

The Tennessee Tribune

Volume 22, No. 40 3 Sections

THURSDAY, October 6-12, 2011

\$1.00

The Poor Will Always Be With You: The Challenge and Call of Kingdom Building

A Commentary by Jason Curry



The Reverend Dr. Jason Richard Curry is Dean of the Fisk Memorial Chapel at Fisk University. He can be reached at jcurry@fisk.edu or www.fiskmemorialchapel.com.

A few weeks ago, I asked my students the following question: "Is poverty evil?" We were discussing Adams Smith's version of capitalism, and we came to the conclusion that some people were destined to become wealthy in society while others were going to be relegated to the lowest rung of the economic ladder. I thought about Dr. King's work with the Poor People's Campaign, the War on Poverty, Mother Teresa's work with the poor in India, and Daniel Finn's criticism of capitalism; therefore, I knew, or at least I thought I knew, that someone was going to champion the cause of the poor. To my surprise, no one agreed with Finn when he stated that poverty was evil. Even though many of my students had come from economically challenged backgrounds, loved Jesus Christ, and agreed that the poor do not want to be poor, they stated that poverty was an unfortunate but unavoidable way of life for many throughout our global community.

I believe in making profits as well as in free and competitive markets, but I also believe that we should strive to eliminate poverty. Also, I am grateful for the responses of my students, even if they challenge my understanding of the world, because our conversations help both parties to grow intellectually and spiritually so that we may become better people. I went to the words of Jesus for insight and clarification about the value of the poor, and the gospel according to Matthew offered these words: "The poor will always be with you... (Matthew 26:11)." Jesus goes on to say: "Do not work for the food which spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you... (John 6:27)"

Jesus was primarily concerned about our spiritual lives, but his love for people who were poor was demonstrated through his actions. Jesus restored sight to the blind, healed the lame, fed those who were

hungry, cured those with leprosy, restored someone who had had been overtaken with evil and helped many others who did not have the economic resources to help themselves. God may not eliminate poverty, and the poor may always be with us, but Jesus declares that we have a moral mandate to feed the hungry, help those who are thirsty, be hospitable to strangers, provide clothes to those who need clothing, minister to those who are sick and visit those who are in prison (Matthew 25:42-43)." Kingdom building for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ necessarily involves helping the economically disadvantaged among us. Let us continue to embrace them and work toward their collective betterment so that we may fulfill our role in kingdom building here on earth.