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Perspectives on Social Ministries and Community Development

Jamie Munday and Murray Nickel

Social Ministries

(Jamie Munday)

Common Questions

“Why don’t you just stick to church planting and let us worry about social development?” This question—put to us by an expert in a large Christian development organization—challenged the very core of what we believe about social



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development. Murray and I had requested this gentleman's input on a fledgling savings and loan program that had sprung up within a group of MB church communities in Congo with whom we had been working.

As development practitioners working with MB Mission, our projects tended to be small in scale and tied into a deeper emphasis on spiritual transformation. Most of these projects had developed organically from within poor church communities, and therefore had humble beginnings and modest goals.

But were these projects inconsequential in light of the much broader impact made by larger and seemingly more efficient organizations? Is it possible that the poor would be better served by allowing the "professionals" to address the complex social issues of our time, while leaving the church to focus on the all-important spiritual ones? What is the relationship between the social and the spiritual when it comes to the mission of the church?

The response we received that day is one that, unfortunately, still reverberates across the sphere of Evangelicalism. Some Christians, like the aforementioned "development professional," will draw a line between the social and the spiritual as a matter of *efficiency*. According to this line of thinking, those who focus their energy solely on social development can logically do it more proficiently. Conversely, those who focus their time and energy on the spiritual—such as evangelism or church planting—can do that with greater effectiveness.

Others will make the separation between social and spiritual as a matter of *priority*. In other words, they feel that social outreach is important since God commands it, but not as important as sharing the good news. According to this line of reasoning, social outreach is an important act of obedience, but is, at best, a bridge moving one towards the greater priority of verbal proclamation.

Historical and Theological Contexts for Social Ministry

Whether it is a matter of efficiency or priority, for Christians in the West, the twentieth century has been characterized by this dichotomy between the social and the spiritual. In Latin America, it was the advent of Liberation Theology in the sixties that shone a light on the relationship between faith and Christian responsibility to the poor. In a society characterized by huge inequalities of power and wealth, Liberation Theology understood the gospel as a message of earthly liberation, which called believers to respond to the down-to-earth implications of the gospel. Over time, this theology of liberation became dangerously interconnected with political ideologies and at the same time disconnected from certain core biblical values such as love, grace and peace. As the influence of Liberation Theology began to wane in the mid-eighties, the church was left with a residue of anxiety towards any social action

or practical response to poverty or injustice. This, in effect, increased the artificial gap between the down-to-earth outworking of the kingdom and the more spiritual elements of the faith.

In North America it was the Social Gospel movement of the early twentieth century that helped to accentuate this dichotomy. During a dire time in American history marked by poverty, urban violence and social unrest, adherents to the Social Gospel sought to apply Christian ethics to these problems and bring the kingdom to bear upon the situation. As these so-called “liberals” grew in prominence they began to come into opposition with more conservative churches who felt that the fundamental values of the faith were being threatened. Many of these “fundamentalists” were not opposed to the practical application of biblical justice, but were concerned that the Social Gospel was soft on other key tenets of the gospel—most notably the call to repentance from sin.

Prominent social activist Ronald Sider suggests that orthodox Christians were right to call attention to the heresies of the Social Gospel; however, in doing so these same Christians disavowed their own responsibility to the poor. Many of them steered clear of any social ministries for fear that it might identify them with mainline Christianity or liberal theology in general.

This social-spiritual dichotomy was also being felt on the mission field. In his autobiography *Educating Tiger*, former missionary Jacob Loewen¹ described himself as a “gung ho soul-winner [who] disdained all relief work as social gospel.” Over time, however, Loewen began to recognize that a complete witness of Christ demanded a “consistent Christian lifestyle.” Later on, back in North America, he came to this conclusion: “Gradually I had to realize that Jesus himself had made no distinction between physical and spiritual help in his ministry.”²

As Jacob Loewen discovered seventy odd years ago, it is becoming clear in our time that the polarities of word and deed must be brought together in subjection to Christ. He communicated the gospel as a whole-body experience, culminating in his bodily death on the cross. Ultimately the spoken truth of the gospel was substantiated by his propensity to bring it to bear on people’s lives in real and tangible ways. He was not only pointing us towards a future hope, but initiating a new kingdom that was immediate and palpable.

When seen through the lens of the *kingdom* - revealed most clearly in the life and teachings of Christ—a more complete rendering of God’s missional purposes come into view. Through this lens, the good news of personal salvation, the hope of earthly justice, and the anticipation of apocalyptic glory begin to coalesce into one *holistic* gospel. Through the kingdom paradigm, there is no room for the tired dichotomies

of word and deed. While evangelism—as a verbal expression of the kingdom—remains imperative, its expression is incomplete apart from this holistic witness to the in-breaking kingdom of God.

In recent years, a number of biblical scholars have pointed us back to the *kingdom of God* as a primary motif for the missiological endeavor.³ In *Announcing the Reign of God*, Mortimer Arias, proclaims that, “a comprehensive New Testament theology of the kingdom will not let us take refuge in our favorite dichotomies that plague our internal debate concerning the spiritual and material.”⁴

While the “kingdom of God does not come by careful observation” (Luke 17:20), as Jesus forewarns, the New Testament is clear that the kingdom is manifest when God’s people move forward in active obedience. As Christians communicate the good news of the gospel in *earthly* and *physical* expressions, the *heavenly* and *spiritual* are rightly revealed—consequently creating fertile ground for God’s Word to take root. For this reason, our theoretical understanding of the kingdom is authenticated when it is applied to a lost, needy and broken world.

Ultimately, a holistic understanding of Jesus’ kingdom objectives should broaden the focus of mission. Social ministries have value not only because they can lead to evangelistic opportunities, but more importantly, because they can be a physical manifestation of the good news, and play an important role in articulating what that news is. Whether the kingdom is revealed in physical or spiritual manifestations, the underlying theme is the transformative power of God. While the manner of communication is important, it is *transformation* that articulates the wider objective of mission.

An Incarnational Approach

Whatever we may understand theologically about holistic ministry, it is useless if it cannot gain a foothold in a world that is tangible and pragmatic. This was Jesus’ way. He had little time for theological platitudes, instead letting his actions tell the story—touching, healing, feeding, liberating. This lifestyle of ministry is expressed most purely and succinctly in John’s introduction: “The word (*logos*) became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

The incarnation presents us with an archetype for Christian mission. In one extraordinary event, Jesus brings together the disparate strands of word and deed. Whoever would have expected a spoken Word—God’s verbal utterance—to be articulated in the flesh?

The full significance of this event is ably described by Darrell Guder. The incarnation is both the event of salvation and the way in which God’s saving purposes are accomplished ... it is both the *what* and the *how*.⁵

So as we abandon our comforts and move into the dark, cold places where the poor and marginalized reside we become a walking, breathing illustration of *what* the gospel is. When we are in step with the Spirit, our loving deeds to the poor have the ability to breathe life into the ancient text so that the gospel is both animated and uniquely focused. In this respect, our bodies are like a canvas on which the vibrant strokes of the gospel might be painted to be understood in ways that text and spoken words may not fully convey. As we listen to the poor and shoulder their burdens, we not only point to Christ, but we also point to a coming kingdom in which “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev. 21:4). This too is the *what* of the gospel.

However, as we minister incarnationally, we are not only communicating the *what*, but also *how* the good news is meant to happen. Throughout the New Testament there is a sense that the gospel—its life, grace, redemption and transformation—is both imminent and palpable. Jesus arrived not only proclaiming the good news of the kingdom (Luke 4:43), but also hinting at something more: “The kingdom is near; it is within you; it is among you” (Luke 17:20-21). Obviously, the incarnation was changing the very landscape of the salvation story, so that through Christ, the kingdom was somehow being substantiated in a new and exhilarating way. Yet we also see that Jesus imparts this ministry onto the disciples, and ultimately onto the church (Luke 10:8-9, 2 Cor. 5:18, Eph. 3:10); “Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’” (Luke 10:8-9). So we also carry the kingdom within us as we minister to the poor and disenfranchised. As the oppressed are freed, the naked are clothed, the hungry are fed and sinners are redeemed, the gospel becomes both imminent and palpable just as Jesus portended. So the ministry of word and deed is more than an illustration of the good news, but the very unleashing of its power and presence into the world.

Unto What?

As Christians engage in social ministry of any kind – advocacy, social justice, relief and development - the underlying question must be: “unto what?” Is the objective to feed the hungry? To liberate the poor? To provide credit, jobs, seeds, water, rights, democracy? While all of these are worthy endeavors, they find their ultimate meaning in the broader context of the in-breaking kingdom. It is through this lens that we should view social ministries, whether in planning, implementing, or evaluating. If our plans are not subjected to the greater purposes of the kingdom, we risk getting lost along the lesser path of our personal ambitions.

On the other hand, as we hold up the kingdom as the “unto what” objective of social ministry, we invite God’s Spirit to intercede with transformative power. Transformation is the evidence of the kingdom. When John the Baptist inquired whether Jesus was the one who is to come, Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor” (Matthew 11:5; Luke 7:22). Why does Jesus not give a clear answer to John’s question, “Are you the one who was to come?” For Jesus, the answer is self-evident, so he simply outlines these accounts of kingdom transformation as if to say, “What did you expect?”

Recent Shifts

Interestingly, transformation has also become a central theme within the sector of international relief and development. This has been evidenced by a categorical shift from “growth-centered” to “people-centered” development. 1991 was a significant year in this shift, as the United Nations Development Programme introduced the Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI is a composite statistic including life expectancy, education, and income indices used to rank countries in their human development. The HDI reflects a new appreciation for *people* as the ultimate beneficiaries of development, as opposed to more growth-oriented outcomes which often measured by broader political and economic indicators.

More recently, we have seen a new appreciation for *people* (the poor) as more than beneficiaries of development, but as agents of transformation. In its 2013 annual report the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development proclaimed that “new development goals need to focus on developing people.”⁶ Central to this new approach is the idea that sustainable, long-term development is achieved by investing in people_moving them from the role of beneficiaries to active citizens and agents of change. It is not enough for the poor to have their needs met, when their greatest need is to live with dignity and self-respect_having the mental and emotional conviction necessary to overcome the barriers of poverty. For external actors, this means stepping back and encouraging the poor to take ownership of their own vision, ideas and assets in order to create their own positive change.

One conclusion to be drawn is that, amongst social development actors, the focus on human transformation is not strictly the domain of the religiously motivated. A more important conclusion however, is that given the new landscape of people-centered development, the experience and aptitudes of Christian field workers

and agencies to facilitate human transformation should make them increasingly relevant both in Christian missions and to some degree across secular relief and development sectors.

What Do You Have?

At its core, the gospel bestows dignity and purpose, which coincidentally are the outcomes deemed necessary by development scholars who are advocating for people-centered change.

In his seminal work on transformational development (*Walking with the Poor*), Bryant Myers suggests that “the fulcrum for transformational change is no longer transferring resources or building capacity or increasing access, agency, and choices, as important as these things are ... these things count only if they take place in a way that allows the poor to recover their true identity and discover the vocation God intends for them.”⁷

A short narrative from Acts 4 emphasizes the significance of dignity in the process of social ministry. A man who is clearly disabled from birth approaches two of the apostles and asks them for money. After hearing the man’s request, Peter commands him, “Look at me!” It is a shocking remark because, for a first-century Jew it flies in the face of social convention. With trembling hands extended, and eyes cast downward, “Look at me!” marks the beginning of this man’s transformation. You can almost see his posture begin to change, even before his physical disability is healed.

Ultimately what Peter offers is more meaningful and transformative than money: “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (Acts 3:6). Aside from physical healing however, he has given him dignity. To look into the eyes is to consider one’s being, and to recognize their value and significance. It is to renounce any perceived hierarchy or condescension and to see the individual for who they are.

It is not enough to have the poor contribute to their own development. Rather, they must be the primary agents of change, providing the vision, energy and leadership needed to achieve their goals. As the poor invest in their own ideas, relying on their own community and expending their own blood, sweat, and tears, the outcomes will go beyond the physical. This very process of engagement is transformative as community actors grow in dignity and their sense of purpose.

The role of the missionary or development practitioner is not to instill something upon the poor, but rather it is to encourage something that already exists. Instead of asking “what do you need?” we must look into the eyes of the poor, and ask “what

do you have?” Inherent to this question is the belief that God has uniquely created and qualified each person—and acting upon that recognition is the beginning of transformational development.

In 2 Kings 4, a woman laments to Elisha that her husband has died and she is about to lose her children as indentured slaves. Elisha responds to her need by asking, “*What do you have* in your house?” She replies, “Nothing,” overlooking for the moment a small jar of olive oil tucked away in her cupboard. When she recognizes this important asset and faithfully offers it to God, it becomes the source of transformation both in the life of her family and the wider community.

“What do you have?” represents a seismic shift in development thinking. In my experience it is so counterintuitive that the initial response of the poor is often bewildered silence, since they are accustomed to working with sympathetic benefactors and problem-solvers. It is not, however, a quick-fix methodology, but an attitude by which we must relate with the poor and evaluate the merit of our poverty interventions. It is a question that negates the self-importance of the giver, while affirming the significance of the poor as valued citizens and agents of change.

Far from a how-to approach to social ministry, this essay has considered development strategy at a more foundational level. The hope is that from this starting point we might set off with confidence down roads of advocacy, peacebuilding, relief and all sorts of other social activities with the faith that our interventions might go beyond social change to invoke kingdom transformation. What is essential is that we see the poor for who they are—as God sees them. As we lay aside easy and reflexive solutions and look into the eyes of the poor, we see that transformation is not rooted in good strategy but in our willingness to invite Christ into every initiative, praying “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Community Development

(Murray Nickel)

Introducing Community Development

If you’ve been to Paris you may have been to the Palais de Chaillot without knowing it. At the Palais complex a large open space is hemmed in by two grand neoclassical buildings and eight bronze statues. Hundreds of tourists come daily to gaze across the fountains and over the river at the most well-known structure in Paris, the Eiffel Tower. Many people who come here don’t know that this square has its own significant history. It’s here that the iconic picture of Hitler was taken after the Germans rolled into Paris. More importantly, it’s here that the United

Nations (UN) General Assembly met on December 10, 1948, and adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in reaction to the barbarities of World War II. As a memorial to that event the square at Palais de Chaillot is called the Human Rights Esplanade.

The UN document drafted at the Palais was surprisingly insightful given that it was written in an age of modernism and paternalistic attitudes towards less developed states. The first article states, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”⁸ If these ideas sound familiar it’s because they closely reflect what you’ve read in the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament.

The UN elaborated on these principles years later defining community development as “a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and fullest possible reliance upon the community’s initiative.”⁹ Unfortunately, these words have done little to quell the suffering resulting from all the wars and oppression the world has seen since 1948. Who is assigned the task of designing the “process?” And who defines what “progress” looks like? We in the North tend to dictate a process of community development for the south even though we aren’t sure what the process is. We agree that community development is our Christian responsibility but we’re uncertain what progress looks like.

Community Development As Process And Progress

When I moved to the Democratic Republic of the Congo I had high hopes of immersing myself in community development. But my optimism rapidly faded. The challenges of understanding a new culture and learning to communicate within a context of war, paranoia, and poverty were almost more than I or my family could handle. Just getting food on the table for supper took so much energy. The sacrifice was greater than I had expected. I questioned seriously the value of my presence in Congo. Questions about process and progress filled my mind, and I wasn’t sure if there were acceptable answers.

As I visited people in Congo and asked questions I began to see what community development meant to people in the past and in the present. I remember visiting a school built by past missionaries. It had seen better days. The roof was half gone, the windows had long been removed, the blackboards were barely discernible and the worn-out desks had been covered with wooden planks. I thought of all the prayers, sweat and maybe even tears that went into raising funds, building the school and supporting missionary teachers. I couldn’t help but feel disappointed.

Soon after this experience I was eating a meal with some of my colleagues and as we reminisced about the ‘good old days’ I was struck by a hopeful thought. Here I was, sitting at the table with a man with the grandest vision I’ve ever seen for good governance and effective leadership. He had worked incredibly hard to obtain an education locally and overseas to acquire the necessary skills. Another colleague was a self-made consultant for administrators and business people. He was so popular that he was now in demand internationally. Another was an agriculturalist encouraging local farmers to form associations. What did they have in common? They had all been students at that run-down school. Each of them acknowledged that their motivation to push forward in Christ-like service to their community came from the inspiration they received at that school. Their stories weren’t about the building or the blackboards. They talked about the teachers. It was the relationships that mattered. The hopelessness I had felt about a past project was gone; in its place was amazement at its immeasurable success.

As I considered the experience of my Congolese colleagues I began to see that the core of community development process needs to be relationship and mutual respect, not projects or programs. I see a clear analogy here to our faith walk. The decision to follow Christ is a critical moment. But transformation of our lives and of our character comes as we discover how to follow. This is Christian discipleship. Discipleship centers around relationship. The process of community development looks more like discipleship to me than like secular charity.

Community development is an act of costly obedience, not a pastime. It is not simply a good work, nor a guilt-ridden task. We take on the challenge because we are passionate about loving others. Healthy development emphasizes our equality rather than drawing attention to our class differences. Those who possess power are willing to give it up for the benefit of the disempowered. Oppressive leaders are not good at this, but Christians should be. Bonhoeffer lived and died by his words: “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”¹⁰ When we practice true community development, attending to people’s social needs is inseparable from and fully integrated with meeting Christ and coming to know Him.

If “process” is analogous to discipleship, how do we define “progress”? It doesn’t follow that progress is achieved by meeting program objectives. My view is that progress in community development is the transformation of an individual or a community into followers of Jesus Christ. Of course, program objectives are important markers. A program to feed the hungry might have the objective to feed a certain number of people in need of food. Attaining these objectives is progress, but not the transformational progress that is necessary to achieve community development.

The success of a community development model shouldn't be measured by the end results of a program. Programs come and go. People in a feeding program get hungry again. A clinic built in a project may be burned down during the next rebel advance. This kind of "failed" project does not equal failed community development. A changed people remain. The progress we look for must be something more permanent—a transformed community of Christ-followers. We should remember that the opposite holds true as well. A program that looks successful doesn't necessarily translate to successful community development. In fact, it may distract us from our ultimate goal of changed lives.

It may sound like I'm dismissing programs and projects altogether, but they are important cogs in a wheel. What we need to remember is that they are not the wheel itself. Methods change from year to year. What was relevant or fashionable in my parents' generation may not apply today. What works in Congo may not work in Thailand. Worldviews change with the times and across cultures. It's critical that we hold loosely to our methods and constantly revisit them.

Community Development, Worldview and Values

A few years into our sojourn in the Congo, a young Congolese colleague of mine died in a terrible motorcycle accident. According to his family it was not the slippery road or the lack of a helmet that led to his death. He had been cursed by another family. Two Christian families, leaders in their communities, accused one another and caused horrible division in their church. Though Christian belief was present, a strong sense of right and wrong resurfaced from the past and influenced their behavior in a time of crisis. Though this story may sound dysfunctional to our Northern ears, it made me realize that I'm not immune to a dysfunctional sense of right and wrong. I may assume that my worldview is correct, but when I base my methodology on my sense of right and wrong, I run the risk of not achieving the progress in community development that I'm hoping for.

Some years ago a church in the U.S. raised money for university scholarships for students from their denomination in Congo. In follow-up they asked the benefiting students how they were getting along. The students said they were receiving only a fraction of the money being sent. The church in the U.S. accused the university administration of thievery and ended the program. When I reviewed the issues later I found that the administration wasn't stealing the money, but distributing it so that all of the most needy students, including those from other denominations, could benefit. This was not communicated to the givers; now none of the students benefit from the scholarships. Lack of honest communication between parties plays havoc,

damaging relationships. In Congo there is a deep sense that loyalty to your friends trumps transparency with outside parties. In the north it's the opposite; transparency trumps loyalty. Who's right?

Once I recognize the fallibility of my deeply ingrained sense of right and wrong, I gain perspective and recognize my need for humility and guidance. Fortunately, we've been given an example to follow. The process of community development can be guided by Christlike virtue instead of the less dependable virtues of modern society or the G-20 (Group of Twenty major economies). If we have by faith committed ourselves to a life in Christ, it follows that we should want Christlike virtues to guide our behavior. Jesus provides a template for behavioral change and guides the process of community development. Understanding Christlike virtue is an essential element of determining methods for community development.

The Micah Way of Community Development

Micah was a prophet who provided a template for community development that we can follow. He highlights three foundational community development virtues: justice, mercy, and humility (Micah 6:8). These virtues should be integrated into every community development methodology, no matter what culture or generation.

Micah implores us to do justice. He lives in a context in which the rich are taking advantage of the poor. Poverty is an injustice. Fortunately, there's a sincere desire in the churches of the richer world to intervene and correct the injustice. But we too often charge in with flags held high as heroes coming into battle. Despite our best intentions, we don't always achieve our objective of transformed lives. Poverty is foreign to us. The poor often speak a different language and live in an unfamiliar culture. These barriers must be crossed if we want to bring hope.

Moving against the injustice of poverty does not begin with our sense of what is right or wrong. It starts with understanding the poor. Entering into relationship before jumping into a project or program is imperative for community development. Justice doesn't start with projects designed by the rich. The theologian and missionary Lesslie Newbigin stated that Christian mission brings everyone "the possibility of understanding that the meaning and goal of history are not to be found in any of the projects, programs, ideologies and utopias..."¹¹ He says, "The Church... offers to all peoples...a vision which makes it possible to act hopefully when there is no earthly hope, and to find the way when everything is dark and there are no earthly landmarks."¹² Bringing justice to a community starts at the grassroots with the oppressed themselves. What are they saying? This takes time, patience and perseverance, particularly when communicating through cross-cultural filters. To introduce the light of Christ we need to discover where it is dark. It will do no good

for the non-poor to make decisions that are best left to local leadership in poor communities. Justice is rarely cut and dried. An understanding of it develops slowly.

Micah understood that justice needs to be dressed with loving mercy. Mercy is not pity. Acting out of pity does not require sacrifice. Pity is content with a quick fix. Pity doesn't challenge class systems. If justice is the muscle of community development, then mercy is at its heart. With mercy we see that we're all created equal; we are eager to break down class barriers. With mercy we commit ourselves for the long term. Mercy acts out the story of love and reconciliation that was acted out for us. As Christ-followers we willingly and obediently take up the cross. Because God has reconciled us to himself, it is a joy to be a part of his reconciliation among the poor. Bringing mercy into community development implies sacrificial commitment and respect for others. Encouraging local leadership, respecting ideas from the community and coaching ongoing progress are key elements of any program or method. Only God can restore a healthy identity to the poor. "When the poor accept their marred identity and their distorted sense of vocation as normative and immutable, their poverty is complete. It is also permanent unless this issue is addressed and they are helped to recover their identity as children of God, made in God's image, and their true vocation as productive stewards in the world God made for them."¹³

Finally, Micah encourages us to walk with humility. Humility is the underlying attitude that corrects our perspective. A delusional, corrupt oppressor is one of the greatest contributors to poverty. Mobutu, a dictator in the Congo in the eighties, stole billions from his country, causing his people to suffer in abject poverty. He constructed palaces for himself in Europe and flew there regularly on his personal Boeing 747. In the last disastrous days of his rule he managed to escape from his jungle palace on a borrowed cargo plane. As the plane took off under fire from his own supposedly loyal presidential guard, Mobutu found it hard to understand why his people had abandoned him. In order to maintain their illusions of grandeur, the powerful create corrupt frameworks that oppress their people. Power so easily distorts our perspective. With humility we retain a sense of reality.

Our god-complexes compromise our ability to engage in healthy community development. Drawing from Jayakumar Christian's insights, Myers states that, "Transformational development that does not assert God's truth over these self-justifying narratives leaves the structural side of poverty and its causes untouched."¹⁴ Though the poor are shackled by their marred identity, the non-poor are deluded by their arrogance. When we grasp the hands of the poor, we don't have as solid a perch as we think. Perhaps it is more true that we're flailing in the water together with the poor. The poor and the non-poor are both guided by the slow process of experimentation and discovery. The non-poor learn that they are not

heroes. The poor learn that they are not helpless. When we realize this, we can begin community development.

Conclusion

Just as discipleship is an important element of our decision to follow Christ, community development is an integral part of planting the church. The goal of community development is not a new clinic or a thriving school, but a behavioral change. Behavioral change implies that corrupt virtues are exposed and Christlike virtues are introduced. It's the process of changing behavior, not the project on the brochure, that's essential for community development. It takes patience and perseverance to find the way through. If you are a Christian, community development is not about telling people how to improve; it's about helping people discover who they are. Emphasis on a Spirit-guided road of mutual understanding, not on our methods and resources, will bring transformation to a community.

Notes

¹ Jacob Loewen was an MB missionary to Colombia and Panama beginning in the 1940s.

² Jacob A. Loewen, *Educating Tiger: My Spiritual and Intellectual Journey*, (Hillsboro: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2000), 290.

³ See, for example, Mortimer Arias, *Announcing the Reign of God: Evangelization and the Subversive Memory of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984); N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008); and Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997).

⁴ Arias, *Announcing the Reign*, xvii.

⁵ Darrell Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 1-9.

⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/dec/05/end-poverty-economic-growth-new-goals-oecd>

⁷ Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 116.

⁸ "The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights - Article 1," <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr>.

⁹ Ashridge Conference on Social Development, *Social Development in the British Colonial Territories* (London: Colonial Office, 1954).

- ¹⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), 87.
- ¹¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 129.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 129.
- ¹³ Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 76.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 74. In this paragraph, Bryant Myers refers to Jayakumar Christian's *Reflections on Poverty and Transformation* lecture series for the World Vision board of directors (March, 1998).

Recommended Reading

- Arias, Mortimer. *Announcing the Reign of God: Evangelization and the Subversive Memory of Jesus*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984.
- Loewen, Jacob A. *Educating Tiger: My Spiritual and Intellectual Journey*. Hillsboro: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2000.
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Study Questions

1. This chapter hopefully introduced some new perspectives about social change. List three new insights you have gained.
2. In the first section, the author promotes viewing people, especially the poor, not primarily as beneficiaries of charity, but as agents of change for themselves and their community. He then gives two biblical examples in response to the question, "What do you have?" Give two current examples where the poor became change agents and lives were transformed.
3. How important is the Jesus model of incarnation? What about lasting social change without the incarnation of the Body of Christ, the church? Reflect and discuss secular social service vs. Christian social service.
4. Reflect on and review those social ministries you are familiar with. How would you evaluate them in terms of some of the principles discussed in this chapter—incarnation, transformation, kingdom presence, relationships, justice, mercy, humility, etc.?

