



**CASC-AID: A BIBLICAL APPROACH
TO SEASONAL GIVING**

1. What is CASC-aid?

CASC-aid is a campaign to raise awareness about our seasonal spending and to initiate a different approach to it. It derives from the acronym for Campaign Against the Secularisation of Christmas - by the promotion of charitable giving or aid. Its scriptural origin is Amos 5: 21-24. In this passage, after denouncing the excesses of religious festivals (even 700 years before the birth of Christ this was evidently a major problem!), the prophet articulates God's wish for justice to 'flow like rivers; righteousness like a never-failing stream' (cascade). Hence CASC-aid seeks to redress the imbalance between the amount we spend on ourselves, especially during our Christmas celebrations, and the pressing needs of those living in poverty throughout the world. In so doing, it also seeks to alleviate seasonal stress and personal debt at home.



Copyright Pete Dredge (www.petedredge.co.uk)

How does CASC-aid work?

CASC-aid promotes an approach of '50/50' giving. It encourages us (a) to take stock of our own spending before we do it; and (b) to aim to set up to half that amount aside for donations to charity for those who can afford to do so; or for reducing debt or helping stimulate savings toward essential purchases for those who cannot. At Christmas 2011, according to various sources including www.moneysupermarket.com, average adult spending in the UK was roughly £500. On the basis of 50/50 giving, this could mean that the 'average' adult would set aside £250 at the outset, spending the remaining £250 on personal gifts and other seasonal items. Through this method, personal debt and its accompanying stress could be vastly relieved; while donations to charity, as appropriate, could substantially increase.



Why bother?

On the one hand, Christmas is the greatest single cause of personal debt in this country, and is accompanied by much social malaise: family breakdown, divorce, even suicide. That these problems occur in the name of a supposedly Christian festival should be unacceptable to the church as a whole. At the same time, the apparently massive sums needed to reduce poverty in various parts of the world are trivial by comparison with the most conservative estimate of £20bn spent in our Christmas shopping spree in 2011. They could easily be raised by simply reallocating our Christmas spending - at no extra cost whatever to ourselves.

2. Why 50/50 Giving?



During Advent, we are preparing to meet Jesus. The principle of 50/50 giving is suggested in scripture as a way of doing just that. In Luke 3, John The Baptist admonishes his followers to prepare for their own encounter with Christ by sharing their possessions and their food with those who have none (vv. 10 ff). This is the only time that we are given any guidance on the subject. There is no mention of exchanging gifts among ourselves: the Magi (Matthew 2:11) were bringing gifts for God incarnate, not for each other. Our gift giving tradition originates from the Roman festival of the Saturnalia that the designation of 25 December as Christmas Day was supposed to replace, not from the Gospels.

The purpose of Advent

Moreover, we should remember that Advent itself was initially intended as a period of preparation for the *second* coming of Christ. The first followers of Jesus, and the founders of the early church, had no need to celebrate His birth. That was already in the past for them (as indeed, it is for us). They were anticipating His return, in glorious kingship, following His resurrection. And how had Jesus told them to prepare for that event? His instructions, in Matthew 25 (31-46), were an elaboration of those of John The Baptist, noted above. They were to put 'the least' first to bring about the Kingdom of God.



Different expectations, same preparations

Whether we observe Advent as a period of expectation of the first or the second coming of Christ, our preparations should be the same in both cases. 'He that has two tunics should give one to him who has none' (Luke 3:11). 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the least of [them], you did for me' (Matthew 25: 40). Sharing with those who have nothing is the essence of 50/50 giving.

3. Relieving Poverty Everywhere

...Overseas

The effects of 50/50 giving - especially to agencies and projects working with the homeless, the hungry and the dispossessed - could be dramatic. Such giving nationally, at Christmas 2011, could have totalled £10bn or even more. Giving on this scale might not only help to alleviate short-term crises, such as those caused by drought, floods, war, or natural disasters; or to fund ongoing projects, but could change the very nature of overseas aid.

In recent years, £1bn could have paid off Haiti's national debt following the earthquake of 2010, releasing badly needed funds to rebuild infrastructure and housing that could have better withstood Hurricane Sandy two years later. The same amount could have rebuilt Pakistan's roads following the floods of 2010, making it possible to take food and medicines to remote areas that remained completely cut off; vastly improved the plight of millions suffering from the effects of drought and famine in East and West Africa in 2011-12, or that of refugees fleeing the fighting in Syria today. £1bn is a huge sum to be raised when people have already given generously in response to an initial appeal. But it could be easily, and painlessly, raised through our Christmas gifts.

If countries are enabled, through our giving as well as through government aid, to pay off their debts, build secure infrastructure and establish their own education and health systems (with professional help from other nations as appropriate), this could help reduce the piecemeal approach that currently reflects the activities of different outside agencies and establish lasting partnerships among nations based on equality rather than on aid. Lobbying for change at a political level is important and should continue, but it should not replace personal giving as the primary focus of our efforts. Jesus exhorted us to respond individually as well as collectively to the needs of others; not - initially - to form committees and sign petitions to do it. As Christians we are personally accountable for our own response. With one-fifth of the world's population living below the poverty line, we have an obligation to act ourselves.



...And at home

Of course, there are many people in need in this country also. It is often said that charity begins at home. 50/50 giving at Christmas could prevent many charitable ventures from closing because of lack of funds, and could help to check the rising tide of homelessness among our own population.

And there's another aspect to this. A 50/50 approach to Christmas spending could help those who struggle with their finances take control of their budgets and not incur massive debts as a result of the festivities. Those who feel they cannot afford to increase their charitable giving should not feel under any pressure to do so. Which of us does not feel guilty as we put those 'begging letters', which proliferate in the run-up to Christmas, straight in the bin?

Instead, debt advice agencies - both secular (like CABs) and faith-based - could perhaps encourage clients who are under seasonal spending stress to try to spend just half the amount they spent the previous Christmas, and set the rest aside to help with household bills or essential purchases such as food and utilities; or maybe even to help toward a family holiday later in the year. This is as valid a response to a 50/50 campaign as giving to charity, for it is helping to reduce poverty at home too. The message needs to be preached, loud and clear, that it is not necessary to spend a lot of money in order to enjoy Christmas to the full. Excessive spending that causes personal debt directly contradicts Jesus' claim that He came 'to bring good news to the poor' (Luke 4: 18-21)

4. Christmas Is For Celebrating!



Finally, CASC-aid does not oppose Christmas itself! Rather, it seeks to reclaim it as a Christian festival. Giving gifts to one another can be a symbol of our love of family and friends. But that love could often be manifested by other means than through expensive gifts that may not be affordable and may not be needed, or even wanted. There are different ways of giving: gift-wrapped IOUs for future outings together, or for shopping in the post-Christmas sales and donating the amount saved to charity, to name but two. And inviting a neighbour in for coffee might sometimes be an alternative to reciprocating a Christmas card with another card. There are endless possibilities for different types of giving that might strengthen family and community relationships; while having the effect of vastly increasing the amount of money available to give to those in the greatest need - wherever they are.

Further suggestions and free downloadable materials are available at www.christmasgiving.net



*CASC-aid is an awareness raising campaign only.
It does not raise funds for itself or for individual charities.
copyright CASC-aid 2013*