

livesimply reflections: week 1: universal destiny of the goods of creation

God has made the earth and all that it contains for all to share.

Populorum Progressio, abridged version, #22

The creation story in Genesis reminds us that God created a world of abundance and generosity. He made man and woman in the divine image to be stewards of the world, to cherish and nurture its resources and to uphold his intention for the created order.

Wherever there is injustice, the balance of this created order is upset. God intended that everyone should share in the goods of creation, so when a minority of people in the world has too much and the vast majority has too little, our stewardship of the earth has gone seriously wrong.

livesimply calls us to think again. It reminds us of our partnership with God to ensure that justice is upheld and of our responsibility to each other to ensure fair play. Whenever we are motivated by greed and forget the needs of our neighbour we violate the image of God. Restoration happens when the earth's goods are shared fairly between all God's people and right relationships are re-established.

Question for reflection

What do I do to ensure a fairer distribution of the world's resources? What more could I do?

Further reading

Read the story of creation in Genesis 1-2:1 and reflect on our role as God's partners in creation. Then read Isaiah 58:5-7 and consider how injustice not only interferes with the relationship we have with each other but also our relationship with God.

Prayer

God, our creator and redeemer, restore in us your vision of a world made whole, that we may learn to share the earth's gifts and become your partners in creation.

Action for change

Join CAFOD's *Unearth Justice* campaign and help struggling communities in the developing world benefit fairly from their natural resources, such as gold and oil.

© Annabel Shilson-Thomas/CAFOD

livesimply reflections: week 2: authentic development

There is more to progress than economic growth. Genuine progress must be complete. No one can be left out. No part of any one can be left out.

Populorum Progressio, abridged, #14

Too often, wealth generation is used as the milestone against which development is measured. But authentic development is much more than economic progress. As Pope Paul VI reminds us, it is about the development of people as human beings. True progress allows every individual to grow into the person God intended them to be.

Whenever one person's freedom or greed diminishes another person's flourishing, or wherever one nation's prosperity is detrimental to another's, authentic development is denied. Real advancement affirms the dignity of each individual and nourishes their growth as human beings made in the image of God. In the words of the *livesimply* message, "This would be true progress, worth more than economic growth alone".

By recognising each other's needs and joining hands in solidarity, many women in the majority world often model what authentic development means. They affirm each other's worth and are eager to embrace changes which bring greater fulfilment to the whole community, whether through working co-operatively, sharing resources or being the voice of peace.

Question for reflection

How do I understand progress and can it be measured?

Further reading

Read Amos 2:6-8 and 8:4-6. These passages depict a deeply divided community where the rich prosper at the expense of the poor. Ultimately everyone is impoverished by such injustice, as further reading of Amos will illustrate. By way of contrast, read the book of Ruth and reflect on the relationship between Ruth and Naomi. It is one of mutual solidarity and self-giving that enriches them both.

Prayer

Self-giving God, open our hearts to the generosity of your love, that we may offer one another support and understanding and so become the people you intended us to be.

Action for change

Buy a copy of the *Big Issue*, talk to the vendor and find out what more you can do to support people who are homeless.

© Annabel Shilson-Thomas / CAFOD

livesimply reflections: week 3: development and peace

Peace will be lost if tensions go on mounting between the over-rich and the over-poor...Peace is the fruit of anxious daily care to see that everyone lives in justice as God intends
Populorum Progressio, abridged version, # 76

True peace goes hand in hand with justice. It is not merely the absence of war or the fragile exhaustion that exists in the aftermath of conflict, when lives have been torn apart, relationships broken, infrastructures destroyed and homes demolished. Rather, the God-given peace that our creator desires for us, and to which *livesimply* calls us, is built on justice, where everything and everyone in the created order is in right relationship with each other and can reach their God-given potential.

If we ignore the inequality that exists between those who have too much and those who have too little, and the mounting tensions that such polarisation brings, we only pay lip service to the pursuit of peace and God's law of justice is denigrated. Real peace needs to be worked at, like a life-long relationship. It is built by those who direct their efforts to its establishment, day after day. Its pursuit means listening to the voice of the oppressed and being challenged to action. It means seeing all humanity as our brothers and sisters and honouring other people's development, as well as our own. And it means building a future for the next generations so they can know life in all its fullness and peace in its entirety.

Question for reflection

In our desire for a tranquil life, do we neglect the pursuit of peace?

Further reading

Read Jeremiah 6:13-14. The fall of Jerusalem is imminent and yet priests and prophets have the audacity to declare peace. In these verses, Jeremiah makes a direct link between justice and peace, declaring that peace without justice is no peace at all. A corrupt nation is a weak one. The pursuit of justice strengthens the path of peace.

Prayer

Righteous God, give us the courage to fight against injustice that we may be instruments of peace and builders of your kingdom.

Action for change

Find out about a regional conflict in the world and investigate how injustice has contributed to causing it.

livesimply reflections: week 4: solidarity and universality

No one may appropriate surplus goods solely for his own private use when others lack the bare necessities of life.

Populorum Progressio # 23

The injustice of a world where some have more than enough and many have less than they need is forcibly demonstrated by these words from Pope Paul VI. They penetrate to the heart of our consumerist society, which is built on the principle that people want more and more. Enough is never enough where the acquisition of wealth is the driving force. Advertisers convince us that we need bigger and better, richer and tastier, quicker and easier, while poor people bear witness to their need of food and clothing, water and medicine, education and housing.

Many such people are excluded from the benefits afforded by globalisation because rich nations control the flow of goods and transnational companies frequently operate at the expense of local communities. The radical message of *livesimply* is that we should choose to live in solidarity with those in poverty. It invites us to live generously and openly with others and to let go of the surplus we possess in order to stand side by side with those who pray for enough. Only then will the rich be liberated from the bondage of wealth, will the poor be released from the grip of poverty, and rich and poor alike discover the freedom of justice.

Question for reflection

How far does advertising influence what you purchase?

Further reading

Read the story of the rich aristocrat in Luke 18:18-27. He discovered that giving up his riches to follow Christ was not an easy option. At times we all have to make difficult choices. Whether to pursue wealth or justice is one of them.

Prayer

Lord, you call us to be your disciples. Help us to confront our fears that we may let go of the things that hold us back and follow in your footsteps.

Action for change

Work out how much you spend each year on an unnecessary luxury and give an equivalent amount to CAFOD's Lent Fast Day appeal.

© Annabel Shilson-Thomas / CAFOD

livesimply reflections: week 5: education

The first thing a country should develop is basic education...Literacy is the foundation stone of self-confidence for the individual and progress for the society.

Populorum Progressio, abridged version, #35

Many people in the developing world never learn to read or write. Education is a luxury they cannot afford - either for themselves or for their children. When survival is a daily struggle, long-term development is sacrificed on the altar of short-term hunger relief. And yet education is the very thing that offers people in poverty the hope of liberation. For it gives them the possibility of shaping their future and contributing to the development of their country. Moreover, it affirms human dignity. Whether healing the sick or dining with the outcasts of society, telling stories to the spiritually hungry or challenging the hypocrisy of the religious élite, Jesus proclaimed the worth of the individual and their value to the community.

In this year of *livesimply* in which we pledge ourselves to live in solidarity with people who are poor, can we not put our own education to good use and challenge politicians to increase aid, cancel debt repayments and work for trade justice? Then, instead of children being forced to eke out a living either on the streets or in the fields, parents in the developing world will have a greater chance of sending them to school.

Question for reflection

What did Nelson Mandela mean when he said 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world'?

Further reading

Read Luke 4:16-22. Jesus was educated. He could read. He stood up in the synagogue and read a passage from the book of Isaiah that both shaped his ministry and offered people a vision of something better. Education empowers people. It gives them the chance to shape their lives and to contribute to the society in which they live.

Prayer

Christ our teacher, inspire us to search your ways, understand your truth and act upon your word that we may empower others to do the same.

Action for change

Write a letter to your MP and urge him or her to campaign in parliament for an increase to the overseas aid budget so that more children have access to education and other basic necessities.

© Annabel Shilson-Thomas / CAFOD

livesimply reflections: week 6: integrity of creation and stewardship

Every man and woman is part of humanity... We are the heirs of the past and we benefit from the work of the present. We ourselves have a binding duty to be at the service of all, especially those still unborn.

Populorum Progressio, abridged version, #17

The sentiments expressed in the line, ‘no man is an island, entire of itself’, immortalised by the 16th century poet, John Donne, take on a new poignancy in the age of globalisation. More than ever before, the choices we make and the actions we take have repercussions for the rest of humanity. Nowhere is this more evident than in our care of the environment. There is growing global consensus that the world’s climate is changing. It is clear that the world’s poor are most vulnerable and will suffer most.

The governments of rich and powerful nations are in a position to take a lead on global warming and to help impoverished nations assume responsibility for their own emissions. We, too, as individuals and communities, can play our part in caring for our world. *livesimply* reminds us to examine our lifestyles and to choose to live simply and sustainably. As stewards of our earth, we are called to share its resources and protect them for future generations. If we exploit them, as we have done the trees in the rainforests and the fish in the oceans, the delicate eco-system that exists in the world will be irreparably damaged. Now is the time to act.

Question for reflection

How can I help conserve energy and water in my own home?

Further reading

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-end and reflect on the imagery of the body. Consider how we all need to work together for the good of the whole and to ensure that the next generation has a future. Now identify the gifts you have to offer humanity and ask yourself how well they are being used.

Prayer

God of wholeness, help us to work together as one body to transform our world and give rise to our future.

Action for change

Encourage your church community to undertake an eco-survey, looking at such things as use of church buildings, energy saving, re-cycling and fair trade – and act on the findings!

© Annabel Shilson-Thomas / CAFOD