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should analyse the problems, vote for and support those who promote justice. Instead of allowing themselves to be hypnotized by the myths of the mass-media, Christians can affirm their critical sense and work towards the promotion of God's values even in Caesar's world.

Christians will never forget that their citizenship is in heaven, but while they remain watchful and ready to recognize the apostate nature of secular hope, they will also be able to remember that their labour will not be vain in the Lord.

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Spiritual Gifts for Community Building in the Urban Slums

Michael Duncan

In this article the author draws on his personal experience of living and working in an urban slum, conscious that community building does not begin with triumphalistic faith or the exercising of spiritual gifts but with the vulnerability and weakness of our flawed humanity, witnessing to the grace of the transforming power of God. He argues that empowering people through technology is not enough; empowerment calls for dependence on spirit controlled gifting, defeating the Devil and his demonic spirits and living lives that radiate peace and justice in the midst of poverty, oppression and powerlessness.

The Editor

Today God is building communities in the cities, especially in Latin America and Asia. This is a remarkable development. As James Comblin points out in 'The Holy Spirit and Liberation'¹. 'It is not natural for communities to spring from the midst of a people so alienated by history and geography from any sort of association: it is a miracle from God.'

Living in the urban slums of Manila has brought new insight into why Paul urged the community at Corinth not to allow their common 'immersion' in the Spirit to lead them into a false individualistic spirituality that elevated tongues over people. The goal was to be formed into one body. To be 'spiritual' means to build up the community. One of the tragedies of so-called church growth in the Philippines where the power dimension has featured largely has been an acceptance of 'culture Christianity' unaccompanied by true repentance and marked by triumphalist individualism.

EMPOWERING THE POOR

Experiencing the gifts of the Spirit can transform community life and empower the poor. Doday was told he needed expensive surgery to remove his kidney stones, otherwise he

¹ James Comblin *The Holy Spirit and Liberation* (Orbis, 1989)

would be dead in two years. But borrowing the money would saddle his children with an appalling burden. He chose to go without the operation. One night he came to a regular cell meeting and asked us to pray for him. We laid hands on Dodoy and the stones popped out. What amazed him was that God was interested in him. Healing not only empowers the diseased and crippled to continue an active life—the awareness of being noticed, the sense of being touched, loved and healed by God does wonders for the poor person's self-esteem.

When Jesus healed lepers his action had social significance. He was welcoming into Israel people who had previously been marginalized— forbidden to hold any political, civil or religious office. Healings were—and are—acts of justice.

A ministry of healing inevitably involves relocating to live alongside the poor and elderly, the addicts, prostitutes and AIDS victims. Yet even if we go to these places, healing says very little about us and a lot about God. Faith is not something we have. It is simply trusting in the Father's character. It is not about getting all fired up and committed; rather it is becoming aware of how much the Father is committed to us and to the poor and needy. When you *see* this, then like Jesus you will go anywhere and do anything.

THE GIFT OF TONGUES

The poor are often treated as ignorant and so in turn they perceive themselves as ignorant. In this big ugly world no one wants to listen to the poor, to the little people, to the uneducated. It is an immense gain to break the culture of silence which is so crippling in a slum. Today the poor are discovering their voice again. They now believe that their speech can convey something worthwhile. This revolution of speech is being facilitated in part by the gift of tongues. As the Spirit enables them to speak directly to God, so they discover that these words from *their* mouths count for something and are worthy of God. The powerless discover a new power in prayer. This gift then gives confidence to pray in their own language and soon they discover that God accepts them despite their grammatical errors and how they pronounce their words or what language type they use. God hears their words.

And so their views, their contribution, their voices are now important. Realizing this, the poor gain awareness of their own dignity and worth. Then, excitingly, this rediscovered dignity carries over into other areas. One who speaks in prayer soon speaks in public places.

THE GIFT OF TEACHING

It is impossible to separate Christ from the Spirit, in terms of activity. As teacher, awakener, and conscientizer, Jesus helped the little people to see that they were no longer little people. Inevitably the elite perceived his 'critical awareness' programme as a threat. But over and above this Jesus was encouraging what Theissen describes as 'a takeover of upperclass attitudes by the lower class'². He taught them to take no care for tomorrow, to not fear their enemies, to not trust in riches. Finally he sought to cure them of their superstitious mistrust of themselves.³ The Spirit likewise through his gift of teaching continues Jesus' work of liberating the poor from the attitudes that keep them a dominated people.

² Gerd Theissen *The Shadow of the Galilean* (SCM, 1989), p. 27

³ Gerd Theissen *The Shadow of the Galilean* (SCM, 1989), p. 23

THE GIFT OF DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN SPIRITS

We cannot divorce development from spiritual realities. In the cities we see the evil of evil but behind all poverty is a Devil. The immediate causes of poverty include injustice, international sin, population growth, wars, climate and the like. But the ultimate cause of poverty is the Devil himself. Community development is as much about the forces of evil as it is about appropriate technology or whatever. All of us, not only the poor, need to be saved from spiritual powers which are beyond our strength to conquer.

It has been suggested that poor folk who lack the basic defences and support systems of life become the natural prey of demons. Biblically, this may not be so absurd as it initially appears. The devil is a devourer ([1 Pet. 5:8](#)) and a murderer. His only interest is death. The evil of evil is that he seeks to take advantage of those who are already disadvantaged. He lives to impoverish the already impoverished. We see him doing this in the slums.

Rene Padilla quotes Ethelbert Stauffer's reminder that 'in primitive Christianity there is no theology without demonology'. Padilla continues, 'Without demonology the answer to the problem of sin must be found exclusively in man, without giving attention to the fact that man himself is the victim of an order that transcends him and imposes on him a detrimental way of life.'⁴

As the marginalized recognize they lack power they may be driven by despair to seek out powerful spirit mediums in the hope of gaining access to supernatural power. In this way they are drawn into further dependency and enslavement and their poverty is reinforced.

A young man asked me to come and pray with his brother, who was being continually plagued by a demon. With legs of lead I followed him to the house. I was introduced to the brother and asked if I might pray for him. Three times I laid my hands on his head. Each time he hit the floor. I put him in a chair. He fell out of it. He would race around the room, muttering in strange languages. When I asked him who told him to drive in the nails that had scarred his hands he replied, 'Mary'. Not for a moment did I interpret this as the mother of Jesus. At length three devils named themselves and were subsequently commanded to leave in the name of Jesus. According to his brother, he is a different man today.

Evil must not be tolerated. During much of my pilgrimage I have tolerated evil and explained it away as part and parcel of life. But Jesus shows us that evil is to be opposed, not tolerated. The social sciences have much to offer us in our work of development but they cannot give ultimate victory over the evil one. Transformation must confront all evils, structural and supernatural, but to share in this we must reach beyond ourselves and touch God.

This gift is needed also to discern where God is at work in history. In the 1986 Edza revolution in Manila, the masses united to overthrow a tyrant. They came together to lament over their nation and to cry out for justice. Marcos was overthrown and under Cory Aquino the Philippines endured the anguish of realizing the freedom won in 1986. Did God hear their cry? Where was he in the revolution? Was it the Spirit who inspired the cry for justice? Was this revolution, in fact, an act of the Spirit in history?

PROPHECY, WISDOM, KNOWLEDGE

⁴ C Rene Padilla *Between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom* (Eerdmans, 1985), p. 7

These gifts are given to counsel and guide us. Unfortunately, we have often allowed the Counsellor to guide us only in matters of evangelism and other 'churchly' things. To guide us through the minefields of justice and development issues we have sought the guidance of the social sciences. Do we defer to the social sciences because we perceive development as a human rather than a theological activity?

Jesus is Lord and by his Spirit demands the right to speak to every aspect of his kingdom mandate. However surprising it may seem, the Holy Spirit has just as much to say on issues of justice and the empowerment of the poor as he does on evangelism and church planting.

URBAN SPIRITUALITY

We need more than gifts. Their effectiveness must be enhanced by an appropriate spirituality. This was realized by the Catholic orders when they instituted disciplines to strengthen those called to carry the gospel to difficult and cruel places. They make the load light not heavy. They can help us to be at peace amidst anxiety and unpredictability.

One important element in this urban spirituality is community. Community is what will birth new communities in the city. No individual is called to go and be Jesus to the people. This concept is a symptom of western individualism. Scripture, by contrast, portrays a community of faith becoming Jesus, the Body of Christ, to others. The city does not need super-servants. The ones who will see 'signs and wonders' are those who are willing to depend on the Spirit in the community of faith. Bruised and bashed by disappointments and hardships, we can come together in community and with laying on of hands invite the Spirit to come and heal, restore, strengthen and equip us anew. This fragile community of the Spirit then scatters again to be community-makers in the wider city.

CONTEMPLATIVES IN ACTION

Westerners have jittery minds and hyperactive bodies. We charge off joining crusades to change the world, leaving our own selves uncultivated. In the city we become reactionists, whether to noise, crowds, pollution or poverty. 'This is it!' we exclaim as we launch ourselves into a painfully mistaken course of action. The person who has been schooled in contemplation will withdraw from the context and seek to harness the mind and the emotions in order to reflect before action.

RESTING IN THE SPIRIT

In urban ministry it seems as if the city is your enemy. You battle against its chaos, its fragmentation, its sheer size. You feel small and helpless and after a while you begin to doubt your place in the city, trapped in a guilt/ helplessness syndrome whereby you feel powerless to achieve anything, yet guilty for failing.

We need reminding that the Spirit also lives in the city. He was already there when we arrived. As we yield ourselves to him, we recognize that where we are going is his concern. Even though I live in a Third World slum, my primary location is not the slum, nor Manila, nor even the world. Primarily I am in Christ through the Spirit. When I walk the streets of the city I am really walking in the palm of God's hand.

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

The city presents many barriers, many aspects. We cannot survive there without being prepared to change. Neither the Scriptures nor the city allows us to get comfortable in our little boxes. Only the Spirit can give us the courage for change and power for renewal. [Luke 11:9-13](#) assures me that if I ask for the Holy Spirit I shall receive. This private communion with the Spirit enables one to walk the many public places in the city.

THE SPIRIT OF WEAKNESS

The church at Corinth had succumbed to a common disease. They had so elevated tongues and other gifts that they thought of themselves as 'like the angels'. Ironically this over-realized spirituality was a source of weakness. For the city needs people who perceive themselves not as sources but as instruments of grace: fellow travellers, not those who have already arrived. It is tragic that the western selection processes for priests, teachers and so on focus only on the strengths of the applicants.

If the poor and needy are initially drawn to our flawed humanity, our weaknesses and wrinkles, then we must become a people that can accept, admit to and use our weaknesses in mission. In the grace of God our insecurities, foibles and fears can become a witness to others. Vulnerability and fragility are just as important in mission as are faith, healings and victories. 'If I must boast', said Paul, I will boast of the things that show my weaknesses.⁵ He recalled Christ's promise. 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness' and decided. 'I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ... I delight in weaknesses ... for when I am weak then I am strong.'⁶

Collectively our communities may be full of every imaginable fear, weakness and sin. Paul, who described himself as the greatest of all sinners, might not be unduly appalled. He also wrote, 'We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.'⁷ In the midst of our flawed communities is a gracious God who is healing us by his power.

A psychiatrist friend remembers a retreat where a number of nuns were asked whom they sought out in times of distress. It was not their mother superior, nor their confessor, but a defrocked alcoholic priest. The implication is not, of course, that we should try to debase ourselves further, as if only depressives or addicts were truly human. All that is needed is that we allow the city-dweller to see our flawed humanity, not as a badge of merit but as a sign of solidarity with the poor and needy.

Doing this will be difficult, incredibly so for people from a hyper-faith or triumphalistic tradition. But radical discipleship and community-making demand a twofold process of contextualization. Not only must we contextualize the written word of God into the host city; we must also have the courage to contextualize ourselves so that we become what the city-dweller needs for the process of transformation.

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⁵ [2 Corinthians 11:30](#)

⁶ [2 Corinthians 12:9, 10](#)

⁷ [2 Corinthians 4:7](#)