

LIVING AS CHRISTIANS IN A COMPLEX WORLD:
Session 6
A HOMEGROUP DISCUSSION SERIES ON SOME TOPICAL
ISSUES

SOCIAL JUSTICE - WHAT DOES IT MEAN, AND WHOSE JOB IS IT ANYWAY?

In this session we shall consider what we mean by the term “social justice” and reflect on ways in which Christian beliefs and values be brought to bear on social justice.

The accompanying video is an interview with Dr Rosemarie Mallett, Archdeacon of Croydon illustrates some specific ways in which Christians might confront oppression, prejudice, bias and unfairness.

As Anglicans, we are committed to “seek to transform unjust structures of society...” (5 Marks of Mission). *As you discuss this subject, spend as much time as you can considering what this might mean in practice.*

Social Justice is a fundamental expression of Christian discipleship. We are to love our neighbour as we love ourselves, and as A/D Rosemarie says, such justice is rooted in the character and nature of God.

Bringing about greater social justice can take a wide variety of different forms. Some of us are involved with initiatives such as the Purley Food Bank, the Refugee Centre. Can you give examples of initiatives in which you have been involved?

Can specific ideals or programmes be derived unambiguously from the Gospel? The Church has a strong tradition and history of helping the poor and powerless - take John Wesley, for example, and his leadership of prison reform and abolitionism. Today, church leaders are active on many different areas, both locally and nationally. Examples, include “Stop the Traffik” (seeking to end human trafficking and modern slavery), FairTrade, clean water initiatives and a wide range of other causes. And Christians rightly

stand against racism, misogyny, bullying - but you may have views about more we could do in these, and other, areas.

How far do you think the Church should be identified with specific political regimes, ideals or programmes? Or do you think Social Justice transcends politics - it is much more than a rallying cry for many on the left. For some, it is indeed a call for egalitarianism - many people are concerned that the rich have become wealthy by exploiting the poor. But others believe that one does not need to become a revolutionary Marxist, or even a socialist, to believe in the rightness of helping people to improve their situation. Whilst Liberation Theology argues that God has a “preferential option” for the poor, others would argue that both the poor and the rich have obligations. The Christian worldview of social justice does *not* assume the wealthy are the beneficiaries of ill-gotten gain. Wealth is not evil in a Christian worldview, but there is a responsibility and an expectation to be a good steward of one’s wealth (because all wealth comes from God).

As Christians, we believe the Bible teaches that God is a God of justice. In fact, “all his ways are justice” (Deuteronomy 32:4). There are many references to the fatherless, the widow and the sojourner – people who were not able to fend for themselves or had no support system. The nation of Israel was commanded by God to care for society’s less fortunate, and their eventual failure to do so was partly the reason for their judgment and expulsion from the land.

Jesus himself, in his Olivet Discourse, mentions caring for the “least of these” (Matthew 25:40), and James, in his epistle, expounds on the nature of “true religion” (James 1:27). Social Justice means that society has a moral obligation to care for those less fortunate. And our model is Jesus himself, who reflected God’s sense of justice by meeting and eating with the outcasts of society and bringing the gospel message to them - including prostitutes, thieves, tax collectors and all manner of “sinners”.

Finally, let’s be clear about the practical implications of the Archdeacon’s message to us here. To live out our stand for greater Social Justice will mean a willingness to:

- challenge some long-standing social “norms”;
- show true grace, humility and mercy; and
- make some real sacrifices.

Do spend some time discussing whether we are really up for this!