

Economic Crisis - November 1975

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Loot, brass, bread, any one of a dozen different expressions turn ones mind to money. How to get more of it has become the full time occupation of millions. The usual response to the cliché "money isn't everything you know, it doesn't mean you're happy", -has become "yeah but it helps you be miserable in comfort."

For the vast majority who have equated 'a good life' with plenty of money, times are getting harder. Inflation is a word very few knew much about until this last twelve months of rocketing prices wage restraint, rising unemployment and the general decrease in the standard of living. The 'easy made easy spent' days are fast coming to an end. Oh yes we still have the 'sharks' or 'on the side' men who manage to make their money often out of the fears and misfortunes of others, every crisis seems to produce it's 'instant millionaires.' However for the great mass of people including many reading this magazine the golden dream of prosperity and ever higher standard of living materially is giving way to the stark realities of our time. What is the cause of it all? What can and should be done about it? How can we live contentedly in such inflationary times? So many questions are being asked.

To the suddenly alarmed worker in the factory it's simply: "them blinking capitalists, look at 'em in the Mercedes and Jags, oh yeah their hurting alright, I wonder how they'd feel if they if they had four little nippers and only thirty quid taking home; Me and the Missis don't know what to do," It is a temptation to look at the other parties in life and see the 'cause of it all.' Whereas in reality around the world something is happening that is shaking the very foundations of world economy. The political pundits continue to assure and reassure us that it will soon be under control. World bankers and brokers continue to issue often quite contradictory statements based upon the flimsiest evidence, of the swinging share indexes, and industrial investment. Meanwhile economists around the world are producing their usual varying predictions forecast from gloom to doom.

Money is not Evil

Some people have the ready answer to the cause of it all like "the Bible says money is the root of all evil." But that is not what the Bible says; those are the words of a worn out song. The Bible states that it is the 'LOVE of money that is the root of all evil,' Money in itself is not an evil. It can be the means of great good when rightly used. Money was used to express love and fellowship in the early Christian church. *"For there was not a needy person amongst them, for all who were owners of lands or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles feet; and they would be distributed to each as any had need."* Acts.4:35.

Jesus speaking to the rich young Man, said it was those who put their trust in' riches would find it very hard to enter the kingdom of heaven.

The Bible Contains a great deal at instruction concerning money probably because of its great potential for good or evil. The love of money and material things, the greed and covetousness of man has probably been the greatest contribution to the economic stress and the inflationary spiral of our times. The world's majority has begun to cry out, it is a cry that gets louder daily and who knows the possible dreadful and horrific revolutionary chaos it may lead to. Maurice Strond, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment programme in Nairobi said:

"Today, the poor of the world are on the march, they are no longer satisfied with their conditions of life: they know that these conditions are flat predestined and immutable — they know that they can be changed, they have concluded that they must now take the initiative to bring about these changes . . . it should be no surprise therefore that the developing nations are now mounting a determined drive for a more just and equitable world system which will be much more responsive to their interests and needs."

A Gospel for Our Time

The good news of the gospel at the Kingdom is therefore particularly relevant to our time. One of the main reasons Jesus was anointed of the Father was to 'preach the gospel to the poor'. The Bible was written in the setting of extreme poverty, in an age and geographical area where life was a constant struggle of man with his environment, the good things of life had to be wrested with much sweat and toil from the ground or by the horny handed labour of men who fished the often difficult seas. It was a time of dreadful social injustice, there was the very rich minority, holding power, and the vast multitude of the poor. Into this setting God came, Jesus was born into an ocean of human need and suffering, not as a King in the palatial wealth of the rich and noble, but in the cradle of human want. He said of I-Himself 'the birds of the air have nests and the foxes have holes, but the Son or Man has nowhere to lay his head? The very heart of the gospel is Jesus Christ, the Son of God who was so rich that our finite mind cannot conceive the immensity of His wealth, yet He became the Son of Man for our sakes the poorest of the poor.

His parents at His birth made the Temple offering of the very poor, two pigeons. The material comforts now accepted as the bare necessities of western society were unknown to Him. He lived in utter dependence upon His Father, and in death was laid in a borrowed tomb.

Not one of the starving masses of today's sick world can point the finger at Jesus and say 'you do not know what it is to be hungry poor, homeless, destitute.' He has been through their world, He experienced their want. The love of God and concern of Jesus for the worlds needy expressed itself in the deep concern for each other seen in the early Christian church. The lifestyle of the infant kingdom community depicts a real fellowship of care. *"And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common and they began selling their possessions and were sharing them with all as anyone might have need,"* Acts.2.45.

The kingdom life of Christ and His church makes no allowance for the wealthy to remain so without due care and concern for the needs of their brothers and sisters in the enlarged relationship in the family of God. In the days before social security, unemployment benefit, welfare programmes, free meals and community volunteers, the church was the most secure company of people on earth.

This does not mean that the church is the 'spongers' heaven or the ideal 'hippie commune' to give money indiscriminately: this is neither appreciated, nor wise. Money is not the 'cure all, answer all' to the economic ills of any generation. We have already established that it is a heart attitude of greed and covetousness that has brought economic injustice. To merely hand out money to a person or cause without finding the root of their difficulty could be putting money into a bag of holes. The person in constant financial difficulties should examine their attitudes to finance, how they make it, how they spend it, where they place it in relation to the whole of life. We cannot cure inflation or find permanent financial security if the heart attitude to money is wrong. We have to find a healthy attitude, wise handling, alternative way of living in relation to money.

Causes of Poverty

I have found after counselling many in these respects certain recurring reasons for their straightened financial circumstances. Mismanagement and living beyond their means; the thoughtless disregard to the quarterly bills that will be received from the Electricity Board, Gas company, telephone account, Insurance policy; the half yearly rate demand: the annual car Insurance and Tax. These and other non weekly bills are forgotten when the wage packet is opened and no budgetary allowance set aside, has radical approach to life in these inflationary Thoughtless buying—when investigating the circumstances of one person recently counselled discovered their monthly Higher Purchase payments exceeded by some ten pounds their total monthly income! The 'work shy' - yes there are unfortunately some Christians with this lazy attitude to life. 'Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.' Pro.10.4 Robbing God — Jesus commended the 'poor' widow who gave her "all" into the temple treasury, for despite her circumstances she ministered to the Lord.

Have you ever noticed that the Bible does not speak of giving your tithe, but paying tithe — this was a practice amongst God fearers before it was incorporated into the Law under Moses, just as the principle of resting one day a week was before law. Malachi contains strong denunciation to those who robbed God by withholding the tithe from His house, and God exhorted them with a promise to "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house and test me now in this", says the Lord of hosts, 'if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing until THERE IS NO MORE NEED" Malachi 3:10.

The principle of sowing and reaping is not only applicable to seed and grain, but what you put into your job, home, relationships, and your financial giving it all has its harvest. Then those who have constantly been looking for someone to 'come through with some cash for me' or 'I had this job lined up — or so I thought', and on the strength of these things

committed themselves further in some way. God is our source of supply, our job, our abilities, and other people are only means He uses. To trust the means can be suddenly disappointing but to trust the source will never lack for supply. In this way we can all live by Faith.

A New Order

Jesus Christ and the lifestyle of the Kingdom he has brought into the community of the church is the only security of our times, The true Christian times. He can look the communist and Maoist in the eye and say: It was Jesus Christ not Karl Marx who said: 'How hard it is for the wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God!' That it was the first Christians not Maoists of whom it was said: 'Not a man among them was held in common' and the Bible not Das Kapital, that warned employers who did not pay a fair wage, that though they lived in wanton luxury oblivious to the suffering and cry of their exploited workers, they were under the judgement of Almighty God and one day soon to give an account of such injustice."

For us as Christians then living in the light of the teaching of Jesus Christ, Inflation holds no tear or terror, but the opportunity to prove God and show to au that the alternative lifestyle of the Christian church is the most secure way of living. Our answer to the statement in the Dag Hammarskjöld 1975 report to the United Nations that 'The existing order is coming apart, and rightly so, since it has failed to meet the needs of the vast majority of peoples and reserved its benefits for a privileged minority. The task is to create another one,' It's that. Hallelujah! There is a new order already in being and it is growing, bringing justice, righteousness, security to thousands who are entering into its principles of living, the Kingdom of God. To live any other way, to put more time, effort, and money to shoring up the crumbling archaic and unjust order of the present world is to put your money into a Bag of Holes.