education and health care. 'Consumer choice' extends in our culture to which hospital we would like to be treated in. In Rwanda the option for treatment may not exist at all. From a Christian perspective, the present situation acts against human dignity for poor and rich alike. For the poor, basic needs are not met. For the rich, their excess acts against their dignity. Pope John Paul II expresses it this way,

This then is the picture: there are some people, the few who possess much, who do not really succeed in 'being' because, through a reversal of the hierarchy of values, they are hindered by the cult of 'having'; and there are others – the many who have little or nothing – who do not succeed in realising their basic human vocation because they are deprived of essential goods.⁹

Catholic social teaching (CST)

'Before these tragedies of total indigence and need, in which so many of our brothers and sisters are living, it is the Lord Jesus himself who comes to question us.'¹⁰ To understand CST's response we must begin with its foundations which

4 The core documents are *Rerum Novarum* (1891), *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), *Mater et Magistra* (1961), *Pacem in Terris* (1963), *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), *Populorum Progressio* (1967), *Octagesimo Adveniens* (1971), *Iustitia in Mundo* (1971) - Synod of Bishops, *Laborem Exercens* (1981) *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), *Centesimus Annus* (1991), *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), *Fides et Ratio* (1998). Most are available on www.vatican.va.

5 United Nations Development Programme, *United Nations Human Development Report 2003*, OUP, New York 2003, p 39.

6 *Human Development Report*, p 8.

7 *Lifting the Burden, Weighting the Rules*, Christian Aid, London 2003.

8 *Independent*, Saturday 31st May 2003.

9 *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, #28.

10 *Sollicitudo*, #13. Cf. Matt. 25:31-46.

shape its vision of economic justice, giving a holistic definition to 'justice' and forming the purpose and practice of economic activity.

Human dignity and the common good

Human dignity is the wellspring for CST. Society, nation, human rights, the concept of economic justice, all begin with the creed that humanity is made in the image of God and there is therefore inherent worth in every individual. This is not divinely sanctioned individualism. Created in the image of the Triune God, humanity can only be fully expressed and nourished within community. People are not fully people as individuals, true human development must be worked out in relation to others. Consequently, how we organise societies politically, economically, legally, affects whether human development is nurtured or retarded. Every person must contribute to the common good and 'loving our neighbour' has a wide outworking.

Because human dignity is nurtured to fullness within community the 'common good' becomes another central tenet of CST. Pope John XXIII described this as, 'the sum total of conditions of social living, whereby persons are enabled more fully and readily to achieve their own perfection'.¹¹

Solidarity

Linked to the common good is 'solidarity'. More than recognition of interdependence, this is 'a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good...to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all'.¹² Government policy compatible with this Christian understanding must recognise our actions affect those in other nations and commit itself to pursuing the common good for all, bearing the responsibility for the poor because 'the duty of promoting human solidarity also falls upon the shoulders of nations'.¹³ As John Paul II writes, 'political leaders and citizens of rich countries...have the moral obligation...to take into consideration...this interdependence which exists between their conduct and the poverty and underdevelopment of so many millions of people'.¹⁴

Costly and committed community, and the inherent dignity of the individual thus provide the bedrock for CST and its understanding of nations' obligations. Economic justice can only be understood with an appreciation of these fundamentals which provide the tradition's DNA.

Development and rights

Authentic development must be full human development, avoiding underdevelopment and superdevelopment where overproduction of material goods harms the moral, cultural or spiritual dimensions of the person.

Community and human dignity dictate that the moral test of any society is how it treats its disadvantaged members. In healthy community there must be an 'option for the poor', where collective policy recognises the poor's needs. The presence of 'have-nots' blights the whole community and deprivation for some affects all within mutually dependent community.

11 *Mater et Magistra*, #65.

12 *Solicitudo*, #38.

13 *Populorum Progressio*, #48.

14 *Solicitudo*, #9.

Today, furthermore, given the worldwide dimension which the social question has assumed, this love of the preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires in us, cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care, and above all, those without hope of a better future...To ignore them would mean becoming like the 'rich man' who pretended not to know the beggar Lazarus lying at his gate.¹⁵

True human development can only be achieved where individuals and society uphold their responsibilities to one another. Persons, because they are made in God's image, have 'rights' to goods essential to human dignity which foster true human development (such as food, shelter, clothing, employment, health care and education).

CST thus seeks the integrated development of the whole person whose ultimate fulfillment is found only in recognizing that they, and all humans, are called by God to share God's life as his children. As John Paul II, says, 'true development cannot consist in the simple accumulation of wealth and in the greater availability of goods and services, if this is gained at the expense of the development of the masses, and without due consideration for the social, cultural and spiritual dimensions of the human being'.¹⁶

The state and subsidiarity

For CST, it is the responsibility of government to nurture and encourage the dignity and development of the human person. Indeed, 'the whole reason for the existence of civil authorities is the realization of the common good'.¹⁷

Government's scope is, however, limited. Subsidiarity dictates that communal responsibilities must be performed and needs met at the lowest practicable level. Government should only be involved where the local level cannot provide. Where human rights can be upheld through individuals, families or local organisations, government should not become involved. However, if the immediate family cannot provide for a child, the provision becomes the responsibility of the wider community whose organizational representative is the government. Interconnected reliance makes us responsible for one another's integrated development towards being more fully human: 'collaboration in the development of the whole person and of every human being is in fact a duty of all towards all'.¹⁸

Economics and justice

Economics must serve people and not the other way round. God has created all things for all people. Resources are to be shared, enjoyed and nurtured by everybody, not just a few. Humans have rights to productive work, decent and fair wages and safe working conditions, to organise and join unions, to economic initiative and to private property. Here again the DNA of human dignity and the common good drive and shape CST.

Economic justice dictates what the economic situation should be. CST takes its understanding from the biblical idea of *shalom* – true peace, completeness.¹⁹

15 *Solicitududo*, #42. Cf. Luke 16:19-31.

16 *Solicitududo*, #9.

17 *Pacem in Terris*, #54.

18 *Solicitududo Rei Socialis*, #32

19 R. Himes, *Responses to 101 Questions on Catholic Social Teaching*, Paulist Press, New York 2001.

Shalom is rooted in the dynamic concept of human development, giving a fuller understanding and direction to the purpose of economics. It seeks a justice which looks to need rather than merit, in contrast to much current economic understanding which revels in being meritorious (economic success as the due reward for hard work and initiative). The Bible shows economic justice based initially on need: all have a right to what they need before further benefits are distributed. Biblical justice seeks to create this state of *shalom*, not 'peace' in the sense of a period between two conflicts, but wider, economic, moral, physical and relational wholeness.²⁰

The underlying principle is that justice is about restoration and the building of God's kingdom, where *shalom* is achieved. The emphasis is on pursuing what people need for their development (Psalm 34:14).

Justice thus requires us to act to ensure needs are met and rights and responsibilities are upheld for all. It teaches that there is a basic line below which none should drop, since this would act against their human dignity. Rights to economic initiative and private property are thus fettered because God's common provision cannot be enjoyed at the cost of others' rights being lost.

CST thus opposes both communist and laissez-faire economic approaches. Its account of economic justice stresses the right to a just wage that allows people, through their *own* labour, to secure basic needs.²¹ This leads to a critique of contracts (perhaps governed by an idea of 'freedom') in which workers agree to wages that do not allow them to achieve basic rights for themselves or their dependants. Rooting economic justice in human dignity and the common good also recognises the goods of the earth as from God and intended to meet the needs of all. We are therefore stewards and not simply consumers and must recognise resources are limited by our responsibility to future generations not to use more than one generation's just share.

Capitalism and property

Economic justice therefore demands a number of checks upon economic activity which must be within the principles outlined: economics as a servant of humanity, a tool for the common good and the nurturing of human development. Daniel Finn suggests CST reveals four types of papal concern regarding capitalism.²² Firstly, there should be some regulation of market systems. Secondly, there should be central provision of basic goods and services for all, so the community's responsibility for the human dignity of all its members is upheld. Thirdly, governments have a responsibility for the promotion of personal and communal morality. Finally, there should be protection for voluntary organisations and other parts of communal life threatened by unregulated market forces (highlighting the dangers of market forces encroaching upon areas of life where they do not belong).

Economics respectful of human dignity and working for human development and the common good cannot simply seek to achieve greater and greater figures

20 P. Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice and Peace*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1987.

21 See Andy Hartropp's article in this issue on just price.

22 D.R. Finn, 'John Paul II and the Moral Ecology of Markets', *Theological Studies* 59 (1998), pp 662-79.

for GDP. Economics, 'cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man'.²³ In particular, 'the right to private property is not absolute and unconditional'. Quoting St. Ambrose, Paul VI sees a duty of the rich towards the poor: 'You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich'.²⁴ No one may take more than he needs when others are going without their needs. The goods of the earth are for the benefit of all and anyone's excess is the property of the one who is without. Significantly, where private gain and basic community needs conflict, governments have a responsibility to seek justice as 'it is for the public authorities to seek a solution to these questions with the active involvement of individual citizens and social groups'.²⁵

Private property is thus subservient to the greater requirement of the common good. Economic justice does not allow ownership as an absolute right where it impinges on the more fundamental rights of others and *shalom*. Richer nations are to pursue social justice and seek 'universal charity', 'a more humane world community, where all can give and receive, and where the progress of some is not bought at the expense of others'.²⁶

John XXIII outlined three further checks to meet the demands of economic justice: (1) a responsibility on the individual nation to minimise waste and unfairness, (2) economically stronger nations must not disrupt the cultural identities of those they give aid to and weaker nations must maintain their cultural integrity and (3) colonialism should not be reborn in a different, economic, form.²⁷

Summary

Economic justice springs from a belief in human dignity and the common good and seeks the *shalom* in which human dignity is acknowledged and development nurtured. It should govern the provision of material needs in pursuit of CST's wider social vision. Economics, business activity, work, are for the development of all. They emerge from human dignity worked out in community and, in turn, nurture human development. Neither individuals nor nations must be isolated. As humanity is one large family, nations have a responsibility for other nations' welfare and the common good extends beyond national borders. There are thus checks and balances emphasising the rights and responsibilities of all and defining the nature of the progress for which all must strive, not only for themselves but for one another. Economic justice is achieved when all are assured of what they need for their development as human beings and, vitally for the Christian understanding, the ultimate goal of this development is faith and a share of God's life in Christ.

23 *Populorum*, #14.

24 *Populorum*, #23.

25 *Populorum*, #23.

26 *Populorum*, #44.

27 This has happened by international debt where through the giving of international loans, 'the means intended for the development of peoples has turned into a brake upon development instead, and indeed in some cases has even aggravated underdevelopment' (*Solicitud*, #19).

British Trade and Development Policy

In the light of this Christian vision, we now examine the Blair government's policy where it interfaces with the Christian account of economic justice in relation to trade and international development.²⁸

The aims of development are not confined solely to the DFID. Much policy comes from the Treasury, Foreign Office and Department for Trade and Industry. Trade's importance is well expressed by Trade Secretary, Patricia Hewitt:

Our next task – our 21st century mission – must be to reform the world trade system based on the same Labour principle of equality – that we all have an equal right to prosperity... We will push the WTO as hard as we can to get an agreement that works for developing countries... I will not accept any proposal we believe will damage the prospects of developing countries trading themselves out of poverty... We are pursuing the new trade round because it is morally the right thing to do. We will act even if there is no direct benefit to the UK... The current negotiations give us an opportunity to put right years of outdated trading laws that put colonial preference and protectionism before the interest of those in most need.

Such language draws together the *means* by which the government believes it will achieve its goals, and its driving *moral conviction and vision*: 'I believe that as a Labour government we must use our power to create the global institutions needed to address global inequities'.²⁹

Britain retains vestiges of its past imperial power, a financial muscle disproportionate to its size and a seat at the greatest tables of power in the world (G8, UN Security Council, International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation). The US, as sole superpower, exercises greatest power in world affairs but Britain, through its influence in the White House, acts as cupbearer to the current earthly ruler (politically rather than theologically speaking!), enjoying unrivalled influence and access to the throne. It is significant, therefore, that Britain should commit itself to the interests of the poor in the belief that 'globalisation can work for the world's poorest people. While aid, effectively targeted, can make a significant difference to the lives and prospects of poor people, it's not a solution by itself'.³⁰

Ends and means: economic growth and trade liberalisation

The underlying assumption is that *economic* development is the fundamental requirement. The world is on a non-stop ascent to greater economic growth. The government's vision is for poorer nations to be part of this economic juggernaut. Its belief is that only through trade can the poor join the wealthy.

28 The key documents are *Making Globalisation Work for the World's Poor*, DFID, London 2000; *Making Globalisation Work for the World's Poor* (White Paper), HMSO, London 2000; *Trade and Poverty*, DFID Background Briefing no.13, London October 2002; *International Finance Facility*, HM Treasury, London 23rd January 2003; *Trade Matters: Eliminating World Poverty*, DFID, London

2001; HM Treasury, *Stability, Growth, Poverty Reduction: The UK and the IMF 2002*, HMSO, London 2003.

29 Patricia Hewitt quoted in 'We will act for the world's poor. Labour will back fairer trade even if it is of no direct benefit to Britain', *The Guardian*, 23rd June 2003.

30 *Making Globalisation Work*, p 18.

If global trade is the engine – all countries engaging in trade and benefiting from the profits – liberalisation is the oil enabling the machine to work efficiently.³¹ Trade liberalisation seems to be a panacea for this government. While critics claim Britain's zeal is really driven by a desire to find new markets for its industries,³² the government denies this and its commitment to maintaining some trade rules offers them some support. The principle is that 'globalisation must be managed properly so that it does not become merely the survival of the biggest, and the most powerful. The means of judgement is via global trade rules and if these are fair and transparent for all... then globalisation can become a road to prosperity for many'.³³ This produces the commitment that, 'the UK government will work for more effective participation in the WTO and international trading system by developing countries'.³⁴

This is important since trade liberalisation tends to favour established industries. Large transnational corporations can undercut local industries, particularly where they have been subsidised heavily by government, as in agriculture. The Common Agricultural Policy heavily subsidises European farmers so, coupled with similar subsidies in the US, large agribusinesses 'dump' their surplus onto the markets of developing nations, selling at a price that undercuts and cripples local industries and producers. The average European cow has a higher income (at \$2.20 per day) than half the world's population!³⁵ This statistic might be facetious, if it were not obscenely instructive. Recognising this, the government states, 'globalisation can bring consumers in richer countries more choice than ever – but if their own subsidised surpluses are then 'dumped' on poorer countries, hundreds of local businesses in those countries will simply go bust'.³⁶ This leads to a commitment to 'press for a pro-development EU negotiating position in a new Trade Round – including substantial cuts in high tariffs and in trade distorting subsidies'.³⁷

The language throughout government publications demonstrates globalised free trade is the key way Britain will aid poorer nations. Whilst direct aid is not removed, active and fair trading is seen as the most effective means of achieving the ultimate goal and 'the challenge is to connect more people from the world's poorest countries with the benefits of the new global economy'.³⁸

International Development Targets

There is also a clear government commitment to better the world's poor so they receive the benefits of increased global wealth, food, shelter and health. The government's vision is perhaps best expressed in its International Development Targets:³⁹

1. A reduction by one half in the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015
2. Universal primary education in all countries by 2015

31 'It's now widely accepted that efficient markets are indispensable for effective development. For globalisation to work for the poorest people, governments must introduce policies that allow companies to conduct their business safely and with a reasonable return' (*Making Globalisation Work*, p 6).

32 See, for example, M. Curtis, *Web of Deceit: Britain's Real Role in the World*, Vermillion, London 2003.

33 *Making Globalisation Work*, p 12.

34 *Making Globalisation Work*, p 14.

35 *Rough Guide to the WTO* at www.cafod.org.uk.

36 *Making Globalisation Work*, p 12.

37 *Making Globalisation Work*, p 15.

38 *Making Globalisation Work*, p 4.

39 *Making Globalisation Work*, p 3.

3. Demonstrated progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women by eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005
4. A reduction by two thirds in the mortality rates for infants and children under age 5 and a reduction by three fourths in maternal mortality – all by 2015
5. Access through the primary healthcare system to reproductive health services for all individuals of appropriate ages as soon as possible, and no later than the year 2015.
6. The implementation of national strategies for sustainable development in all countries by 2005, so as to ensure that current trends in the loss of environmental resources are effectively recovered at both global and national levels by 2015.

Globalised free trade is again the key to these goals: 'The UK government believes that globalisation...offers an opportunity for faster progress in achieving the International Development Targets'.⁴⁰ Britain is also committed to the similar eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through the UN which set out in 2000 to achieve their objectives by 2015.⁴¹ In February 2004, however, it was admitted that the world is no closer to actually achieving these targets and, on current forecasts at current rates they might only be achieved by 2065. With infant mortality from preventable diseases occurring at the rate of 30,000 per day, a fifty year delay was, 'not good enough' according to the Chancellor.⁴² The government (in early 2003) proposed its International Finance Facility (IFF), recognising internationally agreed development goals required higher aid levels. A modern day 'Marshall Plan', the scheme aims to double, and guarantee, the amount of aid from \$50 billion per year to \$100 billion.⁴³ This has become a flagship of British Foreign Policy, described as, 'a social, moral and economic imperative'.⁴⁴ Although welcomed by much of the international community (including the Pope), the idea has yet to find favour in Washington.

Debt

One of the biggest development issues is debt relief. G8 governments have been notable for lack of concrete action in this area, although Britain is at the forefront of those seeking to address the issue. The problem arose because large loans in the 1960s and 1970s became unmanageable in the 1980s when interest rates rose sharply. Debtor nations spent more servicing their foreign debt than on their infrastructure and the needs of their people. In the language of CST, governments were unable to fulfil their obligations to the common good because of obligations to repay foreign governments.

Without debt relief new wealth from trade will be transferred away to debt servicing, often without actually reducing the outstanding debt. Government policy

40 *Making Globalisation Work*, p 4.

41 UN *Millenium Declaration*, 8th September 2000. The Anglican Primates in February 2005 wrote, 'we call upon the people of God in all the Provinces of our Communion to encourage leaders of government to pursue these goals with vigour, and to pray for the

strengthening of their resolve to achieve the MDGs by 2015'.

42 Gordon Brown, speech on 16th February 2004.

43 *International Finance Facility*, Section 1.1.

44 C. Denny, 'Papal Blessing for Brown's Aid Plan', *The Guardian*, Monday 10th November 2003.

is that countries must be accepted as Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) to become eligible for any debt relief, but acquiring this status is a matter of some difficulty. In December 2000, the UK government agreed to cancel the UK debt of 26 countries but Bangladesh, Nigeria and Peru, all poverty stricken nations, do not qualify for HIPC status and are thus barred from debt cancellation and must continue servicing their debt repayments. Furthermore, most debt is owed to multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. Britain has a say in these organisations (where poorer nations are only block-represented) and is committed to debt cancellation, although there has been little movement as yet on this issue.

Summary

British policy is clearly committed to the alleviation of poverty and Britain will use its 2005 presidency of the EU and G8 to press for measures alleviating the world's stark inequalities. Policy documents, targets and initiatives are produced and there is a clear verbal commitment to representing poorer nations' needs at the world's power centres. Trade liberalisation – regulated so as not to leave the weak at the mercy of the strong – is seen as the key to achieving these ambitions.

It is notable, however, that there is little detail about how sustainable development will be achieved and there remains the impression that development could ultimately mean that everyone, from China to the United Kingdom, would own two cars. There is no suggestion the route to equality or growth in real prosperity for the world's poor might involve a lessening in living standards for wealthy nations, not even a commitment to seeing growth in rich nations increase at a lesser rate. Thus, whilst British foreign policy is committed to the plight of poorer nations, questions remain over how this can actually be achieved.

A Christian Evaluation

We want to be clearly understood on this point: the present state of affairs must be confronted boldly, and its concomitant injustices must be challenged and overcome.⁴⁵

Given the government's evident and welcome focus on development, is its vision compatible with CST's understanding of economic justice? There are many critics (including many Christians) of the practice of British policy where commitment to protection of the poorer nations within a liberalised market place is perhaps not so clear (and its pursuit of such protection not as vigorous) as its pursuit of trade liberalisation.⁴⁶ There is also concern over the viability of sustained growth for all peoples without recognition of what this entails for the planet's finite resources. These practical caveats set the context for asking whether CST's vision and that of the government are compatible. In what follows we see that, although there are clearly areas where the two visions speak very similar language, they are based on

45 *Populorum*, #32.

46 See, for example, *Sale of the Century*, WDM, London; *Master or Servant?*, Christian Aid, London 2002; *EU Hypocrisy Unmasked: Why EU Trade Policy Hurts Development*, Oxfam Briefing Note, Oxfam, Oxford 2003; T. Gorringer, *Fair Shares: Ethics and the Global Economy*, Thames and Hudson, London:

1999; M. Curtis, *Web of Deceit*; M. Curtis, *Trade for life: making trade work for people*, Christian Aid, London 2001. Britain's commitment to the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is cited by many as particularly indicative of its prior commitment to trade liberalisation.

fundamentally different premises. Both point towards a 'better deal' for the poor, but they do not share the same 'deal'. The government has one idea for a better world, CST envisages another. It is perhaps better to speak of commonality rather than compatibility and to recognize this distinction in the continuing dialogue between the Christian vision of justice and the government's policy initiatives.

Areas of commonality

Underlying the government's recognition of the vast disparity between rich and poor as a moral issue is an acceptance that humans have *rights* and an *inherent worth* not currently recognised as it should be. The impetus to action recognises humanity is *interdependent*, that the problems of the poor nations are a blight upon humanity's *common good*, and that issues must be addressed by nations working together. CST's *solidarity* is echoed in Blair's 2001 speech – 'the state of Africa is a scar on the conscience of the world. But if the world as a community focussed on it, we could heal it. And if we don't, it will become deeper and angrier'.⁴⁷

There is also commitment to *development*, although the extent to which this is 'integrated' is debatable. Increased prosperity is seen as the key to a better life for those in poverty so 'trade is a means to an end'.⁴⁸ However, if the international development targets encapsulate the government's vision then development is not simply financial, but more integrated and may suggest a commitment to a deeper development of persons.

The creation of the new department and enlisting of various arms of government in the campaign against poverty also suggest an *option for the poor*, while CST's concern for the current imbalance in free trade is tackled within the government's plans.

There are, therefore, important points of commonality between the two visions. Both agree there should be an option for the poor and that policies should not be pursued simply for the benefit of the rich. Furthermore, policies should be designed to provide better health care, education, shelter and other goods that recognise human dignity and nurture human development. Both the Christian understanding and the government's speak of a moral obligation from a recognition of the inherent worth of human beings. There are, indeed, few governments that speak of using their power to address this issue so readily and in such moral terms.

Areas of incompatibility

Although government policy appears to 'tick all the boxes', there are serious and subtle ways in which the two visions are incompatible. Fundamental is the concern that current British policy somehow misses the spirit of the Christian understanding of economic justice and that the two visions' foundations are fundamentally different.

British policy sees *economic growth* as fundamentally a good thing for humanity. The acquisition of things seems to be the motive. Health, food, education, shelter, are vital and basic, yet there is a sense in which these good things are very material. In CST, economic justice ultimately rests on *human dignity* and the *common good*. Its end is not simply material well being and possessions, but rather ensuring that

47 Tony Blair's speech to Labour Party Conference, September 2001.

48 *Trade and Poverty*, p 21.

the needs of human beings are met, so that they are moved towards their *telos*, being fully human and fully alive. Ultimately, this means coming to a knowledge of God and sharing in God's life in Christ. Life in community, work in community, related rights and responsibilities must all be directed towards this end. The common good, therefore, and all the checks and balances it forces upon economic life and its just outworking, are directed at something missing from foreign policy.

The government sees all have the *right* to a share of the world's resources, to live outside poverty and to enjoy the benefits of health care, education and their own particular cultural identity. However, the extent of commitment to the free market places British policy in danger of being utterly materialistic, and instead of producing *integrated development* producing greed and materialism. CST warns, 'the acquisition of worldly goods can lead men to greed, to the unrelenting desire for more, to the pursuit of greater personal power...Neither individuals nor nations should regard the possession of more and more goods as the ultimate objective'.⁴⁹

Linked to this there is no real commitment to *sacrifice* on our part. Raising the standards of others does not seem to necessitate a slowing down for us. We are not expected to go without in order that others may have more. The idea seems to be that they will move onto our fast track. Any language of 'cost' lacking in a utopianism where everybody may enjoy bountiful surplus. There is, however, clearly a point at which the commitment to increasing the prosperity of the poor will affect our own prosperity. Pursuing policies where there is no direct benefit to Britain is about as far as the government is prepared to go. There is no recognition that development might require a loss to the wealthy. CST teaches that all have the right to glean what they need from the earth and that all other rights of free trade and property are subordinated to this. This implies that Britain's right to enjoy the wealth it does is actually subordinate to the right of all peoples to enjoy what they need from the earth. This point is brought to a point of practical action – 'the superfluous goods of wealthier nations ought to be placed at the disposal of poorer nations'.⁵⁰ *Economic justice demands that where there is need, surplus must be redistributed as rightfully the property of the poor.*

Trade liberalisation, reducing tariffs and barriers to trade, potentially contradicts *subsidiarity* with no area out of bounds to private investment. CST views the communal provision of things for the common good as ultimately the responsibility of government and not business. In the commitment to free trade, governments are encouraged to 'open up' their industries to competition from foreign countries and Britain has encouraged this process.⁵¹ Recent trade rounds support this with the prising open of markets taking a higher priority for EU negotiators than the protection of poor nations' governmental common utility provision or the protection of their struggling local industries.⁵² This may also breach CST's commitment to *indigenous culture*. As foreign businesses enter a nation, they bring the cultural influences and mores of their native land, perhaps in direct contravention of local custom and local laws.

Lack of commitment to sacrifice but commitment to ever increasing production and trade through trade liberalisation also undermines the credibility of the government's *sustainable development* policy. The Christian understanding of our role

49 *Populorum*, #18-19.

50 *Populorum*, #49.

51 *Master or Servant?*, Christian Aid, London 2002.

52 *EU Hypocrisy Unmasked*.

as stewards of God's earth may find echoes in government language, but it is difficult to see the two as compatible. CST understands that God has provided for the needs of all people, for all time. Since the government and CST have different understandings of what those needs actually are it is not surprising that the outworking of policy in this area should seem incompatible. Global trade liberalisation needs consumers. Consumption is its very life blood. Yet consumption from the standpoint of CST is aimed at a different end, it feeds a different goal. Consequently, consumption is managed within CST so that needs are met and initiative encouraged, but the earth's resources are not abused. For the government, economic growth needs consumption to the degree that abuse of the earth's resources seems inevitable.

The Christian vision of economic justice is ultimately that human needs are met so that there is completeness, wholeness, a state of *shalom*. Integral to this is the ultimate goal of humanity. British foreign policy works on a different premise. It understands and recognises the physical needs of persons, it recognises and seeks to meet those physical needs, but on this fundamental level there cannot be compatibility since each sees needs being directed towards a different end. The Christian view has an end beyond the physical, and the government, which works within a different field, does not work in terms of this end.

Conclusion

The incompatibility between British foreign policy and a Christian understanding of economic justice occurs on a number of levels. The government may allow for regulations to help poor countries compete, but not the level of regulation which a Christian account requires for the upholding of integrated human development. This Christian understanding of economic justice demands that those who have surplus must give it to those who do not have enough. This is not optional, for the surplus rightly belongs to those who have need. Therefore, economic justice seeks to govern economic activity towards a particular state, the kingdom of God which Jesus announced where there is a restoration for humanity, not only spiritual but physical. The British government is undeniably sympathetic to some of these physical ideals, but its vision for economic growth has neither a cost nor a slowing down for the world's wealthy. There is no redistribution. There is instead help for the poor to pursue prosperity. Thus prosperity, a comfortable existence, is the goal. This is not the same existence which Christian economic justice seeks. Here we see the deeper level at which the two are incompatible despite many points of commonality. At first glance the government's vision seems a close fit and Christians can welcome and encourage their goals. Yet the Christian vision of economic justice not only seeks material well-being for the poor, for their needs to be met, but also recognises these needs have a further dimension of relationship with God. *Shalom* cannot exist where this relationship does not. This is a subtle but profound discord. British foreign policy may have some limited commonality with a Christian understanding of economic justice, but one cannot speak of their compatibility and thus the church's prophetic voice and witness to true economic justice must be maintained.

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