

FAIR TRADE

Introduction

I am delighted to be at this conference for three reasons.

1) SCC

The first is that there is a set of initials which could go after my name, but which I never use. They are SCC. And I suppose that there might be a number of people in this audience who are also SCC's.

The acronym stands for SURVIVOR OF CAMPAIGN COFFEE.

For those who never experienced it, Campaign Coffee was a phenomenon of the 80's. It was powdered coffee which was a foretaste of purgatory. We drank it, knowing that Maxwell House or Nestlé's was infinitely more satisfying, but by this act of Christian masochism we were entering into solidarity with unknown Nicaraguan coffee pickers.

Now there were some people who claimed to fully enjoy it. I suspect that they either had defective taste buds or were lying in order that good might come. Then again, I can think of a number of people who in the 70's were in love with the dank smell of the Glasgow Underground, and who would stand at the station entrances and sniff away ecstatically.

2) Trade Craft Conference

I'm also pleased to be here because one of the happiest events I ever attended was a Fair Trade conference which took place in an Agricultural College in the North West of England, where I was privileged to lead the conference worship.

I remember sitting at meal tables surrounded by people who were from very different backgrounds and denominations...one meal where on one side there was a Lollipop Lady and on the other a Brain Surgeon, getting on famously...because what they had in common was a large supply of slow selling Bangladeshi jewellery and recycled toilet paper stashed under their beds.

3) Faith and Justice

But I'm also pleased to be here because such a gathering as this is concerned with the justice and iniquities of global trade in the context of Christian belief and practice..

For some people this is either an unnecessary or a forced marriage. They would claim that Global Trade and Christian faith are unrelated entities. They may go as far as to say that both are worthy pursuits, and that Christians - as citizens of the world - should be interested in international affairs. But any intrinsic connection would be suspected.

There are good reasons for this attitude.

Rupture of Faith and Social Justice

One is that the 20th century did not always show the Churches at their best in engaging in matters of social justice.

In Britain with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and in the Netherlands (from which I have just come) with the Anti Apartheid Movement, priests, ministers and laypeople became fired with a passionate enthusiasm against what oppressed humanity and for what liberated people. And in the process - sometimes ...sometimes... action for justice was devolved from or not rooted in the Bible, Prayer and Spirituality. The connections were not made, and so people who felt deeply for either of these causes sometimes.. sometimes... left the church and its historic faith behind because it seemed a diversion from saving the world and its people.

Dualism

But at the root of this disenchantment has been a much older, a perennial disorder which has plagued Christendom almost from the start. The disease is called dualism. It is essentially the belief that there are some things which are the genuine concerns of God and God's people and some things which are not.

On the 'Inclusion List' are matters like:

- Care of the Elderly
- Children
- Education
- Hospitals
- Foreign Missions
- Soup Kitchens
- Flowers for the Sanctuary
- Bread and Wine for the Altar.

On the 'Exclusion List' are matters like

- Money... both personal and corporate
- Sexual Abuse
- People Trafficking
- Global Warming
- International Trade
- Carbon Footprints
- Relating to Moslems
- The Arms Race.

I remember this illustrated in glorious relief when years ago I attended a church where the minister and leaders were asked to circulate two petitions to the congregation. The one was to ask the government to increase the Death Grant whereby the relatives of those who had died were given money to help with funeral expenses. The second petition asked the government to desist from replacing Polaris submarines with Trident as the Cold War was ending and the money could be better used elsewhere.

To a man (and they were all men) the elders voted to circulate the Death Grant petition which was to do with those who were deceased... and voted NOT to circulate the anti Trident petition which was about the future of the world and those who lived on it.

This dualism, it seems to me, has two causes.

Cause 1 - buildings

One is the historical legacy of church buildings...which I love.

However, when you build a building for religious purposes, and enjoy the peace and beauty of the environment, there develops a culture of language and thought which is divorced from the rest of life. It becomes a hermetically sealed zone, even - in some cases - a theme park, where there is talk of love, but not so much of justice... of the kindness of Jesus but not so much his anger.

It is very difficult - as we found recently in Scotland when producing a new hymnbook - to find from Western writers many who have a facility for allowing global issues, financial issues, war and peace issues, development issues, industry and science to be represented in their texts, except in rather tendentious and sometimes patronising ways.

But if one looks at the prayers and the poetry of Celtic Peoples from the 7th to the 15th centuries who - in the early days did not have churches... then all of life, with no restrictions is fit for prayer, song and liturgy.

Yes, we speak of a pre-industrial society,
but there is not lack of material which blesses in God's name such industry as existed...
 spinning and weaving
 Cultivating the land
 Taking the cattle to pasture
 Trading and travelling.

Nor is there any reticence to pray against the pursuits of predators
 Whether these were the Vikings who did not come to shake hands with the men and
 Kiss the women,
 Or such people as had the evil eye or were malicious gossips.

And kindling the fire, taking eggs from the hen, putting the baby to the breast... all such quotidian matters were offered to God for blessing and safekeeping and guidance.

Cause 2 - emphasis on Personal Salvation

But the other reason for the creeping dualism which has kept the people of God reticent to engage with matters of social or international justice has been a narrow reading of scripture, believing that because Jesus came and preached personal salvation, my relationship with God is all that matters.

So... the great injunctions of Isaiah and Jeremiah and Amos and Micah... the prophets who spoke about the world as the arena in which God's justice was to be made manifest... the prophets who spoke of the earth as standing in a personal relationship with God which humanity should not jeopardize.... all that is set aside as if of passing if not past importance.

And all the Law of Moses... which tried to flesh out the application of the Ten Commandments... all the requirements of hospitality to strangers, all the teaching about restorative justice for those who had done wrong, all the teaching about how the Sabbath is meant not just for the Jewish masters... but for servants and animals and even for the very ground..... All this is overlooked.

And all the poetry in the Psalms and the wisdom in the Proverbs which deals with the cry of persecuted people to heaven, or the condemnation of unjust payment for goods received... all this is conveniently hidden under the altar cloth or behind the reredos.

And in the process, Jesus is orphaned and emasculated.

He is cut off from his roots. He who - in his own words - came to fulfil, to endorse, to complete all that was said in the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms is disenfranchised from his political heritage.

And, additionally, the primary cause of his crucifixion becomes magnificently egocentric: 'He died for my sins'.... whereas the Gospel indicates that his crucifixion happened because the religious hierarchy of the day were constantly threatened by the company he kept, the social conventions he broke, the radical interpretation of the Law he encouraged, as well as the rumour which he never denied, namely that he was indeed the son of the living God. John the Baptist does not say "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away all the things I personally have done wrong."

But, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the WORLD... and the word is COSMOS.... a global, corporate term."

Now a personal reflection on the need for Fair Trade

WHY DO WE NEED FAIR TRADE? Existential perspectives

When global mentality began

I was leading a retreat recently in Leicestershire and one session dealt with the way in which we - as individuals - respond to the reality of global warming.

Just to give people a chance to speak before I did, I asked them when they had become aware of the inter-connectedness of the world.

One person remembered the maps on her school classroom wall when so much of the globe was covered in pink...indicating how Britain ruled the waves and a fair proportion of humanity.

Someone else said that it was not until she saw a picture of the world from space... This must have been in the 70's.... and there was the whole planet, not a circular globe, but the real whole world... and it looked very beautiful.

Another person said that it was during the anti-apartheid era, when she realised that the South African economy had been buoyed up by people willing to trade with that nation. And when she began to boycott South African goods, she felt a relationship to the rest of the world.

But from this and other testimonies it is clear that global awareness has come late.

The Legacy of Urbanisation and Industrialisation

And, as sociologists tell us, it is not until the West became industrialised that the negative effects of global trade became clear.

Only recently... by which I mean the last five years ...have we in Scotland become aware of our pedigree of global connectedness. Oh, in the 70's we realised that what seemed like local industries... BMK Carpets, Saxone Shoes, Massey Fergusson farm machinery...were actually not locally controlled. In a town of 50, 000 people with 6 out of 7 major manufacturing industries, one by one there were multi-national takeovers, leading eventually to a transfer of the manufacturing base from Ayrshire to France, Taiwan...wherever was cheaper. And just last year the final nail was put in the coffin, when Diageo decided to close the factory in the town where Johnny Walker whiskey has been produced for over 150 years.

Nearby small valley towns which had been the homes of lace mills also knew similar changes of regime and redundancy.

But more recently we realised that actually our economies which now suffer from global management, had previously thrived because of the same.

In Glasgow you will find names such as the Jamaica Bridge and St Vincent Street. These are not named after favoured holiday destinations and favourite catholic saints. Jamaica and St Vincent were islands on which Scots owned up to a third of the Slave plantations. It is odd that in previous teaching of history in schools, the entrepreneurship of the Tea Lords and Tobacco Barons was praised without ever a mention that they made their names and their profits on the backs of West Indian slaves.

Cheap Goods from Hong Kong....on

In the 50's and 60's, if you asked most people how we're connected to the rest of the world, those who shopped in Woolworths would have been quick to say that most children's toys and some cheap accessories were always made in Hong Kong... but tailoring, crockery, ironware.

Furniture, carpeting, were all solidly British.

Go now into a general store or a clothes shop and it is sometimes hard to find anything which is British made. Shirts come from Taiwan, Jeans from Thailand, socks from Bangladesh. Kitchen utensils come from the Far East and even fine bone china and prestigious musical instruments are imported from what we once called The Orient.

And what is true of dry goods, is also true of food. It is reckoned that if Britain were to survive solely on its home produce, we would be in a state of emergency by mid April... because we produce only less than a third of the food we eat (and on the other side, we waste almost a third of the food we buy.)

Two Concomitants

Now there are two concomitants, among many which we might consider.

Low Wages for Producers

The first is that undoubtedly the glut of cheap clothing and other imports is undoubtedly tied to scandalously low wages for the producers. And the more we make these purchases, the longer we assent to and live off other people's poverty.

CHINA BLUE is a film worth seeing. It depicts the deplorable conditions in which people work in the denim industry in China. But by far the most alarming feature is the record of a visit by a British importer. He discovers that the wholesale price for a pair of Jeans is somewhere around \$2.50. He claims he could never sell at that price, and so beats the factory owner down to nearer \$2.00, knowing well that he will sell the jeans for ten times that amount. ...and so we, unawares, become party to unfair trading because of our expectation of low-priced garments.

It is interesting that as regards Fair Trade the first initiatives were in food....and the main initiatives have been so for a long time. Fairly traded clothing...at least as it affects High Street stores is still for many 'reserved business.'

The Cost on the Environment

The other concomitant of unfair trading is simply that with the massive importing of materials from the developing world come environmental costs.

America's need of meat for hamburgers has a direct effect on the landscape and ecosystems of countries like Guatemala, as rainforests are cleared to make pasture land for cattle, who within five years or so need fresh pasture, because the clearing of trees causes erosion of the soil and a resultant turning of the new meadowland into mud flats.

The decision of Harvey Nichols to import bottled water from Fiji, or the desire of health-conscious cooks in the West End of Glasgow to have organic onions from Chile, or the obsession of the British Public to have fresh strawberries in December... all have a toll on the environment, as the transportation of these and other goods .. like cut flowers from Kenya.. require air transportation.... And a fully loaded cargo plane is just as if not more polluting than a full passenger flight.

But we have grown immune to this, partly because we profit from it. The average amount of domestic income spent on food has plummeted in the past two decades, from over 30% in the 70's to between 17 and 24% now...all because of cheap imports.

We have grown used to cheapness.

I see this when I look at the number of shirts I have compared to those my father had. In my wardrobe there are 22... Some have not been worn for 2 years. I have only one back. I don't

need all these shirts. But they are alluringly cheap.

I go into houses where there are young children and look at cupboard after cupboard overflowing with toys made in Taiwan and coloured picture books printed in Singapore (albeit with British authors.) There is no need for this endless novelty. Child Psychologists tell us that repeated patterns of behaviour like repeatedly read bedtimes stories provide more security for children than a succession of the latest novelties. But it doesn't cost much to buy another toy.

Go into WH Smiths any day of the week and you will inevitably be offered a large bar of chocolate for £1 along with your daily paper. We are seduced into buying what might well make us fatter because it is cheap.

Yes they are cheap to us... but can the people who produce the raw materials or the manufactured goods, and can the environment afford our affection for cheapness???

I mentioned the Chinese denim industry. It is but one of a range of industries producing clothes and household goods., many to a high standard. We, in the West enjoy these, and yet are prepared to level against the far eastern nations the accusations that they are major polluters who needed to reduce their CO2 emissions.

The truth is that they are wearing our old shoes. British manufacturing industries have either transferred the manufacturing bases elsewhere or have folded as the desire for cheaper goods increases. It is estimated that around one third of China's CO2 emissions are attributable to the manufacture of goods for the West. If this were even partially added to our carbon emissions, we would look less 'clean.'

Enlightenment to Entitlement

But behind this, I suggest is a shift in awareness... or perhaps it should be called unawareness which will mark the 21st century in the West as distinct from the last 3 centuries.

It seems that we have moved from the Age of Enlightenment to the Age of Entitlement. By this I mean that we have moved from a long era in which the sciences and the humanities have offered us new realms of knowledge beyond our wildest imaginings, but, to quote the Authorised Version,

'With all our knowing, we have not got wisdom.'

Knowledge is an acquiring of information. Wisdom is what happens when you act on it.

I have a friend in Chicago who, with his wife, leaves home every workday at 7.30 and returns around 11 hours later. They keep the central heating on in the winter and air conditioning in the summer. When I suggested he bought a thermostat which would turn the heating/cooling equipment off when they were out, he said. 'Why bother... we can afford it.'

For him, who is unaware of the parlous state of the globe, the simple fact that he could afford to use unnecessary energy, justified its use.

But this is bad wisdom by anyone's reckoning.

Just because I can afford to buy excess clothes at knock-down prices doesn't mean I am thereby entitled to do so.

Just because I crave strawberries in December doesn't mean I am entitled to have them.

Just because Britain ruled the waves for three centuries and America is the allegedly richest country in the world does not entitle the inhabitants of these nations to encourage in the rising generations the expectation that their standard of living should remain high, when we know that

if the whole world were to use non renewable resources at the rate the West does, it would take five worlds to satisfy the demand.

In a televised debate in Scotland during the Copenhagen summit, while the main issue for debate was ostensibly global warming, and Scotland's advantage with off shore energy and the nation's ambivalence towards nuclear power, one issue which seemed a bit of a red-herring at first became the central point of discussion, namely that for us in the West to plan for the survival of our descendants and the rest of the world, consumption has to be bridled. We have to consume less. That is the bottom line.

There is no point in increasing our dependency on renewable energy resources to 30% if we anticipate that our lifestyle will be unaltered... if we still will buy six pairs of socks when we only need two, and still require okra bindhi to be in our supermarkets even if it means transporting them across two continents.

But what a thing to grapple with in an age of entitlement.

Did you notice how at Christmas, when flights were cancelled, those who were discomfited showed great irritation....blaming the airlines, blaming Eurostar, blaming the government.

If we live in a climate where cold snaps can extend to three weeks and snow can fall cavalierly, we are not entitled to have immediate access to a week in Ibiza. We have chosen a risky time to travel and if the weather rules out the possibility, then we have to deal with the disappointment rather than lay blame.

But what a thing to say in an age of entitlement.

The Distinctness of Development & Fair Trade Movements

That is what makes the whole movement for trade and environmental justice such a different kind of protest movement from others we have known.

Vietnam
Anti Apartheid
Nuclear Disarmament

...change the government's policies.

But with the issues of Fair Trade and the preservation of the earth's environment, it has to be a people's movement, where the changes in lifestyle and consumption are made by individuals, who then have an authority with which to address their political and financial superiors.

And in this is great hope. I will give a theological slant on this in a moment, but I want to claim that there is within all people a potential for doing good, a latent philanthropy which - when brought to life does not stay dormant.

Ross

I have a young friend who is highly successful in his work, who makes a lot of money. He had his own house, two cars and a very dashing lifestyle.

But for reasons of faith conviction and personal reflection, all that has changed in the past year. He now shares a house, he has got rid of one of his cars and uses the other cooperatively, he has given up travelling by air within Europe, but goes by train, he cycles to work. He has decided to buy no more clothes unless they are fairly traded or second hand . And he has moved to a mainly vegetarian diet.

He is one of the happiest people I know and one of the most hopeful about the future... because having made what some might consider massive changes in his own lifestyle and

found himself in a more restricted but happier place, he can be a convincing evangelist to others.

It will not be the philanthropy of the very rich or the policies of the government which make the difference, it will be the shared convictions and actions of the people.

Philanthrocapitalism

I was reading the other day a book called *SMALL CHANGE* by Michael Edwards who has previously worked for Oxfam, the Ford Foundations and other altruistic enterprise.

His book is about the weakness of what is called Philanthrocapitalism.... By which is meant the presumption that the wealth of Bill Gates or Warren Buffet which they give to charitable purposes will save the world.

He points out that undoubtedly good as such beneficence is, it is normally directed at producing measurable results and ameliorating immediate difficulty. He draws attention to how it is one thing to build people a hospital. It is another thing to make the same people so self-supporting that they can make provision for their own health care. It is one thing to provide better homes for low-paid workers. It is another thing to challenge the supposition in the West that we should always expect to have cheap goods imported from China.

And then, most astutely he comments:

Is it desirable that the Gates foundation, governed by a board of three family members is able to play such an influential role, or to decide that health outranks global warming as the number one priority.

SMALL CHANGE by Michael Edwards p95 Pub by Better-Koehler, San Francisco

The Liturgy

Later we will be using a liturgy which was prepared for a project in Malawi. A Fair Trade charity in Scotland had been in contact with poorly paid farmers in Malawi, and asked them how much fairly traded rice they would have to sell to send their teenage children to secondary school. (Only between one in 4 and one in 9 go). The farmers concluded 80 Kilos. So the Scottish Episcopal Church - one of the least of the tribes of Israel - encouraged congregations at harvest to buy 80 kilos of rice so that a child could be given a year's secondary education.

But the charity also discovered that European Community regulations were such that - because the rice was checked for grit and bodes by hand, it had to be machine checked when imported into Britain. So now the charity is raising money to buy a machine for farmers in Malawi to enable them to sort the rice and pack it in situ, thereby missing out a European middle man and becoming more self determining.

This is a type of engagement with the developing world which is much more affirming and enabling of local ownership than many of the slicker but more Western dependant schemes foisted on developing nations by the philanthropy of venture capitalists.

For our encouragement, Michael Edwards notes a study done by the Stanford Business School of 12,000 NGO's. The researchers discovered that 'pragmatic organisations fail, are often than pure ones.'... by which he meant that NGO's which are profit driven and success focused fail more commonly than those which are driven by generous and all-embracing altruism. Thus he notes Stanford Business School's conclusion that:

Social movements are most effective when they are purest, most radical, and most disorganised.

Op Cit p 53

Remember that when you are frustrated by poorly selling Bangladeshi jewellery and recycled toilet paper.

ROOTING ALL IN BIBLICAL FAITH

But I want to root all this in Biblical faith, and it is not difficult. It is just that for too long the connections have not been made.

Out of many possible reference points, I am going to take three... none of which has to do with the great injunctions about fair dealing and justice which we find in the book of Proverbs and in the prophecies of people like Isaiah, Amos, Micah and Hosea.

1. The Sabbath

I want to allude to something I mentioned a long while ago... the Sabbath,

The presumption of many people is that the Ten Commandments were the products of a kill-joy tendency in God to prevent people from enjoying themselves.

Not at all.

Each of the commandments is a gracious word enabling human liberation.

For example, 'You shall not commit adultery' was to safeguard women from the predatory intentions of men in a society where women had no voice and could always be vilified as seductresses.'

So, the commandment regarding the Sabbath Day is indicative of how God's intention is that not only the masters, but also the servants and the animals and - ultimately- the earth should have a guaranteed time of rest.

If you ever visit Hong Kong on a Sunday you will see one of the positive legacies left by the British. For the wealthy and even not so wealthy in Hong Kong under British and Chinese dispensations have been relentless in their expectations of arduous work by generations of female Filipino maids, who often will sleep in a 'room' the size of two telephone boxes, often located next to the toilet.

But Sunday has always been the day off for them. So they go to mass and then spread blankets on the ground and cook and visit each other in the shadow of the banks and business enterprises where their masters work Monday to Saturday.

The Sabbath is meant to give people a day of unrestricted leisure, in order that their own being - body, mind and soul- may be nourished. Unfair trading knows nothing of that. It will demand incessant and servile labour. And because the financial rewards are so paltry, the workers will till the fields or operate machines in sweat shops seven days a week....all for the benefit of the leisured in the West who often have two days a week off.

And along with that unfair trade will take no account of how the land needs a rest, but will expect fields to produce high yields aided by artificial fertiliser until the ground becomes so polluted that it is barren. Fair Trade is concerned with land as well as people...and the health of both is intimately connected.

So... honouring the Sabbath implies for us.. being sure that those whose work and whose land

enables us to be fed and clothed are given the rest they deserve.

2) James and Fair Wages

Secondly, I want to go to the other end of the Bible and to the little read letter of James....little read, I suggest, because it is uncompromising and direct. It takes up the condemnation of False Measuring Scales frequently mentioned in Proverbs, and the oppression of the poor condemned by the prophets.

So, let me read:

Next a word to you who are rich.
Weep and wail over the miserable fate overtaking you.

Your clothes have rotted away,
Your fine clothes are moth eaten;
Your silver and gold have corroded
And their corrosion will be evidence against you...

THE WAGES YOU NEVER PAID TO THE MEN WHO MOWED YOUR FIELDS
ARE CRYING LOUD AGAINST YOU,
AND THE OUTCRY OF THE REAPERS HAS REACHED THE EARS
OF THE LORD OF HOSTS.
YOU HAVE LIVED OFF THE LAND, GORGING YOURSELVES.
YOU HAVE CONDEMNED AND MURDERD THE INNOCENT
WHO OFFER NO RESISTANCE.

If you read the book *50 REASONS TO BUY FAIR TRADE*.... many of the short chapters are by way of a commentary on these words from James.

Indeed it is the genesis of the Fair Trade movement not an acknowledgement that for too long we have not paid justly for what we have received. And for too long the backs of the producers have been broken by the weight of the expectations of the consumers.

This iniquity has clearly a long pedigree... going back to the time of the Early Church and before and ... as James... who might have been the brother of our Lord indicates... God is not neutral in the face of such gross injustice.

3 The Incarnation

But finally I want us to think for a moment on the season we have so recently put to bed.... Not the baby fest which Christmas has become, but the celebration of the Incarnation which it is.

And I want to note two things.

The first is that in God coming to earth in Christ and beginning life in Bethlehem, God models what development is about. It is not the trickle-down effect. Jesus is not born in the palace or the temple dispensing from his excess what might placate the poor.

He comes among us and is one of us...and having shared our common pain and seen our potential, he loves us from below...from the ground up, not from the top down.

His miracles can be looked at as signs of God's power to change lives... but they are also moments when God releases the potential which has been placed in all people. The leper is sent back to his community to become a responsible part of it. The crippled man and woman are made to walk tall so that the good that is in them may be liberated and they become known for their potential rather than for their problem.

I see Fair Trade as a direct extension of this principle of the Incarnation...and trusting and entrusting of those who are least, who have no power and voice, and the enabling of their potentials to be developed and their voices to be heard.

But my final point is that the Incarnation takes place for one reason and one reason only.

It is summed up in an often quoted verse which is frequently and wrongly associated with the crucifixion:

God so loved the world
That he gave his only son
That whoever believes in him
Should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Note how the verse begins

God so loved.... Not Jews or Christians
Or Western Civilisation.
Or even humanity
But THE WORLD... and the word in Greek is COSMOS.

If therefore God loves the world so much that he becomes part of it,
Then those of us made in God's image have the joy and responsibility of caring for this planet
and this people which God so clearly loves.

*Delivered 16th January 2010 at London Diocese Fair Trade Conference by John L. Bell.
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