The Role of Religion in International Development

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The post-war dreams of development are largely shattered today. Despite the investment of billions of dollars and great efforts by tens of thousands of people, we live in a world of dehumanizing poverty, collapsing ecological systems, and deeply stressed social systems. The South Commission concludes,

For many, there was the hope born of success in their liberation struggles. Everywhere there was talk of equality and progress . . . . It is important to remember this period of progress and its atmosphere of hope now, when there is deep pessimism in much of the Third World about the prospects of economic development.¹

In part, this failure can be blamed on the continued rapid explosion of the human population. The sheer fact that global famines and government collapse have not taken place more widely is testimony to the fact that significant gains have been made in food production and in the establishment of stable governments. But these gains have not been experienced by the poor and the oppressed.² If anything, inequality between the privileged few and the marginalized many has increased. In countries and between countries the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few continues. What has gone wrong? And what role does religion, or the lack of it, play in this failure?

Definitions

Religion

Traditionally, religion has been defined as belief in supernatural beings and forces. But as anthropologists have studied religions around the world, they have seen that

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² In 1989 about 1.2 billion people lived in absolute poverty, a fact which translates into a world poverty rate of 23.4% (Alan Durning, Poverty and the Environment, Worldwatch Paper 92 [Washington: Worldwatch Institute, 1989]). More than 100 million people are homeless, living under bridges and on garbage dumps. The world's poorest 400 million are subject to stunted growth and mental retardation from malnourishment, and 1.9 billion people drink and bathe in contaminated waters (UNICEF, State of the World's Children [New York: Oxford University Press, 1989]).
this definition is seriously flawed. First, it is ethnocentric. It is based on the western dualism of spirit and matter, mind and brain, supernatural and natural\textsuperscript{3}--a dualism that does not exist in most cultures. They see the world as full of beings and forces, visible and invisible, that interrelate in everyday life. Second, from a Christian point of view, this ontological dualism is unbiblical. The distinction in our Scriptures is between God the Creator and his creation. Creation includes angels (good and evil), humans, animals, and the world. It is not divided into supernatural and natural realms--into spiritual and social concerns.

Anthropologists now define 'religion' as beliefs about the ultimate nature of things, deepest feelings and motivations, and fundamental values and allegiances. It gives us the big picture of reality. In this sense, atheistic Theravada Buddhism, Marxism, and Scientism are religions, and much of western superficial Christianity-as-entertainment is not.\textsuperscript{4} For our purposes we will use Clifford Geertz's definition of religion:

A religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of facticity that (5) the molds and motivations seem uniquely realistic.\textsuperscript{5}

According to Geertz, the fundamental human needs are to find meaning in the world and human life, and to answer the problems of suffering and injustice. Religion gives us the ultimate answers to these concerns and is therefore the foundation of all cultures. In short, religion creates the Cosmos.

Development

The term 'development' is equally difficult to define. As Peter Berger points out, "Underlying the major ideological models for social change (including Third World development) are two powerful myths--the myth of growth and the myth of revolution."\textsuperscript{6} The term 'development' is associated with the first of these. It assumes change through incremental improvement, and is based on Enlightenment assumptions of progress, autonomous individualism, faith in reason, and innate goodness of humans.

3 This dualism appeared in the West when the Crusaders and the Muslim universities in Spain reintroduced the dualism of Plato and Aristotle. Thomas Aquinas provides us with its classical theological codification. The emergence of a secular science devoid of divine activity is a further consequence.


The term ‘development’ itself is a replacement for ‘civilization,’ the earlier term that underlay the nineteenth-century theory of cultural evolution. Jonathan Bonk writes,

Today mission theory on the “cutting edge” resounds with the talk of “development” and “underdevelopment.” The West continues to be the standard against which “development” is measured; and western aid and efforts have, until quite recently, been fueled by the certainty that given enough money, time and Western expertise, the rest of the world can become what the West now is—“developed”.

Berger argues that both capitalism, with its faith in development, and Marxism, with its trust in revolution, have imposed too severe a human cost in the name of progress:

The critics of capitalism are right when they reject policies that accept hunger today while promising affluence tomorrow (and they are right when they question the promise). The critics of socialism are right when they reject policies that accept terror today in the promise of a humane order tomorrow (and, again, when they question whether such a tomorrow is believable).

Clearly a new paradigm of development is needed that is neither capitalist nor Marxist, but truly Christian.

We will define ‘development’ as “the movement of people, societies and cultures towards what God intended for them to be as his creation.” On the individual level, this includes food, shelter, health, reconciliation with God, freedom from the power of sin, and growth into full humanity—into the image of God. On the social level, it includes justice, equality, genuine community, and harmony with nature; on the cultural level it includes the knowledge of truth and a meaningful life, experience of joy, and a commitment to righteousness, love, and peace. And on the spiritual level, it involves right relationships with God and one another within the framework of God’s Kingdom.

Religion and development

Scholars such as Max Weber and Gunner Myrdal have argued that religions

8 Berger, xii.
9 Compare Edgar Stoesz’s definition for MCC: Development is “the process by which persons and societies come to realize the full potential of human life in a context of social justice. It is essentially a people’s struggle in which the poor and oppressed are the active participants and beneficiaries. . . . Development is the conscientization process by which people are awakened to opportunities within their reach. Development is people with an increasing control over their destiny. Development is freedom, wholeness and justice.” See his Thoughts on Development, rev. ed. (Akron, Pa.: MCC, 1977), 3-4.
provide worldviews that either foster or hinder development. Specifically, they believe that other-worldly religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism kill desires for this-worldly progress by putting greatest value on other-worldly concerns. Milton Singer, Kussum Nair, and others have sought to demonstrate from empirical data that religious beliefs do not affect peoples’ desires to improve their lot. Recent discussions focus on the appropriateness of combining religious activities such as evangelism and church planting with activities designed to bring about economic and political development.

Development in the West

What have been the foundations of modern development programs from the West, and what roles has religion played in them? Rather than take a historical approach to this question, we will approach it thematically.

Reductionism: nonreligious solutions

Religion has played no significant part in past scientific and governmental programs of development. The sharp dualism between supernatural and natural domains, combined with the widespread denial of supernatural realities, led to a worldview that reduced development to purely naturalistic interpretations. Even in the sciences there was a tendency to reduce it to single problems and single solutions. In the 1950s the problem was seen as poverty, and the solution was economic development which could be achieved through the transfer of technology, science, and economic resources. It was assumed that such development would lead to political and social advancement. This assumption reflected the linear view of causality characteristic of the sciences in the first half of this century.

12 William van Geest and his associates outline four models of relationship between development and religion, and conclude that all can be effective approaches to development. However, throughout their analysis they stress the importance of including religion as a central component. See William van Geest, “The Relationship Between Development and Other Religious Activities and Objectives” (paper prepared for Church and Development Dialogue, Toronto, June 14-15, 1993), 17-21.
By the end of the 1960s it was clear that solutions based on economic growth and community development had failed. Robert McNamara, president of the World Bank, noted at the bank's annual meeting in 1973 that the development strategies of the past two decades had an unacceptably small impact on poverty. The food per capita for the poor had not changed; the employment rate lagged behind population growth; growth and basic services were available only in some large urban conglomerations; and overall growth rates were erratic and not sustained. Eventually, trickle-down theories of poverty alleviation were abandoned. A major reason for the repeated failures plaguing many economic development programs was that they did not take social and religious factors into account. Too much effort went into providing project hardware, and too little on the indispensable social software. Development agencies failed to involve local communities in expressing their felt needs, working together to design a solution, and implementing development projects.

In the 1970s the cause of poverty was seen primarily as oppression and unjust sociopolitical systems. The assumption was that the poor lacked power, and if power were given to them, they would improve their own lot. The solution was seen as the transformation of sociopolitical structures. Development-oriented social scientists were widely involved in the planning of projects. Target groups—the poor with an income below the absolute threshold of poverty—became the focus of concern. Attempts were made to adapt projects to their cultures, and to involve them in the process. The central issues were land reform and social justice.

But political transformations also missed the mark. They failed to consider human nature and the power of individuals. In India land reform led to a redistribution of only a small amount of marginal land. Rich land owners registered the maximum acreage allowed a person in the names of each member of the family, the family cows, and the family pets. Transforming systems without transforming people has few lasting results. It overlooks the fact that government officials, bankers, merchants, politicians, and other power brokers have vested interests in preserving their own positions and can circumvent the legal and economic changes designed to help the people. It also fails to recognize that people want more than a good living—they want meaningful lives.

By the 1990s it was obvious that programs of political development had largely failed. Peasant revolts in Nicaragua and Zimbabwe were successful but did

14 Michael M Cernea, "Using Knowledge from Social Science in Development Projects" in *Project Appraisal* 9 2 (June 1994), (Guildford Surrey Beec Tree Publications), 83-94
15 During this time co-author Paul Hiebert became involved in work being done by U.S.A.I.D., the Agricultural Development Council, and the International Crop Research Institute of South Asia. Land reform and agricultural development were the central foci of these development programs.
not lead to long-term development. The common people worked hard, but today these nations are part of global systems, and if these systems oppose change, it will not bear fruit. The command economies began to collapse, and the capitalist economies were burdened by debt and reduced their spending on education, health, and welfare programs for the poor.

The lack of success of these approaches to development is due in large measure to reductionism. They reduced problems to a single cause, and their solutions were piecemeal. Most practitioners knew they could lift a few families to self-reliance, but that did not change the situation fundamentally. We now know that cultures, societies, and even people themselves are not linear systems in which one dimension—whether economic, social, political, or ideological—is the motor that drives the whole. True development requires a transformation of all human systems.

Where were Christians in all this? Influenced by a belief in progress and science, missionaries in the nineteenth century saw it their task to Christianize and Civilize people around the world. They planted churches, and built schools and hospitals. The results were significant. The education and medical systems of many young countries have their roots in the mission movement. But the Christianity the missionaries brought was often foreign to the local cultures, and the science they taught destroyed the people’s traditional ways. In the twentieth century, Christian missions split on their central task. One wing of the church accepted the modern agenda of development, and saw its task as responding to economic poverty and political injustice. Another wing left social and economic problems to science and the state, and saw its task as offering eternal salvation defined mainly in spiritual terms. Samuel Escobar notes that the verbal strife in missions "has been due to isolating one element of the gospel to the exclusion of others and to fostering a false dichotomy."17

Stratigraphic approaches: secular and religious

Clifford Geertz calls another way of dealing with human problems the "stratigraphic" approach. It recognizes that several complementary solutions are needed to solve human problems but sees these as working separately from one another. It defines various complete and irreducible levels of human need, each

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16 Bello and his associates trace the global economic rollback now occurring around the world, and attribute it to U.S. attempts to reassert its dominance of the international economy. See Walden Bello.
superimposed on those beneath it and underpinning those above. Strip off the motley forms of culture and we uncover the structural regularities of social organization. Peel off these and we find the underlying psychological needs—basic human needs such as the need to belong, to have identity and status, and to be creative. Remove these and we have biological needs—food, shelter, and medical care—that underlie the whole edifice of human life.

One example of this approach is Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs. According to Maslow we must first meet the basic biological needs of people before we can turn to their psychological needs. When both of these have been met, we can begin to work with their social and cultural needs, and finally their spiritual needs. Given the magnitude of our global task, it is clear that we rarely can move beyond the bottom one or two layers of human needs. The stratigraphic view led to the idea that development must take place on different levels and in different stages. Technological change is required to increase food production; free markets must be introduced to facilitate manufacturing and trade; political reforms are needed to guarantee justice and equity; industry must be regulated to control ecological pollution and damage; and education is needed to empower people for their own development.

In Christian circles this stratigraphic view is widespread. The old Greek dualism of supernatural and natural relegates religion to spiritual salvation, and leaves the development of the material world to science. This division is seen in our separation between evangelism and social concern, and in our attempts to somehow balance the two. Following Maslow’s lead, one side of the church argues that biological and social needs must be met first. Only then can spiritual needs be truly addressed. The other side of the church argues that spiritual needs are more important than physical and social needs. Third World churches often take their cue from their western counterparts: Pentecostal churches in Central America, for example, focus on evangelism and personal salvation, while many mainline protestant churches emphasize service to the poor. Neither approach has succeeded in solving the intertwined human problems of poverty, oppression, and alienation from God and from other humans.

Holism: religious solutions

Both reductionist and stratigraphic approaches to development have failed, largely because both attack the problems of poverty, injustice, and spiritual alienation piecemeal. However, the emerging view of development today has two elements relevant to our discussion. First, development is now being understood more


20 This discussion is based on recent position papers of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and its new policies of partnership with Christian NGOs.
wholistically, as a process of change involving whole people and whole sociocultural systems. Second, it is seen to require a partnership between the people and the agents of change. The paternalistic approaches of the past, in which we define the needs, provide the resources, carry out the work, and evaluate the results, have failed. The people involved in development must participate in each of these steps from the outset.

HOLISM: A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO HUMANS, SOCIETIES, AND CULTURES

Current anthropological theory sees individual human beings, corporate social orders, and cultural maps as intersecting systems (Figure 1). By “system” is meant a set of related elements that interact in distinct ways to form a functioning whole.

21 Van Geest.
22 An example of this is the El Salvadoran government’s latrine project. A promoter was sent to poor communities such as La Linea to sign up families for dry latrines. Although few knew what these were, everybody signed up for one. After all, the program was free and required little or no effort on the part of the community. Like a whirlwind, teams of builders came and constructed the dry latrines with bricks and mortar. The government promised a follow-up program to teach the people how to use them, but months passed and no one came. The people used the small structures to store grain and other household goods. Soon the structures began to disappear as families used the bricks to build walls and structures they felt were needed.
For example, individuals can be analyzed as separate systems made up of physical, biological, psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual subsystems. At the corporate level, people are parts of larger social systems which have economic, social, political, legal, and ideological dimensions. Cultural systems consist of beliefs, feelings, and values—of maps of reality that people use for planning courses of action. They are made up of subsystems of rituals, symbols, beliefs, and, at their core, religion and worldview. These three systems interact to form the macro-human system—a system of systems. Changes in individuals affect societies, and changes in societies affect the people in them. Similarly, shifts in cultural belief affect both social organization and individuals, and vice versa.

One value of a human systems approach to development is that it puts people first in planned development interventions and avoids the weaknesses of reductionist and stratigraphic approaches. A second value is that this approach avoids a linear view of cause and effect, and recognizes that needs and solutions may emerge in any of the systems. This means we must distinguish between root causes and consequent symptoms. If the underlying cause in a dysfunctional society is economic, we may treat the politics, social or religion outcomes, but until we deal with the root economic causes, our remedial programs will be only superficial and temporary. Similarly, if the root case is religious, then economic and political solutions will be nothing more than bandaids mitigating the problem. A third advantage is that we may enter the system at any point to introduce change. We can begin with felt needs through programs of economic development, or medical work, or spiritual ministries. However, we must move from these to their underlying causes—to the systemic evils that give rise to them. Ultimately all the systems and subsystems involved in the problem must be transformed.

RELIGION AND HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

Given a systems view, then, what is the role of religion in development? If religion constitutes the core of a culture and defines its ultimate realities and values, then development that does not include religious change is clearly superficial and transitory. In a recent evaluation of the role of religion in development, sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), William van Geest and his associates write,

We conclude that basic beliefs generally, and religious activities specifically, cannot be separated from the development process. Basic beliefs are inherent, both in the approaches of western agencies and in the development process in southern communities. All development concepts, including those dominant in western culture, are driven by basic beliefs about how societies ought to develop.23

23 Van Geest, i.
All development programs, whether Christian or not, reflect inherent religious beliefs and values. The only difference is that in some programs this remains implicit, and in others it is made explicit.

Van Geest and his colleagues give three reasons for including religion in thinking about development. First, most non-western cultures do not distinguish between religious and secular aspects of life. As natives take leadership, they will not maintain the dualism, and attempts to maintain it are an imposition of western values on their cultures. Second, changing people’s religious beliefs is not qualitatively different from changing their social, political, and economic beliefs. Third, and more fundamentally, the traditional western worldview conflicts with the emerging understanding of development as a holistic process.

**Holistic development: quasi-religious approaches**

If religion, anthropologically defined, is at the core of any lasting development, then what is the religion that drives programs of modern secular development? The answer is nationalism. Ernst Troeltsch observed that

> Nationalism offers people a creed every bit as potent as religion, with love and devotion of one’s people and country a competitor in the altruistic sense with faith in God and the hereafter.\(^{24}\)

Nationalism effectively combines persuasion with sanction, self-denial with personal vindication, and the struggle for existence with giving one’s life. It provides a value that transcends egoism because the values relate not to the individual but to the whole.

But nationalism has failed to bring about development because it is a limited, quasi-religion. First, as William Hocking points out, it seeks its own self-interest and has no ultimate commitment to the well-being of others. The state does not speak for the cosmos, but for a community of people; it is inherently ethnocentric. As well, it elevates bureaucratic rules and military science to a transcendent ethic. It is a secular religion that promises to satisfy human nature and succeed in its work, but it “depends for its vitality upon a [spiritual] motivation which it cannot by itself command. . . . The very nature of the secular pragmatic state is that it is a human, finite contrivance, and the gap between the finite and infinite remains—infinite.”\(^{25}\) National self-interest wins out over sacrifice for humanity.

Second, Hocking argues that the state is necessary to enable macro-planning to take place,\(^{26}\) but this leads to the false conclusion that the state is capable of

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civilizing humans and of leading them out of ignorance and stagnation. In fact, nationalism, sacralized and absolutized, has no higher power to which it is accountable, and, unchecked, becomes a source of the demonic and depraved. A strong State without a strong Church inevitably assumes some or most of the attributes of unchecked absolutism. Repudiation of the cosmic moral law in favor of absolute national sovereignty has disastrous consequences for persons and societies.

Finally, nationalism cannot motivate development workers to sacrifice themselves for the well-being of people in other nations. To die for one’s country is one thing; to die for strangers, foreigners, and enemies is another. The main motive to which nations appeal is national self-interest, and the chief incentive is economic reward, but this keeps the workers from identifying with the people, and builds a wall between them and those whom they serve.

**Holistic development: a Christian approach**

We suggest that the underlying vision and motivation for true development lies in a Christian view of reality, because it provides the foundational views necessary for lasting transformation.

**Goals for development**

People fight for bread to survive, but there is more to life than bread—it is the full recognition of their dignity as persons and as children of God that they want. To live as human beings, as Troeltsch points out, we must live not only for the sake of mere physical existence but for the indestructible moral ideal. Geertz contends that our greatest desire is not to stay alive but to find meaning in life. Martyrs went boldly to the stake because their deaths took on transcendent meaning.

Our goal in development as Christians is to strive towards God’s perfect intentions when he created humans. This begins with their full humanity as beings created in the image of God. It finds its full expression in the reconciliation between humans and God, and among one another, that leads to communities of righteousness, peace, love, and harmony with creation, and to the reign of God over all creation. Says Leslie Newbigin:

Humans find their dignity when they surrender their autonomy to one another. . . . Rich and poor work together on models of development rooted in mutual responsibility for all, which will safeguard real human dignity, freeing ourselves completely from the illusion that ‘happiness’ in the form that modern societies have sought it can ever be the goal of human living and mark

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27 Troeltsch, 176.
28 Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System."
of human dignity. Development, so understood, will require more difficult changes from the rich world than for the poor.29

Ultimately these transformations of individuals, societies, and cultures are rooted in religious transformations.

Causes of poverty and injustice

The failure of secular development programs is partly due to an inadequate concept of evil and the locus of its power. Some views tend to root current problems in the individual (modern evangelicalism, capitalism). Sin is then reduced to personal alienation that separates people from God. To deal with it, we seek transformed individuals. But this overlooks the corporate nature of human rebellion against the reign of God that finds its expression in the societies and cultures humans build, as well as the corporate nature of God’s salvation in the establishment of his reign on earth. Other views assume that evil lies in social systems, and look for revolutions that break the control of the powerful and wealthy over governments and markets, or for education to uproot ideologies that blind people to the fact that they can change their world. But these views overlook the fact that individuals, too, are sinners, and can subvert corporate systems to their own ends.

The transformation of individuals, societies, or cultures without transforming the other systems will have no lasting results. Transformed individuals leave their communities and join the privileged. Social revolutions lead to new tyrannies as the oppressed become the new oppressors. Ideological change that does not change the lives of individuals and social systems will not eliminate the evils we seek to address.

Means of development

In the past agencies have reduced development to matters of technology, economics, social organization or politics, but none of these has led to comprehensive and lasting transformation. Change in all of the human systems is needed.

INDIVIDUAL TRANSFORMATION

On the individual level, we look for transformed people—people who seek righteousness, peace, and justice; people who love their enemies and seek their well-being. This vision must include the material well-being of everyone, their psychological and sociological health, and their spiritual salvation. Transformed individuals are important to indigenize community development. Until local

people emerge with the vision of holistic development, our programs remain potted plants dependent on outside nourishment. Development will take root and grow naturally only when individuals arise in the community who emulate the compassion, servant leadership, and self-sacrifice modeled in Christ.

SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Ultimately social transformation must include the transformation of global systems. Peter Berger notes:

If there is one proposition that today dominates in the Third World, at least among its politicians and intellectuals, it is that there is little hope for Third World countries to emerge from poverty unless they free themselves from their present state of dependency on the rich countries.30

As Christians we seek this change not by violent revolution, nor by assisting the hand of ‘progress’. We must stand as prophetic voices condemning evil and nurturing righteousness, and we must build the church as a model of a community of justice and righteousness.31 It is the church that often serves as the locus of development in a community; it provides local accountability and a bridge to the people. Unfortunately, the local church has often been as much a part of the problem as a part of the solution. Transformation thus must begin in the church, and it is a process in which all of us must be involved, Christian and non-Christian, foreign and native. Finally, as part of global social systems, churches and development agencies need to model the oneness of God’s people and partnership in ministry in intercultural settings. We must work with the local people to define, plan, execute, and evaluate our development programs.32

RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATION

A religious transformation is needed to bring about self-sustaining and self-reproducing development. For several reasons, this transformation must not only be religious but Christian.33

30 Berger, 217.
32 Cernea, 8-10.
33 One might argue that Islam and Hinduism have failed to be major agents in global development because they do not seek the welfare of people other than their own. Islam does not offer non-Muslims full human rights and dignity, while orthodox Hinduism has little concern for others who are not part of one’s immediate caste and family. People involved in development programs are mainly those who have been influenced by Christianity and its value on compassion for all humans, particularly the marginalized, such as members of the Rama Krishna Mission, which arose out of encounters with Christianity.
First, the Christian vision affirms the dignity and equality of all humans, and has special concern for the poor, oppressed, and powerless. It seeks to invert the power structures inherent in fallen societies. Without this ‘upside-down’ view of humanity, religion itself becomes simply an ideology that justifies oppression and poverty, and rewards the powerful and rich. Second, Christian thought provides the motivation for reaching out to help the poor, oppressed, and lost. It calls for a profound understanding of their plight, their suffering, and their aspirations. It challenges us to deny ourselves and our own personal gains, and to sacrifice our lives for the sake of others with no calculation of personal benefit. This motivation is totally alien to business and government, which recruit people for development projects by offering them high salaries and comfortable lifestyles—rewards that keep the agents from truly identifying with the local people. Nor does science provide a motivation to identify ourselves with the people for the sake of their good. Only Christian faith, or memories of it (e.g., the U.S. Peace Corps), are able to motivate people to sacrifice their lives and identify with the alienated.

Third, Christianity provides us with the moral standards by which we must work. We cannot oppress some in order to benefit others, employ evil means to achieve good ends, or use violence to bring about peace. We must embody in our programs the values we proclaim. Finally, Christian faith provides people with the hope of a better life now, and assurance of the final triumph of justice, equity, and peace. If, as the world often sees it, development is a rear guard action against the advance of famine, poverty, injustice, and chaos, then we have little reason to sacrifice ourselves for others. If, however, as Christ proclaimed, we are on the winning side and the final victory is assured, we have every reason to enter the fight against evil, for we know our labor will bear lasting fruit.

Holistic Christian development: a case

One example of a holistic approach to development is the MCC project in La Linea in El Salvador. La Linea is a small community located along the railroad tracks in a semi-urban area. Its residents are mainly people displaced by the twelve-year Salvadoran civil war that ended in 1992. They are squatters, living on what used to be government land that is now the property of the owner of the privatized railroad company. They struggle with many basic issues: lack of access

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34 The effects of this can be seen in the modern mission movement and in the current charismatic ministry in poor, inner-city communities. As people become Christian, they sacrifice to send their children to school. By the second and third generation there is what is called ‘redemption and lift.’ Scholars recognize that Christians are the most upwardly mobile of communities in most Third World nations.

35 Byron and Barbara Hiebert-Crape served with MCC in La Linea from 1990 to 1994. In line with MCC policy of working with churches to empower the poor, they ministered with the Emmanuel Baptist Church of San Salvador to develop a Christian community in the squatters’ settlement.
to food, education, health care, and adequate shelter; problems of violence, gangs, and drugs; and family disintegration and early teenage pregnancies.

Emmanuel Baptist Church in San Salvador began a ministry in the community in 1990. Following more traditional approaches at first, the church provided material aid in the form of food, housing materials, and sewing classes for women. After this program ended, a pastor began visitation in the community to raise interest in weekly worship services. However, Emmanuel Baptist was searching for a new model—one which would address both the spiritual and material needs of the people in an integrated program. The church began a pilot program in cooperation with MCC that would attempt to integrate both the service and evangelism aspects of ministry. The new ministry began with a focus on several basic goals: the need for the individual’s reconciliation with God; the need for individuals to reconcile with each other in order to build community; and the ability of individuals to reflect on the Bible, create new models as they struggle to improve their lot, make decisions, and act on their own behalf in spite of the adverse conditions in which they live.

The church formed a mission team of one pastor and two lay workers with training in community development. The team worked with the couple sent by MCC. Rather than develop a dual program (evangelism vs. service) they sought to integrate their efforts as completely as possible. The team used five means to achieve its goals: 1) accompanying the people of the community, 2) motivating the community to action, 3) guiding and teaching basic and technical skills, 4) challenging the community to practice biblical values, 5) bringing community members into a personal relationship with Christ.

Accompaniment

Accompaniment meant sharing food and drink in the houses of the people and being present in moments of grief as well as joy. The team worked to build personal relationships by being honest about themselves, sharing about the difficulties of their lives, and affirming our common human condition. This approach brought with it personal risks, both physical and emotional, yet it was the key to becoming a part of the people in the community.

Motivation

The team emphasized the building of self-esteem by affirming the importance of each person in the community. Offering greetings, learning names, recognizing the experiences of individuals (births, deaths, and other significant events) during the community worship time, and seeking and affirming the gifts of the people were central.

Contrary to common belief, people who live in marginal communities often have technical and practical skills that can be encouraged. The people of La Linea had been farmers displaced by war. Some knew how to lay bricks and build houses; others had learned midwifery and health skills. Affirming the value of
these skills and involving the community in decision-making built self-esteem and gave ownership of the ministry to the community.

After much discussion the members of the community decided to build a church/community center as a sign that they were putting down roots and planning for the future. Many of them helped carry heavy cement blocks or containers full of sand to the building site which was inaccessible by vehicle. Women carried blocks on their heads, grasping a small child in one hand. Men carried two or three blocks at a time, their backs bent by the weight. Children carried small containers of sand, while old women prepared food at the site. Because the people participated in the building process by volunteering time and labor, they felt ownership in the project. When asked to express what the community was achieving, one woman said, "We are building a place here for our children, something for them to have when you all are gone."

**Guidance and teaching**

Team members also began to build an understanding of a greater vision for the community by getting the people to ask, "Who are we? Where will we live five years from now? How will we live? And what will our children's lives be like?" Until challenged by these questions, the people were used to thinking one day to the next, without greater hopes for the future. Sharing a dream for a better future sparked new life and hope in the community, and rejuvenated belief in life's possibilities. The team also cultivated emerging leaders by working with them, teaching them skills and literacy, and providing them with educational opportunities such as regional conferences and workshops.

**Challenge**

The team challenged the people to think about what they could do about their lives. Many believed they were victims of the political turmoil. This belief, while sympathetic to the adversity suffered by the poor, is a paternalistic view which discounts the skills and ability of individuals to respond to their situations, and leaves them with feelings of resignation and apathy. Poor communities often accept this view, causing them to seek dependence on agencies and government programs rather than to organize and act to improve their conditions. Challenging this view was key to bringing community members into a greater understanding of themselves and the larger society. Denouncing structural injustices was an integral part of the teaching, but the people were shown that they could do something about these injustices.

On the personal level, the pastor worked to instill biblical values in personal and social relationships. The community suffers from family feuds, gossip, slander, and broken relationships; the youth face problems with drugs, gang activity, and violence. While recognizing the suffering the community faced due to adverse conditions, the pastor continued to denounce sinful personal behaviors and called members of the community to reconciliation and to Christian love.
Personal relationship with Christ

Finally, the team believed that development is not sustainable in the individual or the group unless they become followers of Jesus Christ. By practicing discipleship, sharing personal testimony, and integrating biblical teachings into all aspects of the ministry, the team helped bring members of the community to the point where they wanted to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. Baptism was not pushed, but was offered to those who requested it and who demonstrated an understanding and commitment to the church and its outreach.

The ministry developed around weekly worship meetings. The team facilitated biblical reflection by the members of the community in the Anabaptist tradition, allowing each member to relate to the passages based on their own experience. The community discussed its economic situation, lack of education, and need for food and health care. Members also participated in games, group discussions, and other participatory activities that helped develop personal relationships and build a sense of common purpose.

As an outgrowth of methods implemented by the mission team, the worship group grew to approximately eighty members in four years. The community built a church/community center that houses not only worship services but also classes for health promoters, a library for children and youth, and a community garden. Recreation teams compete with outside leagues. Some of the young people run the children's library and assist in the summer Bible school as teachers. Women in the community formed a sewing society and sell their wares in the local market. Above all, they have a growing sense of their own dignity and power, and of their reconciliation with God and their neighbors.

Implications for Christian development programs

What must we do to make our development programs authentically and fully Christian? First, we need to be holistic practitioners. It is not enough for each of us to do our specialized tasks. We need to recapture the vision of the whole gospel for a needy world, to examine and revise the deep assumptions—the worldviews—we bring with us in development, and to reflect together, as office staff and project workers, on the underlying premises of our work. Second, we must re-develop our tools of analysis, for our current ones too often further reductionistic or stratigraphic approaches to knowledge. A recent study by leaders at World Vision International found that

Our information is about family size, incidence of disease, agricultural productivity, and water contamination. This material analysis tends to lead to material solutions: family planning, immunization, introduction of improved seeds and bore holes. Our lack of knowledge about values, religious practices,
spiritual oppression and the like limit our development as Christians.\textsuperscript{36}

Our research methods must enable us to see the whole of life's problems and the unity of the solution.

Third, we must develop holistic evaluations. We need to go beyond assessing our work solely in technical or even social terms, and we must assess whether or not our transforming development has spiritual consequences as well. We must see if our technical work in health care, agriculture, sanitation, water, and micro-enterprise development is being understood in ways which are neither modern nor traditional, but Christian. Holistic development does not occur simply when transformations take place on the individual, social, and cultural levels. To be truly holistic, we must deal with the interrelationship among them (Table 1).

TABLE 1

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<th>Holistic Transformation</th>
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<td><strong>Material Development</strong></td>
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Finally, to be truly holistic, development must take into account the work of God, who is already at work in this fallen world bringing about his Kingdom of reconciliation, righteousness, peace, and justice. This is manifest wherever his people and his churches live in obedience to his rule. God is already at work on the side of the poor, the oppressed, and the lost. This knowledge provides us with our ultimate hope and anticipation that development is not a rear guard action ultimately doomed to defeat. It is a sign of the coming of God's Kingdom when the hungry will be fed and the oppressed freed, when righteousness will reign and evil will be banished.