

World Poverty Coursework – Are A Christians Attitudes
Towards Charity right? And Do They Work?

This essay will deal with Christian's views to those in need of charity or help and whether or not the actions taken towards helping these people are right, and whether they actually work. The example I will use will be world poverty and a Christian's attitude towards it.

To be able to understand why Christians act how they do towards helping those in need, you must first of all look to where Christians get their beliefs. Christians get their beliefs from a number of places, like Church teachings, Christian leaders and ultimately most learn from the Bible.

Much of the Old Testament is the Bible emphasises the need to show compassion for the poor, and is designed to help those in need. Prophets of the Old Testament call for an end to suffering and encourage wealthier people to show stewardship and use what they have been given wisely in helping the less fortunate. The teachings of the Old Testament or mirrored in the New Testament, in which Jesus devotes himself to showing love and compassion towards the poor, and anyone who helps them. He also condemns anyone who doesn't show stewardship.

Church teachings also emphasise the need to help the poor, but take a more direct approach to doing so, by giving money to charitable agencies, or by setting up such agencies to help fight against poverty. The Vatican also allowed the 'Liberation Theology Movement', a generous political party, which shares its beliefs with that of the Vatican, to develop in catholic communities around the world.

The lives of famous Christian leaders such as, Desmond Tutu, Mother Teresa and Martin Luther King Jnr. Inspire other Christians to help the needy. Bishop Desmond Tutu was a theologian who passed on all that he was taught to others in South Africa, and strived towards equal rights for all, and a common system of education. This shows that he was fighting against poverty by creating equality for all in education as well as other things, so that everybody would have opportunities to live a good life by working for it, rather than live in poverty. Mother Teresa was a Nobel Peace Prize winner, dubbed 'the saint of the gutters' because of her life long devotion to helping the 'poorest of the poor'. She also founded an order of nuns, known as Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta, giving others the opportunity to dedicate themselves to helping others, just as she did. Martin Luther King Jnr. Was a 'visible advocate of non violence and direct action of methods of social change'. He used peaceful protests to fight for equality for black and white people, as well as Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants, and the freedom from segregation and discrimination for all. Strong, respected figures of Christianity identified with helping the poor, like these three people, inspire and motivate others to do the same.

Christians are also motivated to help those in need by their own conscience. They may be moved to action by hearing the story of another struggling in poverty. These stories may come direct from the Bible, or actual events in everyday life.

Some stories from the Bible, which show how and why Christians should show compassion for the poor, are The Rich man and Lazarus, The Rich Fool and The Sheep And The Goats.

The Rich Man and Lazarus tells the story of Lazarus, a poor man covered in sores, who goes to the door of the Rich Man a number of times, to beg for scraps of food from the Rich Man's table. The Rich Man refuses to help. Even the Rich Man's dogs showed compassion towards Lazarus when they lick his sores. When Lazarus died, he went up to heaven and sat by Abraham. He had lived a life of poverty and pain, so this was his reward. Once the Rich Man died, he went to hell, where he was punished for not showing compassion or stewardship towards others, and not helping Lazarus. Whilst he was in pain, the Rich Man saw Lazarus far away sitting with Abraham. He called out for help from Lazarus, but Abraham replied 'remember, my son, that in your lifetime you were given all the good things, while Lazarus got all the bad things. But now he is enjoying himself here, whilst you are in pain.' Meaning because he didn't show compassion towards those who needed or asked for it during his life, then he didn't deserve compassion in the afterlife, and Lazarus deserves to be rewarded, as he has had a hard life. The Rich Man then asked Abraham if he could go back to his father's house and warn his five brothers of this, but was told that they too would have the same chances that he had, and if they didn't learn to show compassion before they died, they would end up like the Rich Man. His meaning is that to be a good Christian you must use what you have to help those who are less fortunate than yourself, and that you will be rewarded for it.

The Parable of The Rich Fool is about a wealthy farmer, who has more crops than he needs. He has so many crops that he doesn't have anywhere to store them, so he decides to tear down his barns and build even bigger barns, to store all of his crops. He then planned on living out the rest of his life in the lap of luxury, keeping all of his wealth to himself. God called the man a fool, and told him that he would die that night saying, 'this very night you will have to give up your life; then who will get all of these things you have kept for yourself?' This meant that, by keeping all of his wealth to himself, the man was being greedy, and would be punished for not using his wealth to help those who needed it. It also shows that God judges wealth differently, when Jesus says, 'this is how it is for those who pile up riches for themselves but are not rich in God's sight.'

The final parable, The Sheep and The Goats, or 'The Final Judgement' tells how God treats those who are compassionate to the less fortunate and those who are not. God divides the souls of some people who are to be judged, into two groups like a shepherd would do with his sheep and goats. He places the righteous on the right and the others on the left. He tells the souls on the right that they can go up to heaven and live in

luxury, and tells them, 'when I was hungry you fed me, when I was thirsty you gave me a drink, I was a stranger and you accepted me into your home, when I was naked you clothed me, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' The righteous were confused by this and asked God when they had done this. He replied, 'I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of my family you did it for me.' God then told the souls on the left, that they would go down to hell, because they did not feed him, or give him a drink, or clothe him, or let them into their homes, or look after him when he was sick or visit him in prison, or help him in anyway when he needed it. When they asked, when they had seen him hungry or thirsty, or turned him away when he was sick or homeless or in prison, he replied 'I tell you, whenever you refused to help one of these least important ones, you refused to help me.' Then they were sent off to eternal punishment, whilst the righteous went to eternal life. This meant that, when you help those in need, you are helping God, as you are being a good Christian.

These three stories show that according to the Christian faith, as told by the Bible, and well respected figures of Christianity, to be a good Christian, you should show stewardship, by helping anyone less fortunate, and giving up what you do not need and sacrifice things, in doing so. It also shows that you should treat people less fortunate than yourself as an equal rather than look down at them because they are in need of your help.

Now that we know where Christians get their beliefs from, and why they act how they do towards people in need, I will use the next part of the essay to determine how Christians apply their beliefs in situations where there are lots of people in need of help. To do this I will describe two scenarios in which a natural disaster has forced countries into poverty.

In early February 2000, weeks of torrential rain and cyclonic winds left hundreds of thousands homeless in Mozambique. Southern Mozambique was the worst hit of the country, with heavy rain and rising water levels destroying traditional mud houses, water supplies, cattle and crops. Roads and bridges were ruined leaving thousands stranded in trees or on surviving rooftops, trying to flee the water. Death tolls rose throughout mid February and many more are killed from lack of food and medication. By the 22nd, the full force of the tropical cyclone devastated more of the country, with winds totalling 160mph bringing the flood zone to the size of the Netherlands. The international community eventually sent £25,000,000 worth of aid supplies to the country, and the Tearfund Disaster Response Team (DRT) helped set up camps, and sent its own personal donation, totalling £69,500 in plastic sheeting, jerry cans and a vehicle. They also sent in Water and Sanitation engineers to try and improve the situation. A cancellation in debts was called for the country, but only the U.K. officially promised to do this. The World Bank allowed a 'Payment Holiday', but the debt would eventually increase with a loan issued for aid, and interest would still amount.

Tearfund, is a Christian relief charity who 'conduct Christian development and serve the poor with Christ at their centre.' Tearfund supporters sent

gifts totalling £1.5 million, following the flooding, which devastated housing and Mozambique's infrastructure and ruined its agricultural land. Tearfund's supporters from surrounding countries also responded with emergency food relief and feeding programmes. Tearfund is committed to re-formation and its foundations centre around the beliefs of the Bible, but they believe that in serving the poor as they do, they have to leave their values and principles open, rather than final like the Bible, as they believe learning is a key factor in helping others.

Another example of world poverty and the Christian response is the famine in Malawi, which left seven million people, which is three quarters of the country's population, left on the verge of starvation. All 27 districts of the country were affected by the famine, with 100 people left dead in Kasungu within the first month.

Signs of the Famine showed as early as August a year earlier when only 400,000 tonnes of the required 1.8 million tonnes of staple crop and maize per year needed to feed the country's 11 million inhabitants, was harvested. A number of factors including heavy rain fall in some parts of the country, and dry spells in others, were blamed for the drop in harvest of maize, as well as rampaging hippos and elephants, which destroyed large areas of crops in the southern part of the country. The slow reaction of the country's government to this natural disaster resulted in thousands of citizens starving to death. The U.K. released £2.6 million worth of food aid to the country, and many church organizations tried to help, including Cafod, the 'Catholic Agency For Overseas Development', but the scale of the disaster was too overwhelming.

Cafod, is a charitable agency working in partnership with the Catholic Church of England 'to tackle the causes of poverty, regardless of race, religion or politics. They have been fighting third world poverty since 1962 and believe all human beings have a right to dignity and respect, and say that all the world's resources are a gift to be shared by all men and women regardless. Cafod and its supporters helped issue funds totalling £3 million to feed up to 200,000 people in Malawi, during the famine.

Both agencies, Cafod and Tearfund acted respectfully and efficiently during each disaster, and their actions agreed with all that we determine in the first part of the essay. They applied their beliefs, as they were intended, according to the Bible and famous Catholic figures. The Bible stories can be referred back to in drawing parallels between them and the Christian agencies responses. For example The Rich Man and Lazarus can be compared to the first scenario, the flooding of Mozambique. The story tells us about Lazarus asking for help and aid from the rich man, just as the Mozambique government did when it asked for aid and money to repair itself from developed countries like France and Italy. So we could say that Mozambique was Lazarus asking France and Italy ('The Rich Man') to use their wealth to help him. You could also refer back to another story, 'The Final Judgement' and say that the U.K. and agencies such as Tearfund as the righteous who helped those in need, and in turn helped God too, Whereas the wealthy countries who did not offer their support

when Mozambique needed it are the other souls on the left who acted greedily.

The stories also show that the two agencies, and their supporters are against by their beliefs, as their actions mirror that of which the Bible say a person should act when someone is in need. In the first part of the essay we talked about how the Old Testament emphasised the need to show compassion for the unfortunate, and the New Testament told of how Jesus showed stewardship in helping the poor, and encouraged others to do the same. He did this when he devoted his life to travelling round cities with his disciples and preaching to people. We also learnt that to be a good Christian, you should use what you have been given in life to help those who were not as fortunate as yourself, this is what Tearfund and Cafod do in their missions in the third world, and their supporters do with their donations.

In the Final part of the essay I will evaluate Christianity's beliefs, and Christians attitudes towards charity, and whether or not they are right, and successful. I will discuss both short term and long term aid, and the reasons why some people might agree, or disagree with them.

Does charity have the effect Christians want? Or does it just make people lazy, and keep them poor?

Some people may argue, 'Give a man a fish, and he will eat for a day.' People, who agree with the statement that charity does not work, might think that it makes people lazy, or reliant on other people. Perhaps they think it is a waste of money, throwing good money after bad at third world countries, and that any aid supplied to these countries is only temporary, like tents or cans of water, so to keep them alive there would have to be a regular supply of these things as they do not last forever. This would mean wasting more and more money, and would cause the people to become reliant. Fair enough, it aid is keeping people alive, rather than letting them face starvation, amongst other things, but it doesn't necessarily make it right, letting people become dependent on aid rather than themselves.

Supporters of charities and their work, might argue, 'Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for life.' Maybe long term aid costs more money, but it is a more effective approach to helping these people solve their own problem and working their own way out of poverty. Aid could consist of seeds and money for schools, so that children could be educated to build decent homes for themselves, and how to avoid diseases like Aids or Malaria, which are major problems in many third world countries. They could be told about the importance of cleanliness in water and food, and money from donators could help them build clean, safe wells. Perhaps money could help the countries develop a proper government, and the could negotiate with more economically developed countries, about their debts and compromise ways of paying them off, so that the countries can get back on their feet, rather than be ruined by debt. This could result in the country becoming more self reliant and independent, which shows

that, long term aid, if used properly and efficiently can help a less economically developed country greatly.

Personally, I agree with both statements in different ways. I agree that long term aid can help educate people, and give them the right tools to develop decent lives for themselves, and effectively, save lives. But I think that in some situations, this might not work, and a different approach might have to be taken in helping them. I Also agree with the first statement that short term aid may not work overall, as it is only temporary. But, I think that in some situations it is vital, like in the scenarios discussed earlier, or in situations like War, in which people need help and aid urgently to survive, before they can start rebuilding their lives.

On a smaller scale, I also agree with the Christian view of stewardship. I think that a person who is more fortunate than others should use what he or she has to help those who are less fortunate. I also think that if someone asks for help, and they deserve it, then help should be given. So, overall I agree that a Christian's belief on Charity on a whole, including charitable agencies, and issuing help when it is needed, are completely correct. Perhaps some aspects of the Christian belief seem dated or wrong, but I think that when it comes to their attitudes towards helping people, they are spot on.

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