



Truth and lies about poverty

The lies we tell ourselves: ending comfortable myths about poverty

In the spring of 2013 a joint report from the Church of Scotland, Methodist Church, United Reformed Church and Baptist Union of Great Britain was published called *The lies we tell ourselves: ending comfortable myths about poverty*. You can read the full report at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/truthandliesaboutpoverty

This report exposed some of the myths about poverty that many people assumed to be true – but which were in fact false. The worst thing is that many politicians were using these myths and lies about poverty as reasons to make dramatic changes and big cuts to social security.



1. People on benefits are lazy and don't want to work

Child poverty is often blamed on indolent parents; the truth is that the majority of children living in poverty are from working households. In-work poverty is much more common than out-of-work poverty.

2. Money is wasted on alcoholics and drug addicts

Addiction is widely believed to be the second most common cause of child poverty. While addiction is devastating for the families and communities touched by it, fewer than 4% of benefit claimants report any form of addiction.

3. Poor people can't manage their money

Nearly 60% of the UK population think that the poor could cope if only they handled their money properly. In fact, living on a low income for a long time is a constant struggle to manage limited resources, with small events having serious consequences. Statistics show that people on the lowest incomes spend their money carefully, limiting themselves to the essentials.

4. Benefit cheats are defrauding honest taxpayers

Over 80% believe that 'large numbers falsely claim benefits'. The truth is that benefit fraud has decreased to historically low levels – less than 0.9% of the welfare budget is lost to fraud, a level the tax system could only dream of.

5. It's an easy life sponging off the state

More than half of the British public believes benefits are too high, and Government Ministers speak of families opting for benefits over work as a lifestyle choice. Yet we know that benefits do not meet a minimum income standard; they have halved in relative value to average incomes over the past 30 years. We know that the ill and unemployed are the least satisfied and least happy with life.

6. 'They' caused the deficit

The proportion of public expenditure on social security has remained stable for the last 20 years. It is ridiculous to argue, as some have, that increasing welfare spending is responsible for the current deficit. Public debt is a serious problem, but blame should not be laid at the feet of the poorest.



Poverty and the Bible

Read Luke 4:16-19

- What does 'good news to the poor' mean today?
- How do spiritual dynamics – the Spirit of the Lord, anointing, proclamation – link with justice?
- How do we, as individuals and churches, bring good news to people in poverty?

Read Mark 10:46-49

- How does the crowd following Jesus first respond to the cries of Bartimaeus?
- What causes their change in attitude and how does Jesus use the crowd to meet Bartimaeus' needs?
- What attitudes exist in our own church towards people in society who are marginalised?
- Which are the dominant stories in our society which can drown out the less powerful ones?
- How can we make sure we don't only listen to the most dominant?
- How might the kind of favouritism James talks about be expressed in our churches today?
- What is the link between favouritism and unbelief?
- How does this challenge us to step beyond offering charity to embracing justice?
- Do our churches offer charity or justice – or both?

Read Isaiah 59:14

- Truth stumbles in the public square: where could this vivid metaphor be applied to public debate today?
- What are the effects of truth stumbling on the life of the nation?
- Who is most affected when truth falls?
- What barriers to truth and justice do you see?

Read the full report *The lies we tell ourselves: ending comfortable myths about poverty*

www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/truthandliesaboutpoverty

Write to your MP and MSPs to let them know what you think about lies about poverty.

Keep in Touch

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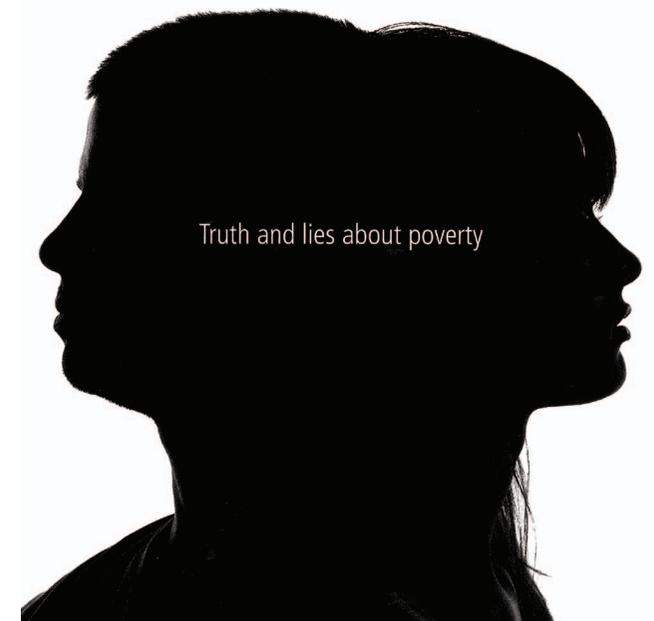
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 Discussion Points