

# The Mystery Unveils



## A Child's Challenge for Civilization

“Dad, why do people have to pay for food?” That is the question my seven-year-old son asked me while I was cleaning off the dinner table. The depth of the question astonished me at first, since it came from such a young child. When I got my wits back, I started to provide the traditional answer about trade, demand, supply and skill sets, but right in the middle of my elaborate economic theory, the profoundness of the question hit me: Why *do* people have to pay for food in an advanced civilization like ours? Why *do* people still experience hunger today? Clearly this seven-year-old was questioning why, in a civilized society, the most basic of needs -food- was not available to everyone. I hesitated for a moment, then looked into Tom’s innocent, questioning eyes and said, “I don’t know. That is a very good question.”

Earlier, on that cold winter day in March, Tom and I had watched a program from Plan International. It invited people to sponsor a child in a developing country so that his or her life circumstances could be improved. For an hour we had been bombarded with the smiling, innocent faces of children against a backdrop of cardboard houses, open sewage streets, and a display of absolute poverty. Kids’ bellies were swollen from starvation, and some of the children were crying, while others showed us their purest smiles. But most striking of all were their eyes: There was something about

them. They were windows through which you could see deep into their souls. Pure and innocent spirits puzzled by their state of being. At times afraid and sad, but always with this innocent, sparkling energy that lay just underneath.

I had noticed that Tom had been unusually silent during the rest of the day and had maintained this introverted attitude during supper. Now I understood why.

Why *do* people have to pay