

FEAST TO FAMINE?

from Christmas to Lent...

It's only a few weeks since Christmas, but apart from the extra pounds some of us gained during the festive season and the debts that may take months to pay off, it's all over for another year. And now we're nearly into Lent - traditionally a time of self-denial in preparation for Holy Week and Easter. Cynics might say there's a connection between the two and that we need some privations during Lent to recuperate from the excesses of Christmas!

Maybe there's some truth in that. For our modern observances of Lent are about as far removed from their scriptural origins as our Christmas festivities are. The fact is that Jesus' 40 days of fasting in the wilderness was not a precursor to his passion and death; but was in preparation for his ministry as the divinely acclaimed Son of God on earth.



So what now?

And so, while giving up luxuries during Lent may be good for our self-discipline, it could be more useful to focus on self-denial as a way of preparing ourselves for our own ministry. We might note what Isaiah says (ch. 58) about occasional fasting: 'Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only for a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head as a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes?' (v. 5)

Instead of this, true fasting should have a positive outcome that will benefit others as well as ourselves. 'Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of

injustice...to share your food with the hungry...? Then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become as the noonday.' (vv. 6-10)

Following his time in the wilderness and his rejection of the ways of this world as offered to him by Satan, Jesus' ministry centred on putting the last first, exalting the humble, feeding the hungry and reaching out to those who were normally regarded as social outcasts. Of such is the real kingdom of God (Mathew 25: 31-46).

LAUNCHING A YEAR-ROUND 50/50 MOVEMENT!

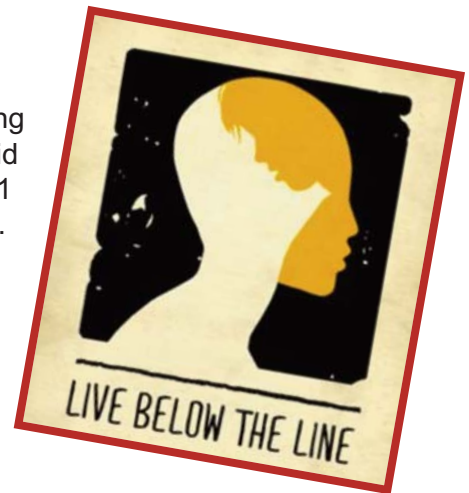
And so there is a natural link between CASC-aid's 50/50 charitable giving campaign at Christmas and Lent. 50/50 giving does not have to be confined to our Christmas spending. It can become a whole lifestyle change. **There is scope for 50/50 giving at other times of year, too!**



This Lent, while cutting back on the chocolate, why not turn a negative into a positive? The money saved on chocolate or other luxuries could be given to charity. The money spent on non-essential items over the coming weeks - outings, entertainment etc - could be totalled up and an equivalent amount donated to a project working with the neediest, wherever they are. Better still, an amount equal to the whole amount we spend on feeding ourselves during Lent could be given away. Which brings us to ...

'Living Below The Line'

A campaign to raise awareness of the hardships endured by those living below the poverty line worldwide has been promoted by several aid agencies in recent years. Those taking part are challenged to live on £1 a day for five days, while others are invited to sponsor them for doing so. Typically, this amount is between £5 and £10 per sponsor. How much more might be raised if everyone taking part - both those 'living below the line' and their sponsors - donated to charity the amount they would normally spend on their weekly food shopping? It would probably at least treble in size. Another example of what could be achieved through 50/50 giving!



...and from 'Living Below The Line' back to Christmas

Still many months to go! Nevertheless, by May/June, the countdown to Christmas 2013 will have started in manufacturing, retailing, leisure and even charitable ventures! This year, watch out for some changes to the CASC-aid website, which we hope will make it even more accessible and thought provoking.

And also watch for announcements about new developments planned for the autumn. There is a groundswell now of individuals and groups who are increasingly concerned that our Christmas celebrations are disproportionate to the actual event (see www.casc-aid.org.uk/further-reading) and it is hoped that we can bring some of them together to discuss other ways of observing this most important of birthdays. This will include church leaders, children's workers and debt counsellors as well as anyone who would like to take part in either a face to face or a 'virtual' debate.

If you would like to have your say, please get in touch via contact@casc-aid.org.uk

In January 2013, Oxfam announced that the amount earned by the wealthiest 100 people in the world could end global poverty four times over. But instead of passing the buck - literally! - to others, many of us may be able to help achieve this goal ourselves just by reallocating our own spending and giving priorities. 50/50 giving at Christmas 2012 alone could have raised tens of £billions for charitable ventures with the homeless and destitute at home and overseas.

Even without taking into account the effects of global warming, the world's population is increasing while its resources are diminishing. But maybe there is still enough for all - if we learn to share it.

CASC-aid would love to hear from you
Get in touch with us at www.casc-aid.org.uk/feedback



CASC-aid and 50/50 are awareness raising campaigns only.
They do not raise funds for themselves or for individual charities.