

I

A Billion Hungry Neighbors

Sometimes I think, "If I die, I won't have to see my children suffering as they are." Sometimes I even think of killing myself. So often I see them crying, hungry; and there I am, without a cent to buy them some bread. I think, "My God, I can't face it! I'll end my life. I don't want to look anymore!"

*—Iracema da Silva
resident of a slum in Brazil*



CAN OVERFED, comfortably clothed, and luxuriously housed persons understand poverty? Can we truly feel what it is like to be a nine-year-old boy playing outside a village school he cannot attend because his father is unable to afford the books? (Which, incidentally, would cost less than my wife and I spent on entertainment one evening during the writing of this book.) Can we comprehend what it means for poverty-stricken parents to watch with helpless grief as their baby daughter dies of a common childhood disease because they lack access to elementary health services? Can we grasp the awful truth that thirty thousand children die every day of hunger and preventable diseases?

To help us imagine what poverty means, a prominent economist itemized the "luxuries" we would have to abandon if we were to adopt the lifestyle of our 1.2 billion neighbors who live in desperate poverty:

We begin by invading the house of our imaginary American family to strip it of its furniture. Everything goes: beds, chairs, tables, television set, lamps. We will leave the family with a few old blankets, a kitchen table, a wooden chair. Along with the bureaus go the clothes. Each

member of the family may keep in his "wardrobe" his oldest suit or dress, a shirt or blouse. We will permit a pair of shoes for the head of the family, but none for the wife or children.

We move to the kitchen. The appliances have already been taken out, so we turn to the cupboards . . . The box of matches may stay, a small bag of flour, some sugar, and salt. A few moldy potatoes, already in the garbage can, must be hastily rescued, for they will provide much of tonight's meal. We will leave a handful of onions, and a dish of dried beans. All the rest we take away: the meat, the fresh vegetables, the canned goods, the crackers, the candy.

Now we have stripped the house: the bathroom has been dismantled, the running water shut off, the electric wires taken out. Next we take away the house. The family can move to the toolshed . . .

Communications must go next. No more newspapers, magazines, books—not that they are missed, since we must take away our family's literacy as well. Instead, in our shantytown we will allow one radio . . .

Now government services must go. No more postman, no more firemen. There is a school, but it is three miles away and consists of two classrooms . . . There are, of course, no hospitals or doctors nearby. The nearest clinic is ten miles away and is tended by a midwife. It can be reached by bicycle, provided that the family has a bicycle, which is unlikely . . .

Finally, money. We will allow our family a cash hoard of \$5.00. This will prevent our breadwinner from experiencing the tragedy of an Iranian peasant who went blind because he could not raise the \$3.94, which he mistakenly thought he needed to receive admission to a hospital where he could have been cured.⁵

It is difficult to obtain precise statistics, but the World Bank estimates that 1.2 billion people live in that kind of grinding poverty—trying to survive on one dollar or less a day.⁶ In addition to these 1.2 billion who live in almost absolute poverty, another 1.6 billion are very poor, living on two dollars or less a day. That means just a little less than half of the world's people (2.8 billion) try to survive on two dollars a day or less.⁵

Hunger and starvation stalk our world. Famine and disease are alive and well on planet Earth. Thirty thousand children die every day of hunger and preventable diseases.⁶ Thirteen million people die every year from infectious and parasitic diseases we know how to prevent.⁷

The news, however, is not all bad. We have made great progress in some developing countries over the past few decades. Since 1970, both the number and percentage of hungry people (i.e., those who regularly lack enough calories for an active, healthy life) have fallen significantly in the developing countries. In 1970, 918 million people, or 35 percent of the developing world, were chronically undernourished. By 1991, that figure had fallen to 841 million people, or 20 percent of the people in the developing countries.⁸ By 2002, even though the world's total population continued to grow, the number of those undernourished was still about the same (840 million people), but that figure represented only 17 percent of people in the developing world.⁹

The main reason for this improvement has been the dramatic growth of some Asian economies, where many of the poor live. The number of chronically undernourished in Asia declined from 785 million (36 percent of the region's population) in 1975 to 540 million (20 percent of the population) in 1990.¹⁰ And by 2000, again despite the growing population, the number had fallen to 508 million.¹¹

Indonesia has experienced healthy economic growth in the last three decades.

Between 1985 and 1995, Indonesia's economy grew at a rate of 7.1 percent per year. From 1970 to 1996, the proportion of the population living below the official poverty line declined from 60 percent to less than 20 percent—reflecting the government's strong commitment to poverty reduction.¹² The Asian economic crisis in the late 1990s temporarily increased Indonesia's poverty rate, but renewed economic growth has lowered Indonesia's poverty to precrisis levels.¹³

Unfortunately, the picture is not so bright in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia. The number of hungry people in Latin America and the Caribbean rose from 45.9 million in 1980 to 58.8 million in 1991 and then dropped slightly to 53.4 million by 2001.¹⁴

In Sub-Saharan Africa, both the number and percentage of hungry people have increased. In 1970, the figure was 103 million (38 percent of the region's

population). By 1980, the number had grown to 125.4 million. By 2001, it was 198.4 million.¹⁵

In South Asia, the country of India alone has 214 million hungry people, and the increase of hunger in recent years has been steepest there, with 19 million more people becoming hungry between 1997 and 2001.¹⁶

There is one other especially disturbing fact. The most recent report in late 2004 from the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization indicated that the long, slow but steady decline of people suffering hunger around the world has been reversed in the last four years. From 2000 to 2004, the number of chronically hungry people rose by 18 million.¹⁷

We cannot know the exact number of people lacking minimally adequate diets, clothing, and shelter. And this number varies depending on harvests, war, and natural disasters. Even though we have seen some significant improvement, the overall picture is still tragic. More than a billion desperate neighbors live in wrenching poverty—and another two billion are poor.

New Economic Divisions in the World

Almost all of the 1.2 billion desperately poor people live in what used to be called the Third World. For many years, all countries that were not part of the developed world (whether capitalist or communist) were lumped together as "Third World" nations. But changes in the last thirty years have necessitated a new division. The World Bank divides countries into four categories: low income, lower-middle income, upper-middle income, and high income. According to the World Bank, "Economies are divided according to 2002 GNI [Gross National Income] per capita, calculated using the World Bank Atlas method. The groups are: low income, \$735 or less; lower middle income, \$736–\$2,935; upper middle income, \$2,936–\$9,075; and high income, \$9,076 or more."¹⁸

Low-income countries (2.5 billion people). India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and many African countries, including Ethiopia, Burundi, Chad, Tanzania, Nigeria, and some of the former Soviet bloc countries, such as Georgia and Belarus, belong to the low-income countries. The per capita GNI¹⁹ in low-income countries is \$735 or less.²⁰ According to the World Bank's *World Development Indicators*, in 2000 the infant mortality in low-

income countries was 80.5 per 1,000 live births, compared to 6.9 per 1,000 live births in the United States.²¹

According to the World Development Indicators database of August 2002, 37 percent of the people in low-income countries over the age of fifteen could not read. But illiteracy in some low-income countries was much worse. In Burkina Faso, 82-percent could not read.²²

There have been significant improvements in a number of these low-income countries, including dramatic change in China, which used to be in this lowest category but has moved up to the next category. We know what to do to reduce the agony even more. Yet hundreds of millions still live unnecessarily in appalling conditions.

Lower-middle-income countries (2.4 billion people). This category includes many Latin American countries, such as Bolivia (\$890); a few of the richest African nations like Namibia (\$1,870); states that were once part of the former Soviet bloc, such as Ukraine (\$970) and Russia (\$2,610); and Asian nations like the Philippines (\$1,080 in 2003) and China (\$1,100 in 2003) at the bottom of the scale, and Thailand (\$2,190 in 2003) at the top. The annual per capita GNI in these countries ranges from \$736 to \$2,935.²³ These countries have a somewhat brighter future, although they still have large numbers of very poor people.

Upper-middle-income countries (329 million people). Included in this category are the richest Latin American nations (e.g., Argentina and Mexico). Per capita GNI ranges from Venezuela's \$4,090 to Barbados's \$9,270.²⁴

High-income countries (966 million people). Per capita GNI in these developed countries ranges from New Zealand's \$15,870 to Switzerland's \$39,880. For the U.S., it is \$37,610, the U.K., \$28,350, and Japan, \$34,510.²⁵

Uneven Distribution

Over the past few decades, economic growth in the developing countries has differed by region (see Table 1). We see healthy growth in most areas during 1965–73. However, beginning in the 1970s, the regions begin to diverge. The annual growth of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Sub-Saharan Africa was actually 1 percent during the 1980s. But the population was growing so fast that the *per capita* GDP actually declined an average of 0.8 percent per

percent of all children under age five still suffered from moderate or severe stunting due to malnutrition.³³

Today, 54 million Brazilians live below the poverty level.³⁴ And 15.6 percent of the people are undernourished.³⁵ The poorest one-fifth of Brazil's 173 million people receive only 2 percent of the national income; 9.9 percent live on less than one dollar per day.³⁶ In 1989, the richest 10 percent of the population received 51.3 percent of the country's income, while the poorest 60 percent received 15.9 percent.³⁷ Tragically, Brazil's rapid economic growth has done far too little to help the people who need it most.

In contrast, Indonesia, a large, densely populated country with vast natural resources like Brazil, experienced annual economic growth of 3.5 percent from 1960 to 1970 and 7.8 percent from 1970 to 1981. In 2001 and 2002, the growth figure was about 3.5 percent.³⁸ The poor fared much better over this period. In 1976, the poorest 40 percent in Indonesia received 14.4 percent of the national income. By 1987, their share increased to 21.2 percent. In 2003, the share of national income enjoyed by Indonesia's poorest fifth of the population was 8.4 percent; in Brazil it was a mere 2 percent.³⁹

The Alarins are a poor Filipino family. Mr. Alarin makes 70 cents on good days as an ice vendor. Several nights a month Mrs. Alarin stays up all night to make a coconut sweet that she sells on the street. Total income for her midnight toil is 40 cents. Cooking utensils are their only furniture. The family had not tasted meat for a month when the president of World Vision visited them and wrote this account:

Tears washed her dark, sunken eye-sockets as she spoke: "I feel so sad when my children cry at night because they have no food. I know my life will never change. What can I do to solve my problems? I am so worried about the future of my children. I want them to go to school, but how can we afford it? I am sick most of the time, but I can't go to the doctor because each visit costs two pesos [28 cents] and the medicine is extra. What can I do?" She broke down into quiet sobbing. I admit without shame that I wept with her.⁴⁰

The tears and agony of the world's poor are captured in the words of Mrs. Alarin. World poverty is a hundred million mothers like Mrs. Alarin, weeping because they cannot feed their children.

year from 1980 to 1990.²⁶ More recently, progress has been made, however, and in 2002 the growth rate of Sub-Saharan Africa per capita GDP was 2.8 percent.²⁷ Latin America's per capita growth slowed in the late 1970s, then declined slightly during the 1980s and early 1990s, and continues to have little growth. This is in stark contrast to the situation in East and South Asia. East Asia (including China, South Korea, and Taiwan) has experienced per capita growth of about 6 percent per year for more than two decades. South Asia, including India and Pakistan, experienced an annual 3 percent per capita growth during the 1980s and mid-1990s and now enjoys even faster growth.

Table 1—Annual GDP per capita growth by region 1965-2002

Regions	1965-73	1973-80	1980-93	1998	2001	2002
Sub-Saharan Africa	3.2%	0.1%	-0.8%	2.2%	3.3%	2.8%
East Asia and the Pacific	5.1%	4.7%	6.4%	0.7%	5.5%	6.7%
South Asia	1.2%	1.7%	3.0%	5.4%	4.7%	4.3%
Mid East, N. Africa	5.5%	2.1%	-2.4%	3.7%	3.3%	3.0%
Latin America and Caribbean	3.7%	2.6%	-0.1%	2.1%	0.3%	-0.8%

Source: *World Bank's World Development indicators 2003*²⁸

Economic growth by itself, however, is not enough. Everyone in a country, especially the poorest, should benefit. Too often, however, overall economic growth primarily benefits the richest. In Brazil a military dictatorship strongly supported by the United States fostered real economic growth at the rate of 10 percent per year from 1968 to 1974. Growth of about 9 percent per year continued through 1980, slowed to 0.3 percent from 1980 through 1993, and then increased to 1.5 percent in 2002.²⁹

Who profited? Even Brazil's own minister of finance admitted in 1972 that only 5 percent of the people had benefited from the fantastic growth of the Brazilian economy. The Brazilian government did not challenge a 1974 study showing that the real purchasing power of the poorest two-thirds of the people had declined by more than one-half in the preceding ten years. In 1989, two-thirds of Brazilian families tried to survive on less than \$500 a month.³⁰

In 1980, 40 percent of the total population of Brazil suffered from malnutrition.³¹ In 1980-93, 16 percent of all children under age five suffered from moderate or severe stunting due to malnutrition.³² Even in 2002, 11

Famine Redefined

The rich today can ignore famine because it manifests itself differently from in much earlier times: "In earlier historical periods, . . . whole nations . . . experienced widespread starvation and death. Today the advancement in both national and international distribution systems has concentrated the effects of food scarcity among the world's poor, wherever they are."⁴¹

People with money can always buy food; famine affects only the poor. When food scarcity triples the price of grain imports, as it did from 1972 to 1974, middle- and upper-income persons in developing countries continue to eat. But people already devoting 60 to 80 percent of their income to food simply eat less and die sooner. Death usually results from diseases that underfed bodies cannot resist.⁴²

Children are the first victims. In 1996, low-income countries had an infant mortality rate nine times higher than in high-income countries. Malnutrition contributes to the deaths of many children. In 2000, UNICEF reported that 149 million children in developing countries were malnourished.⁴³

There is hope, however. In one three-year period in the 1990s, Tanzania's nutrition program more than halved the rate of severe malnutrition. The cost of that nationwide program was only \$2.50 per child.⁴⁴ We could drastically reduce the high child mortality rates in developing countries, which are about nine times higher than those in established market economies. According to the World Bank in 1993, "If death rates in poor countries were reduced to those prevailing in rich countries, 11 million less children would die each year."⁴⁵

Are rich Christians generous enough to save these lives?

Carolina Maria de Jesus helps us feel the terror and anguish endured by the poor in a land where they could have enough food. This uneducated but brilliant woman struggling to survive in the slums of Brazil's second largest city, São Paulo, kept a daily record of her feelings on scraps of paper. Later they were published in a gripping diary called *Child of the Dark*.

Today I'm sad. I'm nervous. I don't know if I should start crying or start running until I fall unconscious. At dawn it was raining. I couldn't go out to get any money [she gathered junk each day to earn money for food] . . . I have a few tin cans and a little scrap that I'm going to sell

to Senhor Manuel. When Joao came home from school, I sent him to sell the scrap. He got 13 cruzeiros. He bought a glass of mineral water: two cruzeiros. I was furious with him . . .

The children eat a lot of bread. They like soft bread but when they don't have it, they eat hard bread . . .

Oh Sao Paulo! A queen that vainly shows her skyscrapers that are her crown of gold. All dressed up in velvet and silk but with cheap stockings underneath—the favela [the slum].

The money didn't stretch far enough to buy meat, so I cooked macaroni with a carrot. I didn't have any grease, it was horrible. Vera was the only one who complained yet asked for more.

"Mama, sell me to Dona Julita, because she has delicious food."⁴⁶

A former president of World Vision visited the home of Sebastian and Maria Nascimento, a poor Brazilian couple whose home was a one-room, thatched lean-to with a sand floor. Inside, one stool, a charcoal hibachi, and four cots covered with sacks partly filled with straw were the only furniture. He wrote this heartrending account about his visit:

My emotions could scarcely take in what I saw and heard. The three-year-old twins, lying naked and unmoving on a small cot, were in the last act of their personal drama. Mercifully, the curtain was coming down on their brief appearance. Malnutrition was the villain. The two-year-old played a silent role, his brain already vegetating from marasmus, a severe form of malnutrition.

The father is without work. Both he and Maria are anguished over their existence, but they are too proud to beg. He tries to shine shoes. Maria cannot talk about their condition. She tries, but the words just will not come. Her mother's love is deep and tender, and the daily deterioration of her children is more than she can bear. Tears must be the vocabulary of the anguished soul.⁴⁷

Carolina's little girl need not have begged to be sold to a rich neighbor. And while Sebastian and Maria's twins lay dying, there was an abundance of food in the world. But it was not divided fairly. The well-to-do in Brazil had plenty to eat. More than two hundred million U.S. citizens were consuming

enough food (partly because of high consumption of grain-fed livestock) to feed more than one billion people in the poor countries. Oxford economist Donald Hay has pointed out that a mere 2 percent of the world's grain harvest would be enough, if shared, to erase the problem of hunger and malnutrition around the world.⁴⁸

This is how famine has been redefined, or rather, redistributed! It no longer inconveniences the rich and powerful. It strikes only the poor and powerless. Since the poor usually die quietly in relative obscurity, the rich of all nations comfortably ignore this kind of famine. But famine—redefined and redistributed—is alive and well. Even in good times, millions and millions of persons go to bed hungry, and children's brains vegetate and their bodies succumb prematurely to disease.

Poverty's Children

Poverty means illiteracy, inadequate medical care, disease, and brain damage.

Illiteracy

Only 59 percent of India's population of 1.05 billion people could read in 2002.⁴⁹

From 1990 to 2002, the percentage of Indians who could read improved from 48 to 59 percent. But that still leaves about 410 million illiterates. For Pakistan's 144 million, the proportion of illiterates is 55.1 percent.⁵⁰ Fortunately, there has been major progress. In 1960, only 40 percent of the developing world could read, but that increased to 84 percent by 2002.⁵¹ Unfortunately, there were still 948 million who could not read in 2003.⁵²

Nor has literacy spread evenly. In Africa, only 41 percent can read.⁵³

Inadequate Medical Care and Disease

Most people in the industrialized North have enjoyed the security of modern medicine for so long that we assume it is now available for all. Indeed, things have gotten better. The World Bank reports that health conditions around the world have improved more in the past forty years than in all preceding human history.⁵⁴ In 1950, life expectancy in the developing countries

was 40 years. In 1990, it had improved to 63 years. In 2003, it was 64.4 years.⁵⁵ (It would have been still higher, but the AIDS crisis has caused life expectancy to fall in thirty-four countries.⁵⁶)

Similarly, the number of children under age five who died was 280 out of 1,000 in 1950, but had declined to 83 out of 1,000 by 2000.⁵⁷

Table 2—Infant Mortality Per 1000 Live Births (2002)

Japan	—3
Finland	—4
Germany	—4
U.K.	—5
Australia	—6
Cuba	—7
U.S.	—7
Chile	—10
Ukraine	—16
Russia	—18
China	—31
Egypt	—35
Guatemala	—36
Malawi	—114
Angola	—154
Niger	—156
Sierra Leone	—165

Source: UNICEF⁵⁸

In spite of these improvements, the World Bank reports that 1 billion do not have access to safe water, and 2.5 billion do not have access to improved sanitation.⁵⁹ The World Health Organization estimates that each day, 6,000 children in developing countries die because of lack of clean water and sanitation.⁶⁰ In houses with clean water and sanitation, children are 60 percent less likely to die than in houses without those services.⁶¹ In addition, 13 million people die each year from infectious and parasitic diseases such as diarrhea, malaria, and tuberculosis.⁶²

Lacking both food and medicine, poor nations have much higher infant mortality rates than the developed world. The cost of cleaner water and better sanitation is relatively small. In 1996, the World Health

Organization reported that an annual increase in preventive care of 75 cents per person in the Third World could save 5 million lives every year. That would take less than \$3 billion. Surely the people of the wealthier nations can find \$3 billion to save 5 million people. The National Center for Health Statistics reported that people in the United States spend between \$30 and \$50 billion each year on diets and related expenditures to reduce their calorie intake.⁶³

Brain Damage

No one knows how many poor children have suffered irreversible brain damage due to insufficient protein intake during childhood, but there are millions of such children. In 1999, there were 149 million malnourished children under the age of five.⁶⁴

Marli, a happy six-year-old girl from Rio de Janeiro[,] is just one of these. Marli looks normal in every way. Healthy. Happy. There is just one thing wrong with her. She can't learn. At first the teachers thought perhaps her difficulty was psychological, the result of neglect in a family of eleven children. Her younger sister had the same problem. But after careful observation and testing, it became evident that Marli, a child of Brazil's poor and wretched favelas [slums], was unable to learn because as an infant her malnourished body could not produce a healthy brain.⁶⁵

Permanent brain damage caused by protein deficiency is one of the most devastating aspects of world poverty. Eighty percent of total brain development takes place between conception and age two. Adequate protein intake—precisely what over one-third of all children under five in developing countries do not have—is necessary for proper brain development.⁶⁶ A study in the early 1980s in Mexico found that a group of severely malnourished children under five had an IQ thirteen points lower than a scientifically selected, adequately fed control group.⁶⁷ Medical science has demonstrated that severe malnutrition produces irreversible brain damage.

When a poor family runs out of food, the children suffer most. For

people eking out a day-to-day existence, an inactive child is not as serious a problem as an inactive wage earner. But malnutrition produces millions of retarded children that become a serious problem in the future.

AIDS

AIDS is one of the most deadly killers of the poor, especially in Africa. Globally about 48 million are infected with the virus or have AIDS.⁶⁸ Twenty-five million of those are in Africa.

In wealthy nations today, people who get AIDS receive expensive (anti-retroviral) drugs that prolong life for many years and enable people to live a largely normal life. In poor countries, they just die.

Every day in Africa, 6,000 people die of AIDS. Seventeen million have already died, leaving families destitute and alone; 12 million African children have lost one or both parents. Unless we do much more, AIDS will produce more than 20 million orphans by 2010. Parents, farmers, teachers, and leaders are gone. Whole communities are devastated.

The personal stories are wrenching. Before he got AIDS a hardworking father sold milk from his goats to provide for his wife and family. When he fell ill, he used the children's school fee money to pay for traditional medicine. Finally, he sold two goats so he could visit a clinic—only to discover that it was AIDS that was devastating not only him, but his wife and their toddler. His wife sold another goat to pay for his funeral. All the goats were gone by the time the wife died.

Two daughters, nine and ten, were left to take care of their dying brother. When they visited their grandmother, she told them they must take care of themselves, because she was already caring for five grandchildren orphaned by AIDS. All she could give them was a cardboard box—a coffin to bury their dying brother.⁶⁹

Millions of African children face that kind of terrifying future.

The joint United Nations program on AIDS estimates that by 2007, at least \$20 billion per year will be needed to fight AIDS. In 2003, the wealthy nations gave less than \$5 billion for the global fight against AIDS.

The price of drugs for AIDS sufferers in poor nations has dropped from \$10,800 to as low as \$140 per year just from 2001 to 2003. But only 3 percent of the four million Africans who urgently need these drugs are getting

them—partly because they cannot even afford them at 50 cents or a dollar a day and partly because there are not enough trained health workers.⁷⁰

We now know a lot about combating AIDS in Africa. Evidence shows that Africans take the lifesaving drugs even more carefully and responsibly than Americans and Europeans. The success rate is about 80 percent. Uganda's successful public education program dramatically cut its infection rate from 14 percent of adults in the early 1990s to just 5 percent by 2001. President Bush pledged \$15 billion over five years for the battle against AIDS. Many private Christian organizations are expanding their programs. Bono's organization, DATA, says that just "an extra cent of every \$10 we spend [in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Japan] could save the lives of eight million Africans a year."⁷¹ And a study by scholars at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine estimated that just \$27 billion (far less than what the rich world spends on golf each year) spent over eight years would prevent 30 million people from becoming infected with HIV/AIDS.⁷²

Hunger, illiteracy, disease, brain damage, death. That's what grinding poverty means. About one billion impoverished people of the world experience this anguish regularly. A little more help from rich nations would save many lives.

Developing nations must also change their priorities. In 1994, the United Nations reported that 12 percent of the \$125 billion developing countries spend on the military each year could provide health care for all their citizens, including immunization of all children, elimination of severe malnutrition, reduction of moderate malnutrition by half, and provision of safe drinking water for all.⁷³ According to UNICEF in 1995, developing country governments spent a total of approximately \$440 billion per year. But a mere \$50 billion of that (just over 10 percent) went to nutrition, basic health care, primary education, family planning, clean water, and safe sanitation. If that proportion were increased to 20 percent, approximately \$50 billion more per year would be available. In most countries, that would be enough to construct basic social safety nets.⁷⁴

Making Progress

The results of modest efforts can be dramatic. During the 1980s and 1990s, a few inexpensive actions saved the lives of millions of children. During that

time, the immunization levels in the developing world rose from 20 percent to about 80 percent.⁷⁵ In the early 1980s, about 75 million children contracted measles each year and more than 2.5 million died. By 1999 only 800,000 measles cases were reported worldwide.⁷⁶ Vaccines now save the lives of at least 3 million annually. And the vaccines cost an average of only \$17 per child.⁷⁷

Unfortunately, we lost a little ground in the 1990s. According to the World Health Organization:

In 1999, worldwide average vaccination coverage of children under five fell to 74% (it had been at 80% in 1990). One in four children in the world remains without immunization against the six diseases initially covered . . . (measles, polio, pertussis, diphtheria, tetanus and tuberculosis).

Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, [former] Director-General of the World Health Organization, says, "Nearly two million children worldwide still die needlessly each year of vaccine-preventable illnesses. For only U.S. \$17 per child, we can provide lifetime protection against the six historical scourges . . . and for not much more, we can extend the protection to include hepatitis B, yellow fever and *Haemophilus influenzae* type B."⁷⁸

The success story on river blindness shows how much can be done at a modest cost. A cooperative effort among several international organizations, including the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO), set out in 1974 to combat river blindness in eleven African countries. Spread by a tiny black fly and caused by a microscopic parasite, this disease causes intense itching, debilitation, and eventually blindness. The initial effort involved spraying biodegradable insecticides (which are harmless to the environment). The program was a glowing success and allowed farmers to return to about sixty million acres of prime farmland;⁷⁹ and the costs of the program were only \$570 million, or roughly \$1 per person protected from blindness per year.⁸⁰

More recently, Mectizan, a drug donated by Merck, has been used in a number of additional countries in Africa. Through the *Mectizan Control Program* at the Carter Presidential Center, some thirty million treatment doses per year are being distributed. This agent has both treatment and

control benefits and may eventually lead to the elimination of river blindness as a public health problem.⁸¹

Iodine deficiency is another terrible problem that could be easily solved. Goiter, the swelling of the thyroid gland due to iodine deficiency, results in mental impairment and affects 740 million people.⁸² At least 50 million people are affected by some degree of iodine deficiency-related brain damage, and 5.7 million will become cretins (people with stunted, deformed bodies and brains).⁸³ The solution? Iodize each country's salt supply, which costs only 5 cents per person per year.⁸⁴ The total cost of such a program would be around \$100 million—less than two modern fighter planes.⁸⁵

The good news is that we have made major progress. Since 1990, many governments have worked hard to add iodine to salt, and by 2004 the proportion of household salt that was iodized had risen from 20 percent to 60 percent. But it could easily be 100 percent! Even today, the United Nations estimates that twenty million children are born with some mental retardation because their mothers did not have enough iodine during pregnancy.⁸⁶

Oral rehydration therapy (ORT) is an inexpensive health procedure that prevents children from dehydrating from diarrhea. In 1980, 10,000 children died every day from diarrheal dehydration. By 1993, that was down to 5,000. In 1999, it was still lower at 4,100 deaths per day globally.⁸⁷ But that is still about 1.5 million needlessly dead children.⁸⁸ Bags of oral rehydration salts cost about 50 cents each.⁸⁹ They can be used by parents themselves.⁹⁰ With a little more help, millions more would live.

In the 1990 World Summit for Children, held by UNICEF, more than one hundred developing countries set the goal for the year 2000 of eliminating polio around the world. By 1991, we had successfully eliminated polio in the Western Hemisphere.⁹¹ By 1996, that success had spread to 145 countries.⁹² In 2004, the world had an excellent opportunity to stop transmission of wild poliovirus, as it was confined to a limited number of polio "hot spots" within six countries.⁹³

We are making progress. Modest expenditures have reduced malnutrition and greatly increased immunization levels. A few years ago, UNICEF estimated that the total cost of providing basic social services in

the developing countries, including health, education, family planning, and clean water, would cost \$30 to \$40 billion per year.⁹⁴ At the time the rich of this world were spending more than this on golf each year.⁹⁵

Progress in reducing poverty, of course, does not flow only from improved health care for the poor. Expanding market economies have significantly reduced poverty in Asia (see chapter 8). And there is a wide range of changes—both personal and structural—that you and I can make to reduce the agony of poor people (see chapters 9–11).

Population

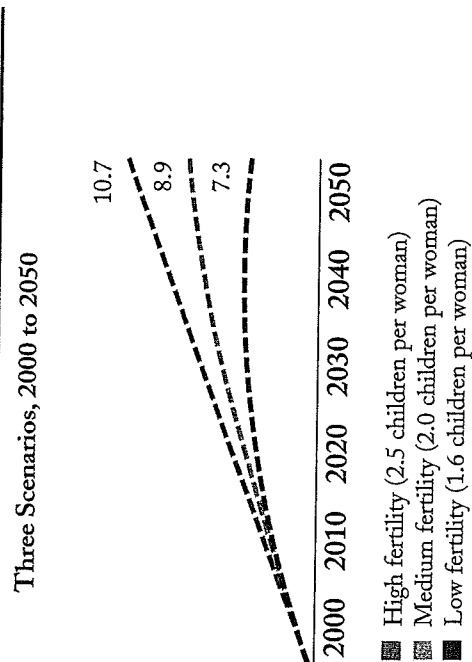
The population explosion is another fundamental problem. Not until 1830 did the world have one billion people. It took only one hundred years more to add another billion. Within a mere thirty years another billion human beings appeared. The fourth billion arrived in only fifteen years, by 1975.⁹⁶ In 2004, the world had 6.4 billion human inhabitants. This number could rise to more than 10.7 billion in the next fifty years (see Table 3).

There is good news here, too, however. Total fertility rates (the average number of children each woman will bear) have declined from 5.9 births per woman in the 1970s to 3.9 in the 1990s. In the least developed countries, fertility rates are still well over five children per woman; however, the rate "has reached below-replacement levels in about 20 developing countries."⁹⁷ We are getting closer globally to the fertility rate of 2.1 children per couple, which is the rate at which the population remains the same. Still today, however, many young people are entering their reproductive years. Even if most couples today have fewer children than previous generations (which they are doing), the total population will still grow.⁹⁸

A population of 100 million people growing at 1.5 percent per year expands to 145 million in 25 years, and 443 million in 100 years. And a population of 100 million growing at 3 percent (which is the rate for Sub-Saharan Africa, which has about 628 million people⁹⁹) expands to 438 million in 50 years and 1,922 million in 100 years.

It is impossible to predict exactly how many people will be alive in 2050 or 2100. The United Nations projects three scenarios (see Table 3).

Table 3—Future of World Population Growth:



Source: *United Nations, World Population Prospects 1998*¹⁰⁰

The median projection indicates that total population would increase to 7.8 billion by 2025, and reach 8.9 billion by 2050. As the century progresses, the growth rate will fall and reach 11 billion by 2100.¹⁰¹

Much depends on what large continents like Asia, Europe, and North America do. Table 4 indicates the current growth rates in these major regions.

Table 4—Projected 2050 Population Size for Major Regions, Three Scenarios

Region/country	2004			2050		
	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
World	6,378	8,919	7,409	10,633	8,919	7,409
More Developed	1,206	1,219	1,084	1,370	1,219	1,084
Less Developed	5,172	7,699	6,325	9,263	7,699	6,325
Africa	869	1,803	1,516	2,122	1,803	1,516
Sub-Saharan Africa	716	1,557	1,315	1,825	1,557	1,315
Asia	3,871	5,222	4,274	6,318	5,222	4,274
China	1,313	1,395	1,129	1,710	1,395	1,129
Japan	128	110	100	120	110	100

Latin America/Caribbean	551	924	768	623
North America	329	512	448	390
Europe	725	705	632	565
Oceania	33	52	46	40

Source: UN Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2002 Revision* (2003).¹⁰²

The population explosion prompts some people to apocalyptic hysteria. One group ran an advertisement in 1976 in many newspapers, including the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. Drafted by William Paddock and Garrett Hardin, among others, the statement read, in part, "The world as we know it will likely be ruined before the year 2000 . . . The world tum toward tragedy is at this moment so great that there is probably no way of halting it."¹⁰³

Such views were alarmist, pessimistic, and obviously untrue (from the perspective of 2005!).¹⁰⁴ Population trends in the last forty years offer some hope. Whereas the overall annual population growth rate in the world was about 2 percent in 1960, the Population Reference Bureau indicates that it had dropped to 1.4 percent by 2000.¹⁰⁵ We can be grateful for the improvement, but the present rate of population growth is still too high. At this rate, the population will increase to almost 9 billion people by 2054.¹⁰⁶ We are already damaging the environment to feed today's 6.3 billion—and not all of those receive sufficient food.

In considering the issue of population growth, it is important to remember that although Northern developed nations now have much lower population growth rates than developing nations (see Table 4), the number of children per family in Western Europe and North America was much higher in the latter half of the nineteenth century than the two children or less per family common now. Infant mortality rates, of course, were also higher. Despite this, family size and population growth in the industrializing nations at that time were quite close to the size and growth rates in many developing countries since World War II. Affluence and decline in population growth seem to go together, in the long term anyway.

Fortunately, empowering the poor is an effective way to reduce the population explosion (see chapters 2 and 11). When poor people receive adequate food, health care, and education (especially women), population growth drops dramatically.

Limits to Growth?

Along with widespread poverty and the population explosion, a third set of complex, interrelated issues makes our dilemma even more difficult. How long can the earth sustain the present rate of industrialization? What will be the effect of the resulting pollution?

In 1992, the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and the Royal Society of London issued a joint report that began, "If current predictions of population growth prove accurate and patterns of human activity on the planet remain unchanged, science and technology may not be able to prevent either irreversible degradation of the environment or continued poverty for much of the world."¹⁰⁷ In 1993, fifty-eight national science academies from around the world issued a similar warning.¹⁰⁸

During the 1980s, per capita levels of arable land fell by 1.9 percent annually. Worldwide, an estimated 5 million to 7 million hectares (1 hectare = 2.47 acres) of farming land disappear each year.¹⁰⁹ UNICEF reports that every year 42 million acres (a combined area the size of Oklahoma) of tropical forests are destroyed and about 15 million acres (the size of West Virginia) of drylands turn into deserts.¹¹⁰ The United Nations reports that desertification is a worldwide problem directly affecting 250 million people and a third of the earth's land surface or more than 4 billion hectares.¹¹¹

Though desertification affects Africa the most, where two-thirds of the continent is desert or drylands, it is also a problem elsewhere. In China since the 1950s, sand drifts and expanding deserts have taken over nearly 700,000 hectares of cultivated land, 2.35 million hectares of rangeland, 6.4 million hectares of forests, woodlands, and shrub lands. Worldwide, some 70 percent of the 5.2 billion hectares of drylands used for agriculture is already degraded and threatened by desertification.¹¹² In chapter 8 we will look at other related environmental problems that raise questions about limits to growth.

The Future and Our Response

Widespread hunger, the population explosion, environmental decay, and the possible necessity of slowing industrialization (in the affluent nations) compound the difficulties of trying to share the world's resources more justly. Not surprisingly, predictions of doomsday are legion. What are our prospects?

Senator Mark Hatfield (a prominent evangelical leader and four-term Republican senator) warned, "The greatest threat to this nation [the United States] and the stability of the entire world is hunger. It's more explosive than all the atomic weaponry possessed by the big powers. Desperate people do desperate things, and remember that nuclear fission is now in the hands of even the developing nations."¹¹³

A U.S. Presidential Commission on World Hunger (composed of Democrats and Republicans, conservatives and liberals) repeated this warning:

The most potentially explosive force in the world today is the frustrated desire of poor people to attain a decent standard of living . . . The Commission believes that promoting economic development in general, and overcoming hunger in particular, are tasks far more critical to U.S. national security than most policy makers acknowledge or even believe. Since the advent of nuclear weapons, most Americans have been conditioned to equate national security with the strength of strategic military forces. The Commission considers this prevailing belief to be a simplistic illusion.¹¹⁴

Former U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali stated that the deepest causes of conflict are "economic despair, social injustice, and political oppression. Only a society of democratically protected human rights can offer the stability that can sustain development over time."¹¹⁵ Global cooperation to reduce hunger and injustice is essential for enduring peace.

What will Christians do in this time of swelling affluence and persistent poverty? Will we dare to remember that the God we worship tells us that "whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD" (Prov. 19:17 NRSV)? Will Christians have the courage to seek justice for the poor, even if that means disapproval by affluent neighbors?

Where will you and I stand? With the starving or the overfed? With poor Lazarus or the rich man? Most of the rich countries are at least nominally Christian. What an ironic tragedy that an affluent, "Christian" minority in the world continues to hoard its wealth while hundreds of millions of people hover on the edge of starvation!

One popular fundamentalist newsletter has called on Christians to stockpile new dried foods. In a most ingenious combination of apocalyptic piety

and slick salesmanship, the newsletter quoted several "Bible scholars" to prove that some Christians will live through the tribulation. And the conclusion? Since we cannot be absolutely certain where we will be during the tribulation, we ought to purchase a seven-year supply of reserve foods for a couple thousand dollars!^{11,16}

In an age of affluence and poverty, most Christians, regardless of theological labels, are tempted to succumb to the heresy of following society's materialistic values rather than biblical truth. Advertisements offer demagogically convincing justifications for enjoying our affluence while neglecting billions of poor neighbors.

Imagine what one quarter of the world's Christians could do if they became truly generous. A few of us could move, as David and Carol Bussau did (see chapter 9), to desperately poor areas. The rest of us could defy surrounding materialism. We could refuse to let our affluent world squeeze us into its consumeristic mold. Instead, we could become generous nonconformists who love Jesus more than wealth. In obedience to our Lord, we could empower the poor through small loans, community development, and better societal systems. And in the process, we would learn again His paradoxical truth that true happiness flows from generosity.



Study Questions

1. What are your strongest feelings as you read this chapter?
2. What facts were most surprising to you? Most disturbing?
3. How has famine been redefined?
4. What concretely does poverty mean in day-to-day life?
5. How do you think most Christians you know would respond if they truly understood the problem of world hunger?

2

The Affluent Minority

*I used to think when I was a child, that Christ might have been exag-
gerating when he warned about the dangers of wealth. Today I know
better. I know how very hard it is to be rich and still keep the milk of
human kindness. Money has a dangerous way of putting scales on one's
eyes, a dangerous way of freezing people's hands, eyes, lips and hearts.¹*

—Dom Hélder Câmara



“Create more desire” shrieked an inch-high headline for an unusually honest ad in the *New York Times*. It continued: “Now, as always, profit and growth stem directly from the ability of salesmanship to create more desire.”²

Costly, manipulative advertising bombards us at every turn, and its primary purpose is not to inform; it is to create desire. Luxurious houses in *Better Homes and Gardens* make our perfectly adequate houses shrink by comparison into dilapidated, tiny cottages in need of immediate renovation. The advertisements for the new fall fashions make our almost-new dresses and suits from previous years look shabby and old-fashioned.

We in the U.S. spend more money on advertising than on all our public institutions of higher education.³ In 1996, we spent \$174 billion,⁴ and in 2002 that figure soared to \$237 billion.⁵ In 2000, worldwide expenditures for advertising were \$463.9 billion.⁶ Tragically, a lot of advertising is used “to convince us that Jesus was wrong about the abundance of possessions.”⁷

One of the most astounding things about the affluent minority is that we honestly think we have barely enough to survive in modest comfort. Constant, seductive advertising helps to create this destructive delusion. Advertisers regularly deceive us into thinking that we genuinely need one luxury after another. We are convinced that we are in competition with our neighbors. So

we buy another dress, sports jacket, or sports car, and thereby force up the standard of living.

The increasingly affluent standard of living is the god of twenty-first-century North America, and the adman is its prophet.

Advertising reclassifies luxuries as necessities. Our postman once delivered an elegant brochure complete with glossy photographs of exceedingly expensive homes. The brochure announced the seductive lie that *Architectural Digest* would help quench "man's passionate need for beauty and luxury" (my emphasis). How much luxury do we need?

The average American child (ages 2-17) watches 2.8 hours of television per day. The average adult watches more than 4 hours a day, which means 30,769 commercials a year. This means that over a period of sixty-five years, the average person will watch two million commercials, which will devour about two years of the person's life.⁸

Sometimes advertising overkill is hilarious. An evangelical book discount house once created this promotional gem: "Your mouth is going to water, and your soul is going to glow, when you feast your eyes on the bargains which have been providentially provided for your benefit this month." (I promptly ordered books worth twenty-four dollars.)

Promises, Promises

Perhaps the most demonic part of advertising is that it attempts to persuade us that material possessions will bring joy and fulfillment. "That happiness is to be attained through limitless material acquisition is denied by every religion and philosophy known to man, but is preached incessantly by every American television set."⁹

Advertisers promise that their products will satisfy our deepest needs and inner longings for love, acceptance, security, and sexual fulfillment. The right deodorant will bring acceptance and friendship. The newest toothpaste or shampoo will make us irresistible. A comment by New York jewelry designer Barry Kieselstein shows how people search for meaning and friendship in things: "A nice piece of jewelry you can relate to is like having a friend who's always there" (emphasis mine).¹⁰

A bank in Washington, D.C., advertised for new savings accounts with the question "Who's gonna love you when you're old and gray?"

For a decade, my own savings bank used a particularly enticing ad: "Put a little love away. Everybody needs a penny for a rainy day. Put a little love away." Responsible saving is good stewardship. But promising that a bank account guarantees love is unbiblical, heretical, and demonic. This ad teaches the big lie of our secular, materialistic society. But the words and music were so seductive that they danced through my head hundreds of times.

If no one paid any attention to these lies, they would be harmless. But advertising has a powerful effect on all of us, and it shapes the values of our children.

In a sense we pay too little attention to advertisements. Most of us think we ignore them, but in fact they seep into the subconscious. We experience them instead of analyze them. John V. Taylor suggested that Christian families ought to adopt the slogan "Who are you kidding?" and shout it in unison every time a commercial appears on the television screen.¹¹

Where Did It All Begin?

Theologian Patrick Kerans has argued that commitment to unlimited growth and an ever-increasing materialistic "standard of living" is really a sellout to the Enlightenment. During the eighteenth century, many Western thinkers decided that science was the only way to find knowledge. This thinking elevated all things quantitative and devalued all things nonquantitative. Thus intangible values such as community, trust, friendship, and the beauty of creation became less important. It is hard to measure the value of friendship, unspoiled nature, and justice. But Gross National Income (GNI) is easy to measure. The result is our competitive growth economy where economic success and material things are all-important to many people.¹²

If Christianity is true and Kerans is correct, our society will eventually collapse. A social structure built on the heretical ideas that the scientific method is the only way to reach truth and value and that material things are all-important will eventually self-destruct.

Much (but not all) advertising contains a *fundamental inner contradiction*.¹³ Advertisers know that we all long for the qualities of life that will satisfy our deepest needs; we long for significance, love, and joy. Marketing recognizes these needs and hooks into them. But then, in order to sell us

more gadgets, it promotes the big lie. It says that love and fulfillment come from more and more material abundance.

Christians, of course, know that affluence does not guarantee love, beauty, acceptance, and joy. Our deepest joy comes from right relationships—with God, neighbor, and the earth. But our inherent bent toward idolatry gives advertisers the power to convince us that more gadgets and bigger bank accounts are an easy way to meet our needs. As a result, people persist in the fruitless effort to quench their thirst for meaning and fulfillment with an ever-rising river of possessions.

The personal result is agonizing distress and undefined dissatisfaction. The social result is environmental pollution and neglected poor people. Affluence fails to satisfy our restless hearts. It also keeps us from sharing food and assistance with our more than one billion hungry neighbors. Will we affluent Christians have the generosity and faithfulness to refuse to conform to society's seductive advertising?

How Affluent Are We?

By any objective criterion, the 5 percent of the world's people who live in the United States are an incredibly rich aristocracy living on the same little planet with billions of very poor neighbors. Combined with the rest of North America, Europe, and Japan, we comprise an affluent northern aristocracy. Our standard of living, compared with that of more than 2.8 billion very poor neighbors living on two dollars or less per day, is at least as luxurious as was the lifestyle of the medieval aristocracy compared with their serfs.

With a few exceptions, the rich countries are in the Northern Hemisphere. The poor countries are more to the south. The north-south division is one of the most dangerous fault lines in the world today.

And the chasm widens year after year. In 1960, the one-fifth of the world's people living in the richest nations enjoyed an income 30 times that of the poorest one-fifth. By 1990, the rich were 60 times richer. And by 1997, it was 74 times!¹⁴

According to the United Nations *Human Development Report* (2003), the richest 5 percent of the world's people receive 114 times as much income as the poorest 5 percent. In fact, "the richest 1 percent receive as much as the poorest 57 percent"! A mere twenty-five million Americans (the richest twenty-five

million) enjoy as much income as the poorest two billion people in the world combined.¹⁵

The Gross National Income (GNI)—or Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which is very similar—provides one standard of comparison between rich and poor countries.¹⁶ (These measures, however, say nothing about income equality within a country.) By dividing a country's GNI by its population, you arrive at a per capita GNI. As Table 5 shows, the annual per capita GNI in the United States was \$37,610 in 2003. In India it was \$530.¹⁷

Table 5—Per Capita GNP in 2003 (U.S. Dollars/Atlas Method)

Switzerland	39,880
United States	37,610
Japan	34,510
United Kingdom	28,350
Mexico	6,230
Egypt	1,390
India	530
Kenya	390
Bangladesh	400
Ethiopia	90

Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators 2004.¹⁸

Virtually all authorities agree that the chasm will widen still more in the next decade. In 1995, the World Bank made several projections of growth for various regions around the world through the year 2010. Using the optimistic projections, for every \$13 increase in GNI per capita projected for the industrialized countries, an increase of only \$1 was projected for developing countries.¹⁹ From 1980 to 2004, the low-income countries actually had a higher percentage growth rate per year than the high-income countries.²⁰

However, even when a poor country has a higher percentage rate of growth, the absolute income still widens! An increase of 3.7 percent in a poor country's per capita income of \$300 means that on average each person has \$11.10 more. But an increase of 2.2 percent in a rich country's per capita income of \$15,000, adds \$330 more per person! This is one reason that the ratio of income of the richest one-fifth of countries to the poorest one-fifth increased from 30:1 in 1960 to 74:1 in 1997.

Merely comparing per capita GNI, however, is misleading. In 1996, haircuts cost \$25 in New York and only 65 cents in Bangladesh, but the New York haircut was not worth 38 times more!²¹ Development specialists have tried to improve on the GNI comparisons.

One way is to measure GNI using Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). To understand how this is better, you need to understand how the GNI is usually figured. GNI (and also GDP and GNP)²² per capita is usually expressed in terms of U.S. dollars. Economists calculate a country's GNI per capita and then convert it to U.S. dollars using the market rate for foreign exchange. For example, the GNP per capita in Bangladesh is 20,856 taka (the local currency), which will buy U.S. \$351. But 20,856 taka will purchase far more in Bangladesh than \$351 will purchase in the United States, partly because wages are lower.²³

Using the PPP helps to reduce this distortion. A similar bundle of goods in both countries is priced to see how much each currency can actually purchase. Then GNI per capita is adjusted into PPP dollars that are equal and comparable among countries. Table 6 shows that Bangladesh's GNP per capita in PPP dollars is actually \$1,700. This means that the Bangladeshi, with 20,856 taka, can only get \$351 U.S. in the foreign currency market, but can purchase goods in Bangladesh that would cost \$1,700 to purchase in the United States. Poor countries do not appear to be as poor when measured in PPP dollars.²⁴

Does that mean people in poor countries are really not so poor after all? Yes, but only slightly. They are still very poor. Table 6 shows that the average person in Bangladesh (where more than 141 million people live) has an annual income of \$1,700 in PPP. That would be like trying to live in the U.S. on about \$140 per person per month! Imagine a family of four trying to survive in the U.S. or Canada on \$560 a month. That would not even pay the rent for an apartment in most places.

Another measure of countries' well-being is the Human Development Index (HDI). Created in 1990 by the United Nations Development Programme, it attempts to measure well-being more broadly than simply by how much money people have. It uses three measures—life expectancy, education (adult literacy and mean years of schooling combined), and income (purchasing power parity dollars per capita). Each of the three figures is weighted equally to produce the HDI. The HDI is rated from zero to one—higher numbers mean the country is better off in those three areas. The HDI

measures human well-being in terms of persons' ability to enjoy a long life and basic education as well as income. A country's standing changes when the availability of education and health care, not just purchasing power, is taken into account.

Table 6—Comparison of Different Measures of Wealth (2002)

Country	GNP/Capita	PPP/Capita	HDI
U.S.	\$36,006	\$35,750	.939
Switzerland	\$36,687	\$30,010	.936
Japan	\$31,407	\$26,940	.938
U.K.	\$26,444	\$26,150	.936
Canada	\$22,777	\$9,480	.943
Saudi Arabia	\$8,612	\$12,650	.768
Ecuador	\$1,897	\$3,580	.735
India	\$487	\$2,670	.595
Pakistan	\$408	\$1,940	.497
Kenya	\$393	\$1,020	.488
Bangladesh	\$351	\$1,700	.509

Source: *United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Reports (2003)*

A comparison of energy usage underscores our affluence. Because of a lengthening list of luxuries—numerous electrical gadgets and toys, large air-conditioned cars, skyscrapers, and so on—North Americans use vastly more energy per year per person than South Americans. In fact, although there are approximately the same number of people in both North and South America, North America uses 86 percent of all the energy used in all the Americas.²⁶

Money spent on health research tells the same story. Rich countries "of course" have almost all the available money for medical research to solve medical problems. "Naturally," they spend it on health problems in rich nations even though health problems are much worse in poor nations. Ninety percent of all spending on health research goes to study 10 percent of the world's diseases.²⁷

The percentage of income spent on food in different countries provides another stark comparison (see Table 7). In the United States, it is a mere 9.73 percent. In the United Kingdom, it is 16.37 percent. In the Philippines, it is 48.35 percent.²⁸

Agony and anguish are concealed in the simple statistics of Table 7. For persons in the U.S. spending 9.73 percent of their disposable income on food, a 50 percent increase in food costs is troubling but not disastrous. But for the one already spending 60 percent of income on food, a 50 percent increase means hunger, malnutrition, and perhaps starvation.

Table 7—Expenditures for Food (1996)
(as percent of disposable personal income)

United States	9.73%
Canada	11.68%
Australia	15.07%
France	15.34%
United Kingdom	16.37%
Italy	16.59%
Thailand	28.56%
Ecuador	29.90%
Philippines	48.35%
Sri Lanka	63.55%

Source: USDA, *Economic Research Service*²⁹

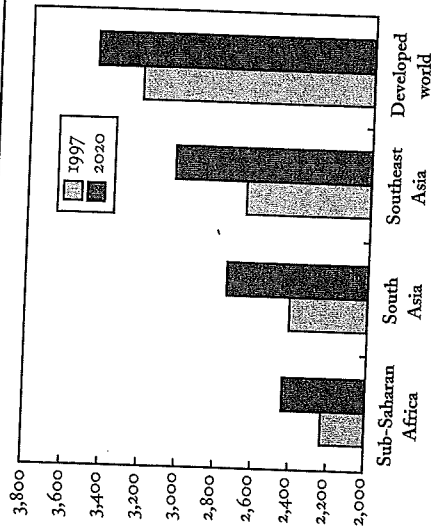
Calorie consumption tells the same story. People in many poor nations consume fewer than the daily minimal calorie requirements while people in the developed world have more than they need. While lack of food destroys millions in poor lands, too much food is devastating millions in affluent countries. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 65.7 percent of all American adults were overweight or obese in 2001–2002.³⁰

If the U.S. were to add about fifty million people to its population over the next forty years, those fifty million would have approximately the same global impact in terms of resource consumption as two billion more people in India. Due to overconsumption, small numbers of affluent people strain the earth's limited resources far more than much larger numbers of poor people.³¹

The different scales and comparisons all tell the same story. The richest

one-fifth are incredibly wealthy and the poorest one-fifth are desperately poor. Those of us in developed countries make up only one-fifth of the world's population, yet we consume two-thirds of the planet's resources.³² The United States makes up only 5 percent of the world's population, but according to the Center for a New American Dream,

Table 8—Daily per Capita Calorie Consumption by Region (1997 and 2020)



Source: *International Food Policy Research Institute*³³

The average American consumes about fifty-three times more goods and services than someone from China. The United States contains 5 percent of the world's population but accounts for 22 percent of fossil fuel consumption, 24 percent of carbon dioxide emissions, and 33 percent of paper and plastic use. A child born in the United States will create thirteen times as much ecological damage over the course of his or her lifetime than [sic] a child born in Brazil. He or she will drain as many resources as thirty-five natives of India.³⁴

The facts are clear. North Americans, Europeans, and Japanese devour an incredibly unequal share of the world's available resources. Whether measured in terms of GNP, PPP, or energy and food consumption, we are many, many times more affluent than the poor majority of our sisters and brothers.

Poverty at \$50,000 a Year?

It was late 1974. Millions were dying from starvation. But that was not the concern of Judd Arnett, a syndicated columnist with Knight Newspapers. In a column read (and probably believed) by millions of North Americans, Arnett lamented the fact that people earning \$15,000 (\$50,000 in 2004 dollars) a year were on the edge of poverty.³⁵ "One of the great mysteries of life to me," Arnett wrote, "is how a family in the [\$50,000] bracket, before taxes, or even [\$60,000,] can meet all its obligations and still educate its children."³⁶

A few years later *Newsweek* did a story titled "The Middle Class Poor," calmly reporting that U.S. citizens earning \$38,200, \$46,300, or even \$63,700 a year felt they were at the edge of poverty.³⁷ One resident of New York City grumbled that "you just can't live in this city on a hundred thousand dollars a year."³⁸ In the fall of 1995, a U.S. congressman announced that his salary of \$163,000 per year put him in the lower middle class.³⁹

To the vast majority of the world's people, such statements would be unintelligible—or dishonest. To be sure, we do need \$50,000, \$70,000, or even more each year if we insist on having two cars, an expensively furnished, sprawling suburban home, a million dollar life insurance policy, new clothes every time fashions change, the most recent "laborsaving devices" for home and garden, an annual three-week vacation, and so on. Many North Americans have come to expect precisely that. But that is hardly life at the edge of poverty.

How Generous Are We?

The United States is one of the richest nations in the world. But as Table 9 shows, the U.S. government ranks dead last (in percentage of GNP) among major Western donors of foreign aid. The U.S. gives just 0.14 percent (i.e., less than one-seventh of 1 percent!) of GNP in foreign aid. The United Kingdom ranks only slightly higher—seventh from the bottom.

Table 9—Estimated Official Development Assistance from Industrialized Countries as Percentage of GNP (2003/1993)

	2003	1993	2003	1993	
Denmark	.84	1.03	Australia	.25	.35
Norway	.92	1.01	Switzerland	.38	.33

Sweden	.70	.98	U.K.	.34	.31
Netherlands	.81	.82	Italy	.16	.31
France	.41	.63	Austria	.20	.30
Finland	.34	.46	Japan	.20	.26
Canada	.26	.45	New Zealand	.23	.25
Belgium	.61	.39	Ireland	.41	.20
Germany	.28	.37	United States	.14	.15

Source: *Organization for Co-operation and Development*.⁴⁰

Table 9 also shows that almost every country gives less foreign aid today than ten years ago, even though these nations have become more wealthy in the last ten years.

Popular opinion suggests we are far more generous. Several polls have shown that the average American thinks the U.S. government's spending on foreign aid is twenty to fifty times as much as it is in reality.⁴¹

The United States did display national generosity at the end of World War II. At the height of the Marshall Plan (begun in 1947 to rebuild war-torn Europe) we annually gave 2.79 percent of our total GNP.⁴² But by 1960 the figure for foreign aid had dropped to 0.53 percent of GNP, and by 2003 it had plummeted to a mere 0.14 percent (see Table 9). The richer we become, the less we share with others.

The same pattern holds for most rich nations. In 1961 and 1962, rich countries as a whole gave 0.52 percent of their total GNP in foreign aid. By 1965, it had decreased to .48. By 1970 it had declined to 0.34 percent. By 1993 the figure had fallen to a mere 0.30 percent. In 2003, it had fallen further to an average of 0.23 percent.⁴³ Ironically, between 1965 and 1980 the economies of rich countries grew at an annual rate of 3.6 percent, between 1980 and 1993 at an annual rate of 2.2 percent, and between 1993 and 2003 at an annual rate of 2.5 percent.⁴⁴ Although vastly richer, we shared a smaller percentage.

A comparison of Western expenditures on foreign aid and the military is startling. In 1991, major aid donors spent 3.55 percent of their GNP on military expenditures but gave only 0.34 percent of their GNP on military foreign aid. In 1992, world military spending was \$815 billion, which equaled the combined income of 49 percent of the world's people.⁴⁵ The level of global military spending in 2003 was fourteen times more than aid given to developing countries.⁴⁶

Is that the way we want to use our abundance?

For a time after the collapse of the Soviet Union, global military expenditures fell. Between 1987 and 1994, global military spending declined at an estimated annual rate of 3.6 percent. That yielded a cumulative peace dividend of \$935 billion—\$810 billion in industrialized countries and \$125 billion in developing countries.⁴⁷ Tragically, we were not willing to spend the peace dividend on increasing foreign aid for the poor. And in more recent years, especially since September 11, 2001, military expenditures, especially in the U.S., have rapidly increased.

Rationalizing Our Affluence

It would be impossible for us as a rich minority to live with ourselves if we did not invent plausible justifications. These rationalizations take many forms. Analyzing a few of the most common may help us spot each year's new models.

Lifeboat Ethics

Garrett Hardin, a distinguished biologist at the University of California at Santa Barbara, popularized the term *lifeboat ethics*. He provoked impassioned, widespread debate with his provocative articles on the subject.⁴⁸ He argued that we should not help the poor with food or aid. According to his theory, each rich country is a lifeboat that will survive only if it refuses to waste its limited resources on the hungry masses swimming in the water around it. If we eat together today, we will all starve together tomorrow. Furthermore, since poor countries "irresponsibly" permit unrestrained population growth, starvation is the only way to check the ever-growing number of hungry mouths. The poor will always reproduce like rabbits until starvation reduces their number. Hence, increased aid merely postpones the day of reckoning. Aid simply preserves more persons for ultimate starvation. Therefore, it is ethically correct to help them learn the hard way—by letting them starve now.

Hardin ignored data showing that poor countries can (and have) cut population growth fairly rapidly when they concentrate on improving the lot of

the poor. If the poor have a secure food supply, access to some (relatively inexpensive) health services, and modest educational opportunities, population growth tends to decline quickly. Lester Brown summarized these findings:

There is striking evidence that in an increasing number of poor countries . . . birth rates have dropped sharply despite relatively low per capita income . . . Examination of societies as different as China, Barbados, Sri Lanka, Uruguay, Taiwan, The Indian Punjab, Cuba and South Korea suggests a common factor. In all these countries, a large portion of the population has gained access to modern social and economic services—such as education, employment, and credit systems . . . There is increasing evidence that the very strategies which cause the greatest improvement in the welfare of the entire population also have the greatest effect on reducing population growth.⁴⁹

Harvard economist Amartya Sen made the same point in his important 1994 essay on population.⁵⁰

Education for women is especially important. Bread for the World reports that "education, especially of girls, is . . . strongly correlated with lower birthrates . . . In Bangladesh, a midday meal program designed to increase the enrollment of girls in school resulted in a 25 percent decline in birthrates over six years."⁵¹ Education delays the time when women marry and begin having children. It also gives them more self-confidence in making reproductive decisions with their husbands.

The right kind of aid—focused especially on empowering the poorest and educating women—will help check population growth.⁵² Hardin suggested doing nothing at a time when the right kind of action could produce dramatic improvement.

Another omission in Hardin's thesis is even more astonishing. He totally ignored the fact that there is more than enough food to feed everyone if it is shared fairly. The United Nations Development Programme reported that there is enough food available to offer everyone on the planet 2,500 calories per day (200 more than the minimum necessary).⁵³ The boat in which the rich sail is not an austere equipped lifeboat. It is a lavishly stocked luxury liner.

Hardin's proposal, of course, is also unrealistic. Hungry nations left to

starve would not disappear in submissive silence. India is one of the nations sometimes nominated for this dubious honor. A nation with nuclear weapons would certainly not tolerate such a decision.⁵⁴

To Evangelize the Rich

A second rationalization has a pious ring to it. Some evangelical Christians argue that they must live in affluence to evangelize the wealthy. Rationalization is dreadfully easy. Garden Grove Community Church in California has a lavish, multimillion-dollar plant complete with a series of water fountains that begin spraying when the minister touches a button in the pulpit. The pastor, Robert Schuller, defended his luxurious facilities:

We are trying to make a big, beautiful impression upon the affluent non-religious American who is riding by on this busy freeway. It's obvious that we are not trying to impress the Christians! . . . Nor are we trying to impress the social workers in the County Welfare Department. They would tell us that we ought to be content to remain in the Orange Drive-In Theater and give the money to feed the poor. But suppose we had given this money to feed the poor? What would we have today? We would still have hungry, poor people and God would not have this tremendous base of operations which He is using to inspire people to become more successful, more affluent, more generous, more genuinely unselfish in their giving of themselves.⁵⁵

Beautiful church construction is sometimes appropriate. But how many more glass cathedrals would we build if we first examined the needs of the billion-plus people who live on one dollar a day?

Trickle-Down Wealth

A lively conversation that I had some years ago with a wealthy friend illustrates a third widespread rationalization. This prominent business leader insisted that the best thing he could do for the poor was to buy more things for himself. If he purchased more Jaguars, he argued, then the economy

would grow and the poor would have more jobs. This is a dangerous half-truth. Fortunately, some of the benefits of a growing economy do trickle down to the poor—at least to a degree. My response to my friend, however, was that if he spent \$100,000 less on Jaguars and used that \$100,000 for direct economic empowerment of the poor (via David Bussau's micro-loans, for example—see chapter 9), the poor would benefit far more quickly and substantially. That way, the \$100,000 would offer the same stimulus to the economy *and* immediately reduce poverty. My friend insisted that buying Jaguars would work just as well.

Where does valid justification end and rationalization begin? We must, of course, avoid simplistic legalism. Christians certainly ought

to live in the suburbs as well as the inner city. But those who defend an affluent lifestyle on the basis of their call to witness to the rich must ask themselves hard questions:

- How much of my affluent lifestyle is directly related to my witnessing to rich neighbors?
- How much of it could I abandon for the sake of Christ's poor and still be able to witness effectively?
- Indeed how much of it *must* I abandon in order to faithfully proclaim the biblical Christ who taught that failure to feed the poor leads to eternal damnation (Matt. 25:45-46)?

In the coming decades rationalizations for affluence will abound. They will be popular and persuasive. "Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:23 NRSV). But all things are possible with God—if we will hear and obey his Word. We can move toward a more hopeful future for our world and more genuine joy and fulfillment in our personal lives if we affluent Christians will dare to allow the Bible to shape our relationship to a billion sons and daughters of poor Lazarus. Will rich Christians also be generous?



Study Questions

1. How is the gap between rich and poor different from what you had thought?
2. What are some of the best measures of that gap?
3. How does advertising contribute to our problem? What are some of the theological questions raised by advertising?
4. How does solving poverty help reduce overpopulation?
5. What rationalizations of affluence are most convincing? For yourself? Your friends?
6. Is there any sense in which this book is about joy and self-fulfillment? Explain.

Part Two

A Biblical Perspective on the Poor and Possessions

"If you preach the gospel in all aspects with the exception of the issues which deal specifically with your time you are not preaching the gospel at all."¹



Social scientists who examined the factors that shape American attitudes on matters related to the development of the poorest nations discovered that religion plays no significant role at all! Those with deep religious beliefs are no more concerned about assistance and development for the poor than are persons with little or no religious commitment.²

Most wealthy Christians have failed to seek God's perspective on the plight of our billion hungry neighbors—surely one of the most pressing issues of our time.

But I refuse to believe that this failure must inevitably continue. I believe there are millions of affluent Christians who care more about Jesus than anything else in the world. There are millions of Christians who will take any risk, make any sacrifice, forsake any treasure, if they see clearly that God's Word demands it. That is why Part Two—A Biblical Perspective on the Poor and Possessions—is the most important section of this book.

Part Two is full of Scripture. But even so it is only a small selection of the vast volume of biblical material. My book *For They Shall Be Fed* contains almost two hundred pages of biblical texts that relate directly to the four chapters in this section.³