

Jesus on Inequality

*In this paper **Clive and Cara Beed** explore whether Jesus' sayings can serve as a basis for advocating a reduction in inequality, but without implying complete equality. Only one parameter is discussed by which inequality might be assessed, the distribution of wealth and income, called here for short, wealth. Potentially relevant texts in the New Testament expressed by Jesus are analysed with the assistance of Biblical exegetes. These texts show Jesus wanting to see inequalities of wealth reduced. Suggestions are made as to how this might be pursued in a developed economy.*

Aspects of the enormous increase in wealth in developed capitalism in the last few centuries have not followed trajectories God and Jesus require for human development. Jesus stresses the need to reduce inequality in material wealth, compared with the pervasiveness of inequality throughout history. This does not mean that Jesus was advocating a flat or even equality, but only that parameters of extreme inequality were to be modified. Jesus' teachings relate also to ways of reducing inequality. They show Jesus

constantly calling for reductions in material inequality, with the rich divesting some (and, at times, all) of their wealth to the poor. The existence of poverty was anathema to God's project for humankind.

However defined, complete or absolute equality between human beings is not possible in the fallen world. This is because people differ in natural aptitudes, like intelligence, personality, ability and strength, and in life experiences that might affect values, for example. Accordingly,

Miller suggests that 'there is no agreed answer to the question 'in what respect should people be judged more or less equal'.¹ Hicks expresses the problem that various 'currencies' exist within which equality can be construed, for example, greater equality in the distribution of income and wealth, in access to health care, and so on.² One view is that all people are of equal worth before God, who seeks to bring them to a new creation where 'basic human differences are transcended'.³ The worth of each person is equal, despite seeming

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