

## Church at the Margins: A Theology of the economic margins

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/23012/chapter-2.pdf>

Margins are often places of growth and adaptation, edges, thresholds between places and people. The margins of a field can enable insects, birds, and wildflowers to develop and thrive.

To be marginalised as a person, however, is to be excluded, distanced, and disconnected from the life of a community by others. The existence of marginalisation in the human community is an example of sin. God loves and values every human being. Processes which discriminate and marginalise are not what God desires for the human community.

Marginalisation is a process and a condition. The Bible contains many stories of people being excluded or dominated by others due to their gender, ethnicity, physical, or mental ill health and poverty. To be born into poverty in the biblical text, often resulted in you and your family experiencing shame and exclusion. Marginalisation caused by economic poverty has always had a devastating impact on the lives of individuals and communities, contributing to mental and physical ill health.

In the biblical stories God persistently highlights the injustices of the human community. The prophets frequently communicate God's message of justice, and the offence caused to God when people become wealthy by oppressing people in poverty and failing to share with people in need. Through the prophets God calls the wealthy to repentance. God's character reveals a God of justice. The presence of poverty contradicts the will and justice of God. God is not biased to the poor, God is for all, but the biblical story indicates that God does have a preferential option for people experiencing economic injustice.

The good news of God revealed in Jesus Christ demonstrates the challenge offered to human systems which marginalise others. Jesus sees the extraordinary worth of people, including those outcast by others, and seeks to restore their worth, dignity and value.

The work of the church at the economic margins recognises the harm caused by marginalisation, and the sin of economic exclusion. We recognise that the multiple systems which marginalise others are challenged by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not only does Jesus challenge the social systems which marginalise people experiencing poverty, on many occasions Jesus tells us that in the face of the poor we see God, 'Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me' Matthew 25v 40.' Jesus is inviting us into the expansive vision of the diversity of God's image which includes people experiencing poverty. Church at the economic margins is a theology of liberation and resistance. Liberating people from economic poverty to discover their intrinsic worth, dignity and value and resisting the privileged position of wealth and power. It also resists seeing people as 'lacking or deficient and in need' and recognises and celebrates the gifts and talents of people at the margins.

God is good news to people experiencing poverty and good news to people who are wealthy. The good news for people who are wealthy includes freedom from the sin of being unjust and exploiting others. This includes individuals, and the social structures and systems of the human community. Jesus spent time with people who were marginalised by the social structures of his community, including women, children, those stigmatised by their physical health and people who were impoverished. Jesus highlighted the needs of the marginalised in such a way, that it is reasonable to conclude, that to abandon people experiencing poverty is to abandon the gospel. Our tendency when we want to change is to look towards the wealthy and powerful, those with influence, Jesus often looked towards those who were oppressed, those who were marginalised.

In Matthew 5, Jesus spoke to the crowds and offered a reflection on how to live. Jesus begins with, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Jesus echoes the text of Isaiah 61 v1, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to bring good news to the oppressed.' Jesus does not say 'Blessed are

those in poverty.' Good news to the poor is freedom to live a life of dignity and value. Church at the economic margins is not new, neither is it an initiative, it is the gospel of Christ. Developing new Christian communities amongst economically marginalised people is an invitation for Christians to act like Christians, and to share the good news of the gospel which includes challenging economic poverty.

### Questions

- What are you noticing about economic poverty in your community?
- Where could you listen and learn from others in your community?

### Church at the economic Margins: Beatitudes

Blessed are those who challenge unjust economic structures, for they will be signs of hope.

Blessed are those who amplify the voices and stories of others, for they will learn the wisdom of interdependence.

Blessed are those who recognize their vulnerability and brokenness, for they will resist being the saviours and heroes of other people's stories.

Blessed are those who respond to the needs of others, without the need for recognition or reward, for they serve Christ himself.

Blessed are those who protest and campaign, for they draw attention to injustice.

Blessed are those who nurture friendship amongst diverse people, for they will become an inclusive community.

Blessed are those who rage with anger, for they challenge us to face uncomfortable truths.

Blessed are the curious, for they will see beyond the answers of the powerful.

Blessed are those who celebrate the worth, dignity and value of every human being, for they will recognize the face of God.

Blessed are those who work for racial justice, for they challenge the sin of racism and know the true richness and diversity of God's image.

Blessed are those who enable the leadership of others, for they sustain the present and the future.

Rejoice and be glad, for those who truly listen and learn from people experiencing poverty will share in the liberating, life-giving message of the gospel of Christ.

*Deacon Eunice Attwood, Church at the Margins Officer*

### Questions

- Which of these 'beatitudes' do you recognise you/your church is attentive to?
- Which 'beatitudes' needs more attention from you/your church community?

Deacon Eunice Attwood, Church at the Margins Officer