

# LIVING IN THE SHADOW OF GIANTS



If you ever come to the Caribbean, you will meet our *higglers* and *hucksters*. Who are these people? They are independent business people – vendors and merchants who are part of the Caribbean economy. Many *higglers* and *hucksters* go to bigger islands like Jamaica, to sell their products in the market. This is one feature of our economy.

For many centuries, the French, Spanish, Dutch and English dominated the Caribbean. The colonial system imposed many political, economic and social patterns on Caribbean life. It also left behind a legacy, namely that today we are poor nations.

The Caribbean is an extremely diverse region; in terms of its economies, however, there are many common features. Most of the islands depend on the production of basic goods such as sugar, bananas, coffee, coconuts or cigars. At the same time, we import manufactured goods such as automobiles, gasoline and other items. Over time, the imbalance of money received from exports and money spent on imports has created debts that we are not able to repay.

Caribbean countries must compete with other nations that export the same basic goods. Therefore the quality of the Caribbean products must be good enough to compete in the open market.

Many Caribbean islands have turned to tourism to improve their economic situation. Most people working in the tourist sector do not earn enough money to support their families. Tourism enriches the investors, who usually come from abroad. Unfortunately, the industry has negative side effects, such as an increase in drug use and high levels of prostitution.

As part of the Caribbean, Cuba shares this reality. Although for many years Cuba has developed a different social and political system, since the growth of tourism in the 1990s and the implementation of a double currency system –

Cuban pesos and US dollars – Cubans face new economic difficulties. Though we welcome lots of tourists every year, we see the impact on the mentality and behaviour of Cubans – a large percentage of our population is drawn to this foreign influence. Many young people have lost touch with traditional cultural values, preferring to imitate the lifestyles made popular by tourism.

Although many countries in the region have become politically independent, the Caribbean still depends on outsiders for its economic development.

## DAVID AND THE GIANT (1 SAMUEL 17.48-51)

We often classify Bible passages as stories for children and stories for adults. This is a passage that many people would teach to children in Sunday school. How often do adults look into the story of David and Goliath?

The passage describes a struggle of power, strength and intelligence. It is one of the many difficult situations that confronted Israel at the time of King Saul. It is a story of contrast that shows the courage of a young man, David, in the face of the power of an expert and gigantic soldier, Goliath.

Today, our world is constantly faced with the struggle between powers. Powerful countries and institutions take control over those who are weak. Powerful people dominate those who are powerless or dependent on others. Sometimes, even in family and other relationships we experience the struggle for power.

Many Caribbean people see themselves as David facing the Goliath of international economic institutions that set up bank loans, credits and fix prices for exporting and importing products. These institutions have become a dominating power that controls the economic systems of many islands. We have become dependent on them.



Even though we are known for our bright, cheerful music and our infectious rhythms, sometimes they express our sorrows or they are a way to turn our sadness into happiness. We are little islands, facing day by day the results of being colonized lands that suffered the terrible system of slavery and that now are trying to build independent nations. As Christian peoples, we ask God to give us the strength and the wisdom to face this challenge.

### QUESTIONS

1. WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM DAVID IN THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN POWERS?
2. HOW DO WE TAKE RESPONSIBILITY IN THE DAILY ECONOMIC STRUGGLES OF OUR CITIZENS?
3. ARE WE ABLE TO CREATE SENSITIVITY IN OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD TO RECOGNISE THE IMBALANCES EXISTING IN OUR WORLD?
4. HOW DO WE DEFEND OURSELVES IN THE FACE OF GIANT ECONOMIC STRUCTURES?

### PRAYER

*God, creator and sustainer, we come before you to ask you to give us the wisdom to face the burdens we carry daily in our different countries. Give us the ability as a church to become voices in our midst and also help us to become active instruments for social change. Give us the strength and the courage to change the structures of the big economic powers that surround us. May we work for social justice and struggle for your kingdom here and now. Bless us and be with us day by day in our sorrows, in our dance, in our*

*music and especially remind us to care for your creation, one of our most special treasures. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

### AUTHOR

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### THE SONG OF THE BANANA MAN

*Touris, white man, wipin his face,  
Met me in Golden Crove market place.  
He looked at m'ol' clothes brown wid stain,  
An soaked right through wid de Portlan rain,  
He cas his eye, turn up his nose,  
He says, "You are a beggar man, I suppose?"  
He says, "Boy, get some occupation,  
Be of some value to your nation."  
I said, "by God and dis big right han  
You mus recognize a banana man.*

*So when you see dese ol clothes brown wid stain,  
An soaked right through wid de Portlan rain,  
Don't cas your eye nor turn your nose,  
Don't judge a man by his patchy clothes,  
I'm a strong man, a proud man, an I'm free,  
Free as dese mountains, free as dis sea,  
I know myself, and I know my ways,  
An will sing wid pride to de end o my days  
(sung) Praise God an m'big right han  
I will live and die a banana man*

(From the poem by Evan Jones of Jamaica, as printed in "All A We A One: A Caribbean Scrapbook" by David P. Young, Friendship Press, New York)