

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 4

Volume 4 • Number 2 • October 1980

Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews selected from publications
worldwide for an international readership,
interpreting the Christian faith for contemporary
living.*

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Published by
THE PATERNOSTER PRESS

7. Commit western development agencies and their staff to leading the western Church into patterns of voluntary simplicity through:
 - a. Dramatically reducing overhead by decorating offices simply, exclusively using budget hotels, restaurants and transportation, significantly increasing the use of volunteers at all levels and seeking to reduce all overhead that isn't absolutely essential to mission;
 - b. Seeking separate funding for all agency overhead expenses so that the full amount of contributed dollars can be directly used in Third World development;
 - c. Making a commitment to a lifestyle of voluntary simplicity a condition of employment (leaving it to the individual to find God's direction as to how to pursue simplicity in his own life);
 - d. Providing regular seminars within agencies on biblical discipleship, Third World mission and voluntary simplicity;
8. Use the resources that are freed through voluntary simplicity and co-operation to significantly increase our ability to respond to those anticipated areas of greatest urban and rural needs in the eighties.

In view of the anticipated human needs of the next two decades, Christian development agencies need to take the initiative in challenging the church to mobilize all of its resources and creativity to significantly increase its capacity for global mission. We have absolutely no idea of the change God could bring in a world of escalating need [p. 262](#) if we were to fully commit ourselves and our resources to seeking first His kingdom of justice, righteousness, reconciliation, peace and love ... in anticipation of that day when it fully comes.

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This paper was given at the consultation on *Theology of Development* sponsored by the WEF Theological Commission's study unit on Ethics and Society and was held 11–15 March, 1980 at High Leigh, Hodderson, England. [p. 263](#)

Beyond Relief, Development and Justice

John Alexander

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RELIEF IS VITAL, BUT ...

Your response to world hunger grows out of your picture of what causes it. One picture is that hunger is caused by disasters—hurricanes, droughts, earthquakes, wars. The appropriate response is *relief*: send food and medicine, build homes, fly the orphans to the States.

This picture is good—as far as it goes. Relief is vital. Cambodia needs it now because of the war there and the Dominican Republic needs it because of Hurricane David.

But that picture does not go far enough. It does not explain the long-range hunger in countries like Zaire, Haiti, Bangladesh. The danger of the relief picture comes when we apply it to long-range hunger and do little more than ship food. Sending food is crucial in the Dominican Republic at the moment, but it is grossly inadequate in a country where hunger is perpetual. It does not enable people to feed themselves. In fact, in that kind of case, relief often makes things worse by lowering the prices of local food and making it harder for farmers to earn a living.

TECHNOLOGY MAY BE APPROPRIATE, BUT ...

So we need another picture. That picture is of people who are hungry partly because they don't know how to farm and don't have the right technology. The appropriate response to this picture is to ship technology and experts—experts who can teach farming.

Let's call this *technological development*. It's an effort to get at causes. You know: give people a fish and you feed them for a day; teach them how to fish and ...

But the track record of this kind of development is not unduly inspiring. One problem is the possible bad effects of Western technology on the environment. (Is chemical fertilizer really better than manure?)

But even ignoring that, transferring things from one culture to another is always tricky. And Western experts transferring things from an "advanced" culture to a "primitive" one are bound to think they know everything. They are almost certain to be arrogant and paternalistic. Believing they have the answers and local farmers don't p. 264 know how to farm, they won't get much further than a return trip home.

But even if they get beyond the kind of cultural imperialism that chuckles at the "ignorant natives," such development is still tricky. Our schemes tend to be too grandiose to help little people. We set up a model farm of a hundred acres to show poor farmers better methods. But their farms are only two acres, and our lovely big farm has no relevance to their needs.

Or we advocate tractors, forgetting that only the wealthy can afford tractors. So the wealthy buy them—and need fewer labourers or tenant farmers. And the poor are worse off than before. Or we advocate seeds that require irrigation, forgetting that often only the wealthy can afford irrigation. So the wealthy irrigate and increase their yields enormously. Crop prices drop because of abundance, and the poor farmer is so broke he can't even buy the abundant food.

In other words, even if transferring Western technology got beyond paternalism, it is simply too expensive to help the poorest people. Take hospitals, for example. Here Christians have done fine work. But hospitals are so costly that they can treat only a few of the poorest people: their income has to come from patients who have some money.

Of course, if the hospital is heavily subsidized, it can treat the very poor. But to subsidize hospitals for the billion poorest people would cost billions, and in the long run trillions. Such money is not available.

And even if we got beyond paternalism and even if we could pay for the technology, this kind of development often does not meet the most basic needs of the poor. In the area

of health, the greatest needs of the poor are not hospitals or even doctors or nurses. What they need is food, clean water and sanitation.

What can a hospital do about starving children? It can take a few in and feed them, but as soon as they go home they will begin to starve again. Hospitals can treat people for the various diseases caused by poor sanitation and unsafe water, but it would be far better to prevent the diseases in the first place.

Finally, even when poor third world people are given Western technology and it is meeting their real needs, they often seem unable to use and maintain it. This causes Westerners extreme exasperation and makes us think the people are hopelessly incompetent.

But what would you expect to happen if an outsider comes and tells people they have a problem and then offers a complex, foreign [p. 265](#) solution? They aren't likely to buy in, are they?

The recognition of a problem and its solution must come to a large extent from within or it will never be appropriated. What is more, if the technology is given to them and they don't have to work for it, they are even less likely to value and maintain it.

So technological development may be of value, but the value is mainly for those who are already Westernized and relatively wealthy. It is unlikely to do much for the poorest people. For that we need a different picture.

COMMUNITY ENCOURAGES SELF-RELIANCE, BUT ...

We need a picture of the causes of hunger which acknowledges that the poor lack know-how but which nevertheless emphasizes their competence. This picture does not encourage dealing with hunger by technology and pouring in money. It encourages enablement instead. Our rôle is at most to enable the poor to formulate for themselves what their problems—and the solutions—are. This is *human development or community organizing*.

Instead of providing social services, food, and technology, community organizers call the poor together. They can be facilitators as the poor analyze their own problems and find their own solutions. Since money and technology are not promised, the poor will have to come up with ideas that are not costly. They will suggest things like credit unions, producers' co-operatives, and demanding services the government is supposed to provide.

As a group they can do things they can't do separately. They are more likely to be able to insist that laws be enforced fairly. They can buy in bulk. They can be more effective in resisting landlords who are cheating them. And so on.

All of this encourages self-reliance and independence and self-respect rather than dependence and self-hatred and a welfare mentality. It is also so inexpensive that it can be duplicated all over the world. (If the organization is ever given a large amount of money, it must be for something they see the need for themselves. It must also come after they are well-established, so that they exist on their own and are not just there to receive money.)

So community organizing or human development goes a long way toward meeting the needs of the poorest people.

STRUCTURES MUST BE CHANGED, BUT ...

But it doesn't go far enough. So we need another picture. That picture [P. 266](#) is of hunger caused partly by political and economic oppression. The appropriate response is the

changing of political and economic structures. This picture is not the whole picture any more than the others are, but it is an important part of it.

One cause of hunger is that in many third-world countries half the land is owned by a handful of people. Many of the rest have too little land to earn a living, or else they are tenant farmers who have to give half their crops to the landlord. What these people need is land redistribution. Until then, development will do them precious little good. But land redistribution is a political and economic problem.

What is more, the wealthy landowners soon discover that they can earn more money by growing things for export than they can by growing food for local people. So they begin growing orchids, coffee, tea, sugar (luxurious junk) and bananas for the West.

Of course, that means less nutritious food in the world and particularly in the third world. And that means more hunger, but it happens anyway because our economic system is more concerned about increasing profits than about decreasing human hunger. And those with the profits use it for more luxurious junk—cars, oil, televisions, fancy houses, and armaments—to keep the poor under control.

Of course, many more people are poor than are rich, and in time they get organized. (Community organizing can be of enormous political and economic importance.) But just about when they are ready to bring basic change, the Marines arrive, and the wealthy stay in control.

At least that is what used to happen. These days the West and its local allies are more sophisticated. They rarely allow the poor to get organized in the first place. Union-breaking, death squads, torture, and the banning of opposition parties make successful organizing difficult. If it does happen, the West can choke the country with economic sanctions.

So in addition to relief and development, the third world needs political and economic change. It needs justice. And justice can come to the third world only if the West changes. We eat the food that the third world needs and we provide a large part of the muscle that keeps oppressive elites in power in the third world. That is, we see to it that the third world doesn't solve its own political and economic problems.

So if you want to fight world hunger, you shouldn't be in too big a hurry to teach farming in the third world. You are needed at least as badly to teach about justice in Washington and Peoria.

Besides, going overseas lacks grace. How can you travel thousands [p. 267](#) of miles to teach development to people whose problem is at least as much that your own country is oppressing them? Why not stay home and teach justice here? The simple fact is that the third world is not seriously short of food. The problem is that they export it to us. Hunger is caused partly by our luxurious junk.

So we must fight for justice. That picture is good—as far as it goes. But it does not go far enough. It does not deal with the spiritual and moral roots of hunger. It is a good secular analysis of hunger, but it is secular. Christians must do more. We must have a bigger picture.

EVANGELISM HAS PRIORITY, BUT ...

Secular ideas on how to work for social change are vital, but they are inadequate. From a Christian point of view, the cause of hunger is sin. And the appropriate response to sin is evangelism and new lives.

And if that is true, then the most important thing Christians can do about world hunger is *evangelism*. We must see that eating imported luxury junk foods is taking food out of

the mouths of the hungry. And that is sin. So we must call on people to repent, be forgiven, and lead new lives.

We must say it is a sin for Western politicians to support third world régimes which grind the face of the poor, and it is a sin to vote for politicians who do so. So we must call politicians to repent of supporting murderous, repressive régimes, and we must call voters to repent of voting for politicians who support such régimes. The message is repentance, forgiveness and a new life.

If we want to do something in the third world, we should send missionaries to the bloody dictators. And the missionaries (or better yet, prophetic nationals) must call the dictators to repentance, just as Elijah did when Ahab seized Naboth's vineyard. They should go to big landowners and tell them to repent and show fruit worthy of repentance. Salvation will lead the wealthy to redistribute their land. (John the Baptist told the Pharisees that salvation would lead them to redistribute their coats.)

But Christians rarely combine evangelism and justice in this way. Some of us evangelize, and some work for justice. A few of us even do both. But we rarely do them at the same time. More and more Christian agencies are beginning to see injustice as a major cause of hunger, and so they are spending part of their money on teaching people in the West about injustice. They call this justice education. That is a good thing, but it is a whole lot less than calling people to repent. [p. 268](#)

Or a few agencies are starting to put some of their time and money into lobbying in Washington for a more just foreign policy. That's a step forward, but a whole lot less than telling legislators and those who vote for them to repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.

The failure of most Christian development groups to combine their development and evangelism is especially striking. But the truth is that we just don't know how to do it. We rightly want to avoid using development as a *bait* for evangelism. We're beyond Skid Row missions that will feed only those who make a profession of faith.

But that can't mean separating evangelism from helping people. Certainly we can't make helping people depend on their accepting the message, but that need not stop us from vigorously working at the same time on evangelism *and* justice.

To do less will be ineffective because supporting justice is a costly thing. To support relief only costs a little money. You see a photo of an innocent, hungry-looking orphan and begin sending a few dollars a month for food. You can even get letters from the child. Helping someone is fun. it makes you feel good.

But justice is another matter. It requires you to change your life—how you eat, how you spend money, what you do for a living. That isn't always fun. What is more, it makes you see yourself not as the handsome prince rescuing helpless children but as a marauding beast from whom children must be rescued. And most of us don't care for that picture.

So education and lobbying are going to be inadequate. Something more powerful is necessary if people are going to see themselves as oppressors and then repent and lead new lives. They'll need the Spirit working in their lives; they'll need to be born again; they'll need a new world view with happier values. In short, nothing less than evangelism will do.

BUILDING CHURCH COMMUNITIES IS IMPORTANT, BUT ...

So evangelism is good—as far as it goes. But it doesn't go far enough. We need another picture. Sin is deep and powerful and insidious. It isn't something you repent of once and for all when you're saved. Repentance of sin is, or should be, a permanent state of mind.

So we need a picture of the *church*. And I don't mean a building or a hierarchy or even a preacher. I mean a group of people who are together to support each other, love each other, nurture each other, challenge each other. The church is people using their gifts to serve one another. As we jointly use our gifts to build each other up, we will bear fruit fit for repentance. Then we will begin to overcome the [p. 269](#) sin in our lives. That doesn't happen in a blinding flash the moment we decide to follow Jesus.

That means that at the very heart of any deeply Christian work must be church or community building. Whether we emphasize evangelism or development or justice, we are not doing it in a Christian way unless part of what we are doing is forming a community of believers.

The Bible repeatedly makes it clear that this is central to God's plan for our age. Consider what Paul says in Ephesians: "His gifts were for equipping the saints in the work of serving and in building up the body of Christ. That way we can attain mature adulthood, the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. When each part is working properly, the body grows and builds itself up in love" ([4:11 a](#), [12](#), [13b](#), [16b](#)).

So if we want people to grow to maturity, we will have to get beyond relief, technological development, community organizing, and work for justice. We will also have to evangelize and build church-communities.

WHAT THEN SHALL WE DO?

But even all these pictures combined will not be enough. They are good—as far as they go. But we must go farther.

We must recognize that we are not adequate to solve the problem ourselves. Our own sinfulness and weakness are too great—not to mention the enormous forces arrayed against us. We are hopelessly outnumbered and outfinanced. What chance do we have against massive corporations like G + W, McDonnell Douglas, Castle and Cook? Against brutal dictatorships sponsored by the Kremlin or the Pentagon?

We have no chance. And that is grounds for despair—except for Christians. For us, it is grounds for hope, for that is when God chooses to act. Any work among the poor must *expect God to act* or it is not deeply Christian. Work for development or justice which does not expect God's intervention is practical atheism even if it is done by Christians.

Of course we are outnumbered. But so was Israel when the Syrians surrounded Elisha's city: "His servant said, 'Alas, my master. What shall we do?' Elisha said, 'Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw; and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire" ([2 Kings 6:15b](#), [16](#), [17b](#)).

All we need to do is to open our eyes.

John Alexander is a co-editor of *The Other Side*, a magazine designed to help Christians grow in their commitment to justice rooted in discipleship. [p. 270](#)

Our Evangelical Social Responsibility: A Personal Response