Christians and Poverty

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Supervisor: Prof. D.E. de Villiers
For Mar–Eli,*

angel

sent by God

to facilitate my growth

* Mar–Eli means ‘the bitterness of my God’

[mar (Heb.) - bitter; cry or weep bitterly]
[Eli = my God (Aramaic) (see Mt. 27: 46)]
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H.P.P. (Hennie) Lötter (9630595)

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CHRISTIANS AND POVERTY — SUMMARY

In this thesis I want to answer the simple question: “What is the message of the Bible about poverty for us today?” To get a simple answer to this question of Christian ethics I do four things. They are as follows: [1] I develop an understanding of the complexities of poverty, [2] I explain the moral issues raised by the complexities of poverty, [3] I analyse Biblical texts related to issues of poverty, and [4] I develop a theory of Christian ethics for dealing with poverty in contemporary societies.

The plan of the thesis is as follows. In Chapter One I draw a profile of poverty in South Africa. Then I look at theological discussions of poverty in recent theology. Afterwards follows a brief methodological justification for the interdisciplinary nature of this study in Christian ethics. In Chapter Two I give a fuller methodological justification for my project. I answer the question whether ancient religious texts from different socio-cultural periods in history can teach us anything about poverty and wealth. I justify a concept of theology as science, based on my conception of science as a complex system. I also develop my own conception of the hermeneutics that are involved. In Chapter Three I develop two arguments, based on empirical team research done in South Africa. One argument shows that Christians ought to take poverty seriously as a result of the serious effects it has on individuals and members of their households. The other argument makes the point that poverty is a threat to democratic societies.

Chapter Four explains the complexity of poverty and the link between poverty and wealth. I give definitions of poverty and wealth. I then discuss the possible causes of poverty and show why poverty is a complex phenomenon. In Chapter Five I explain the concept of justice in political philosophy and demonstrate why this concept is particularly appropriate for articulating the moral issues involved in issues of poverty and wealth.
In Chapter Six I analyse and interpret all texts from the Old Testament that might be relevant for understanding or dealing with poverty and wealth. In Chapter Seven I analyse and interpret all texts from the New Testament that might be relevant for understanding or dealing with poverty and wealth. In the final chapter, Chapter Eight, I develop a comprehensive Christian theory of poverty and wealth. I compare the social context of the Bible with those of contemporary democracies. I link my philosophical analyses of poverty with textual evidence from the Bible. The proposed Christian ethics on poverty and riches are linked to the larger themes of the Biblical message. This is necessary, as I believe the Biblical message about poverty cannot be divorced from many of the major themes of the Bible. Finally, I explore the role a Christian ethics of wealth and poverty can play in shaping public philosophy and policy in contemporary constitutional democracies.

Key terms:
Poverty, wealth, liberation theology, Christian ethics, science, justice, democracy, injustice, hermeneutics, biblical ethics
CHRISTENE EN ARMOEDE — OPSOMMING


Die plan van die proefskrif is soos volg. In Hoofstuk Een skets ek ‘n profiel van armoede in Suid-Afrika. Daarna kyk ek na teologiese besprekings van armoede in onlangse teologie. Die hoofstuk sluit af met ‘n kort verduideliking van my sining oor die aard van Christelike etiek en die verloop van my studie. In Hoofstuk Twee gee ek ‘n vollediger metodologiese regverdiging van my projek deur die rasionaliteit van teologie as wetenskap te beredeneer. Ek beantwoord die vraag of die ou antieke tekste van die Bybel ons vandag nog iets oor rykdom en armoede kan leer. Ek regverdig die idee van teologie as wetenskap, wat voldoen aan ‘n wetenskapsbeeld van wetenskap as komplekse sisteem. Ek ontwikkel ook my eie sining van die hermeneutiek wat betrokke is.

In Hoofstuk Drie ontwikkel ek twee argumente, gebaseer op empiriese spannavorsing wat in Suid-Afrika gedoen is. Een argument toon aan dat Christene armoede ernstig moet opneem as gevolg van die skadelike gevolge wat dit op individue en huishoudings het. Die ander argument beredeneer die punt dat armoede ‘n bedreiging vir demokratiese samelewings is.
Hoofstuk Vier verduidelik die kompleksiteit van armoede en die verband tussen rykdom en armoede. Ek bied definisies van beide rykdom en armoede en toon aan watter sake as indikatore van armoede beskou word. Daarna bespreek ek moontlike oorsake van armoede en toon aan waarom armoede 'n komplekse verskynsel is.

In Hoofstuk Vyf bespreek ek die begrip geregtigheid in politieke filosofie en toon aan waarom hierdie begrip besonder geskik is om die morele kwessies rakende armoede te artikuleer. In Hoofstuk Ses ontleed en interpreteer ek alle tekste in die Ou Testament wat relevant mag wees vir die verstaan en hantering van armoede. In Hoofstuk Sewe ontleed en interpreteer ek alle tekste in die Nuwe Testament wat relevant mag wees vir die verstaan en hantering van armoede.

In die laaste hoofstuk, Hoofstuk Agt, ontwikkel ek 'n omvattend Christelike teorie van rykdom en armoede. Ek vergelyk eers die sosiale konteks van die Bybel met die konteks van hedendaagse samelewings om vas te stel of boodskap van die Bybel gepas vir vandag kan wees. Ek verbind my filosofiese analises van armoede met die tekstuele getuienis van die Bybel. Die voorgestelde Christelike etiek van rykdom en armoede word verbind aan die groter temas van die Bybel. Dit is noodsaaklik, aangesien ek oortuig is dat die Bybelse boodskap oor rykdom en armoede nie losgemaak kan word van baie van die hooftemas van die Bybel nie. Ten slotte ondersoek ek die rol wat 'n Christelike etiek van rykdom en armoede kan speel in die vorming van openbare filosofie en beleid in hedendaagse konstitusionele demokrasieë.

**Sleuteltermes:**
Armoede, rykdom, bevrydingsteologie, Christelike etiek, wetenskap, geregtigheid, demokrasie, onreg, hermeneutiek, bybelse etiek
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