

HOW MUCH DO WE DESERVE? AN INQUIRY INTO DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

A STUDY GUIDE

By Richard S. Gilbert

This online study guide has been prepared to enable congregations and other groups interested in economic justice to use *How Much Do We Deserve?* more effectively. A study session is planned for each chapter of the book, but leaders and groups may adapt it to their own timetables.

Since *How Much Do We Deserve?* was written, much has happened in the American economy. We have moved from the buoyant prosperity of the 1990s to the economic turmoil of the new millennium, including a stock market plunge, higher unemployment, corporate scandals, reduced government spending on human services, and war in the Middle East. Although the principles that undergird the book have not changed, the context for understanding them has.

This study guide will attempt to set the new context, updating material and pointing to other resources. Skinner House Books and the author join in hoping that participants in this process will both clarify their understanding and be moved to action for economic justice.

Practical suggestions: Page numbers refer to the companion book *How Much Do We Deserve?* unless otherwise indicated. There are time indications for each activity. These are simply guidelines. Take time for ingathering and time for a break. You may wish to open and close your program with a brief worship service planned either by the group leader or by group participants. You may wish to limit each session to 90 minutes. In some cases there are alternative activities suggested. In short, the program is as flexible as you want it to be. Adapt it to your group and to the local situation. Use the discussion to launch a social action program in your congregation. Please provide feedback to Skinner House Books (skinner_house@uua.org) and/or to the author (rsgilbert@aol.com).

SESSION 1: HOW SHOULD WE SLICE THE PIE?

Purpose:

- To get acquainted.
- To examine the historic approaches to just economic distribution.
- To begin developing one's own criteria for a just economic distribution.

Preparations:

- Read "How Should We Slice the Pie?" (pp. 1-28) in *How Much Do We Deserve?*
- Write the following on 3" x 5" cards (one occupation per card): welfare recipient, artist, teacher, farmer, lawyer, laborer, minister, business executive, carpenter, and doctor.

Ingathering Activity: Making a Name Tag (30 minutes)

Please make a name tag by filling in the card in the following way:

The most critical economic issue we face *An ethical value that applies to economics*

Your name
Occupation or Avocation

An ethical question *Your learning priority for this seminar*
pertaining to the economic order

Pair up the group and have each partner interview the other about their name tag. Ask each partner to introduce his or her partner to the group. Allow three minutes for the interviews and about one minute each for the introductions.

Overview of Seminar (5 minutes)

Summarize the material in the introductions to this guide and to the book along with any local background material that might be interesting. Discuss time, place, and frequency of meeting. The program is designed to run for nine weeks, two hours per session. Participants should have read the appropriate chapter in the text in advance of the session. If each person does not have access to a book, arrange for sharing, library loans, or purchase. Develop a sign-up sheet for refreshments. Take care of administrative details—course fee, refreshments, etc.

Activity: The "Original Position" Exercise (60 minutes)

This is an exercise in imagination and simulation. Please come to it with as fresh and open a mind as possible. Imagine you are at a gathering that is expected to create a new society. You are among rational people with roughly similar needs and interests. You are roughly equal in terms of power and ability so that none is able to dominate the others. You are to make your decisions by balancing fairness and enlightened self-interest. You wish to establish the economic guidelines for a truly just social order that will work in the world.

You live behind a “veil of ignorance.” You do not know how well you will fare in this new social environment. There is an equal chance you will succeed or fail—that you will become the most or the least affluent in the group.

The annual income available to you is \$200,000. There are ten “work positions” (listed below) that are necessary to maintain this society. Allocate the income as fairly as possible. After you have made your allocations, draw a card to find out your work position. Compare that work position with the income you have assigned to it. Share your feelings with the group.

<i>Work Position</i>	<i>\$ Income</i>	<i>Work Position</i>	<i>\$ Income</i>
1. welfare recipient	_____	6. laborer	_____
2. artist	_____	7. minister	_____
3. teacher	_____	8. business executive	_____
4. farmer	_____	9. carpenter	_____
5. lawyer	_____	10. doctor	_____

Discussion Questions:

- Would you rather have an economic system with large income discrepancies in which some can become rich, than one in which income is more evenly divided and no one is rich?
- Would it have made any difference if the dollar amount had been in capital rather than annual income?
- Do you agree with the following two principles of justice?

First, each person participating in a practice, or affected by it, has an equal right to the most extensive liberty compatible with a like liberty for all.

Second, inequalities are arbitrary unless it is reasonable to expect that they will work out to everyone’s advantage and provided the positions and offices to which they attach, or from which they may be gained, are open to all.

Activity: The Fair Income Exercise (25 minutes)

Below are listed statements expressing several criteria for income distribution. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the statements in the following way: (1) strongly agree (2) agree, (3) neutral or don’t know, (4) disagree, (5) strongly disagree. Please add your own criteria in the space below and rank accordingly.

Fair Income Criteria:

Ranking:

Moral equality as persons.

No superfluity until basic needs of all are met.

1 2 3 4 5

Proportional need. People receive according to their ability to use goods reasonably.	1	2	3	4	5
Efforts and sacrifice based on labor and exertion. Those who work harder deserve to be compensated accordingly.	1	2	3	4	5
Contribution to final productivity. This may be based on high skill levels or superior effort.	1	2	3	4	5
Contribution to final productivity in ways that do not depend on exertion. One example is capital investment.	1	2	3	4	5
Risk. People who risk loss of investment deserve to be compensated for the risk.	1	2	3	4	5
Scarcity. People who possess rare skills deserve to be compensated at a higher rate than others.	1	2	3	4	5
Contribution to the public good. People who work to serve the commonweal should be compensated more than those who pursue self-interest	1	2	3	4	5
Other.	1	2	3	4	5

Discussion Questions:

How do you feel about the various theories of distributive justice outlined in the first chapter?

- Hinduism: “There is enough wealth to meet everyone’s need, but not everyone’s greed.” (Mohandas Gandhi)
- Buddhism: Right livelihood is the maximum of well-being with the minimum of consumption.
- Islam: Wealth, justly earned, is a bounty from God and should be spent to redress imbalance.
- Judaism: God as Creator finds poverty an affront to human dignity and enters into a covenant with humanity to share earth’s abundance as widely as possible.
- Christianity: God’s prophet Jesus challenges the spiritual validity of the wealthy, while taking on the poor as a special mission.
- Greco-Roman teaching: Limits should be placed on both wealth and poverty: “It is impossible . . . to be both good and excessively rich.” (Plato)

- Catholicism and John Ryan's "canons" of distributive justice: the canon of equality, the canon of needs, the canon of effort and sacrifice, the canon of productivity, the canon of scarcity, and the canon of human welfare.
- Protestant teaching: There is a religious passion for equality which seeks a rough balance between a necessary individual freedom to prosper and the just claims of the poor, who must be included in the community.
- Utilitarian teaching: Economic utility (efficiency) is the prime value in economic distribution, for it will eventually maximize the economic goods of all beneficiaries.
- Libertarian teaching: Economic justice is the result of maximizing individual liberty in pursuit of economic ends, provided the rules of the game are fair and enforced.
- Social contract: Economic justice in distribution is basically an agreement within a free society to meet the basic needs of all by limiting individual liberty to the smallest extent possible.
- Covenantal pragmatism: The needs of the poor take moral priority over the wants of the rich; the freedom of the dominated takes moral priority over the liberty of the powerful; the participation of marginal groups takes moral priority over the order that excludes them.

Preparation for the Next Session:

- Read "Distributive Injustice in Practice" (pp. 29-66) and Session 2 of this study guide.
- Bring in items from the media or personal experience on economic justice issues for Show and Tell discussion.

SESSION 2: DISTRIBUTIVE INJUSTICE IN PRACTICE

Purpose:

- To learn the current dimensions of income distribution in the U.S.
- To ascertain the scope of poverty in the U.S. and the local community.
- To assess personal and group knowledge of income disparities.

Preparations:

- Read “Distributive Injustice in Practice” (pp. 29-66) in *How Much Do We Deserve?*
- Display materials group members have brought.
- Display enlargements of charts found in the text on walls or easels.

Ingathering Activity: Show and Tell (15 minutes)

Invite participants to present items on economic justice in the media or from personal experience.

Activity: The Economic Pie Quiz (45 minutes)

Complete the following quiz and discuss. Correct answers are at the end of the quiz.

1. What is the ratio of CEO compensation to the average factory worker’s salary?
a. ___ 10 to 1 b. ___ 25 to 1 c. ___ 75 to 1 d. ___ 400 to 1
2. Today, how many American children below age eighteen live in poverty?
a. ___ 1 out of 20 b. ___ 1 out of 10 c. ___ 1 out of 6
3. Today, roughly, how many Americans over sixty-five live at or near the poverty line?
a. ___ 1 out of 20 b. ___ 1 out of 10 c. ___ 1 out of 5
4. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure Survey, the poorest fifth of the population with an average income of \$7,946 per capita pay a cumulative tax rate of 18 percent on all forms of taxation—income, excise, sales, property, and payroll. What is the cumulative tax rate of the richest fifth of the population with an average income of \$116,666?
a. ___ 19 percent b. ___ 25 percent c. ___ 38 percent d. ___ 47 percent
5. In which year was the income disparity between the richest quintile (fifth) and the poorest quintile the greatest? a. ___ 1950 b. ___ 1960 c. ___ 1975 d. ___ 2001
6. How many children in the United States are without any kind of health care coverage?
a. ___ 3 million b. ___ 9 million c. ___ 18 million
7. As welfare roles have dropped to approximately half of their 1996 numbers when federal welfare reform was instituted, what has happened to poverty over that period?
a. ___ it has dropped dramatically b. ___ stayed the same c. ___ increased slightly
8. What is the percentage of total personal income you believe the top 5 percent and each of the five quintiles receives?
a. ___ top 5 percent

- b. ___ first quintile (richest fifth)
- c. ___ second quintile
- d. ___ middle quintile
- e. ___ fourth quintile
- f. ___ fifth quintile (poorest fifth)

9. What happened to the median household income (half of all households below, half above) between 2000 and 2001?
- a. ___ up 5.5 percent b. ___ remained about the same c. ___ down 2.2 percent
10. President Bush's 2003 proposals for tax cuts give each American taxpayer an average cut of \$1,083. Under this formula what percentage of all tax filers would receive tax cuts of less than \$100?
- a. ___ 11 percent b. ___ 28 percent c. ___ 49 percent d. ___ 65 percent
11. What was the poverty line for a family of four in 2001?
- a. ___ \$13,500 b. ___ \$8,500 c. ___ \$18,000
12. What is the impact of government cash transfers on poverty?
- a. ___ increases poverty rate by 5 percent
 - b. ___ neutral impact—does not affect the poverty rate
 - c. ___ reduces poverty rate by 7.5 percent
 - d. ___ eliminates poverty
13. How many children do federal programs lift out of poverty?
- a. ___ 1 in 3 out of poverty b. ___ 1 in 2 c. ___ 1 in 5
14. How many people over 65 do federal programs lift out of poverty?
- a. ___ 1 in 5 b. ___ 3 of 5 c. ___ 4 of 5
15. Much has been made of the stock market as antidote to income disparity. What percentage of American households hold no stock?
- a. ___ 75 percent b. ___ 60 percent c. ___ 25 percent d. ___ 10 percent
16. Women earn on average what percentage of men's income?
- a. ___ 65.8 percent b. ___ 50.3 percent c. ___ 77.5 percent d. ___ 85.2 percent
17. What happened to overall health care costs from 2000 to 2001?
- a. ___ increased 5 percent b. ___ decreased 5 percent c. ___ increased over 12 percent
- d. ___ remained flat
18. How much will a full-time employee working 52 weeks per year earn at the federal minimum wage (\$5.15 per hour)?
- a. ___ \$7,500 b. ___ \$9,000 c. ___ \$11,000 d. ___ \$15,000
19. When the 2001 tax cuts are fully enacted, how much will the richest 1 percent receive?
- a. almost \$500 billion b. almost \$250 billion c. almost \$100 billion
20. What are the respective cost estimates of spending by the pharmaceutical industry on research and development as compared to advertising and marketing?
- a. ___ \$30 billion to \$45 billion b. ___ \$15 billion to \$20 billion

c. ____ \$20 billion to \$15 billion

Answers to Quiz:

1. (d) 419 to 1, up from 44 to 1 in 1965. If the trend continues, the average CEO would make the salary equivalent of more than 150,000 workers by 2050. In another study, United for a Fair Economy and the Institute for Policy Studies found that chief executives at 23 corporations under investigation for improper accounting received \$1.4 billion, on average \$62 million each, in the last three years. Meanwhile, their companies' stock values plunged \$530 billion and they laid off 162,000 workers. (Diane Stafford, *The Kansas City Star*, August 26, 2002)
2. (c) 1 out of 6, or 11.7 million children. (United States Census Bureau, September 24, 2002) Children are 26 percent of the total population, but constitute 36 percent of the official poor.
3. (c) 1 out of 10, 10.1 percent, or 3.4 million. (United States Census Bureau, September 24, 2002) The number would be doubled without Social Security according to a 1998 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities report. ("Government Benefit Programs Cut Poverty Nearly in Half," March 8, 1998)
4. (a) 19 percent. (*The New York Times*, January 21, 2003) The top 5 percent do pay 56–59 percent of all income taxes, which are usually regarded as "progressive," i.e., the more you earn the higher percentage you pay.
5. (d) 2001, 50.1 percent. (United States Census Bureau, September 24, 2002)
6. (b) 9 million under age 19, nearly 90 percent of them in working families. 5.8 million of them are eligible for the federal/state Children's Health Insurance Program or Medicaid. (Children's Defense Fund website, October 13, 2002)
7. (c) Despite the dramatic drop in welfare roles (approximately one-half what they were in 1996 when welfare reform was passed), poverty has declined only modestly and is rising again with recession. In 1996 there were 36,529,000 poor compared to 32.9 million in 2001, from 13.7 percent to 11.9 percent. However, officials have not really tracked all those who have left the welfare roles. (United States Census Bureau, September 24, 2002)
8. a. 22.4 percent b. 50.1 percent c. 23.7 percent d. 14.6 percent e. 8.7 percent f. 3.5 percent. United States Census Bureau, September 24, 2002.
9. (c) Down 2.2 percent, from \$43,100 to \$42,200. However, household median income is up 31.6 percent since 1967, the first year it was computed. (United States Census Bureau, September 24, 2002)
10. (c) According to the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center, this tax cut proposal would give tax cuts of less than \$100 to 49 percent of all tax filers; the average tax cut for the bottom 80 percent of tax filers would be \$226; the next to top fifth would receive \$574; the top 1% of all tax filers would receive an average tax cut of \$24,100. Those with incomes of more than \$1 million would get tax cuts averaging \$90,200. Reported by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Administration's Use of 'Average' Tax Cut Figures Creates Misleading Impression About the Tax Cuts Most Households Would Receive," January 15, 2003.
11. (c) \$18,000 for a family of four. U. S. Census Bureau, September 24, 2002.

12. (c) Reduces poverty rate by 7.5 percent, from 19.2 percent before transfers to 11.7 percent after, from 52,118,000 to 31,581,000 individuals. United States Census Bureau, Historical Poverty Tables, September 24, 2002.
13. (a) 1 of 3. (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Government Benefit Programs Cut Poverty*, March 8, 1998)
14. (c) 4 of 5. (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Government Benefit Programs Cut Poverty*, March 8, 1998)
15. (b) 60 percent. (*The Washington Post National Weekly Edition*, April 13, 1998)
16. (c) 77.5 percent. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, David Leonhardt, “Wage Gap Between Men and Woman Shrinks,” *The New York Times*, February 17, 2003)
17. (c) 12.7 percent, (Bill Brubaker, “Paying More . . . for Less,” *Washington Post National Weekly Edition*, September 16–22, 2002)
18. (c) \$11,000, below the poverty line for a family of three or four. (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Raising Families with a Full-Time Worker out of Poverty: The Role of an Increase in the Minimum Wage*, June 28, 1996) The federal minimum wage remains at \$5.15 per hour.
19. (a) Almost \$500 billion. From 2001 to 2010, the richest Americans will receive about \$477 billion, averaging \$342,000 each over the decade. (Citizens for Tax Justice, *CTJ Update*, July 2002)
20. (a) \$30 billion to \$45 billion. (Daryl Lease, “Drug CEOs need credibility pill,” *Oakland Tribune*, September 16, 2002)

Activity: Criteria for a Just Economic Society (60 minutes)

In view of the realities of economic distribution in American society, list your criteria for a just economic society. What should it be? What should it be able to do? How does the ideal compare with the real? Keep both ethical and economic considerations in your mind. Break into groups of three and brainstorm criteria for a just economic order. If you were to start from scratch, what purposes would you wish such an order to serve? What should it be able to do? Each group should limit its criteria to five. Bring the groups together and list their respective criteria on a blackboard or newsprint. Discuss and try to reduce the list to ten. Check areas of consensus and dissensus. Duplicate the list for later reflection.

Discussion Questions:

- How does this nation rate in meeting these criteria?
- How do ethics and economics relate?
- Is *economic justice* an oxymoron?
- What are *leading economic indicators*?
- Can they become *misleading economic indictors*?
- Compare the group’s list with suggested criteria listed below.
- What impact should/does economic recession have upon economic justice?

The Overseas Development Council has developed the Physical Quality of Life Index for measuring economic health. This includes longevity, literacy, and infant mortality rates.

The United Nations has developed yet another set of criteria for measurement, the Human Development Index (HDI), an aggregate of three indicators—life expectancy, literacy, and gross domestic product per person. This means, for instance, that while Sri Lanka’s gross domestic product per person is only half that of Brazil, the HDI is higher, because of a more equitable distribution of income. The U.S. is relatively low on the HDI scale, below Australia, Canada, and Spain, because our income is so maldistributed and our human services so poor.

The Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare developed by theologian John Cobb and World Bank economist Herman Daly goes one step further by factoring the environment into the equation. It combines consumption, distribution, and environmental degradation. There was a rise from 1950 to 1976 and a decline since. See *Toward the Common Good* by Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb (Bibliography).

- How do you feel about these criteria for measuring quality of life?
- How does the American economic system measure up to the UU Principle affirming justice, equity, and compassion in human relations?

Preparation for the Next Session:

- Read “Human Rights and Economic Rights” (pp. 67-82) in *How Much Do We Deserve?* and Session 3 of this study guide.
- Bring in items from the media or personal experience on economic justice issues for Show and Tell discussion.

SESSION 3: HUMAN RIGHTS AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Purpose:

- To examine the question of economic rights as human rights.
- To differentiate between economic rights and political rights.
- To share items on economics\ethics.

Preparations:

- Read “Human Rights and Economic Rights” (pp. 67-82) in *How Much Do We Deserve?*
- Display materials group members have brought.

Ingathering Activity: Show and Tell (15 minutes)

Invite participants to share items on economic justice in the media or from personal experience.

Activity: The Lifeboat Dilemma (60 minutes)

Professor Garret Hardin has presented a provocative problem in moral reflection and social action in his “Lifeboat Ethics” dilemma. He says that approximately two-thirds of the world is poor and about one-third is rich. He writes,

Metaphorically speaking, each rich nation amounts to a lifeboat full of comparatively rich people. The poor of the world are in the other, much more crowded lifeboats. Continuously, so to speak, the poor fall out of their lifeboats and swim for a while in the water outside, hoping to be admitted to a rich lifeboat, or in some other way to benefit from the “goodies” on board. What should the passengers on a rich lifeboat do? This is the central problem of “the ethics of a lifeboat.”

First we must acknowledge that each lifeboat is effectively limited in capacity. The land of every nation has a limited carrying capacity. Here we sit, say 50 people, in a lifeboat. To be generous, let us assume our boat has a capacity of 10 more, making 60. The 50 of us in the lifeboat see 100 others swimming in the water outside, asking for admission to the boat, or for handouts. How shall we respond to their calls? There are several possibilities.

One: We may be tempted to try to live by the Christian ideal of being “our brother’s keeper,” or by the Marxian ideal of “from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.” Since the needs of all are the same, we take all the needy into our boat, making a total of 150 in a boat with a capacity of 60. The boat is swamped, and everyone drowns. Complete justice, complete catastrophe.

Two: Since the boat has an unused excess capacity of 10, we admit just 10 more to it. This has the disadvantage of getting rid of the safety factor, for which action we will sooner or later pay dearly. Moreover, which 10 do we let in? “First come, first served?” The best 10? The neediest 10? How do we discriminate? And what do we say to the 90 who are excluded?

Three: Admit no more to the boat and preserve the small safety factor. Survival of the people in the lifeboat is then possible (though we shall have to be on guard against boarding parties). The last solution is abhorrent to many people. It is unjust, they say. Let us grant that it is.

“I feel guilty about my good luck,” say some. The reply to this is simple: Get out and yield your place to others. Such a selfless action might satisfy the conscience of those who are addicted to guilt, but it would not change the ethics of the lifeboat. The needy person to whom a guilt-addict yields his place will not himself feel guilty about his sudden good luck. (If he did he would not climb aboard.) The net result of conscience-stricken people relinquishing their unjustly held positions is the elimination of their kind of conscience from the lifeboat. The lifeboat, as it were, purifies itself of guilt. The ethics of the lifeboat persist, unchanged by such momentary aberrations. This then is the basic metaphor within which we must work out our solutions.

—October 1974 *Bioscience*, American Institute of Biological Sciences (October, 1974)

Discussion Questions:

- Do you agree with Hardin’s metaphor? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Do those outside our lifeboat have a “right” to get on it?
- How would you feel being on the safe lifeboat? On the overcrowded lifeboat?
- How would you resolve the dilemma?

Activity: Two Statements of Economic Rights (45 minutes)

Read *The Economic Bill of Rights* below and either comment on each article or rewrite it.

We, the People of the United States, advancing into the third century of our nation’s existence, do hereby proclaim this Economic Bill of Rights and pledge ourselves to judge future Presidents and Members of Congress, as well as state and local governments, on how effectively they adhere to its principles and implement its purposes.

Article 1: Every person who is able and willing to work shall have the right to a job at a livable wage under decent working conditions.

Article 2: Consumers shall be protected against excessive prices, unwarranted interest charges, fraudulent and misleading advertisements, adulterated and hazardous products, shoddy workmanship, and other abuses.

Article 3: Tax laws shall be revised to conform to the ability-to-pay principle: tax loopholes for wealthy persons and corporations shall be closed; the neediest shall be given priority in tax relief.

Article 4: There shall be no discrimination against any person in regard to employment, pay standards, training, promotion, and other economic opportunities because of race, sex, religion, or other extraneous factors. Where inequities exist, they shall be rectified.

Article 5: The government shall take the necessary steps to eliminate hunger, malnutrition, and poverty in our country and help to alleviate starvation among the world’s poor. It shall see that food, energy, and other essentials are made available in sufficient quantities and at reasonable prices.

Article 6: Every person shall have the right to adequate housing, education, medical care, and other requirements for a humane existence. The government shall ensure that funds, facilities, and staffing for these services are expanded in accordance with the growing needs of the population.

Article 7: Industrial and financial corporations shall be held accountable for the manner in which their operations and policies serve the people. When they act contrary to the public interest, they shall be placed under public ownership, with due compensation to their stockholders.

Article 8: The government shall give high priority to social, educational, and environmental programs that enrich the lives of the people, make our cities more habitable, and create new job opportunities. Military spending shall be reduced to levels consistent with national defense.

Article 9: People shall have the right to a decent livelihood while they are working and to an adequate pension when they retire. Needy persons who are incapable of working shall have the right to a subsistence income.

Article 10: International trade shall be conducted with due regard to the needs of consumers, workers, farmers, and small businesses. Multinational corporations shall not be permitted to undermine the wage standards and job opportunities of working people.”

—Charles McCollough, *Morality of Power: A Notebook on Christian Education for Social Change* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1977)

Erich Fromm proposes the following criteria:

that production must serve the real needs of the people, not the demands of the economic system;

that a new relation must be established between people and nature, one of cooperation, not of exploitation;

that mutual antagonism must be replaced by solidarity;

that the aim of all social arrangements must be human well-being and the prevention of ill-being;

that not maximum consumption but sane consumption that furthers well-being must be striven for;

that the individual must be an active, not a passive, participant in social life.

--Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976)

Discussion Questions:

- Read the excerpt from Franklin D. Roosevelt’s State of the Union speech of January 11, 1944 (p. 67). With what sections do you agree? Disagree?
- What, if any, is the fundamental difference between political rights and economic rights?

- What economic rights do now exist? What should exist?

Preparation for the Next Session:

- Read “Liberty and Responsibility” (pp. 83-96) in *How Much Do We Deserve?* and Session 4 in this study guide.

SESSION 4: LIBERTY AND RESPONSIBILITY

Purpose:

- To explore the meanings of freedom in economic life.
- To study the limitations of freedom to act in economic life with the restraints of the environment.
- To experience the tension between economic freedom and trusteeship of the environment.

Preparations:

- Read “Liberty and Responsibility” (pp. 83-96) in *How Much Do We Deserve?*
- Display materials group members have brought.

Ingathering Activity: Show and Tell (15 minutes)

Invite participants to share items on economic justice in the media or from personal experience.

Activity: The Market as a Voting Booth (45 minutes)

Economist Milton Friedman uses the metaphor of the free market economy as a voting booth in which each member votes with his or her money. Take the following example and apply Friedman’s view to it.

A prominent publisher made \$80 million in income in 2000. During that same year he dismissed sixty employees. Clearly, he had the freedom to do this. Clearly, the fired employees chose to work for him originally and are free to seek new work. Those in the community who may object to such behavior are also free not to purchase the publication in question. However, is there more economic freedom in one man making an economic judgment than in sixty employees making their judgments? How do we measure human freedom quantitatively—or *can* it be measured? Or, put another way, is there more economic freedom in one person with \$100 to spend or in ten persons each with \$10 to spend? How do you arrive at your judgment?

Activity: Assumptions Characteristic of American Culture (60 minutes)

Consider the following list of assumptions:

- Nature has a virtually infinite storehouse of resources that are there for human use.
- Humanity has the commission to control nature.
- Humanity has the right and obligation to use both renewable and nonrenewable resources for an ongoing improvement in the material standard of living.
- The most effective way to attain individual and social betterment is through the elevation of material standards of living.
- The most effective way to attain higher standards of living is through ongoing economic growth.
- The quality of life itself is furthered by an economic system directed to ever-expanding material abundance.

- The future is open, systematic material progress for the whole human race is possible, and through the careful use of human powers humanity can make history “turn out right.”
- Modern science and technology have helped achieve a superior civilization in the West.
- What can be scientifically known and technologically done ought to be known and done.
- The good life is one of productive labor and material well-being.
- Both social progress and individual interest are best served by competitive, achievement-oriented behavior.
- There is freedom in material abundance; when people have more, their freedom of choice is expanded, and they can and will be more.

—adapted from Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen, *The Predicament of the Prosperous* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978)

Discussion Questions:

- Which of the above do you agree with and which of them do you not?
- What other assumptions of American culture would you list?
- What would be your own assumptions as to what American culture should be?
- Is redistribution possible in a “steady-state economy”?
- How does one balance the need for economic production and ecological protection?
- What is our responsibility to future generations? Does this limit our freedom to use natural resources in our pursuit of economic freedom?
- How would you define economic freedom?
- How would you define trusteeship?
- Does the UU Principle affirming the “interdependent web of all being of which we are a part” stand up in the freedom-trusteeship tension?
- Is there a difference between freedom from and freedom for in economic life?
- Do you agree with the proposition that “the greater the equality in income and wealth, the more the freedom in society”?

Preparation for the Next Session:

- Read “What Is a Fair Share?” (pp. 97-112) in *How Much Do We Deserve?* and Session 5 of this study guide.
- Bring in items from the media or personal experience on economic justice issues for Show and Tell discussion.

SESSION 5: WHAT IS A FAIR SHARE?

Purpose:

- To explore the meanings of and differences between *equality* and *equity*.
- To discuss the relative values of *equality of opportunity* and *equality of results*.
- To compare *fair play* and *fair share* value systems.
- To ask whether there can be a balance between equity and efficiency, and if so, what is it?

Preparations:

- Read “What Is a Fair Share?” in *How Much Do We Deserve?*
- Display materials group members have brought.

Ingathering Activity: Show and Tell (15 minutes)

Invite participants to share items on economic justice in the media or from personal experience.

Activity: Creating a Level Playing Field (60 minutes)

You are at the creation of a new society. You know this new society will have the usual range of abilities, a bell curve in which a few will be highly talented economically, a few will be essentially unable to be productive by virtue of some handicap, and the majority will have a full spectrum of ability and disability.

You have the power to create educational, economic, and social institutions that will be operative. Consider the following issues as you plan.

- Will you seek to create a “level playing field” insofar as this is possible? That is, will you create educational opportunities that will take advantage of the existing range of abilities (e.g., college preparation courses for bright students and vocational skills for those not so bright)? Or will you seek to create a situation in which you will allocate greater resources to slower students to give them a better chance to compete with better students?
- Will you seek to create greater economic incentives across the board or greater incentives for less able people, on the grounds that more talented people will create their own incentives—psychic as well as monetary? Or will that thwart the most able people in your new society such that they will contribute less to the common good?
- Will you create a single competitive economy based on the market in which all will compete equally, or will you create two parallel economies—one in which market forces dominate and competition thrives with all its risks, and another in which competition is blunted and basic security needs are met for those who cannot compete? What would the creation of each kind of arrangement do to the people of your society?
- Compare your ideal society with the United States. How level is the playing field? Should it be more level? Less? Why? Is the “level playing field” concept mere rhetoric? Should we strive for an absolute level playing field? Why or why not?

Discussion Questions:

- What is the difference between *equality* and *equity*?
- Do you agree with Walter Lippmann's quote on p. 98 that certain "differences do not matter, for the best part of him is untouchable and incomparable and unique and universal"?
- Does the market in a capitalist society have values? Or is it a value-free or neutral mechanism to which individuals and groups ascribe value?
- Should the market seek some semblance of equality? Is equality desirable? If equality is desirable, how should it be attained?
- Given the resources of our economy, what is a "fair share"?
- How much efficiency can be sacrificed for equity? Would you be willing to lower your own standard of living if it would lead to greater equity? For example, would you be willing to lower your annual income \$1,000 if poverty could thereby be eliminated? \$2,000? \$5,000?
- Is there a "just wage," a minimum compensation package which would ensure a decent standard of living for workers and their families? (See pp. 110–111.)
- How do you respond to Arthur Okun's comment that in democratic capitalism the rewards "allow the big winners to feed their pets better than the losers can feed their children?" (See p. 105.)
- Do you agree with the proposition: "The greater the equality in income and wealth, the more equity (fairness) in society?" (See p. 97.)
- Do you buy William Ryan's analysis that the economic well-being of people can essentially be predicted by their socio-economic origins? Are those who rise above poverty to affluence the rule or the exception?
- Does the unequal distribution of economic rewards mean that those who have high rewards invest those resources effectively?
- What changes in economic incentives would you make in our economy?
- Does the current rise in inequality of income have anything to do with recessions?

Preparation for the Next Session:

- Read "Community and Individualism" (pp. 113-128) in *How Much Do We Deserve?* and Session 6 of this study guide.
- Bring in items from the media or personal experience on economic justice issues for Show and Tell discussion.

SESSION 6: COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUALISM

Purpose:

- To explore the tensions between individualism and community in the American ethos.
- To examine how the distribution of income and wealth affects the common good.
- To critique proposition three: “The greater the equality of income and wealth, the greater the sense of community in a society.”
- To discuss meanings of *the common good*.

Preparations:

- Read “Community and Individualism” (pp. 113-128) in *How Much Do We Deserve?*
- Display materials group members have brought.
- Display the charts on the American economy.
- Bring balloons and string.

Ingathering Activity: Discussion of Show and Tell (15 minutes)

Invite participants to share items on economic justice in the media or from personal experience.

Activity: *The Heavens Above Caper* (60 minutes)

Read the following excerpt from a film review:

The Rev. John E. Smallwood (Peter Sellers) arrives as vicar of Holy Trinity Church in Orbiston Parva, an English village contentedly thriving under the aegis of the wealthy Despard family and the pill it manufactures—sedative, pepper-upper and laxative combined, a perfect trinity. Smallwood takes Biblical injunctions literally and persuades rich Lady Despard to do likewise. Lady Despard freely distributes food to those who will take it, driving butcher, baker and candlestick maker out of business. And when Smallwood pronounces that the trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost is more efficacious than the triple-acted pill, sales go down, unemployment goes up and mob violence ensues. . . . Culture, we learn, maintains its precarious balance only so long as everyone is committed to the ideology of profit-sharing and of it-is-better-to-receive-than-to-give; whereas an authentic Christian, unless he is able to win everyone to his reversal of ideals, simply succeeds in giving impetus to riotous anarchy.

—William Mueller, review of the film *Heavens Above*, *The Christian Century* (November 6, 1963)

Discussion of *Film*:

- Is the conflict of class inevitable in society? Why or why not?
- What does the movie review suggest about human nature? Do you agree or disagree with its assumptions?

- Given the decline of Communism in the 1990s, is socialism an irrelevant concept?
- What, if anything, is wrong with the *Heavens Above* analogy to the United States?
- Analyze cooperation vs. competition in moral terms. Where are their strengths? Weaknesses?
- Apply your answers to the previous question to the U.S. economy. How even is the balance we have created between them? Between individualism and community?

General Discussion Questions (45 minutes):

- Given the growing disparity among people in the U.S. in terms of income and wealth, would you call our situation a “class war”? Why or why not?
- What does the competition endemic to the American economy do to people?
- William Sloan Coffin asks, “In a competitive society what do we do with the losers?” What is your response to the question? What *should* we do?
- There has been no really strong socialist movement in the U.S., a lack almost unique among Western democracies. How do you account for that?
- How do you feel about the voting patterns outlined on pp. 86–88?
- How do you respond to Conrad Wright’s statement (p. 116) about the dysfunction of individualism for solving current economic problems?
- Respond to the description by Marc K. Landy and Henry A. Plotkin of the personal pain experienced in the market economy? (See p. 117.)
- How would you define *the common good*? How would you define an individual’s responsibility for the common good economically speaking?
- What do you think the founders meant when they wrote that one of the purposes of the federal government is to promote the general welfare?
- What do you think of the metaphors for economic life in the U.S. on pp. 126-128? Invent your own metaphor for the ideal economic situation.
- What degree of competition is healthy? Have we gone beyond that point in our economic life?
- Give your moral critique of Senator Chauncey M. Depew’s description of Commodore Vanderbilt’s attitude on p. 115. Is today’s society a “fail-safe” society that is creating “mediocrity”? Give evidence for your view.
- How do you respond to Lester Thurow’s experience described on pp. 116–117?

Alternate Activity: The Balloon Stomp (45 minutes)

Read the story told by Jim Roberts on pp.123–124. If the group is willing, play the game and discuss.

Discussion Questions:

- How do you feel about the balloon stomp game and its educational value?
- Does it prepare children for the “real world” in which they will live?

Preparation for the Next Session:

- Read “Through the Eye of a Needle” (pp. 129-148) in *How Much Do We Deserve?* and Session 7 of this study guide.
- Bring in items from the media or personal experience on economic justice issues for Show and Tell discussion.

SESSION 7: THROUGH THE EYE OF A NEEDLE

Purpose:

- To explore the impact of affluence and poverty on the individual's spiritual meaning of life.
- To examine the impact of affluence and poverty on the individual's moral sensibility.
- To critique proposition four: "the greater the disparity of income, the greater the erosion of moral sensitivity and religious meaning."

Preparations:

- Read "Through the Eye of a Needle" (pp. 129-148) in *How Much Do We Deserve?*
- Display materials group members have brought.

Ingathering Activity: Show and Tell (15 minutes)

Invite participants to share items on economic justice in the media or from personal experience.

Activity: Needs, Wants, and Haves (45 minutes)

Place an "N" for *need*, a "W" for *want* and an "H" for *have* beside each item listed below.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| ___ 1. Love | ___ 24. One close friend with un- |
| ___ 2. More than five shirts | conditional love and acceptance |
| ___ 3. A job | ___ 25. Belief that nothing can |
| ___ 4. Fulfillment in job | cause ultimate harm |
| ___ 5. Underarm deodorant | ___ 26. Going out to dinner once |
| ___ 6. Two cars | a week |
| ___ 7. Health insurance | ___ 27. A college education |
| ___ 8. Acceptance by other people | ___ 28. Hair spray |
| ___ 9. Meat at every meal | ___ 29. Three meals a day |
| ___ 10. The capacity to love | ___ 30. Being part of a religious |
| ___ 11. Time to relax | community |
| ___ 12. Television | ___ 31. Housing |
| ___ 13. Air conditioning | ___ 32. A bed |
| ___ 14. Water | ___ 33. Candy |
| ___ 15. Religious integrity | ___ 34. A place to scream |
| ___ 16. More than two pairs of shoes | ___ 35. Time to be alone |
| ___ 17. Praise and appreciation from | ___ 36. Magazines |
| friends | ___ 37. The right to a decent |
| ___ 18. Hostess Twinkies | standard of living |
| ___ 19. Several close friends | ___ 38. The Bible |
| ___ 20. Haircuts | ___ 39. Paper plates and Styrofoam cups |
| ___ 21. Wearing current styles of | ___ 40. Opportunities to travel |
| clothing | ___ 41. Self-respect |
| ___ 22. An opportunity to cry | ___ 42. Dreams |
| ___ 23. Alcoholic beverages | ___ 43. <i>The New York Times</i> |

- ___ 44. Receiving or giving music
- ___ 45. White sidewall tires
- ___ 46. Coffee
- ___ 47. Appreciation for nature
- ___ 48. Pets
- ___ 49. Alpo for pets
- ___ 50. A DVD and/or CD player
- ___ 51. Sports
- ___ 52. Competition
- ___ 53. Physical health
- ___ 54. Close family relations
- ___ 55. Control over life
- ___ 56. Credit cards
- ___ 57. Mortgages

- ___ 58. Control over work
- ___ 59. Hot dogs
- ___ 60. White bread
- ___ 61. Junk foods
- ___ 62. Enough physical exercise
- ___ 63. Equal rights
- ___ 64. Privacy
- ___ 65. Stocks and bonds
- ___ 66. Cell phone
- ___ 67. Other (_____)

Discussion of “Needs, Wants, Haves” Exercise:

- List all the things you both need and have.
- List all the things you feel you need but don’t have.
- List those things you have but do not need.
- How do you feel? What stands in your way of having these needs met? If you chose to eliminate these things from your life, what stands in your way?
- From a moral point of view, how do you compare satisfying your “wants” with other peoples’ needs?

—adapted from Charles R. McCollough, *Morality of Power* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1977)

General Discussion Questions (30 minutes):

More than anything it seems to be a generalized accusation against U.S. society, calculated to make Americans above a certain income feel bad about themselves. No, it is not greed that we need worry about in a free society. Rather it is the viperous envy that so often nestles in the bosoms of those who accuse others of greed.

—Tom Bethell, “Greed (and Envy),” *National Review* (April 15, 1983)

- How do you respond to that charge? Is he right?
- How do you respond to Aristotle’s words on p. 129 in the text?
- Robert Reich has recently said that the “fortunate fifth” of the population (in terms of income) has simply dropped any concern for the less fortunate four-fifths. Do you agree? On what do you base your opinion? Has there been a “blunting of social conscience” in recent years? (See pp. 117–119.)
- Is there such a thing as *wealth addiction* as Philip Slater says? (See p. 137.)
- Does affluence tend to corrupt spiritually? What makes you say so?
- How do you respond to George Leonard’s experience with leading industrialists discussing his observation that competition may not be the wave of the future? One of them said, “If there is to be no competition, then what will life be all about?” (See p. 143.)
- Do you believe that poverty also tends to corrupt spiritually and morally? (Look at the Granny’s Hollow sketch on p. 145.)
- How would you respond to the author’s enumeration of the moral and spiritual corruptions of affluence: self-righteousness, blunting of social conscience, conspicuous consumption, distorted meaning?

Discussion of UUSC, UNICEF, and Wall Street Poverty (30 minutes):

Read the author's experience on pp. 139–140 about the feelings of financial inadequacy expressed by wealthy people in a *Wall Street Journal* article. This was over two decades ago, but do you believe the same attitude exists in America today? Give examples.

Preparation for the Next Session:

- Read “Muddling Toward the Beloved Community” (pp. 149-164) in *How Much Do We Deserve?* and Session 8 of this study guide.
- Bring in items from the media or personal experience on economic justice issues for Show and Tell discussion.

SESSION 8: MUDDLING TOWARD THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

Purpose:

- To evaluate the canons of distributive justice suggested in the text.
- To amend these canons as stated.
- To suggest other canons of distributive justice.

Preparations:

- Read “Muddling Toward the Beloved Community” (pp. 149-164) in *How Much Do We Deserve?*
- Display materials group members have brought.
- Bring and distribute copies of “Criteria for a Just Economic Society,” which the group created in an earlier session.

Ingathering Activity: Show and Tell (15 minutes)

Invite participants to share items on economic justice in the media or from personal experience.

Activity: Using the “Canons” to Evaluate Our Economic Situation (60 minutes)

Consider your own economic situation and its history. Create a line graph with each square representing a year. Trace your economic history numerically by using your family of origin’s annual income (in approximate 2002 dollars) as one baseline and your current annual income as a point of reference. (This is a private exercise at this point, so as to protect confidentiality of income.) Without trying for too much statistical accuracy, draw a line representing your economic trajectory for different periods in your life. For example, let’s say you were born in a four-member poverty home. Using 2002 figures, that means the income would be about \$18,000. Say you were on scholarship during college and lived somewhat more comfortably than in your family of origin. Say that you have gained in income at roughly 5 percent a year since. Your graph line would start in the lower left quadrant and be a relatively straight line to the upper right quadrant. Or, say that you started a business from scratch and then prospered rapidly. In that case your income line would make a more vertical trajectory.

The canon of need: All human beings have an inherent right to have their basic human needs met before any economic surplus is distributed to others. For example, your income during childhood and youth would doubtless be informed by the canon of need, as you probably did little work to earn your income.

The canon of proportional equality: Every human being should be limited in consumption of income and wealth by the principle of sufficiency. For example, say you were on welfare for five years and were sustained at a basic level by social services with money generated from tax dollars. That is a floor. Say you then hit the lottery but there was a lottery tax that limited your winnings to 50 percent of the cash value. That is a ceiling.

The canon of contribution to the common good: Persons should be remunerated on the basis of their value to the community. Say that you are teacher of the year at your local college and have educated dozens of young men and women in the duties of citizenship. Your advice is sought by both political parties who want to know the impact of alternative policies on the community. You are able to lift the level of community political debate. That would merit consideration for higher remuneration because of your contribution.

The canon of productivity: Persons should be remunerated in proportion to the goods and services they produce for the society. Say you are a chief executive officer of a company that makes containers for food. The company is extremely efficient, supplies many well-paid jobs in the community, and pays a hefty property tax for the local government.

The canon of effort and sacrifice: Persons should be remunerated according to how hard they work and the extent to which they commit themselves to their task, even at considerable cost to their personal well-being. For example, say you were a social worker in an AIDS hospital in the middle of the ghetto. Although you are not contributing much to the gross national product, you are of inestimable value in contributing to the quality of life of several people over time. Your work is cited much like Mother Theresa's, and your life is touted as a model for the society. You have contributed much by giving so much of yourself in effort and sacrifice.

The canon of scarcity: Persons who have unique and hard-won skills that are necessary for the society should be rewarded more generously than others who have skills not needed as much. Perhaps you are known as a world-class scientist with an income in the six-figure range. The canon of scarcity would apply, since your income reflects the relative scarcity of persons with your unique skills.

Now, try to apply each of these canons to your own situation at any point on your time–income line. What have you learned? Did anything surprise you in this exercise?

Activity: Creating Canons of Distribution (45 minutes)

What canons of income distribution would you suggest? Please list them in their order of importance. Why did you suggest them? Repeat the above exercise using your own canons.

Questions for Discussion:

- Is it practicable to use these canons of distribution for allocation purposes in American society? Why or why not?
- How would you describe the canons of distribution that now inform and control the American economy? Please list one or more of these canons.
- Ayn Rand held that altruism and capitalism are incompatible. Are they? Why or why not?
- Look again at the criteria for a just economic order that the group created earlier. How does it stack up against any of the canons discussed?
- The canon of need: Is there a place for this canon in our society? Do you agree with Daniel C. Maguire's analysis of his son Danny's need on pp.152–153?
- The canon of proportional equality: Should there be a floor and a ceiling in income and wealth? What are the advantages of such a policy? The disadvantages?
- The canon of contribution to the common good: Can this be measured?
- The canon of productivity: Is this the dominant canon in our society?

- The canon of effort and sacrifice: Should there be special rewards for those who do the most distasteful work or make the greatest sacrifice?
- The canon of scarcity: Is it fair? Why or why not?

Preparation for the Next Session:

- Read “Policy Implications for the United States” (pp. 165-198) in *How Much Do We Deserve?* and Session 9 of this study guide.
- Bring in items from the media or personal experience on economic justice issues for Show and Tell discussion.

SESSION 9: POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

Purpose:

- To consider economic alternatives that might lead toward greater economic justice.
- To create personal “game plans” for the reform of the American economy.

Preparations:

- Read “Policy Implications for the United States” (pp. 165-198) in *How Much Do We Deserve?*
- Display materials group members have brought.

Ingathering Activity: Show and Tell (15 minutes)

Invite participants to share items on economic justice in the media or from personal experience.

Activity: Creating the Just Economic Society (45 minutes)

If you were the master architect of the American economy and had absolute power, how would you shape it? Consider the following issues and options, keeping in mind the relative balance of public and private control of the economy, all the way from a state capitalism as in the Soviet Union to a totally free-market capitalism that once upon a time prevailed in the United States.

- What would be the role of government? How would you control the private sector, or would it need no control?
- What would be the role of government? How would you control the private sector, or would it need no control?
- How would you fund the public sector and its efforts? Taxes? What balance of taxes would you propose—property, sales, use, income, capital gains, excess profits, etc.? How progressive or regressive would each of these taxes be?
- What would be the relative balance of competition and cooperation in your economic system? How would you moderate competition? How would you encourage cooperation?
- Assuming competition, how would you deal with the losers? What income should they receive, if any? How would it be funded? How would you deal with the “winners”?
- How would you protect the environment in this new system? At what cost?
- What changes would you make in the national and state welfare programs?

Activity: The Good Samaritan Exercise (30 minutes)

Read the following passage from the Bible:

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.”

“Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”
--Luke 10:25-37

Questions for Discussion:

- With whom in this story do you most closely identify? ___ Lawyer ___ Jesus ___ Victim ___ Thieves ___ Priest ___ Levite ___ Samaritan ___ Inn Keeper. Why?
- At what point in this story is the critical injustice?
- What would your impulse be if you came upon the Samaritan? Pass by on the other side? Retell the story widely? Set up first aid stations along the road? Make the road safe by patrolling it? Arrest the robbers and punish them? Restore the thieves to the community? Question a society that produces thieves?
- Do you see parallels with our society?

Alternate Activity: The Parable of Good Works Exercise (30 minutes)

Read the following parable:

Once upon a time there was a small village on the edge of a river. The people there were good and the life in the village was good. One day a villager noticed a baby floating down the river. The villager quickly jumped into the river and swam out to save the baby from drowning.

The next day this same villager was walking along the river bank and noticed two babies in the river. He called for help, and both babies were rescued from the swift waters. And the following day four babies were seen caught in the turbulent current. And then eight, then more, and still more.

The villagers organized themselves quickly, setting up watch towers and training teams of swimmers who could resist the swift waters and rescue babies. Rescue squads were soon working 24 hours a day. And each day the number of helpless babies floating down the river increased.

The villagers organized themselves efficiently. The rescue squads were snatching many children each day. Groups were trained to give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Others prepared formula and provided clothing for the chilled babies. Many, particularly elderly women, were involved in making clothing and knitting blankets. Still others provided foster homes and placement.

Although not all the babies, now very numerous, could be saved, the villagers felt they were doing well to save as many as they could each day. Indeed, the village priest blessed them in their good work. And life in the village continued on that basis.

One day, however, someone raised the question, “But where are all these babies coming from? Who is throwing them into the river? Why? Let’s organize a team to go upstream and see who’s doing it.” The seeming logic of the elders countered: “And if we go upstream, who will operate the rescue operations? We need every concerned person here.”

“But don’t you see,” cried the one lone voice, “if we find out who is throwing them in, we can stop the problem and no babies will drown. By going upstream we can eliminate the cause of the problem.”

“It is too risky.”

And so the numbers of babies in the river increased daily. Those saved increased, but those who drowned increased even more.

—Peggy Case, ed., *Must We Choose Sides?* (Oakland, CA: Inter-Religious Task Force for Social Analysis, 1980).

What parallels, if any, do you find between this parable and economic life in the United States? Who are the elders? Who is the lone voice? What are the implications for social action?

Questions for Discussion:

- How would you evaluate the author’s policy proposals in this chapter?

- How are you faring now? Are you getting what you believe you “deserve”?
- How is the U.S. doing as an economic system? How would you rate it on a scale of 1 to 10? Pick two countries you would rank higher (if any) and two you would rank lower.
- What is your reaction to this quote from Theodore Parker?

Yet it seemed to me the money given by public and private charity—two fountains that never fail in Puritanic Boston—was more than sufficient to relieve it all, and gradually remove the deep-seated and unseen cause, which in the hurry of business and of money, is not attended to.

There is a hole in the dim-lit public bridge, where many fall through and perish. Our mercy pulls a few out of the water; it does not stop the hole, nor light the bridge, nor warn men of the peril! We need the great Charity that palliates effects of wrong, and the greater Justice which removes the cause.

—Theodore Parker, “Theodore Parker’s Experience as a Minister,” *The New Englander* (August 1859)

- What changes in your outlook, if any, have you experienced as a result of this program? What changes in behavior?
- What specific personal actions and/or church/temple/mosque programs do you plan in order to create a more just economic community?