

Jesus' Division Will Eliminate All the Others

It's pretty typical for Americans to think we're number one, especially when it comes to wealth.

But we're not.

In terms of income per person, we rank behind Norway, Luxembourg, Singapore, Switzerland and Hong Kong.

I suppose, still, that we can take some pride in being sixth.

But using a different scale, we are, indeed, on the top of the heap.

When it comes to infant and maternal mortality, we have a higher percentage than all of these nations. We're also first among these six leading economic nations in the mortality rate for children under 20 years of age.

In fact, as a recent *New York Times* [article](#) summarizes: "The United States is one of the richest nations on earth, but on a number of social and economic measures it is more typical of a developing country. Compared with other advanced nations, it ranks consistently among the worst performers in matters of economic equality and child welfare."

The article supplies [rankings](#) of where the U.S. stands on a number of fronts, in relation to 19 other members in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

For example, the U.S. ranks fifth in income inequality and literacy inequality, fourth in child poverty and first in the percentage of children living in single-parent families.

While Australia, Sweden, Canada, Britain, Mexico, France, Italy and Germany

showed a positive change in “median disposable income” in the first decade of this century, only the United States and Japan came in with negative percentages.

So we aren’t even holding our own – we’re losing ground on the inequality front, not just compared with other nations but over against our own benchmarks.

The division between rich and poor, even between the upper and the middle class, is widening. And every sign indicates that this will continue for the foreseeable future.

Why?

Well, to take just one of many possible examples, the rich can invest, individually and collectively, in their children’s education.

The parents usually choose to live in school districts with superb teachers and facilities, and the high income levels in those school districts mean that the tax base for supporting those excellent schools can be low.

We should then add on the specialized educational opportunities that these parents usually bestow on their kids, all of which make it highly likely that their children will do very well throughout their lives

Compare that to poor families, most of whom want quality education for their children too, but can only afford housing in school districts that don’t have the funds, even with a high tax rate, for good schools.

These parents also don’t have the disposable income to provide additional educational opportunities for their kids, all of which makes it more difficult for their children to succeed.

The *Times* article reports that “60 percent of disadvantaged children go to disadvantaged schools with fewer and lower quality resources.”

If the U.S. really wanted to reverse inequality among all its citizens and realized

how public education is a key to achieving that on a continuing basis, it couldn't choose just to equalize funding for schools across the country, it would have to invest substantially more in poor school districts to make up for lost ground.

How likely is that to happen in a nation that is indiscriminately sequestering funds across the board so that it can satisfy its craving for debt reduction and refusing to increase taxes on the wealthy so that debt reduction, economic growth and support for social programs could be achieved?

That's why the widening division between the "haves" and "have-nots" isn't going to change any time soon.

As reported in the Gospels, Jesus didn't look favorably upon this kind of inequality or division. Many of his teachings were devoted to narrowing the divide between rich and poor of his own day.

But in his own way, he was completely on board with divisions.

In the 12th chapter of Luke, for example, he is reported to have said: "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division."

And then he proceeded to say that the division he brings will divide even households - "father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother."

The division Jesus brings is not between rich and poor, "haves" and "have-nots," educated and illiterates or well fed and hungry.

It is a division, rather, between those who see what God intends for all of God's world and are ready to embrace and act on that vision, and those who refuse to see, refuse to embrace and refuse to act.

It's this division - promised by Jesus - that should give us hope for overcoming the divisions that now plague us.

<https://ethicsdaily.com/jesus-division-will-eliminate-all-the-others-cms-21025/> August 16, 2013 Larry Greenfield

[Larry Greenfield](#) is executive minister for the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago. He also serves as editor and theologian-in-residence for The Common Good Network.