# The Role of Religion in International Development

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The post-war dreams of development today are largely shattered. 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 (Bello 1994, 7).

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.[1] If anything, the 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 is the role does religion, or the lack of it, play in this failure?

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[1] In 1989 about 1.2 billion people lived in absolute poverty which translates into a world poverty rate of 23.4% (Alan Durning, 1989. Poverty and the Environment. Worldwatch Paper 92. Washington: Worldwatch Institute). Over 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 1989. State of the World's Children. NY: Oxford Univ. Press).

## DEFINITIONS

The terms 'religion' and 'development' have been used with many different meanings. Before we examine the relationship between them, we need to clarify how we are using these terms. This is no trivial task, for in defining our terms we determine the theoretical frame we will use, the central questions to be asked and the possible solutions to these questions.

### Religion

Traditionally, we have defined religion as belief in 'supernatual beings and forces'. This domain stands in contrast to science which deals with facts regarding the 'natural world' run by impersonal, deterministic natural laws. As anthropologists have studied religions around the world, they have seen that 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[2]--a dualism that does not exist in most cultures. They see the world as full of beings (spirits, ancestors, humans, unborn, animals, plants and earth spirit), and forces (magic, mana, kismet, witchcraft, evil eye, fire and so on), visible and invisible, that interrelate in everyday life. Second, from a Christian point of view, this ontological dualism is, in fact, unbiblical. The distinction in 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.

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[2] 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 the classical theological codification of this. The emergence of a secular science devoid of divine activity is a further consequence (Hiebert 1994).

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 (Postman 1986) is not. For our purposes we will use Clifford Geertz' 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 (1979, 79-80).

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, and, therefore, is 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 (1974, xi)." The term 'development' is associated with the first of these. It assumes change through incremental improvement, and is based on the enlightenment assumptions of progress, autonomous individualism, faith in reason and innate goodness of humans.

We need to recognize that the term 'development' itself is a replacement for the earlier term 'civilization' that underlay the 19th century theory of cultural evolution. Jon Bonk writes,

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Today mission theory on the "cutting edge" resounds with the talk of "development" and "underdeveloment." 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" (1991, 20).

Berger argues that both capitalism, with its faith in development, and Marxism, with it trust in revolution have imposed too severe 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) (1974, xii).

Clearly a new paradigm of development is needed that is neither capitalist or 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.*"[3] 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 level of society 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. On the spiritual level, it involves right relationships with God and one another within the framework of God's Kingdom. In all this, we must remember that this is not what we do for God, but what God

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[3] This is similar to Edgar Stoesz' 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 (Thoughts on Development, pp 3-4). This definition is comprehensive from a human point of view, but it needs to include the religious dimension to justify its values, motivate its practitioners, and, above all, to recognize that development is not simply humans trying to set things right. It is working with God as he establishes his kingdom on earth.

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is doing in the world through his Spirit and his people. We will argue that as Christians, and in particular as Anabaptists, we have the theological basis for a better paradigm of development.

## Religion and Development

The question of the relationship of religion to development is not new. Scholars such as Max Weber (1958) and Gunner Myrdal (1968) have argued that religions 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 (1980), Kussum Nair (1979) and others have sought to demonstrate from empirical data that religious beliefs do not affect peoples' desires to improve their lots.[4] We will not address these issues here.

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.[5] We will examine these as they relate to our specific concern, namely the relationship of Christianity to programs of development.

## DEVELOPMENT IN THE WEST

What have been the foundations of modern development programs from the West, and

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[4] There is another question that must be addressed here, namely which religions have given rise to programs that seek to help others. It is important to note that Christian churches, and countries influenced by Christianity are most involved in programs of development. For example, when Bangladesh was formed, despite pleas for help by the new government to Muslim countries around the world, most of the funds and personnel came from Christian communities and so called 'Christian' nations.

[5] For example 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 (1993, 17-21). However, throughout their analysis they stress the importance of including religion as a central component in the development process.

what roles has religion played in them? Rather than take a historical approach to this question, we will approach it from 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 economic development which could be achieved through the transfer of technology, science and economic resources. It was assumed that economic development would lead to political and social advancement. This reflected the linear view of causality characteristic of the sciences in the first half of this century.

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 (Samuel nd, 3). 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 the fact that they did not take social and religious factors into account (Cernea 1994, 83).

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 for 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.[6]

But political transformations also failed. They did not take into account human nature and the power of individuals. In India land reform led to a redistribution of only a small amount of marginal lands. 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 little 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 good living--they want meaningful lives.

By the 1990s it was clear that programs of political development had largely failed. The peasant revolts in Nicaragua and Zimbabwe were successful but did not lead to long term

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[6] It was during this time that I became involved in work being done by U.S.A.I.D., Agricultural Development Council, and the International Crop Research Institute of South Asia. At that time land reform and agricultural development were the central foci of these development programs.

development. The common people worked hard, but these nations today are part of global systems, and if these oppose change, it will not bear fruit.[7] 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 failure 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 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. 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 (1978, 5)." Influenced by beliefs 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 they brought was often foreign to the local cultures, and the science they taught destroyed the peoples' 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

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[7] Walden Bello and his associates (1994) trace the global economic rollback now occurring around the world, and attributes it to the U.S. attempts to reassert its dominance of the international economy.

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.

## Strategraphic Approaches: Secular and Religious

Clifford Geertz (1965, 97) refers to another way of dealing with human problems as the stratigraphic approach. This recognizes that several complimentary solutions are needed to solve human problems, but sees these as working separately from one another. It defines various levels of human need, each superimposed on those beneath it and underpinning those above. As we analyze human needs, we peel off layer after layer, each such being complete and irreducible in itself, revealing another, quite different sort of layer of needs underneath. Strip off the motley forms of culture and we find 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. Peel off psychological factors and we are left with biological needs--food, shelter and medical care--that underlie the whole edifice of human life.. As Geertz points out, one value of this approach is that it guarantees the established academic disciples their independence, provides jobs for different specialists and guarantees them a living.

One example of a stratigraphic approach to development is Abraham Maslow with his hierarchy of human needs (Feist 1990). According to Maslow we must first meet the basic biological needs of human beings 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. We may give people good lives, but meaningless ones. We may save their bodies but lose their souls.

This stratigraphic view led to the idea that development must take place on different levels, and in different stages. Technological change is needed to increase food production; free markets need to 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 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 met. 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. Many mainline protestant churches emphasize service to the poor. Both of these approaches have failed to solve the intertwined human problems of poverty, oppression and alienation from God and from other humans.

## Wholism: Religious Solutions

Both reductionist and stratigraphic approaches to development have failed, in large part because both attack the problems of poverty, injustice and spiritual alienation piecemeal. The

solution must lie deeper. The emerging view of development today has two elements relevant to our discussion.[8] First, development is now being understood more wholistically, as a process of change involving whole people and whole sociocultural systems (van Geest 1993, 5-6). Second, we now realize that it must be based on 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.[9]

## Wholism: 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 we mean a set of related elements that interact in distinct ways to form a functioning whole. For example, *individuals* can be analyzed as separate systems made up of physical, biological, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual subsystems. If people are biologically deprived of nourishment, they experience psychological depression, social alienation and spiritual questioning. If they are caught in difficult social circumstances, they experience biological ills, psychological tensions and spiritual uncertainty.

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[8] This discussion is based on the recent position papers of the Canadian International Development Agency and its new policies of partnership with Christian NGOs.

[9] An example of this is the latrine project of the Nicaraguan government. A "promoter' was sent to poor communities such as Las Linea to sign families for dry latrines. Although few knew what these were, everyone in La Linea 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 the latrines, 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.

At the corporate level, people are parts of larger *social systems* which have economic, social, political, legal and ideological dimensions. Economic stress can lead to political and religious changes. Similarly, changes in ideology lead to changes in the market place and in the government, as we have seen with the collapse of the former USSR.

*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. Cernea writes,

> This is not just a good-will appeal to the humanitarian feelings of project planners . . . It is a concept for constructing programs for inducing development and an imperative for their effectiveness. Putting people first in development programs must be read as a . . . request to policy-makers, planners and technical experts to explicitly recognize the centrality of what is the primary factor in development processes (1994, 4).

By putting people first we avoid reductionist and stratigraphic approaches to development.

A second value of a systems approach is that it avoids a linear view of cause and effect, and recognizes that needs and solutions may emerge in any of the systems. This means that 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 surface and

temporary. Similarly, if the root case is religious, than economic and political solutions will be nothing more than band-aids mitigating the problem.

A third advantage of a systems approach to human systems 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 medial 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 wholistic development

Given a systems view of human beings, 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 surface 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 (1993, 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.

The van Geest and his associates give three reasons for including religion in thinking on development. First, most of the 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 the distinction are an imposition of western values on those cultures.

Second, changing people's religious beliefs is not qualitatively different from changing their social, political and economic beliefs. Van Geest writes,

> It is not clear whether or how evangelism efforts of Christian agencies differ fundamentally from attempts by secular agencies to affect the belief-systems of the cultures in which they work or even other religious agencies in their work. Evangelism does not necessarily differ in method from other educational efforts of a "non-religious" nature by northern agencies in the South (1993, 8).

Third, and more fundamentally, the traditional western worldview conflicts with the emerging understanding of development as a wholistic process.

> As the traditional view of development as an objective and technical matter, isolated from specific cultural and religious contexts declines, the reality of religion and religious change inevitably becomes more relevant, and also more problematic.
> Belief systems tend to change in a development process. . . . [T]he issue in determining effective development criteria is not *whether* belief change is an acceptable part of an effective development process, but *how* belief change occurs. . . . [I]t cannot be convincingly argued that promoting belief change inherently violates criteria of effective development any more or less than does encouraging economic or political change (van Geest 1993, ii).

## WHOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT: QUASI-RELIGIOUS APPROACHES

If religion, anthropological defined, is a the core of any lasting development, then what is the religion that drives programs of modern secular development? The answer is nationalism.

Ernst Troeltsch writes,

> 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 (1991, 179).

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 the whole.

But nationalism has failed to bring about development because it is a limited, quasi-religion. First, as Ernest 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. It elevates bureaucratic rules and military science to a transcendent ethic. It is 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 (Sanneh 1993, 65-66). National self-interest wins out over sacrifice for humanity.

Second, Hocking argues (1956, 2) that the state is necessary to enable macro-planning to take place, but this leads us to the wrong conclusion that the state is capable of civilizing humans and of leading us 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. Recent events have vividly shown that a strong State without a strong Church inevitably assumes some or most of the attributes of unchecked absolutism. We cannot repudiate the cosmic moral law in favor of absolute national sovereignty without disastrous consequences for persons and societies. Governments are not innately good, they are self-centered and often evil. They are, in fact, often a part of the problem, not its solution.

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 high wall between them and those whom they serve.

## WHOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT: A CHRISTIAN APPROACH

If nationalism fails as a religion to bring about lasting development, where do we find an answer? We suggest that the underlying vision and motivation for true development lies in a Christian view of reality, because it provides the foundational views of the humans, evil and salvation necessary for lasting transformation. Even secular programs of development today are built on the memories of Christian beliefs and values.

### Goals for Development

What is the goal of 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. Troeltsch points out, to live as humans beings we must live not only for the sake of mere physical existence but for the indestructible moral ideal (1991, 176). Geertz says that staying alive is not our greatest desire, it is to find meaning in life. Martyrs went boldly to the stake because their deaths took on transcendent meaning (1979).

Our goal in development as Christians it 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 one another that leads to communities of righteousness, peace, love and harmony with creation, and to the reign of God over all creation. Leslie Newbigin writes,

> 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 of human dignity.
> Development, so understood, will require more difficult changes from the rich
> world than for the poor (1984, 56-57).

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

transformations.


## Causes of Poverty and Injustice

The failure in secular development programs is due, in part, to an inadequate concept of

evil and the locus of its power. Some of us 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, and the corporate nature of God's salvation in the

establishment of his reign on earth.

Others of us assume that evil lies in social systems. We 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 of

corporate sin overlook the fact that individuals, too, are sinners, and can subvert corporate

systems to their own ends.

The fact is that the transformation of individuals, or 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

We need a wholistic view of redemption and betterment. As we have seen, in the past we have reduced development to matters of technology, economics, social organization or politics, but none of these has led to comprehensive and lasting transformation. We need to look for change in all of the human systems.

### Individual transformation

On the individual level, we look for transformed people--people who seek righteousness, peace and justice, who love their enemies and seek their well-being. Our vision must include the material well being of all individuals, 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 wholistic 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 as modeled in Christ.

### Social transformation

Development is incomplete if it does not lead to a transformation of the social order. Our goal is not only individual transformation, but the transformation of social systems that

underlie much of the oppression and poverty we see. Ultimately this 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 (1974, 217).

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.

Here we see the importance of building the Church as a model of a community of justice and righteousness (Kraus 1979, Hauerwas and Willimon 1991). 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 of the solution. This reminds us that transformation must begin in the Church. It is a process in which all of us must be involved, Christian and nonChristian, foreign and native.

Finally, as churches and development agencies we are part of the global social systems, and we 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 (Cernea 1994, 8-10).

Religious transformation

Ultimately development calls for a new view of reality. Nationalism has provided this view in the past, but it is ethnocentric and oriented to short term gains. A religious

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transformation is need to bring about self-sustaining and self-reproducing development. For several reasons, we believe that this transformation must not only be religious but Christian.[10]

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 life-styles--rewards that keep the agents from truly identifying with the local people. Science, too, does not provide us with the motivation to identify ourselves with the people for the sake of the peoples' good.[11] Only Christian faith, or the memories of it (eg. Peace Corp), 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. We cannot use evil means to achieve good ends.

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[10] 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 nonMuslims full human rights and dignity. Orthodox Hinduism has little concern for Others who are not part of one's immediate caste and family. Those 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.

[11] An example of this was the earthquake in Nicaragua. Anthropologists began to feel that they should not only study other peoples, but also help them in their need, so they asked for contributions. In the end they raised about $50,000. They did not know how to use this money to help the people, so they gave it to the Friends Service Committee for use in Nicaragua.

We cannot 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.[12] 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, 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.

## Wholistic Christian Development: A Case

One example of a wholistic approach to development is the M.C.C. project in La Linea in El Salvador.[13] La Linea is a small community located along the railroad tracks in a semi-urban area. For the most part, its residents are people who were 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 to food, education, health care, and adequate shelter; problems of violence, gangs and drugs; and family disintegration and early teenage pregnancies.

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[12] We see the effects of this in the modern mission movement, and in the current charismatic ministry in poor, inner-city communities. As people have become Christian, they sacrifice to send their children to school. By the second and third generation we have what is called 'redemption and lift.' Even secular scholars recognize that Christians are the most upwardly mobile of communities in most third world nations (even by purely earthly standards of a good life).

[13] Byron and Barbara Hiebert-Crape served with M.C.C. in La Linea from 1990-1994. In line with the M.C.C. policy of working with churches to empower the poor, they ministered with the Emmanuel Baptist Church of San Salvador to develop a developing Christian community in the squatters' settlement.

Emmanuel Baptist Church, an active, Bible-based congregation in San Salvador, began a ministry in the community of La Linea in 1990. Following more traditional approaches at first, the church provided material aid to the community 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.

Emmanuel Baptist, however, was searching for a new model; one which would address both the spiritual and material needs of the people of La Linea in an integrated program. The church began a pilot program in cooperation with M.C.C. that would attempt to develop a ministry patterned more closely after Christ's own ministry; an integration of both the service and evangelism aspects of ministry.

The new ministry began with a focus on several basic goals: 1) the need for the individual's reconciliation with God, 2) the need for individuals to reconcile with each other in order to build community, and 3) 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.

Emmanuel Baptist formed a mission team of one pastor and two lay workers who had training in the area of community development. These worked with the couple sent by M.C.C. Rather than develop a dual program (evangelism vs. service) the team sought to integrate as completely as possible their efforts in the community. The team used five means to achieve its goals: 1) to accompany the people of the community, 2) to motivate the community to action, 3) to guide and teach basic and technical skills, 4) to challenge the community to make up biblical values, 5) to bring community members into a personal relationship with Christ.

## Accompaniment

The team defined this as: "to walk and live with the people of the community in their daily life and struggles." This 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.

## Motivate

The team emphasized the building of self-esteem by affirming the importance of each individual in the community. 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 key to building self-esteem.

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 the heads, grasping a small child in

one hand. Men carried two or three blocks at a time, they backs bent by the weight. Children carried small containers of sand. 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 in that place, one woman, Bernarda said, "We are building a place here for our children, something for them to have when you all are gone."

## Guiding and Teaching

While recognizing the gifts and skills of the community members, the La Linea team members also affirmed their own contributions and training. They began to build an understanding of a greater vision for the people in the community by asking the people, "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 with the people 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.

## Challenging

The team not only "walked with" the community, but also challenged the people to think about what they could do about their lives. Many believed they were victims of the political turmoil. This view, 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 the community members into a greater understanding of themselves and the greater society of which they are a part. 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 community relationships. The community, like many of its kind, 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 the 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 the weekly worship meetings in the community. Team members 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.[14] The community discussed its economic situation, lack education, and need for food and health care. The community also participated in games, group discussions and other participatory activities that helped develop personal relationships and build a sense of community.

The results have been gratifying. As an outgrowth of the 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. The mission team also formed recreation teams that 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

If the above argument is plausible, what must we do to make our development programs authentically and fully Christian? First, we need to be wholistic practitioners. It is not enough for

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[14] For example, Rafaela, a fifty-six year old woman in the community, shared her view on Romans 8:5-9 (Spanish translation: "... those who live under the desires of man cannot please God."). Normally very reserved, she became very animated and said, "I know what this means. I have lived it! The man I used to live with was not at all interested in spiritual things. He would not allow me to go to church. I was living under his desires." Her interpretation of "under man's desires" was a very literal one, yet more relevant to her experience than usual interpretations.

each of us to do our specialized tasks. We need to recapture the vision of the whole gospel for a needy world. We must examine and revise the deep assumptions--the worldviews--we bring with us in development. We must reflect together, as office staff and project workers, on the underlying premises of our work. Until we have a biblical view of development, we will have a limited view of our calling.

Second, we must re-develop our tools of analysis, for our current tools too often further reductionistic or stratigraphic approaches to knowledge. A recent study by leaders at World Vision International found,

> 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 (Myers 1994, 6).

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

Third, we must develop wholistic evaluations. We need to go beyond assessing our work solely in technical, or even social terms. We need to assess whether or not our transforming development has spiritual consequences as well. We need to see if our technical work of health care, agriculture, sanitation, water and micro-enterprise development is being understood in ways which are neither modern or traditional, but Christian.

Wholistic development does not occur simply when transformations take place on the individual, social and cultural levels. To be truly wholistic, we must deal with the interrelationship between them (Table 2).

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## Table 2
### Wholistic Transformation

|  | **Material Development** | **Human Development** | **Spiritual Development** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Individuals** | food, shelter, health, recreation | mental health, dignity, education | salvation, spiritual wholeness |
| **Social** | sharing, cooperatives, | human values, justice, reconciliation | community, worship, |
| **Cultural** | values on sharing, and caring for others | value on human life, vision of a better world | hope, vision of a better world |

Finally, to be truly wholistic, development must take into account the work of God. Development is not something we do for God. If that is all it is, we are doomed to failure. We need to recognize that God 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. He is already at work on the side of the poor, the oppressed and the lost. It is this knowledge that 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, the oppressed freed, and righteousness will reign and evil banished.

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