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Reflections

YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL

NO MORE EXCUSES: CONFRONTING POVERTY

The curse of poverty can be broken; nothing is permanent. God is on the side of the poor. Let the world join God.

– Evalyn Wakhusama '01 M.Div., '02 S.T.M.

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Josh Hester
• FRONT COVER: *Mathare Valley, Kenya, one of the oldest slums in Africa*
• BACK COVER: *Food served to children at Mathare Community School, Kenya*

INTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY:
Josh Hester
Bethany Mahan

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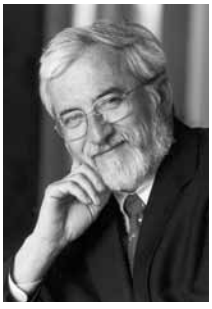
NO MORE EXCUSES: CONFRONTING POVERTY

From the Dean's Desk



Harold W. Attridge
The Reverend Henry L. Slack Dean of Yale Divinity School
& Lillian Claus Professor of New Testament

Confronting the reality of global poverty is not a pleasant task. Being reminded of the immensity of human suffering and deprivation can in fact be a very depressing experience, not the kind of thing that we would choose to be doing on a lovely autumn day. When we hear of the statistics of poverty, recounted in this issue, it is easy to be discouraged. That 20,000 children die *daily* from preventable malnutrition is horrific. That a billion people suffer from unsafe drinking water is an even more overwhelming fact of life. Yet hopeless resignation in the face of such facts is not the response that we as Christians are called upon to make. As Dorothy Day once said, "No one has the right to sit down and feel hopeless; there is too much work to do."

The serious work of addressing global poverty has been underway for some time, spurred on most recently by the widespread adoption of the Millennium Development Goals a decade ago. This issue of *Reflections* is timed to coincide with the September UN summit on the MDGs. There will be things to celebrate about the progress that has been made toward those goals (see p. 33 for a brief synopsis), but there is much yet to be done. Despite some successes, it will be extremely difficult to meet many of the goals set for 2015 without further concerted effort.

For this *Reflections* issue the contributing writers have been asked to offer their assessments about the current state of the various campaigns to combat poverty and to think about some of the forces, such as the phenomena of globalization, that complicate the effort. They have also been asked to reflect on the role of our religious convictions and theological assessments in addressing the needs of the poor. Alongside the theories there are concrete suggestions for how people of faith can have an impact on a perennial human problem.

We are grateful to the talented and perceptive contributors to this issue. All are individuals who care deeply about poverty and have graciously provided their insights in the face of tight deadlines. They represent a remarkable range of experiences, disciplines, and perspectives, but they share a common hope that we can make a difference. We hope that their arguments and insights will stimulate further thought and action among communities of faith.

Harold W. Attridge

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Climbing Up to the Light

By Katherine Marshall

We are living today through an unprecedented world transformation that shatters expectations of what citizenship means. Our new world has seen distances shrink, human potential expand, and national borders fade in significance.

In this media world of instantaneous images, we cannot hide from a disturbing contemporary reality: vast gulfs separate the enormous, avoidable poverty of billions of people from achievable living standards, decent healthcare, and basic nutrition that could ease their suffering. We face an unmistakable gap between what is and what should be.

Because we live in an unavoidably interconnected world, everyone who is blessed with a decent life must today ask three questions: Why should I care about global poverty? What is our responsibility to act? And what can we do?

It's still an intimidating idea to regard poverty as something that can and must be eliminated from our midst.

It is easily forgotten that the vast majority of people, through most of human history, lived short and difficult lives. Until rather recently, a quarter of all children died before they were five, hunger was a constant, slavery was commonplace, and education was the privilege of a tiny minority. This situation was, for the most part, viewed as humankind's accepted fate: the poor would always be with us. Charity was a duty; it could ease suffering, but would not solve the underlying fact of inevitable poverty.

The past fifty years have given birth to a very different reality, one whose full dimensions have yet to insinuate themselves completely into the way we look at the world. Revolutions of healthcare, global communications, manufacturing, and transport have produced a demographic transformation, stretching normal lifespans so that now we contemplate a time when our children may well live routinely to 100. In such a globalized world, the life of work and families themselves take different shapes. Business, travel, and identities move across hemispheres and cultures. In the global village, everyone is our neighbor.

By far the most exciting piece of this new reality is that a decent life is truly within the reach of almost every child born on this earth. This is a first in human history: we have the resources and the knowledge to end poverty. But we confront a world that is deeply divided between rich and poor, making true fairness a dream that is still far from reality.

Ascending the Ladder

So why should we care? There are many reasons, but I propose a "priority ladder" to help order the responses of our minds, our hearts, our souls, and our hands to this new and demanding challenge. The principles behind each rung can be found in the teachings of the great religions, epitomized especially in the Golden Rule – to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. They are captured in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other wise calls to action and justice. Yet it's still a fresh, even intimidating idea to regard poverty as something that can and must be eliminated from our midst.

We should first care about poverty because working to eradicate it is fair and just. Human dignity, the divine spark in human life, underlies a global ethic that mandates giving each person a fair chance. That ideal of human dignity and equality, however distorted throughout history by unequal relation-

◀ Photo by Bethany Mahan

ships between men and women, between races, and between rich and poor, underlies our modern focus on rights.

Addressing the unfairness of inequality, we talk today about a right to development, a right to education, a right to food, a right to freedom. We should not forget that rights come with responsibilities. And once you accept that human beings are equal, endowed by the creator with unalienable rights, then surely there is a common obligation to translate that into something real. Thus working for universal education, making it available to all children no matter where they are born, is not driven alone by the goodness of our hearts but by a common human obligation. The MDGs are above all about this common responsibility to right the imbalances of opportunity.

Helping the "bottom billion" means confronting the conflicts that plague them and the poor political accountability that above all sets them apart.

Neighbors in Distress

The second rung is compassion and charity. We should never cease from caring in the face of suffering, from following our desire to respond when we know about neighbors in distress. The outpourings of citizens eager to help Haitians devastated by an earthquake or orphans without anyone to care for them show caring humanity at its best. There are pitfalls in such impulses – they can feed paternalistic and patronizing behaviors – but they cannot efface the nobility of wanting to help.

A third important theme is gaining force: giving poor people the chance to prosper is good for everyone. People who get access to resources spark production and innovation and contribute to the global economy in countless ways. So helping people at the "bottom of the pyramid" to prosper, for example with microloans to start a tiny business or access to appropriate pharmaceutical products, is a third rung on the ladder: we should work to end poverty because it is good business.

Fourth, today's mobile world sees movements of people on a new scale: migration is a dynamic reality. Those who would block migration are the delusional modern-day King Canutes who cannot see that the human drive to seek a better life won't be stopped. The real solution is therefore not to build high and ultimately futile barriers but to recognize the interconnectedness of markets and to work to give people a chance to prosper in their own lands so that their migration is not driven by desperation and lack of opportunity.

Fifth and finally, we must recognize the contemporary element of fear as another reason to care and to act: the harsh truth is that an unequal and unfair world is dangerous for all. The anger that is fueled by the lethal combination of perceived unfairness, lack of opportunities, and a sense that others lack respect takes many forms, and many of them are violent. If we want our children to be safe we need to address the root causes of justifiable anger and create a fairer world.

Each of these arguments points us to an urgent obligation to care about poverty and seek new ways of fulfilling our duties to our neighbors. We need to revamp our thinking and our theologies in order to make central the new promise of equity in a coming world where every child has a fair chance.

It also means new dilemmas. The ethics of caring about poverty seem quite straightforward, but we must accept that the practicalities of doing something about it are immensely complex. And there are plenty of sages and pundits who would paralyze us with these complexities. We need to respect the different sides of the debates as we navigate towards sensible solutions. But necessary debate and dialogue cannot be allowed to block action. Caring about poverty demands the best of human commitment and cooperation. We must live with complexities and learn from experience as we proceed.

Progress and Panaceas

In the thickets of debate, five have particular importance.

The first turns on aid versus trade: is it more important to increase financial aid to fight poverty or to focus on bringing down barriers to trade that stymie national efforts to grow their way towards prosperity? The question these days is part of a broader discussion of macroeconomic forces and priorities. The good news is that the ideological posturing that stunted progress toward attracting private investment has quieted. But the evils that many see in the unbridled power of huge multinational companies are not figments of the imagination. Economic growth is a means, not a panacea. This challenge is plainly about "both/and," not "either/or." Economic management is too important to leave to the economists alone; theologians need to equip themselves to enter the fray in intelligent ways.

A second set of debates turns on governance, a catch-all term that evokes ancient skirmishing over the roles of states and private actors. Today it points

to fears that corruption leaches most international aid. A dose of good sense here helps to make clear that there are no simple answers as to how large a government is the "right" size; each society has to sort that out for itself, whether the United States or Great Britain or Mali or Malaysia. Legitimate fear of corruption should never be the excuse for failure to act; we know so much more than we did a decade ago about how to stop it. The refreshing power of information, the potency of transparency in determining how and where money is spent, can work wonders in ferreting out hidden transfers of funds and sheer waste and incompetence. Arguably it is harder for tyrants to be tyrants in this 24/7 media climate of internet, blogs, and YouTube. Many bodies, public and private, have practical, even inspiring tools that can advance integrity, above all through the "sunshine principle" of shedding light on what is done. There will no doubt always be some corruption, but a wiser, more vigilant citizenry, using the tools that law and administration can offer, whatever the nation, can turn the tide against it.

Harmonizing Chaos

A third debate pits aid coordination and harmonization against local initiative. The large and growing numbers of development actors do indeed complicate aid programs; sensible efforts to corral programs, led by local actors, are essential. It makes far more sense, say, for Tanzania to have a single national health program that works toward common goals rather than a hodge-podge of scattered though admirable individual clinics. An international effort to harmonize aid is slowly making a dent against a chaos of good if often misguided intentions. Translating these tools into practice in ways that don't produce a stultifying bureaucracy but also respect the innovation and leadership of local initiative are twin challenges for the future. We can all contribute by sensible behavior that neither puts all faith into a coordination committee nor allows the blinkers of a local miracle to obscure how it fits into a larger whole.

Arguably it is harder for tyrants to be tyrants in this 24/7 media climate of internet, blogs, and YouTube.

A fourth debate focuses on how to help the most difficult cases: the Haitis, Burmas, and Somalias of the world – the countries of the "bottom billion." We can neither wait for perfect conditions nor pour in money without accountability and sensible controls. Addressing the poorest and most fragile societies needs the best and brightest minds and our most courageous souls. That means confronting the conflicts that plague them and the poor political accountability that above all sets them apart.

Finally, the most complex and important debate is about the very ends of development: what kind of global society do we want to build? What common values should and could it be founded on? How to do this while respecting and encouraging the rich diversity of human cultures and their faiths? That's something for UN leaders to ponder as they prepare their speeches about what lies ahead for the Millennium Development Goals.

These ten challenges can frame a thoughtful exploration of where the world stands on the noble MDG commitment its leaders made in 2000 to end the outrage of dehumanizing poverty. At the United Nations in September there will be plenty of well-merited complaints of shortfalls in action and reminders of broken promises. But the great hope that ending poverty is a reachable dream and, therefore, an imperative, must be kept front and center.

Katherine Marshall is a senior fellow at Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, a Georgetown visiting professor, and executive director of the World Faiths Development Dialogue. She has nearly four decades of experience in development issues, including a career with the World Bank (1971-2006). She led the World Bank's faith and ethics work from 2000-2009. Her books include Development and Faith: Where Mind, Heart, and Soul Work Together *(World Bank, 2007).*

Unspeakable Monument

Imagine a public monument to the victims of poverty. Imagine that it resembles the black granite wall of the Vietnam Memorial, and it includes the names of everyone who has died of poverty-related causes since the end of the Cold War twenty years ago.

That would be more than 300 million names, mostly children. To make room for so many names, philosopher Thomas Pogge calculates, the monument would have to be 480 miles long, roughly the distance from Detroit to New York City. To keep up with the tally of death that continues daily, the length of the wall would have to be extended by half a mile per week.

Source: Thomas Pogge,* World Poverty and Human Rights *(Polity, 2008)

I Have A Spoon: A Meditation

By Abagail Nelson

(from Lifting Women's Voices: Prayers to Change the World, *edited by Margaret Rose, Jeanne Person, Abagail Nelson, and Jenny Te Paa* *Adapted with permission from the publisher.)*

The sole grocery store within walking distance of Cayla's apartment carries only hot dogs, bologna, baked beans, white bread, and cereal. Of course, there is also the counter with Twinkies, candy, chips, and other snacks. She has no car, and so she goes there often during the week. It is easier to just stop in on her way home from the bus stop. Cayla is tired, and drags her feet as the bell tinkles at the front door of the deli. Struggling with her weight, and diabetic, Cayla is poor and looking for dinner in urban America.

Lourdes wakes up to the sound of roosters at three in the morning, and walks two miles with a bucket on her head to the river where she just finished her wash last evening, beating the soap out of the clothes against the worn river rocks. This morning, she is gathering the family's water for the day. She confidently springs back along the mud paths to her house, only to spend the rest of her early-morning hours collecting wood. She then squats beside the old mortar and pestle that was used by her mother and her mother's mother before her, grinding down the corn for the morning's tortillas. Lourdes already feels the twinges of pain run down her neck into her back, and stifles a cough exacerbated by the open cooking fire. Lourdes is a new mother, extremely poor, in rural Central America, surviving on less than a dollar a day.

Poverty is a terribly difficult concept to wrestle with in the abstract. It encompasses so many realities of deprivation. That is why economists, philosophers, theologians, and all of us in between so often start out by trying to define what we mean.

The World Bank has said, "Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom."

So how should we define poverty? As people of faith, we know true wealth consists of a generosity of spirit, an open hand, a limitless compassion for those in need. We are judged, the Bible tells us, by how we treat the Samaritan along our path, how we as a society embrace the weakest members in our midst. Widows and orphans in the Bible are referenced countless times not because they are more worthy of God's grace than you or I, but because their survival teeters on a knife's edge. Because they have been left bare before the elements, and this bothers the Lord. And because ... there, but for His grace, go you or I. All of us together, all people of

I asked a young woman there, "What in this house is yours, alone?" and she said to me, "I own my spoon."

grace, are called to take very seriously the simple ugly affront of poverty that lies in our midst: here in your town, there at the edge of that city, or oceans and rivers and mountains away. Not merely to read about it, or keen over it, or wring our hands at the complexity of it, but in the small moments that God gives each of us each day – those times when we know we can be generous or we can turn away – to *change* things.

When I was twenty-two, I was in a small village in Ecuador doing a study of a coastal village's economics. I asked a young woman there, about twenty, a woman with three young children already, "What

Poverty is like a whistling wind, a cry thrown at an unfeeling sky, a sound that pulls at the spirit of the listener.

in this house is yours, alone?" and she said to me, "I own my spoon."

Her dress was borrowed, on loan from her sister after she splattered oil all over her own. She lived in her husband's house, and all that was there was his. But her spoon had come with her to this house and would stay with her, should he leave.

I felt a stone fall into my stomach and something deep within me went still ...

This woman had a spoon to reach into a common bowl, a spoon to lift to the mouth of her little girl. She had a spoon, and if her husband left, he could not take that spoon with him.

Poverty is both relative and extreme. Poverty is like a whistling wind, a cry thrown at an unfeeling sky, a sound that pulls at the spirit of the listener, and calls each of us in our humanity to lean in with compassion toward the sound even if it breaks us with its power.

Abagail Nelson is senior vice president for programs at Episcopal Relief and Development, which works in more than 40 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. Based in New York, the organization is affiliated with the Episcopal Church.

THIS AND EVERY DAY: A PRAYER

This day I pray –

For the mother and child waiting at the clinic for survival packed in a can of plumpy'nut

For the woman shunned by her family because her illness shames them

For the little girl with sad eyes who begs on the beach

For the great-grandmother weaving with gnarled hands

For the woman who walks four miles each morning to fill her jug with brown water

For the family living in their car

For the addict who has no teeth and no freedom

For the baby who could be sleeping under a mosquito net

This day I pray –

To see Jesus in the face of all who suffer

To do what I can to take the suffering away

To help convince the world that reconciliation is doing God's work with our own hands

This day I pray –

That we may let God's love lead us from intention to action

From possibility to reality

From scarcity to true abundance.

• 2.6 billion live on less than $2 a day. More than 70 percent live in rural areas and depend on agriculture.

• Some 1.3 billion live in extreme poverty, defined as $1.25 a day. The number of people in extreme poverty has been falling since 1990. However, more than sixty million additional people fell into extreme poverty last year because of the global recession, the UN reported.

• The number of hungry people has risen from 842 million in the early 1990s to 1.02 billion last year.

• Women represent two-thirds of the world's poor, perform two-thirds of the world's work and produce 50 percent of the food (in some regions, 90 percent), while earning 10 percent of the income and owning 1 percent of the property. Women's share of national parliamentary seats increased to 19 percent in 2009, a 6 percent improvement in a decade, according to the UN.

• 2.5 billion people lack basic sanitation services, nearly 40 percent of the world's population. That number has decreased by 8 percent since 1990. Some 1.2 billion practice open defecation, posing health hazards to entire communities, the UN reported.

• About 900 million have no access to safe drinking water. Unsanitary water causes more deaths than HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined. Water-related illness accounts for 80 percent of all sickness and disease globally. Unsanitary water is blamed for 1.5 million cases of hepatitis A and 133 million cases of intestinal worms, the UN reported. At some point in their lives, 50 percent of all people in the developing world will be in the hospital because of a water-related disease.

• About eight million children under five are expected to die this year, most from preventable diseases. That vast number is considered an improvement; mortality rates are declining because of stepped up immunizations, vitamin A supplements, and insecticide-treated bed nets to prevent malaria. Some 40 percent of the deaths occur in just three countries: India, Nigeria, and Democratic Republic of Congo, UNICEF reported.

• Four million children die annually from just three causes: diarrhea, malaria, and pneumonia.

• 31 percent of African households owned anti-malaria bed nets in 2008, a 14 percent increase since 2006.

• Fifteen million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS. Two million children under fifteen have HIV.

• In the U.S., the poverty threshold is about $15 a day per person (based on the 2008 definition of $21,834 for a family of four.) The most recently reported poverty rate was 13.2 percent, or 39.8 million people, an increase from the year before, according to the U.S. Census. For children under eighteen, the poverty rate was 19 percent. For African Americans, the poverty rate was 25 percent.

• During the last decade, two economic downturns translated into a significant rise in U.S. poverty, according to a 2010 Brookings Institution report. Suburbs saw the greatest growth in their poor population and by 2008 had the largest share of the nation's poor. Suburbs in the country's largest metro areas saw their poor populations grow by 25 percent – almost five times faster than primary cities. As a result, by 2008 large suburbs were home to 1.5 million more poor than their primary cities and housed almost one-third of the nation's poor overall.

• Some 500 million tons of heavy metals and toxins slip into the global water supply annually, according to UNESCO estimates. Up to 70 percent of industrial waste in developing countries is dumped untreated into lakes and rivers. China's polluted lakes and rivers force 300 million people to rely on polluted water supplies.

• 20 percent of the wealthiest people (the top billion) consume 80 percent of the earth's water, energy, and minerals each day, according to www.fairshareinternational.org.

• World agriculture produces 17 percent more calories per person than it did thirty years ago despite a 70-percent increase in the population, according to worldhunger.org. This is enough to provide everyone in the world with 2,720 food calories a day. But millions do not have enough land to grow food or enough income to buy it.

The Poor We'll Always Have?

By Arthur B. Keys, Jr.

As a boy in rural Pennsylvania, I came to understand that growing food and creating sustenance are a function of hard work and even harder thinking.

Though growing enough food to support those who don't grow it looks easy, it's anything but that. Significant individual and collective creativity is required to transform seed, soil, and water into distributable surplus. Reliable supplies of surplus food are only a recent human achievement.

Those surpluses helped bring about a fundamental change in human expectations – the conviction that poverty can be overcome through human action.

For Jesus and the early church, what we call poverty was a fact of life. That's not to say He accepted it as a permanent part of the human condition. Indeed, the miracle of the feeding of the multitude, which appears in all four canonical Gospels, provides us with Jesus' powerful vision of a world in which abundant food is shared freely among all people.

A Permanent Stain?

This story made an especially deep impression on me as a young boy living in farm country. In the biblical world, the elimination of extreme poverty occurs when God decisively intervenes in history and establishes "a new heaven and new earth."

Apparently no one imagined that mere humans could achieve sustenance and abundance on earth. Ambitions of communal nurture extended only to the modest efforts of small groups, and only then with the ongoing assistance of others. Paul writes a number of times about "the saints" in Jerusalem. He describes this group's communal life of sharing according to need, in which no one wanted for the basics. What is striking, however, is that Paul also writes about collecting money from other early churches to help support this community of "saints."

Their way of life was not, to use a modern term, sustainable. They had not overcome poverty as much as delayed it. Paul makes it clear that he and those about whom he writes expect Jesus to return in the near future to establish the world of shared abundance without end that he talked about and demonstrated in his miracles.

What makes the approach to poverty today so fundamentally different from that in Jesus' time is the consensus that now exists among most churches, governments, non-profits, and others: reducing and eventually eliminating poverty should be a human goal achievable in the foreseeable future. The elimination of poverty, as an element of the radical vision of Jesus along with other prophets, has become almost universally accepted as conventional wisdom.

In recent decades, poverty strategies have evolved from local self-help initiatives for fellow believers, here in the U.S. and abroad, to sustained actions by large organizations working in dozens of countries. These large organizations, often global in scale and scope, now work on behalf of all people in need who profess every imaginable type of religious commitment – or none at all. We've moved a long way from ancient days when one small group of like-minded believers supported another while waiting for the Kingdom to appear.

The elimination of poverty, as an element of the radical vision of Jesus along with other prophets, has become almost universally accepted as conventional wisdom.

In important ways, global non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have become a new form of

"mission." Though they are organized like businesses and often deliberately eschew denominational or religious trappings, they are often run and staffed by clergy and others with a faith background. They work with churches and faith-based groups as well as with secular groups, community-based organizations, local governments, and sometimes even the military. They are dedicated to assisting those in dire need, a mission that creates a distinct sense of community. NGOs have many of the markers of a mission organization – but their "mission" is defined by a modern, secular, in-it-for-the-long-haul version of the early church's anticipatory end-time worldview.

Incomes and Outcomes

These "mission-driven" global NGOs are successful in addressing and overcoming poverty when they align themselves with a single goal – economic development. In the past forty years, countries that have sustained significant economic growth – like Japan, China, South Korea, and Taiwan – have also experienced a significant reduction in the number of people living in poverty. NGOs, and the church organizations that work with and through them, are effective when they partner with local institutions that know how to achieve practical economic goals with measurable outcomes. Usually this means encouraging the sale of goods for local or global markets, resulting in long-term wealth creation.

Reducing poverty and hunger also means working effectively with national governments and transnational governing institutions, finding successful markets, and using concrete metrics to measure progress. Governments today are more consciously organized around economic development than at almost any time in history. It could be argued that no matter what the ideology or form of government, economic development is the state's primary source of legitimacy in today's world.

That makes governments powerful potential allies in the effort to eliminate poverty. Modern states have the capacity to mobilize resources and effect change on a scale the early church could never imagine. Not all do, of course. Corruption, instability, and civil war persist as obstacles. Corruption is an especially insidious hindrance that reduces incentives to participate in the formal economy. But in the past decade, leading governments and transnational organizations like the World Bank have gotten serious about tying development assistance to compliance with anti-fraud and corruption protections and other measures of "good governance."

This is a long-term effort, and developed nations' programs to combat it are long overdue. But the larger trend shouldn't be overlooked: in the modern world, improving citizens' material conditions is considered a normal function of government, and governments are judged by how well they achieve this goal.

Reducing poverty must focus on those communities damaged or destroyed by natural disaster, or caught in the middle of armed conflict. These are people in greatest need – "the least among us." Serving them means taking risks to try to make a difference, with the creativity that understands that lived faith has never been a matter of simple or inflexible rules.

Success in Indonesia

An example of how all this can come together in practice occurred in Indonesia. International Relief and Development (IRD) launched a successful project to help Indonesians recover from the economic and financial crisis of the late 1990s. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) shipped 128,000 metric tons of wheat to Indonesia from 1999 to 2008. But rather than simply handing over the wheat, the two governments invited my organization to devise a food-aid program based on sustainable business principles. We worked with the U.S. Wheat Association, the American Soy Bean Association, and several Indonesian companies, including Tiga Pilar Sejahtera Food (TPS). TPS factories produce rice vermicelli, egg noodles, and wheat biscuits.

Even though we acknowledge that the utopian vision of economic and social peace on earth will not likely be achieved, we live and act in a world in which these social ills are now considered unacceptable.

TPS received USDA-donated flour to produce a new line of fortified noodles, distributed and sold in high-unemployment areas. In return, TPS was required to reinvest a portion of its proceeds in new production to expand output and increase jobs. My organization also collected a portion of the profits, which we used to fund water-treatment facilities, snacks for school children, and health services.

Since 1999, the program has produced nearly two billion packets of fortified noodles to feed about four million low-income Indonesians monthly. It has also produced thousands of jobs in milling, noodle production, marketing, distribution, and sales. It helped provide basic education and healthcare for thousands of people, enabling them to seek higher-

paying and steady work. This in turn created more demand for the products and other locally produced goods and services. The circle continues, each year lifting more people out of poverty. IRD has worked with public and private groups to develop similar noodle production and distribution systems in Cambodia and Cameroon.

As important as they are, such successes are relative. The world remains engulfed in conflict, injustice, poverty, and plain indifference. Jesus preached against social realities that His listeners usually assumed to be outside human control. Even though we acknowledge that the utopian vision of economic and social peace on earth will not likely be

Governments today are more consciously organized around economic development than at almost any time in history.

achieved, we live and act in a world in which these social ills are now considered unacceptable. Perhaps for the first time in history, the largest institutions in the world are being measured by how effectively they address these human-generated shortcomings, especially economic deprivation. In decidedly imperfect but important ways, much of the world's population, including those who run it, subscribe to some version of the vision of attending to "the least of these" laid out in the ancient Scriptures.

Rededication Time

This vision will be evident during the United Nations summit in September 2010, when the world's nations rededicate themselves to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Adopted by world leaders in 2000, the eight MDGs are broken down into twenty-one quantifiable targets to be achieved by 2015. These include income poverty, hunger, maternal and child mortality, disease, inadequate shelter, gender inequality, and environmental degradation. Though it is unlikely all the goals will be achieved in the next five years, they identify common human needs, generate and focus resources to address them, and measure results.

Any setbacks in achieving the MDGs may be viewed as largely political, often taking the form of instability and conflict. One lesson of the last decade should be the primacy of civil stability in economic and human development. Religious organizations have great potential for brokering peace that creates stability. For example, the recent peace accord in Sudan is dependent on Christian groups like the Sudan Council of Churches and Muslim clerics like Ahmed al-Mahdi finding ways to increase religious tolerance and freedom of religion. The peace achieved is anything but perfect. But it has reduced the level of violence and enabled NGOs to help Sudan's people build healthcare systems and other core elements of a sustainable economy and society. Faith groups interested in reducing poverty should increase their commitment to those organizations working to end conflict and promote civil stability.

In addition to doing so through our own individual faith groups, we can work for, give to and otherwise support the global NGOs that work to bring relief and, more important, build sustainable development to every corner of the globe. Jesus' vision of a world free of abject need might never come to pass on this earth. But we're closer to achieving marked improvements in the world's economic and social conditions than most people realize. Though a world with less poverty won't look like anything Jesus – or those of us who grew up in rural Pennsylvania – could ever imagine, it can be a taste of the heaven on earth that inspired so many of his followers throughout the ages. It should inspire us as well.

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NOTES ON POVERTY
by Hayden Carruth

Was I so poor
in those damned days
that I went in the dark
in torn shoes
and furtiveness
to steal fat ears
of cattle corn
from the good cows
and pound them
like hard maize
on my worn Aztec
stone? I was.

Early Christians and the Care of the Poor

By Harold W. Attridge

Several impulses run through the history of early Christian treatment of the poor. At the heart of the Good News that Jesus preached and that his evangelists recorded is first a proclamation of the coming reign of God, a state of affairs in which justice and peace would be the norm, when the promises found in the prophets of Israel would be realized. The proclamation involved both a message of hope and also a trenchant critique of the world as it is. Alongside the proclamation, the second major impulse enshrined in the teachings of Jesus was a challenge to radical obedience to the will of God, an obedience that would make eschatological hope concrete and present through rejection of material possessions. Such radical obedience may have been a somewhat precarious way to have an impact on the lives of the poor. Hence, the third impulse, which marked the Christian movement from its inception, consisted of systematic efforts to do just that, to hear and respond to the cry of the poor.

The earliest Christian gospel involves a definite "option for the poor." Jesus' proclamation of the coming Reign of God (Matt 4:17; Mark 1:15), a change in administration marking a decided shift in the way the world is run, offered a message of hope to widows, orphans, the blind, and lame, those who also received special treatment in the Torah and prophets of ancient Israel. In Luke's version of his inaugural sermon, Jesus cites Isaiah 61:1-2, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18). The words of Isaiah evoke in turn the stipulations of Leviticus 25 regarding the year of Jubilee, when slaves are freed and ancestral land restored to its original owners. Matthew's allusion to the prophetic text (Matt 11:4-5) is less dramatically situated, in Jesus' response to a question about his mission from the disciples of John the Baptist, but it climaxes with the word of good news to the poor (Matt 11:5).

Woe To You Who Are Full Now

While Jesus proclaims good news for the poor, there is a sense that the rich have something to answer for and will be called to account. That combination of hope for vindication and expectation of judgment is manifest in Luke's version of the Beatitudes, a form probably more original than that of Matthew, which express harsh words of judgment on the well-to-do while offering a message of hope to those in distress (Luke 6:20-25): "Woe to you who are rich, for you have your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry."

That same critical perspective also features prominently in the Magnificat, the great poem set on the lips of Mary in the opening chapter of Luke, which celebrates the Mighty One who has "brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:46-55). Luke's story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) vividly illustrates the principle enshrined in the Magnificat and offers an oft-repeated admonition to the well-to-do.

Prophetic critique and eschatological hope continued in Christian preaching. The challenging proclamation to the rich that characterized the Lukan beatitudes is echoed in the Epistle of James, which prophesies that the rich "will disappear like a flower in the field" (Jas 1:10). Affirming that God has "chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith" (Jas 2:5), James castigates the rich for their partiality (Jas 2:1-7) and warns them that the proceeds of their murderous exploitation of poor laborers will rot and decay (Jas 5:1-6). Implicit in this prophetic critique is a recommendation for action. The proclamation that "faith without works is dead" (Jas 2:26) involves a commitment to social justice for laborers, but how that might work remains unclear.

What God promised to do at the "end of days" in redressing the balance between rich and poor needed assistance from human hearts, hands, and purses.

A Rich Young Man

While the gospel offered a message of hope and a prophetic critique of the rich, it also issued a call to radical generosity and to a rejection of involvement with wealth and the corruption that it produced. One cannot, said Jesus, serve both God and Mammon (Matt 11:12-13; Luke 16:13). Disciples desiring to follow Jesus had to leave all behind (Matt 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11). Such is also the explicit point of the anecdote of the rich ("young" according to Matthew) man (Matt 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-20), a story that long resonated in the history of Christian asceticism. Jesus tells him that if he wants to go beyond keeping the commandments, he should sell all he had, give to the poor, and follow Jesus, a message the man found difficult to accept.

The eschatological hope prominent in Jesus' proclamation of the reign of God turned out to be not quite enough for the Jesus movement as it gradually developed into an institution of its own. What God promised to do at the "end of days" in redressing the balance between rich and poor needed assistance from human hearts, hands, and purses. The followers of Jesus learned to develop habits of generosity and care that would attempt to make eschatological hope a current reality.

Some passages in the Gospels point in the direction of this more practical approach to care for the poor. No doubt the most influential of these is the story of the last judgment in Matthew 25:31-46. In words that have ever since inspired Christian social action, the story paints a vision of Jesus come in glory to judge humankind. He does so by separating the sheep from the goats, not on the basis of their theological sophistication or confessional allegiance, but on the basis of their willingness to address concrete human needs. The sheep are those who have had the generosity to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to shelter the homeless and to clothe the naked. Most importantly, perhaps, the story offers a strong motivation for engaging in such generous behavior. What the sheep did for the "least of the brethren" they did, Jesus says, "to me."

Some interpreters of this story found a limit to generosity in the reference to the "brethren" as the locus of encounter with Jesus, but the weight of the tradition found not a limit, but a directive to see the Lord in all those in need.[1]

Luke and Mammon

Other passages in the Gospels also suggest a concern with concrete efforts to address human need. Luke's gospel is particularly concerned with issues of wealth and poverty. We have already noted the prophetic critique enshrined in his version of the Beatitudes and the Magnificat. Other passages display a more practical focus. John the Baptist, in Luke's version of his preaching, admonishes the crowds that come to him for baptism to use their resources to care for those in need: "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise" (Luke 3:10). The context in which Luke surrounds the "God and Mammon" saying is the story of the "dishonest" or "shrewd" steward (Luke 16:1-8). The mysterious tale of a steward who cooks his master's books in order to secure his own future elicits several admonitions, including the perhaps ironic injunction to use "unrighteous mammon" to secure an eternal reward (Luke 16:9). How exactly that is to be done is not transparent. The later account of Jesus' encounter with the tax-collector Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) may offer a hint. When acknowledged by Jesus, the tax collector promises to give half his possessions to

the poor and compensate fourfold those whom he has defrauded (Luke 19:8). Restorative justice and not simply charity must be a part of the picture in addressing human need.

The Acts of the Apostles offers several vignettes that suggest some of the practical measures adopted by early Christians to address human need. Luke tells the story of the earliest followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, who lived in community, sharing their goods, and meeting one another's needs (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37). Such a common life did not satisfy all wants; Luke reports that there were widows afflicted with poverty, care for whom occupied the time and energy of the apostles. To address those needs, they created the office of deacon (Acts 6:1-6). Acts later reports on the activity of a disciple in Joppa, Tabitha (aka Dorcas), who was "devoted to good works and acts of charity" (Acts 9:36). These works included making "tunics and other clothing" for the widows of the community (Acts 6:39).

The accounts in Acts raise intriguing historical questions; Luke may have idealized the portrait of the earliest church in Jerusalem, anachronistically introducing features more at home in the ecclesial life of his own day.[2] Nevertheless, by the time that Acts was written in the late first or early second century[3] organized poor relief was no doubt underway in parts of the Christian world, conducted by either local workers specifically designated for the activity, or by volunteers who heard the cry of the poor. These dedicated individuals probably included some of the figures who make cameo appearances in the New Testament, people such as Phoebe, the "deaconess" at Cenchreae (Rom 16:1) and many of the other workers whom Paul greets at the end of Romans.

Widows and Wealth

One further bit of evidence for such organized activity, at the same general time as Acts, may be found in the reference to an organized body of "widows" in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 5:3-16). Despite the author's anxiety about the role of women in leadership of the church and his concern about abuses, his community took care to meet the needs of women who were particularly threatened by economic insecurity.

While Luke's reports about poor relief in the earliest Jerusalem community need critical sifting, it is clear from the letters of Paul that organized philanthropy was a feature of Christian life in the first decades of the new movement. In the decades after Christ's death and resurrection, his followers struggled with many issues, including whether they were to be a community that included Jews and Gentiles, or one that would be exclusively and traditionally Jewish. The apostle Paul was at the center of the debate about that issue and once he had resolved it, so he believed at a theoretical level – Gentiles could join the community as Gentiles – he devoted himself with passion to an effort to make the union between Jew and Gentile a tangible reality: he took up a collection.[4] Paul's effort to raise funds for the poor (Gal 2:10) in Jerusalem, who were perhaps suffering from famine (Acts 11:28-29), occupied a good deal of his time while he was spreading the Good News throughout Asia Minor and the Greek heartland. Many of his letters have references to the collection he undertook to aid the Church in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1-4; Gal 2:10; Rom 15:25-16), with two chapters of 2 Corinthians (8-9) devoted fully to the fundraising effort.[5]

It is striking that the movement so soon undertook a major fund-raising effort to meet a concrete human problem.

Apostolic Fundraising

Paul's motives in organizing this collection were complex. There was indeed compassion for suffering brethren, but more important was the concrete gesture of solidarity between two factions within the Jesus movement. However that may be, it is striking that the movement so soon undertook a major fundraising effort to meet a concrete human problem. Paul may have known of Jesus' call to radical simplicity; he portrays Jesus as one who "emptied himself" (Phil 2:7). Paul also believed that the "shape of this world was passing away" (2 Cor 7:31), but his efforts focused on the practical steps needed to aid those in need.

As the Christian church grew and developed the impulses that we find in the New Testament continued and took on new forms. The hope for the coming Reign of God remained, if not as an immediate framework for belief and practice for all Christians, at least as a fixed element of the liturgy. The call to radical discipleship, to give away all that one had to follow a life of renunciation and prayer, inspired many to adopt an ascetical lifestyle. This lifestyle spread once Christianity became accepted by Roman authorities in the fourth century. Some combined the call of Jesus with the principle found in Prov 19:17, that a gift to the poor constituted a loan to God. In the logic of that economic metaphor, a gift of everything to someone who paid the extraordinary interest of life eternal was a very good investment indeed.[6]

Despite the popularity of ascetical renunciation of wealth, enshrined in influential accounts of early monastic heroes such as Antony in the fourth century,[7] other Christians demurred and, like Clement of Alexandria in the second century, in his treatise *What Rich Man can be Saved*, advocated spiritual detachment from wealth rather than radical poverty.

Even those Christians knew that they had obligations to the poor. Their preachers and teachers continually told them so, and giving alms became a central act of Christian life. At the same time the impulse to engage in organized charity and support for the poor, evidenced in Acts and Paul, continued. In the middle of the second century Justin Martyr, in *1 Apol*. 67, tells of such efforts in the Roman community at their weekly assembly: "And they who are well-to-do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need."[8]

These early hospitals were precursors of the wide variety of institutions that Christian churches developed in the course of western history to live in fidelity to the vision of care for the poor that Jesus shared with his disciples.

Once Christians became an authorized part of the Roman world, such care for those in need took on new institutional forms. Two famous examples are the "hospital" founded in Cappadocia by St. Basil and the similar institution founded in the Syrian east by Rabbula of Edessa.[9] These were precursors of the wide variety of institutions that Christian churches developed in the course of western history to live in fidelity to the vision of care for the poor that was an integral part of the vision of the Reign of God that Jesus shared with his disciples. In one way or another that vision must remain a vital part of the teaching and action of the Christian churches today, whatever other impulses from the Gospels may drive our contemporary engagement.

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Notes

1 See Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), pp. 263-96.

2 For parallels, see Richard Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), pp. 88-95.

3 See Pervo, *Acts*, pp. 5-7, for a discussion of the issues. He himself dates the work to around 115.

4 Many scholars have offered analyses of Paul's collection. See especially Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: A History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992).

5 For a detailed treatment of these chapters, see Hans Dieter Betz, *2 Corinthians 8-9: A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

6 For an insightful exploration of the ways in which that economic metaphor worked itself out in Christian life and preaching through the Patristic period, see Gary Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), esp. pp. 135-88.

7 For the text see Tim Vivian and Apostolos N. Athanassakis, *Athanasius of Alexandria, Life of Antony* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 2003).

8 Translation from the on-line Ante-Nicene Fathers: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.viii.ii.lxvii.html

9 For a good popular account of these institutions, see Susan R. Holman, *God Knows There's Need: Christian Responses to Poverty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). A more detailed study of Basil's hospital is available in Andrew Crislip, "Monastic healthcare system and the development of the hospital in Late Antiquity" (Dissertation, Yale, 2002). On Rabbula, see Robert Doran, trans., *Stewards of the Poor: The Man of God, Rabbula, and Hiba in Firth-Century Edessa* (Cistercian Studies Series 208; Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 2006).

For those of us who don't have to do it, it is hard to imagine what it is like to live on so small an income. The chances of moving out of poverty depend, we assume, either on international charity or on incorporation into the globalized economy. The hottest public debates in world poverty, therefore, are those about aid flows and debt forgiveness, and about the virtues and vices of globalization. Discussion of what the poor might do for themselves is less often heard.

Suppose that your household income indeed averaged $2 or less a day per head. How do you budget? How do you make sure there is something to eat and drink every day, and not just on the days you earn? (One of the least-remarked-on problems of living on $2 a day is that you don't literally get that amount each day. The $2 a day is just an average over time.)

Consider Hamid and Khadeja. The couple married in a poor coastal village of Bangladesh. After their first child was born, they gave up rural life and moved, as so many hundreds of thousands have done before them, to the capital city, Dhaka, where they settled in a slum. Hamid eventually got taken on as a reserve driver of a motorized rickshaw, while Khadeja stayed home to run the household, raise their child, and earn a little from taking in sewing work. Home was one of a strip of small rooms with cement block walls and a tin roof, with a toilet and kitchen space shared by the eight families that lived there.

In an average month Hamid and Khadeja lived on the equivalent of $70, almost all of it earned by Hamid, whose incomes arrived in unpredictable daily amounts that varied according to whether he got work that day, and if he did get work, how many hours he was allowed to keep his vehicle, and how often it broke down. A fifth of the $70 was spent on rent, and much of the rest went toward the most basic necessities of life – food and the means to prepare it. Their income – an uncertain 78 cents per person per day – put them among the poor of Bangladesh, though not among the very poorest. By global standards they would fall into the bottom two-fifths of the world's income distribution tables.

You wouldn't expect them to have much of a financial life. Yet their year-end household balance sheet shows that Hamid and Khadeja, as part of their struggle to survive, within their slim means, were active money managers. Far from living hand-to-mouth, they had built up reserves in six different financial instruments, ranging from $2 kept at home for minor day-to-day shortfalls to $30 sent for safe-keeping to his parents, $40 lent out to a relative, and $76 in a life insurance savings policy. Hamid also made sure he always had $2 in his pocket to deal with anything else that might befall him on the road.

In addition to saving, borrowing, and repaying money, Hamid and Khadeja, like nearly all poor households, also saved, borrowed, and repaid in kind. Khadeja, sharing a crude kitchen with seven other wives, would often swap small amounts of rice or lentils or salt with her neighbors. Virtually all of the rural Bangladeshi households followed the well-established tradition of *musti chaul* – of keeping back one fistful of dry rice each time a meal was cooked, to hold against lean times, to have ready when a beggar called, or to donate to the mosque or temple when called on to do so.

Hamid and Khadeja kept track of their financial transactions in their heads, but their records were accurate. When we asked how they managed to do this when so many transactions were ongoing, Khadeja said, "We talk about it all the time, and that fixes it in our memories." One of their neighbors remarked, "These things are important – they keep you awake at night."

In our book we were struck by two thoughts that changed our perspective on world poverty, and on the potential for markets to respond to the needs of poor households.

First, we came to see that money management is, for the poor, a fundamental part of everyday life.

Second, we saw that poor households are frustrated by the poor quality – above all the poor reliability – of the instruments that they use to manage their meager incomes. If poor households enjoyed assured access to a handful of better financial tools, their chances of improving their lives would surely be much higher.

This runs against common assumptions about poor families. It requires that we rethink our ideas about banks and banking. Some of that rethinking has already started through the global "microfinance" movement, but there is further to travel. Our findings point to new opportunities for philanthropists and governments seeking to create social and economic change, and for businesses seeking to expand markets.

Excerpt from Portfolios of the Poor: How the World's Poor Live on $2 a Day *by Daryl Collins, Jonathan Morduch, Stuart Rutherford, and Orlanda Ruthven, published by Princeton University Press, 2009. Adapted with permission of the publisher. For their research, the authors worked in Bangladesh, India, and South Africa with more than 250 poor households who kept financial diaries tracking their money-managing habits. (See www.press.princeton.edu/titles/8884.html)*

◀ Mathare Valley, Kenya – photo by Josh Hester

Dare to Dream: A World Without Poverty

By Lesley-Anne Knight

I recently took some visiting friends to see St Peter's Basilica in Rome, and in preparation for the visit I looked up some interesting facts about its history. One in particular made me stop and think: "Construction of the basilica began in 1506 and was completed in 1626."

In other words, it took 120 years to build. No one alive when the building was started would have been around to see it completed. It ranks among the world's Grand Projects: those endeavours that transcend the ambitions of individuals, producing something of lasting value for posterity.

Quick-Fix Failures

This started me wondering whether we would ever embark on such a venture in the twenty-first century. We live today in a world where we expect immediate gratification. A world of fast food, rapid transit, TV on demand, instant access, fast tracks and quick fixes.

Any slight delay in getting what we want, any minor hitch, and we're apt to become disillusioned, to give up and move on to some other distraction. Take the movement to tackle climate change. We knew this was always going to be a long battle. Yet following the failure of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change at Copenhagen, a debilitating air of despondency has all but brought the process to a halt.

Any slight delay in getting what we want, any minor hitch, and we're apt to become disillusioned, to give up and move on to some other distraction.

A similar defeatism now threatens the Millennium Development Goals – which with their fifteen-year time frame represent the closest we have come to real long-term planning in recent years. At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in 2008, I witnessed an enthusiastic endorsement of the MDGs and renewed commitment to meeting them. Then came the global financial crisis. And at this year's Davos Forum, the one session on the MDGs, featuring a panel of top humanitarian activists, attracted an embarrassingly small audience.

Thinking Big Again

As our civilization's capabilities have matured, it seems that the scale of our ambitions, the scope of our vision, and our staying power have all diminished. It feels now like an overwhelming undertaking to embark on any project that is likely to take more than a decade – let alone more than a century.

But if we could dare to imagine a modern equivalent to a project on the scale of St Peter's, what would it be? Given the enormous technological advances we have made in the 500 years since St. Peter's was begun, it could surely be something to marvel at.

I don't think we need a new St Peter's, but could we not create something even more impressive – a better world perhaps?

Of course, that sounds somewhat trite, so let me be more specific: a world without poverty. That may sound hopelessly idealistic. But don't forget, we are talking about a Grand Project, not something to be completed by the end of this decade, or maybe not even within our lifetimes. Like St. Peter's, it could take a hundred years. But what an achievement it would be.

I would hope we could reach that goal in less than a hundred years, but the important thing is not to be deterred by the scale of the task. It requires us to have the courage and conviction to begin something that we may not have the satisfaction of completing ourselves. It requires a selfless spirit, far-sighted vision and, above all, faith.

Where can we find such qualities in today's world? Contemporary institutions are largely ephemeral entities focused on short-term goals. Governments come and go, rarely looking far beyond the next election. Private corporations are intent on delivering short-term shareholder value. Even in international development, with the notable exception of the MDGs, we seldom plan more than five years ahead.

Ancient Dreams

But faith-based humanitarian organizations like Caritas are supported by some of the most long-lived institutions in human history – the great world religions, which have histories stretching back 2,000 years; beyond, in the case of Buddhism and Judaism.

It is reasonable to suppose that the world's major religions will still be around in one hundred years' time. In fact the signs show religious faith growing in importance. The proportion of people attached to the world's four biggest religions – Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism – rose from 67 percent in 1900 to 73 percent in 2005 and may reach 80 percent by 2050.

Given this dramatic trend, faith-based development organizations are uniquely placed to take a visionary, far-sighted view of their work; to plan a Grand Project; and to lead a steady process of construction that will be continued by successive generations, until the job is done.

Like St. Peter's, any Grand Project has to be built on solid foundations. And if we are talking about changing our world, those foundations must be the shared values of humanity. Here again, the great religions can help us. Yes, they have all developed their own sets of values, but they hold many in common. These shared values could be the basis for an unprecedented and powerful interfaith collaboration.

How Firm A Foundation

As a Catholic humanitarian organization, Caritas grounds its work on the social values of the Roman Catholic Church, so I would like to look briefly at how these values might contribute towards our Grand Project.

We only need look at the recent global financial crisis to see what happens when international systems stray from human values. What was clearly lacking in the strategies and decisions that led to the crisis was any concept of respect for the human person.

That respect is central to Catholic values. It recognizes the essential dignity of all human beings, and the basic rights they should enjoy as a result. Rights, however, are linked to duties and responsibilities – towards our families, communities, and humanity as a whole.

These duties are based on the value of solidarity, a sense of responsibility of everyone for everyone else.[1] It recognises the interdependence of human beings and helps us to see the "other" – whether individuals, peoples, or nations – not just as something to be exploited at low cost and discarded, but as our neighbor, a helper, a sharer in the banquet of life.[2]

Someone will likely point out that Jesus said the poor would always be with us. He did not mean we should accept that 50,000 people die every day from the effects of extreme poverty, or that around a billion people are on the brink of starvation.

Solidarity demands that we work towards the common good – towards the creation of communities, where all people can flourish and achieve fulfilment. In the new century's global context, the common good must be seen as the good of all humanity.

In seeking to help others, we should not, however, negate the ability of individuals and communities to help themselves and to develop their own solutions. Following the principle of subsidiarity, larger overarching entities should not take on what people and groups can achieve through their own initiative and enterprise. This principle places a duty on communities and institutions to ensure the participation of all of their stakeholders, particularly those who are weaker or disadvantaged. It implies a duty on those stakeholders to take up their rights to participate.

The morality of a society can be judged on the basis of how it treats its most vulnerable members. Catholic social values promote a preferential option for the poor, prioritizing the hungry, the weak, the marginalized, and persecuted.[3] Charity – *caritas* – is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine, but it is

inseparable from the concept of justice. You cannot make a gift of something that justice demands a person should already have.[4]

Working from values such as these, we could begin to draw up a blueprint, a grand design, for our Grand Project.

Taking "A world without poverty" as our Grand Project, we could begin by examining what we mean by poverty – and what we mean by a world freed from it.

Whenever we talk about ridding the world of poverty, someone will likely point out that Jesus said the poor would always be with us. So let me deal with this point now. When I say "a world without poverty," I don't mean a world in which no one is poorer than I am. There will always be someone poorer than us, someone who needs our compassion and our help. This, I believe, is what Jesus meant. He did not mean that we should accept that 50,000 people die every day from the effects of extreme poverty, or that around a billion people are on the brink of starvation.

What would a world without poverty look like? Whole books have been written on theories of poverty; we don't have space to consider them here.

Like St. Peter's Basilica, it could take a hundred years or more. But what an achievement it would be.

One often-quoted definition says poverty means living on less than one dollar a day. But solutions need to address far more than income levels.

Consider the problem of poverty as having three key interlinked characteristics that could shape a thematic approach to our plan: vulnerability, deprivation, and marginalization.

Poverty makes people more vulnerable to natural disasters, to conflict, to disease, and to the effects of climate change. Poor people live and work in buildings that are swept away by floods and collapse in earthquakes. This was graphically illustrated by the Haiti earthquake earlier this year. When I visited Port au Prince shortly after the quake, I stayed in the Caritas Haiti headquarters – a quality building that remained intact. But as we toured the devastated city, it was evident that many other buildings had been little more than death traps.

You only need to compare the death toll in Haiti with the damage done by the major recent earthquake in Chile. There were more than 230,000 deaths in the Haiti earthquake, and yet Chile's much more powerful earthquake killed fewer than 500. It is not the earthquakes that kill people – it is buildings that kill people. We have a duty to speak out about the real story behind tragedies like Haiti – the fact that so many people die needlessly in natural disasters as a result of infrastructure poverty.

Violent conflict is both a cause and consequence of poverty. Poor people are especially vulnerable because weak governments are unable to protect them, as we have seen recently in Nigeria. They are often used as pawns in conflicts in which they have no real stake.

Deadly Vulnerabilities

Poor people are prone to disease as a result of malnutrition and lack access to preventative healthcare and medicines. Worldwide, more than two million children with HIV/AIDS have no access to lifesaving drugs, and most will die before they reach the age of two.

The poor are vulnerable to the disruptions and dangers of climate change. They live in drought and flood-prone areas and their livelihoods are threatened by changing weather patterns. If not managed justly, measures to combat climate change could hinder the development of poor countries.

Deprivation manifests itself in many ways – for instance, poor people's efforts to build sustainable livelihoods are hampered by poor infrastructure and lack of access to credit facilities. But hunger and lack of access to clean water must be regarded as the worst forms of deprivation. Food security is an increasingly urgent issue with global food demand set to double by 2050. It is estimated that by 2025 more than three billion people will be living in water-stressed countries. Lack of access to water looms as a source of future conflict.

Discrimination – because of race, religion or gender – keeps poor people on the margins of development. They are often denied basic human rights. Girls and women are subjected to sexual violence with absolute impunity in many parts of the world; their property and rights go unprotected.

Lack of access to education, particularly for girls, might be the single biggest barrier to development. Education is also key to building sustainable peace.

Sustainable Compassion

It is clear that the task ahead is immensely complex and will require enormous resources. But this is characteristic of Grand Projects. They challenge us and push us towards innovative solutions.

Who will be the agents of change in this project? Who will be the craftsmen, stonemasons, and laborers who will build this new world?

Religious leaders will have a central role to play. Many are strongly identified with the cause of the

poor and oppressed. Often they are free to speak out when politicians are silenced by expediency.

People can become agents of development, active citizens who find a voice, men and women together, shaping decisions that affect their lives, joining in collective action.

We should demand that our governments and institutions be responsible and accountable to the poorest among us and fair to all. Our leaders should create conditions for sustainable economic growth, provide security, and uphold rule of law. They should raise revenue effectively and fairly to provide essential services while encouraging a responsible private sector.

Grand Projects are never completed without setbacks, and we must continue to be prepared to respond to natural disasters and other humanitarian crises that will occur along the way and temporarily hamper our efforts. The challenge is to keep the ultimate goal always in sight and not to be discouraged or diverted.

The international community has shown great generosity in response to major disasters like the Asia tsunami in 2004 and the earthquake in Haiti in 2010. We have not been so good at maintaining a consistent commitment to ending chronic global poverty. We will need to develop a sustainable compassion to maintain our momentum.

It will be important to measure and celebrate our progress – to see our new construction rising stone by stone on the horizon. The Millennium Development Goals have shown us how this can be done. Even if the MDGs are not achieved by 2015, they will have galvanized our imaginations and fulfilled a useful purpose.

But now we need a much more ambitious project. One that is truly inspirational. A project not undertaken for personal glory, or for the glory of any nation, race, or religion, but for the glory of God and all humanity.

Lesley-Anne Knight is Chief Executive Officer of Caritas Internationalis. A British citizen, born in Zimbabwe, Ms. Knight has some thirty years of experience in international development. Based in Vatican City, Caritas is a global confederation of 165 Catholic humanitarian and development organizations that work with and support people (based on need not creed) in more than 200 countries and territories.

Notes

1 *Caritas in Veritate*, Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, paragraph 38.
2 *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II, 1987, paragraph 39.
3 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, paragraph 182.
4 *Caritas in Veritate*, paragraph 6.

Joe Cistone '90 M.A.R., CEO of International Partners in Mission, headquartered in Cleveland, which works on behalf of children, women, and youth to create partnerships that build justice, peace, and hope. (ipmconnect.org)

Our partnerships:

"IPM partners globally with over sixty projects in more than twenty-five countries. Our Project Partners promote micro-enterprise, organizational development, and education initiatives to better their local community. In partnership, we provide small grants and technical assistance and training as well as convene partners regionally so that we can learn from one another."

Images of hope:

"Dorothy Day once said: 'No one has the right to sit down and feel hopeless, there is simply too much work to do.' I am blessed to witness such hope-filled endeavors when I sojourn among IPM's Partners worldwide – whether it is the recent, long-overdue change of government in El Salvador; or the light in the eyes of a young Kenyan girl who has been rescued from a forced early marriage and mutilation and now dreams of continuing her studies at a place like Yale; or the 'epiphany' of an American university student who first ventures abroad with IPM on an Immersion Experience and realizes just how much he or she shares the same hopes and dreams of an age-mate in some far-off village; or the Hindu and Muslim women in Ahmedabad, India, who have developed a kite-making micro-enterprise to overcome historic ethnic and religious differences and provide sustainable income for their families."

Systemic change:

"Perhaps the biggest misconception about poverty is that it is only 'treatable' with giant checks. Money is certainly necessary – now more than ever in the midst of this global economic crisis – but philanthropy is ultimately ephemeral if it doesn't go hand-in-hand with work for systemic change."

The two-way street:

"My hope is grounded in the rather simple principle that the struggle against poverty (and for justice and peace!) is a two-way street. Hope is not found only in so-called developing countries where socio-economic development and constituent democracy may work hand-in-hand to promote human dignity. Hope is also found in North America when individuals and particularly people of faith increasingly understand that our human dignity is bound up with the dignity of our brothers and sisters around the world. Such solidarity – which IPM has worked for thirty-six years to promote – is often a slow and gritty process, but it is a journey worth undertaking and recommitting ourselves to each day. It has the power to nurture and sustain hope for us all."

Saving A Child, Easily

By Peter Singer

Imagine you come across a small child who has fallen into a pond and is in danger of drowning. You know that you can easily and safely rescue him, but you are wearing an expensive pair of shoes that will be ruined if you do. It would be wrong – monstrous, in fact – to walk on past the pond, leaving the child to drown, because you don't want to have to buy a new pair of shoes. You can't compare a child's life with a pair of shoes!

Yet while we all say that it would be wrong to walk past the child, there are other children whose lives we could save just as easily – and yet we don't. UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, estimates that nearly nine million children under five die each year from causes related to poverty. That's 24,000 a day – a football stadium full of young children, dying every day (along with thousands of older children and adults who die from poverty every day as well). Some die because they don't have enough to eat or clean water to drink. More die from measles, malaria, diarrhea, and pneumonia – diseases that don't exist in developed nations, or if they do, are easily cured and rarely fatal.

Describing a case in Ghana, a man told a researcher from the World Bank: "Take the death of this small boy this morning, for example. The boy died of measles. We all know he could have been cured at the hospital. But the parents had no money and so the boy died a slow and painful death, not of measles but out of poverty."

Money To Spare

Many organizations are working to reduce poverty and provide clean water and basic healthcare. If people donated more to these organizations, they could save more lives. Most people living in affluent nations have money to spare, money that they spend on luxuries like clothes they don't need, vacations in exotic places, even bottled water when the water that comes out of the tap is safe to drink. Instead of spending money on these things, we could give the money to an organization that would use it to reduce poverty, and quite possibly to save a child's life.

Of course, the situation in which you can rescue the child in the pond is not exactly the same as that in which you can donate to an aid organization to save a child's life. There is only one child in the pond, and once we have saved him, we have solved the problem and need not think more about it. But there are millions of children in poverty, and saving one of them does not solve the problem. Often this feeling – that whatever we do will be merely "drops in the ocean" – makes us feel that trying to do anything at all is futile. But that is a mistake. Saving one child is not less important because there are other children we cannot save. We have still saved a life, and saved the child's parents from the grief that the parents of that boy in Ghana had to suffer.

Most people living in affluent nations have money they spend on luxuries like clothes they don't need, vacations in exotic places, even bottled water when the water that comes out of the tap is safe to drink.

◀ Mahtare Valley, Kenya. Photo by Josh Hester

Saving a child drowning in a shallow pond is a simple thing to do, whereas reducing global poverty is complex. But some aspects of saving human life are not so complex. We know that providing clean water and sanitation saves lives, and often saves women hours each day that they previously spent fetching water, and then boiling it. We know that providing bednets reduces malaria, and immunizing children stops them getting measles. We know that educating girls helps them to control their fertility, and leads them to have fewer children.

Often this feeling – that whatever we do will be merely "drops in the ocean" – makes us feel that trying to do anything at all is futile. But that is a mistake.

In *The Life You Can Save* I explore this argument in more depth, and consider objections. I discuss whether aid is effective, and how we can be confident that our donations are making a difference.

Objections Overruled

Some will argue, for example, that I can't have any confidence that my donation to an aid organization will save a life, or will help people to lift themselves out of extreme poverty. Often these arguments are based on demonstrably false beliefs, such as the idea that aid organizations use most of the money given to them for administrative costs, so that only a small fraction gets through to the people who need it, or that corrupt governments in developing nations will take the money. In fact, the major aid organizations use no more than 20 percent of the funds they raise for administrative purposes, leaving at least 80 percent for the programs that directly help the poor, and they do not donate to governments, but work directly with the poor, or with grassroots organizations in developing countries that have a good record of helping the poor.

Measuring the effectiveness of an aid organization by the extent to which it can reduce its administrative costs is, however, a common mistake. Administrative costs include the salaries of experienced people who can ensure that your donation will fund projects that really help the poor in a sustainable, long-term way. An organization that does not employ such people may have lower administrative costs than one that does, but it will still achieve less with your donation. *

I also propose a realistic scale for giving. (You can also find that at www.thelifeyoucansave.com.) I have suggested a progressive scale, like a tax scale. It begins at just 1 percent of income, and for 90 percent of taxpayers, it does not require giving more than 5 percent. This is therefore an entirely realistic amount, and one that people could easily give with no sacrifice – and indeed, often with a personal gain, since there are many psychological studies showing that those who give are happier than those who do not. I do not really know if the scale I propose is the one that will, if widely advocated, achieve the greatest total amount donated. But I calculated that if everyone in the affluent world gave according to that scale, it would raise $1.5 trillion dollars each year – which is eight times what the United Nations task force headed by the economist Jeffrey Sachs calculated would be needed to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Those goals included reducing by half the proportion of the world's people living in extreme poverty, and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger, as well as reducing by two-thirds the death toll among children under five – thus saving six million lives every year – and enabling children everywhere to have a full course of primary schooling.

An Ethical Life

We do not need to transfer half, or a quarter, or even a tenth, of the wealth of the rich to the poor. If we all, or even most of us, gave according to the scale I have suggested, none of us would have to give up much. That is why this is a suitable standard for public advocacy. What we need to do is to change our public ethics so that for anyone who can afford to buy luxuries – and even a bottle of water is a luxury if there is safe drinking water available free – giving something significant to those in extreme poverty becomes an elementary part of what it is to live an ethical life.

We who are fortunate to have more than enough have a moral obligation to help those who, through no fault of their own, are living in extreme poverty. It's not hard to do.

* For more on this, see www.GiveWell.org. GiveWell is not an aid organization, but an organization that seeks hard evidence about which organizations are most effective. It has, for example, compared the cost per life saved, of various organizations that work to combat the diseases that kill many of those 8.8 million children who die each year from poverty-related causes. According to GiveWell, there are several organizations that can save a life for somewhere in the range of $600-$1,200, and on the GiveWell website, you can see which it ranks most highly.

Peter Singer is Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University and Laureate Professor at the University of Melbourne. His many books include The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty *(Random House, 2009) and* One World: Ethics and Globalization *(Yale University Press, 2002)*

HOW TO DO

By Cornelius Eady

It embarrasses my niece to think of her mother
Walking the streets with a cart,
Picking up empties
For their deposits,

But my sister knows how to ***do***,
Which was all our mother asked of us.
She's learned how to ***do***,
Which is both a solution and a test,

So I stand in line with my sister
At the supermarket.
Today's the best day of the week
To bring the bottles in.

It is a poor people's science,
A concept that works until
Someone with power
Notices it works,

And then, it doesn't.
There's at least 15 carts,
At least 10 people in line,

But only one guy
Behind the counter:
Not what's supposed
To happen.

The manager shrugs
His shoulders when asked.
No rules here,

Points to a sign taped
Above our heads
Which, boiled down,
Says ***wait, behave***.

No rules, except for
What's always been:
Do what you gotta do.

And the poor stiff

Whose job it is to sort the clears
From the greens, the plastics
From the cans, who is short
One or two people this shift,

Who flings my sister's
Stumpy treasure
Into the hamper's
Great, indifferent mouth,

Temporary chief of staff
Of Lotto,

Who's been instructed to keep
The refunds down to
Twelve dollars' worth of
Store credit, no matter
How many empties
Come in,

Maybe he has a favorite song.
Maybe he's a good guy
To have in a pinch.
He's not paid enough to reveal that here.

This, as my mother would say,
Is the way we have to ***do***:
Tired as convicts, we inch along,
Shift our weight
On the black,
Sticky carpet,

Beholden to nobody's luck
But our own.

Give, Pray, Love: A Mid-Life Crisis

By Debbie McLeod Sears

It seemed prudent at age forty to schedule a mid-life crisis since the average American life expectancy is about eighty. Being a stay-at-home mom, I made most of the family-related decisions; therefore my midlife crisis would affect us all – my husband, Jay, fifteen-year old son Jonathan, and twelve-year old daughter Meredith. After eighteen years of marriage Jay knew that when I was on a mission from God he had better stand aside.

My mission from God started with shoes, children's shoes. I helped organize a "Shoes for Orphan Souls" shoe drive (sponsored by Buckner Orphan Care International) to our church in 1999. A small group of us drove all over Houston buying shoes to send overseas with money raised from our Baptist congregation. At a ridiculously old age I had learned what the New Testament Epistle of James had been saying for nearly 2,000 years (Baptists quote Scripture. It is in our DNA):

> *What good is it, my sisters and brothers, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a sister or brother is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.* (James 2:14-17)

I believed I had faith but my works were minimal and therefore my faith was headed towards death. Examining my daily schedule, what I read, my checkbook, and what I watched on television, the obvious conclusion would be that I was making financial gifts because they were much easier and spiritually safer than getting my hands and heart dirty. My family has consistently given money and time, but out of a sense of obligation and not out of love. If I was going to have a effective mid-life crisis then I needed to make some huge changes in the legacy I would leave to my children and grandchildren.

In summer 2000, the Buckner folks allowed me, Jonathan, and Meredith to work with a group of college students in Romania. It was a nightmare and a blessing all rolled into one ten-day period.

Romanian Revelations

There were turbulent and life-changing moments. During a cold snap in the Carpathian Mountains we had to borrow donated sweaters to keep warm. There is nothing more humbling than wearing clothes donated to the poor and being grateful. We left the sweaters with the children when we finished our work. I clashed with a Buckner staffer over his doctrinal stance and evangelistic approach. Still, despite the emotional and spiritual turmoil we found ourselves falling in love with the orphaned

I believed I had faith, but my works were minimal and therefore my faith was headed towards death.

Romanian children while we ran summer camps and vacation Bible schools. Children hung off each of us like we were jungle gyms. It was terribly painful to say goodbye to Mavi, Grigorie, and Anna. I tried via e-mail to maintain a relationship with them, sponsoring them in high school and then college, but they all dropped out for reasons mostly beyond their control. I still hear from them occasionally and am left wondering what I could have done differently. I so wish the unexamined life *was* worth living.

What should we do now? I decided to continue traveling with Buckner in ways that would be authentic to my faith. Since 1999 the organization has delivered more than two million pairs of shoes and socks to children in sixty-eight countries, including the U.S. after Katrina hit. I joined Buckner's foundation and continued to help run yearly shoes drives and also visited Buckner-sponsored orphanages worldwide. In Kenya, I along with a team of volunteers sat on the floor, washed children's feet, put on socks, tied shoestrings, and read notes to the children placed in the shoes by donors. In various countries I held crying children, sang, took a ridiculous number of photographs, said the wrong thing, steered a plane for about ten seconds over the Kalahari desert, ate caterpillars, brushed my teeth with bottled water, handed out medication, wiped dirty noses, asked insensitive questions, sat through a three-hour church service, wore a skirt (that won't happen again) and tried to treat others as I would want to be treated, but not once did I try to "save" a soul. I would let God do the saving.

I want to prepare women and girls to speak truth to power like so many biblical women did.

Lessons at the Orphanage

What I learned from visiting developing-world orphanages:

1. Orphanages are primarily filled with girls and special-needs children because these children are less likely to be able to care financially for their parents in old age.

2. Orphanages are deathly quiet. Babies quickly discover that crying does not bring about swaddling, so they stop crying. Orphanage workers are underpaid and overburdened with children.

3. Orphanages are not always safe, particularly for girls.

4. Foster care is rare.

5. Most orphans are put out on the street with no further support by age eighteen.

At age forty-five I decided that I hadn't really finished my forty-year-old's mid-life crisis. At this point I had been a stay-at-home mom for twenty-one years and I knew that it wouldn't go well for me if I walked past two empty bedrooms numerous times a day. When Meredith left to get an entrepreneurship degree from Babson College I stuck my toe into the seminary pool to see if I found the water warm and inviting or if a cold, harsh temperature would shock me (I hope the baptism imagery isn't lost). I was amazed at how quickly my obsession at being a great parent was transferred to being a great student. (I was devastated when I got my first B.) I went part-time at three seminaries with Houston branches and then transferred to Yale Divinity School, where I studied and I slept.

During the two YDS years Jay become increasingly involved with a Christian microloan organization where he sat on a Ghanaian bank board. This meant a lot of frequent flyer miles. He changed from being a man who only read financial periodicals to one who devoured books on the developing world at record speed.

The "Girl Effect"

After Meredith and I both graduated in May 2009 all three of us became aware that microfinance alone wasn't the answer to poverty that we had been led to believe it was. Rather we found that education (literacy, numeracy, business skills), whether in conjunction with microloans or not, seemed to be necessary for real change in an individual's or a family's life. After many sleepless nights and emotionally charged discussions with God and each other, we began to focus on the importance of educating girls. "The Girl Effect" describes how an educated girl improves her family and an educated family creates world change.[1]

As I finish writing this, we are still doing our due diligence talking to teaching professionals at YES Academy, KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) and Teach for America (the largest employer of Yale and Harvard grads), as well as school "edupreneurs" (entrepreneurs who start schools) all over the world. As a result, our family has begun the Grant Me The Wisdom fund to develop and finance educational programs as well as other areas of need for the poorest of the poor. I want to spend the last half of my life educating mothers and their daughters, because when you educate a mother you educate her children. We have learned that moms and dads on various continents are asking to come to their children's schools at night to learn *American* English. I imagine nighttime Bible studies that teach entire communities that God feels their pain and doesn't require earthly suffering in exchange for eternity in heaven. I want to prepare women and girls to speak truth to power like so many biblical women did.

I imagine nighttime Bible studies that teach entire communities that God sees their pain and doesn't require earthly suffering in exchange for eternity in heaven.

I want my life to matter. Before I close my eyes and head to one of those rooms God has prepared for me, I want to say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Tim 4:7) Most importantly, I want to know that God is pleased with my life.

What I've learned now that I'm 50 (I'm slow):

1. There is no single solution to poverty. Infrastructure (roads, electricity, clean water, sanitation), healthcare, savings accounts, political and economic stability, women's equality, dependable legal systems, and local leadership are all necessary.

2. I am a glutton. I eat whenever I want and more than I need, which means I must exercise. I use excessive amounts of natural resources and make more waste than the average person living in the developing world.

3. Education and meaningful employment bring hope and stability to people and nations. Poverty causes understandable anger that results in political and social unrest.

4. Before making a purchase I ask myself if I *want* this item or I *need* this item. There is a difference.

5. Transparency and accountability are essential regardless of whether you are working with a Christian organization or a secular one. Insist on it.

6. Organizations must work with one another regardless of their ideological bent. I have worked with and will continue to work with folks with whom I have nothing in common.

7. I am not in the least bit altruistic nor is anyone I know! I serve because it fills the gaping God-ordained hole in my soul.

8. *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."* (Luke 10:27) This is true.

9. Without hope there is no reason to live.

Debbie McLeod Sears '09 M.Div., based in Houston, is currently director of Grant Me The Wisdom Fund.

Notes

1 *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression Into Opportunity For Women Worldwide* by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn (Knopf, 2009), pp. xvii, 171, 192, 238. The authors argue that educating girls delays marriage and lessens the number of children women have, but the corollary is not true for boys. Women tend to use any extra money on education or business whereas men spend 20 percent of their income on "a combination of alcohol, prostitutes, candy, sugary drinks, and lavish feasts rather than on educating their children." Another byproduct of female education is national stability.

What To Do

1. Admit your ignorance and your desire to become informed, because these are equally valuable. Pray, read your Bible, pray, read some more. I am not good a praying at a set time each day, so I ask God all through the day if I'm thinking, acting, speaking as God would have me. Figure out your own method. Sign up for Sojourner's Verse of the Day e-mail.
2. Add to your circle of friends. We have found that reading, traveling, and attending conferences regarding poverty have created a whole network for friends who have similar interests to ours. Don't be surprised if you end up having dinner with rich and poor alike.
3. Learn Spanish. If you live in the U.S., knowing Spanish will open you up to people in your town that you may have just ignored.
4. Recognize that how you use the earth's resources affects the world. Be an example to your children, neighbors, and friends.
5. Read: *The Blue Sweater: Bridging the Gap Between Rich and Poor in an Interconnected World* by Jacqueline Novogratz; *Portfolios of the Poor: How the World's Poor Live on $2 a Day* by Collins, Morduch, Rutherford and Ruthven; *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* by Miroslav Volf; the Bible, particularly the Gospels and Prophets.
6. Do something. Join a group, rewrite your will so that you give away at least half of your net worth either before or at your death like forty of the 400 U.S. billionaires have done (thegivingpledge.org). Involve your church with NGOs that are nondenominational or nonreligious.

– Debbie McLeod Sears

White Earth Reservation, Minnesota – photo by Josh Hester ►


REZ RAGS
THRIFT STORE

Virtuous Cycles: An Interview with Robert Orr

When they were unveiled a decade ago, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) stirred billions of people to a noble dream: the world's nations were finally getting serious about reducing poverty. Under United Nations auspices, 189 heads of state pledged commitment to eight achievable goals by 2015, goals that would be monitored and funded in an era of unprecedented prosperity.

From early on, critics declared the MDGs were too modest, or too easily evaded by recalcitrant politicians. After ten years, the MDGs can claim many remarkable successes, but results have been mixed. The UN's most recent report says: "Though progress has been made, it is uneven. And without a major push forward, many of the MDG targets are likely to be missed in most regions." (See progress reports at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mdg/)

With five years to go before the deadline, the UN Summit on the MDGs this month in New York City is dedicated to rekindling the vision despite the frayed uncertainties of today's global political and economic climate.

Robert Orr, assistant UN Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Strategic Planning, believes the MDGs are everybody's business. We can still achieve the targets, he argues, if we muster the heart and imagination. Orr knows the politics of international affairs and governmental dynamics; he has held senior posts in the U.S. government and positions at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, D.C. Last month, Orr talked in his New York office with Reflections' editorial director John Lindner and editor Ray Waddle. Here is an edited version of the interview.

REFLECTIONS: So many unforeseen crises have unfolded since 2000, when the Millennium Development Goals were unveiled – 9/11, a nine-year war on terror, Darfur, the Asian tsunami, global recession, fears of climate change. Have these jeopardized MDG progress? Are you satisfied with the pace of progress after ten years?

ROBERT ORR: In the grand scheme of things, MDGs are a novel experiment. There were people who doubted that you could do development by goals. But the last ten years has produced outcomes we otherwise would not have had. Structured goal-setting, organized on national and international levels, has proven a very worthy experiment.

But are we not satisfied with the pace? Of course not. There is no such thing as satisfied in this business. One poor person is too many. There has been good progress in some of the goals, and good progress in some countries and regions, but the challenges are especially acute in specific parts of the goals and specific regions and countries. What we are trying to do at the two-third mark, with five years to go, is get an agreed plan for attacking the remaining gaps with the lessons learned and build on some really dramatic successes.

REFLECTIONS: Can the eight goals be met by 2015?

ORR: The answer is yes, but it will take an extraordinary effort. Even where we were on track and doing very well, the recent economic crisis, combined with the food crisis, energy crisis – the waves of crisis – have dealt a real setback to progress made. For example over a billion people now are hungry, whereas in 1992, the number was 842 million. We need to recognize that even where we have made significant progress, the potential of backslide is quite great. That said, by really turning the focus on this in specific countries, focus leads to results. It's achievable, but it will take intense focus especially in a tough economic climate, which can translate into a tough political climate. We need real leadership at this point and time.

REFLECTIONS: What should the United States do?

ORR: Last year when President Obama came to the UN for his first address to the world community at the UN, he said the MDGs are America's goals, which was a very dramatic and important statement. The U.S. has to lead on many levels. The U.S. has a presence in institutions and resources no one else has. The U.S. can't just take a business-as-usual approach. This is not going to be solved just by overseas development assistance. It's going to take the mobilization of civil society, private sector, as well as government. I think the Obama Administration is in fact in the process of creating a strategy for this for the first time. I have seen an initial draft. The fact is there is commitment and, on specific parts of the MDGs, we've seen real U.S. leadership – on food security issues, on global health. Many have hoped for that kind of U.S. leadership for many years.

REFLECTIONS: Is there a groundswell of grassroots support and awareness here? Has it caught fire?

ORR: Has it caught fire? No, but it's smoldering. The fact is, it has caught fire in various parts of the world. It has excited popular imagination. Various governments have people in the president's office organizing, following each MDG one by one, indicator by indicator, to see how they are doing. That type of focus does not come without a swell from the bottom. You just don't do this as a gesture from the top. In the U.S., maybe it's the saturation of information, maybe it's looking to problems at home. There are communities in the U.S. that are very aware of the MDGs. Religious communities of various persuasions have been an important base of support. But for the broader populace it has not caught on to the extent it needs to. The key is: people should understand it's a moral issue, but also a self-interest issue. The fate of all those people "out there" is inextricably linked to the prospects for a stable and prosperous U.S. I think that link has yet to be fully made clear. I hope U.S. strategy and follow-up after the September summit will help make the case more broadly.

REFLECTIONS: We don't hear that argument so much – that it's in our own best interest to support the MDGs.

ORR: What crystallizes this point for me was the dramatic food crisis spike in 2008. The level of integration of global markets today means that a poor crop in one corner of the world can affect everyone. That kind of global integration is something that we need to factor into our own thinking. It can happen on food, on health, climate change, and security. When

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty. Halve the proportion of people whose income is less than $1.50 a day. So far, the deepest reductions of poverty have been in Eastern Asia, especially China and India. All developing regions except sub-Saharan Africa, Western Asia, and parts of Eastern Europe and Central Asia are expected to attain target.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education. Ensure that children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. Enrollment is up to 89 percent in the developing world, but pace of progress will not be enough to meet goal by 2015.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women. Poverty remains a barrier to education, especially among older girls. Women are overrepresented in informal employment, with its lack of benefits and security. Top-level jobs go overwhelmingly to men.

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality. Reduce by two-thirds the under-five mortality rate. Since 1990, mortality rates have dropped by 28 percent. Against the odds, remarkable progress has been made in many of the poorest countries. But pace of success is unlikely to meet the 2015 goal. Progress in controlling measles may be short-lived if funding gaps are not bridged.

Goal 5: Improve maternal health. Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio. Rates of reduction are well short of the 5.5 percent annual decline needed to meet target. The rural-urban gap in skilled care during childbirth has narrowed. But giving birth is especially risky in Southern Asia and sub-Sahara Africa, where most women deliver without skilled care.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases. Spread of HIV appears to have stabilized, though some 17.5 million children lost one or both parents to AIDS in 2008, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa. Half the world is at risk of malaria. But expanded use of insecticide-treated bed nets is protecting communities like never before. Global production of mosquito nets has increased five-fold since 2004. Tuberculosis remains the second-leading killer after HIV.

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability. Targets include reversing biodiversity losses and species endangerment, halving the proportion of those without access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers. Results so far are mixed. Rates of deforestation show signs of decreasing, but remain alarmingly high. The world is on track to meet the drinking water target, though much work remains. Sanitation improvements are bypassing the poor.

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development. Aid is rising despite the recession, but Africa is short-changed. Debt burdens are easing for developing countries. Access to the internet is still closed to most of the world's people.

Source: MDG Report 2010 (United Nations, 2010).
See http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mdg/)

the food price rose, there was public unrest in over forty countries around the world.

REFLECTIONS: We live in a sound-byte world; we look for quick answers to complex questions. People latch onto microcredit as the answer, or making a donation as the answer. How do you communicate the complexities of poverty to people?

ORR: People can understand an issue like women and children's health. So the fact that the maternal mortality MDG is the slowest-moving goal is a travesty. Safe birthing and those first precious days and months of life are something that we know what to do, and yet we are still losing over 350,000 women a year – entirely preventable. Over eight million children a year – deaths entirely preventable. I don't mind appealing to people to say: I hope you are as outraged as I am about this, and we have the solutions. This fall one of the key things we hope to achieve is to make specific MDG progress in areas where we've been stuck; maternal and child health is one of the areas. Take the slowest-moving MDGs and move them from the caboose of the train to be an engine of the train. If a woman is healthy and her children are healthy, that is a nucleus for a stable and prosperous family.

People should understand it's a moral issue, but also a self-interest issue. The fate of all those people "out there" is inextricably linked to the prospects for a stable and prosperous U.S.

Now, the progress we are making on malaria has us on track to have a world free of death from malaria by 2015. If we just keep up the efforts that are underway today, we can get there by 2015. That is a revolution. Malaria is still today one of the biggest killers in the world. We need a totally mobilized civil society, north and south. We need totally mobilized private-sector interests coming together with government and international organizations. This is not something that government will do alone. In the U.S., the $10 insecticide-treated bed nets became something most Americans have heard of. They can make a difference. Those kinds of interventions – that's stuff we can all understand. If we can do this on malaria, get on that kind of trajectory, and do the same for maternal and child health, it can have a huge echo effect for mobilizing the other MDGs.

REFLECTIONS: The "total elimination of poverty" – is that just a cruel exercise in wishful thinking, a false hope, or can it be a reachable goal in this century?

ORR: It is not a cruel exercise. It is quite the opposite, if we can define ourselves in the twenty-first century as a humanity that no longer accepts the conventional wisdom that the poor will always be with us. We can prove that though you may never get to zero, you can get on a trajectory where you actually drive the numbers down so dramatically, you move to a virtual zero. It is not just wishful thinking. It can work. We need to apply the lessons of MDG to the hardest cases – not just go for the easy wins or go just for the countries that are almost there, the ones that are well organized. If you are really going after the tough stuff, it's amazing the momentum you can generate for the easier things. The clock won't stop in 2015; we will have development challenges after that. We will have poverty to address after that. But if we can broaden the arc of progress that we have seen in some places, there is no reason to say we have to live with extreme poverty in the twenty-first century.

REFLECTIONS: Assembling this particular *Reflections* issue, we know the very word poverty can evoke frustration, defeatism, guilt. What would you say to people of good will who want to help despite the despairing persistence of poverty?

ORR: People have to follow their passions. Rather than trying to solve all the world's problems, try to identify a cause, a place, a person, a family, something that speaks to you, and try to sustain the effort in that area. I know people who started out making contributions of $100 for ten bed nets, then later became deeply involved in the development project of recipient countries, people, and villages. A human connection has to be made. With the internet today, you can see the results of your work. There are some very innovative efforts using modern technology, linking people in Iowa to the remotest forest region of Africa. If you can do that, there's no reason in today's world why you have to remain distant from this. I have found if you can feed your own passion, you will go deeper and deeper, and successes will follow from there. There is nothing like momentum.

And I would say our biggest champions are people under thirty, and that is exciting! If you can excite people under thirty about the future of their planet, through a human lens, through a person or community – for instance, my daughter's school is linked to a community in Uganda. I am not sure that that was really possible before. Also, at the time of the Haiti earthquake, my daughter came home and said her school was organizing a relief effort. I thought they are going to be putting their pennies in a jug. But they organized the whole school and families

around it. There is connectiveness now in today's world. We don't have to let ourselves be isolated.

REFLECTIONS: You mention momentum – is there an MDG team sketching out a plan of action after 2015?

ORR: We are the first to say: we aren't going to stop at 2015. But right now we are organized for the big push in the next five years and a retooled MDG effort, then we can adjust as we get into the final period here for what happens after. I think it's an open question under what auspices and what lessons we draw from this. But one lesson of the first ten years is: national action, organization on a national level, make a big difference, and there is a need for international assistance, and public and private partnerships are growing, and where they grow they make a difference.

REFLECTIONS: What gives you hope that people can be moved to action?

ORR: One of the most encouraging things I have seen in years of working with my fellow Americans, mobilizing support for the MDGs and internationalism generally is this: when people are activated they tend not to go back. Once you've reached out and touch the world, it touches you back and you don't slide back. I think we all have to make a concerted effort to get those initial touches. No one is beyond reach in this country. Poor people in this country can make a difference for poverty here and abroad. Some of the partnerships of people – poor people in this country talking to poor people in other countries – can now be done pretty easily, and they actually change lives. A lot of people find it very powerful to talk with empowered poor people from other places. Those kinds of connections – human-to-human, community-to-community – help create the virtuous cycle that is needed to get us to the finish line.

Trying to address poverty can be so draining. Addressing human rights abuses can suck the lifeblood out of you. But all you need to do is meet a real champion, someone who stood up and defeated their circumstances, and you will never forget that. You will be fed by that.

Kate E. Brubacher '07 M.A.R., '10 Law, president and founder of Liberian Widows Initiative, Inc. based in Monrovia, Liberia (www.lwinitiative.org)

Desperate conditions:

"The Liberian Widows Initiative (LWI) provides capital, training, and support to survivors of Liberia's civil war. We are working with a population in desperate need. LWI uses microfinance as a point of engagement through which women and families gain access to business lending as well as debt forgiveness, business advice, and now free literacy and health training. We combine efficient business principles with compassion. I am confident that the innovative combinations of charity and market-oriented approaches will have greater success than traditional programs that were either/or."

Painful dissonance:

"Those of us living in comfort will never be able to understand the day-to-day reality of the families with whom LWI works. Likewise, these families cannot understand our world of excess. This dissonance is painful. In six years of working with Liberians, I have accepted that I cannot comprehend the disparity between our worlds. Theories will never make the injustice coherent. The ability to persevere through the senselessness and inevitable disappointments of this work flows out of love of God and God's people; it is sustained by the voice deep within one's heart and conscience that acknowledges both suffering and our obligation to lessen it. For me, this work is both wound and salve. It has made me reckon with the broken nature of our world. But even in our fallen state, we can continually turn towards God as we struggle to realign ourselves with God's goodness and peace."

National nightmare and recovery:

"Liberia is emerging from a desperate period. From 1989 to 2004, the country endured two civil wars that crippled its economy, claimed more than 250,000 lives (more than one out of every sixteen Liberians), and displaced a million others into refugee camps. In 2005, the nation saw its first sign of progress in a generation: Liberia held its first free and fair presidential election since 1989 and elected the first female head of state in Africa, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Since her election, Liberia has received increasing international and U.S. support. More importantly, there is a renewed spirit of hope. Much work remains: last year, Liberia ranked 178 out of 181 countries in GDP per capita. More than 85 percent of Liberians live on less than $1.25 a day. But Liberians are eager to rebuild their country. LWI is part of that process."

Jubilee Justice for Haiti and Beyond

By Melinda St. Louis

On the evening of January 12, 2010, I was on a conference call, listening to a colleague share details of a recent fact-finding trip to Haiti. As he sketched the latest reports of Haitians' day-to-day struggles in the most impoverished country in the Western Hemisphere, someone interrupted in a worried voice, "I just got a call from a colleague – apparently a few minutes ago there was a terrible earthquake in Port-au-Prince."

We were speechless. I know I was not the only one thinking, praying, "No, this can't be happening. Not to Haiti. Please, God, give Haiti a break this time." Yet we all knew: a natural disaster in Haiti, where 80 percent of the population already lived in poverty, would mean catastrophe.

The reports over the next days washed over us – 250,000 Haitians dead, millions homeless, most government buildings completely demolished. We realized the cataclysm was worse than even our deepest fears – almost no emergency vehicles to dig people out from the rubble, dangerously few healthcare workers to treat the wounded.

People around the world responded with generosity, sending whatever they could to the rescue and recovery efforts. As always, natural disasters evoke our sympathy and response. We know natural disasters are unavoidable. But what about Haiti's *completely avoidable, unnatural* disaster – the human-made disaster of impoverishment? The unimaginable loss of life and destruction on January 12, 2010, stemmed from a historic lack of investment in infrastructure, education, healthcare, government systems, due in part to the burden of odious and illegitimate debts.

After the earthquake, Haiti needs not just charity – though the aid it receives is critical. Haiti also needs justice – justice that begins with 100 percent cancellation of its debt burdens.

The origins of Haiti's debt date back to 1804, when the country won independence from France and abolished slavery. France threatened to reinvade and re-establish slavery unless Haiti compensated it for its loss of "property," including slaves. With French warships positioned off the coast, Haiti gave in to French demands in 1825, and agreed to pay 150 million francs (equivalent to $21 billion today) in return for recognition of Haiti's sovereignty.

Abyss of Debt

This enormous debt – equal to fourteen times Haiti's export revenues – placed a heavy burden on the new country. It has never recovered. The debt was a primary barrier to Haiti's development. For almost a century, successive Haitian governments dutifully paid the debt service, passing the bill onto Haiti's poorest citizens. As late as 1908, 51 percent of coffee revenues went to service the exterior debt, while 47 percent went to service the internal debt, leaving 2 percent available for all other expenses.[1] During these formative decades, the state lacked revenue for an educational system, infrastructure,

We know natural disasters are unavoidable. But what about Haiti's completely avoidable, unnatural disaster – the human-made disaster of impoverishment?

◀ Youngsters at play, Port-au-Prince, Haiti – photo by Bethany Mahan

agricultural technology, environmental protection, or healthcare investment. Haiti serviced its odious debt to France for well over 100 years. The world's first black republic descended into a spiral of debt and underdevelopment that it has never overcome.

The country became further indebted during the cruel reign of the father/son dictatorship of Francois "Papa Doc" and Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier from 1957 to 1986. For nearly thirty years they spent foreign assistance on fur coats and brutal death squads like the *Tonton Macoutes*.[2] As just one example, in 1980 the International Monetary Fund made a $22 million loan to Jean Claude Duvalier. Within weeks, $20 million of the total was removed from the government's account – the IMF discovered $4 million went to the *Tonton Macoutes*, while the remaining $16 million disappeared into Duvalier's personal accounts.[3] These thefts were widely reported, yet donor countries and international financial institutions continued to make loans to the staunchly anti-communist Duvaliers. Despite calls from global civil society repudiating these odious measures, the Haitian people continued to have to service those debts long after the dictatorship was banished. Until last year, Haiti was forced to pay between $60 million and $80 million per year in debt service, with no consideration made for the dubious debt burden incurred under the Duvaliers.[4]

Staggering into the Present

This legacy of debt has been staggering. Even before the earthquake, more than 70 percent of the population lived on less than $2 per day.[5] Life expectancy remains low at sixty-one years.[6] HIV/AIDS rates are the highest in the hemisphere.[7] There are only three doctors per 10,000 people in Haiti.[8] One in twelve children dies before reaching her fifth birthday.[9] The maternal mortality rate is the highest in the hemisphere at 670 per 100,000 births.[10] Only 35 percent of Haitian children are able to finish elementary school.[11]

In addition to this painful history of poverty and political turmoil, Haiti recently suffered other shocks harming the economy. In 2008, the island nation endured four devastating tropical storms, bringing floods that killed more than 800 people people and caused nearly $1 billion of damage.[12] The global spike in prices for fuel and food in 2008, then the global economic crisis in 2009, hit Haiti hard. Unable to purchase basic staples such as rice, flour, and corn that doubled in price, many Haitians were driven by extreme hunger and resorted to eating mud pies.[13] Because of the jump in fuel prices, public transportation became overcrowded. In one instance, fifteen people were killed when an overloaded ferry capsized, and the closest rescue boat lacked the gas to respond.

A Jubilee Movement

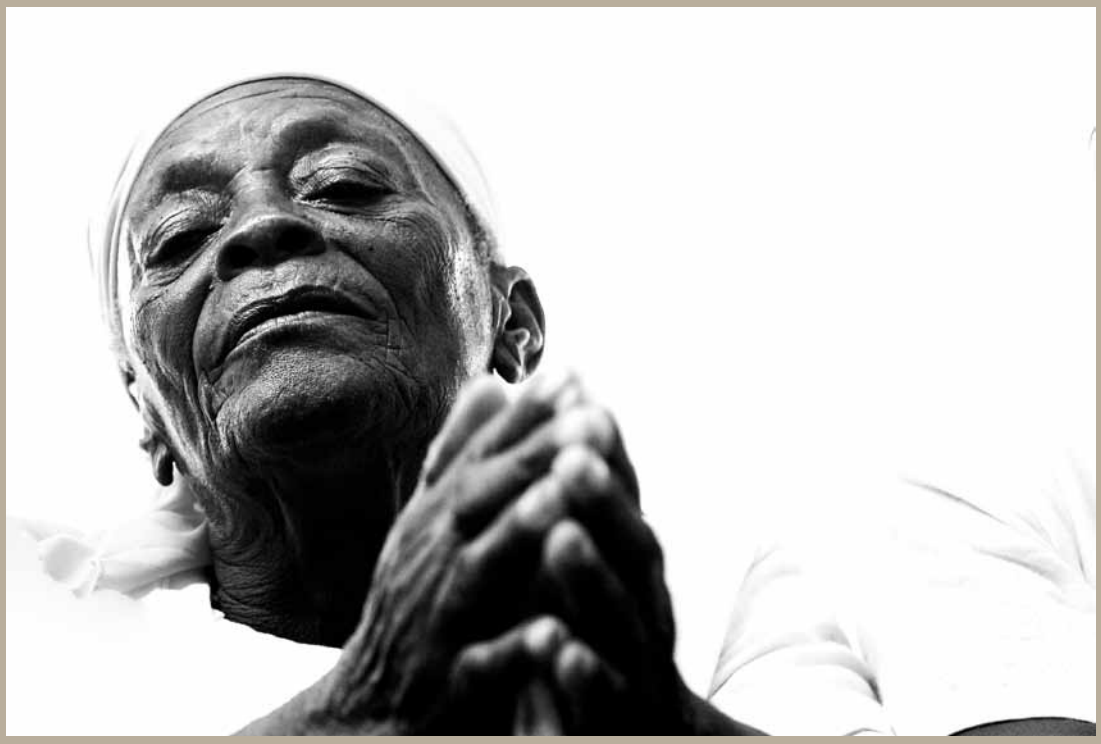
In the mid-1990s, as it became clear that the people of Haiti and other poor nations were unfairly burdened by past illegitimate debts, people of faith and conscience were compelled to act. The notion of debt cancellation sounded threatening at the time: it was only fair that everyone should be expected to pay back their loans, right? But a Jubilee vision based on biblical tradition called for a different type of justice – a vision of leveling the playing field every fifty years, of establishing right relationships among nations and people. In the Jubilee Year as described in the Book of Leviticus, those enslaved by debt are freed, lands lost because of debt are returned, and communities torn by inequality are restored. This Jubilee vision was so powerful, and the organized passion of modern faith communities so strong, that Jubilee became a global movement, and world leaders were forced to respond. In 1999 and then in 2005, G8 governments made high-level commitments to reduce or cancel debt for a significant number of poor countries.

These agreements have resulted in debt relief for more than thirty-five nations, totaling more than $100 billion.[14] Twenty-nine nations have received 100 percent cancellation of eligible debt stock.[15] With a ten-year track record now, debt relief has delivered striking results in the fight against poverty. Total poverty-reducing expenditures in countries that received debt relief increased from $6.4 billion in 2001 to an estimated $28.8 billion in 2009.[16] For every dollar received in debt relief, African governments have increased social spending by two dollars.[17]

There are still at least twenty very poor countries – such as Lesotho, Bangladesh, and Kenya – that were excluded from past debt relief deals.

Despite being the hemisphere's poorest country, Haiti was initially excluded from debt relief initiatives because of a technicality related to its debt-to-export ratio.[18] After focused advocacy by our movement, Haiti's eligibility was finally granted, but the delay meant Haiti waited for debt relief longer than other poor countries in the region such as Nicaragua, Honduras, and Bolivia.

Haitian woman at prayer – photo by Bethany Mahan ►



Haiti was still forced to comply with numerous and onerous conditions imposed by the World Bank and IMF before receiving debt relief. These conditions included selling off government-owned businesses such as the power, water, and phone services, as well as the airport administration.[19] The privatization of such services meant a major loss of revenue-generating activities for the government, an influx in foreign-owned companies, and accelerated capital flight.

The Jubilee USA Network and our partners advocated strongly for Haiti to receive debt relief quickly without harmful economic conditions. In response to massive mobilization by people of faith, sympathetic members of Congress pushed for rapid cancellation. Finally, on June 30, 2009, the World Bank and IMF, and then large creditor countries, certified that Haiti would receive 100 percent cancellation of the debt it had incurred before 2004. This $1.2 billion in debt cancellation meant that Haiti's debt service payments were reduced from over $50 million to $20 million annually. The U.S. agreed to pay some of this debt service as well.

The Never-Ending Story?

Unfortunately, this was not the end of Haiti's debt story. Because Haiti had taken out loans since 2004, Haiti still owed over a billion dollars to external creditors when the earthquake hit on January 12, 2010. Within a week of the earthquake the IMF announced that it would send $100 million in emergency assistance – as a new loan.

This is a familiar, devastating pattern for impoverished countries like Haiti. They suffer shocks that they have no control over – a natural disaster, a drop in world prices for a main export crop, a spike in world prices for food they must import – and the international financial institutions respond with loans, condemning the countries to another cycle of debt and impoverishment.

The global Jubilee movement has never accepted these immoral financial patterns, which intensify global inequalities. Earlier this year, Jubilee USA and our global partners responded: 400,000 people signed a petition calling for the cancellation of Haiti's remaining debt, and for all assistance to take the form of grants, not loans. In just a few days, Jubilee USA organized a letter to Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner signed by organizations representing thirty million Americans, and another letter signed by ninety-two members of Congress. We achieved high-level commitments from the Group of 7 Finance Ministers to pay for full debt cancellation for Haiti.

This was an important victory not only for Haiti but because of the precedent it set: for the first time, a country received debt cancellation from multilateral institutions like the World Bank and IMF after a natural disaster. Still, it was painful to think how little and how late this justice came – all the debts Haiti had been forced to pay for nearly 200 years at the expense of investing in healthcare and education, building earthquake-proof infrastructure, and hiring sufficient emergency personnel, with so much unnecessary suffering as a result. Haiti is not alone. Our work is far from over.

Finance for the most impoverished countries like Haiti must be in the form of grant and not loan support, and should not come with harsh economic conditions.

In 2000, world leaders adopted the Millennium Development Goals, benchmarks for reducing extreme poverty by 2015. In a world with so many resources and so much wealth, those of us who seek justice considered even these goals too modest. With five years left to the 2015 target, many countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, have fallen off track in attempting to meet these targets. According to the World Bank, 64 million people were pushed into extreme poverty last year because of the financial crisis.

Even as the governments of developed countries mobilized $18 *trillion* to bail out the banking and financial sectors that created the meltdown, we were told it is not politically feasible now to provide just a tiny fraction of that amount to help the world's most impoverished people weather this crisis, which they had no hand in creating.

Gaining Momentum

It is time for people of faith and conscience to redouble our efforts. As the Haiti experience showed, when we have a clear, moral argument on our side, we can move even the most established institutions to respond.

We must expand the benefits of debt cancellation to all countries that need it. There are still at least twenty very poor countries – such as Lesotho, Bangladesh, and Kenya – that were excluded from past debt relief deals. Thanks to the work of people of faith around the U.S., there is strong bipartisan support in Congress for the Jubilee Act for Responsible Lending and Expanded Debt Cancellation. The Act nearly became law in the last Congress, with

strong support from then-Senator Obama. We are continuing to build support so this Act will become law, but in the meantime, President Obama can lead a global effort to expand debt cancellation to countries that need it to fight poverty.

More importantly, we must work to transform the international economic system to redress historic inequalities and restore right relationships among nations. The global economic crisis showed the world that irresponsible lending and borrowing to benefit the wealthy is not only unfair, it is destined to collapse on itself. Responsible international finance must begin by recognizing that our sisters and brothers in the Global South deserve justice.

Our Jubilee partners in developing countries have long maintained that they "don't owe, won't pay." They argue that they should be considered the world's true "creditors" because their underdevelopment is the dire result of the plunder of their countries' natural resources and human capital by rich nations – a historic injustice that continues today through unjust trading and financial relationships. Therefore we should support developing countries that undertake "debt audits" to investigate the conditions under which past loans were made and whether these debts are illegitimate. For the future, finance for the most impoverished countries like Haiti, struggling to meet the MDGs or to adapt to the urgent threat of climate change, must be in the form of grant and not loan support, and should not come with harsh economic conditions. For countries in a position to begin borrowing, we must establish frameworks that recognize the co-responsibility of lenders and borrowers to ensure financial help that improves livelihoods, protects human rights and the environment, and promotes true, sustainable development.

When we have a clear, moral argument on our side, we can move even the most established institutions to respond.

Transforming the international financial architecture may seem too ambitious. But the Jubilee vision of right relationships that comes from our faith traditions drives us to take on those challenges. Being ambitious for the world's poorest nations never stopped us before.

Melinda St. Louis, Deputy Director of Jubilee USA, has more than a decade of experience as an advocate in Washington, D.C. and Central America. She holds a Masters of Public Policy in International Policy and Development from Georgetown University. Jubilee USA Network is an alliance of more than 75 denominations, human rights, environmental, labor, and community groups working for the definitive cancellation of crushing debts to fight poverty and injustice in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

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IF IT WERE NOT FOR YOU

by Hayden Carruth

Liebe, meine liebe, I had not hoped
to be so poor

The night winds reach
like the blind breath of the world
in a rhythm without mind, gusting and beating
as if to destroy us, battering our poverty
and all the land's flat and cold and dark
under iron snow
the dog leaps in the wind
barking, maddened with winter, and his voice
claps again and again down the valley
like tatters of revolutionary pennants
birches
cry and hemlocks by the brook
stand hunched and downcast with their hands
in their pockets

Liebe, the world is wild
and without intention

how far
this might be from the night of Christmas
if it were not for you.

Down the reaching wind
shrieks of starlight bear broken messages
among mountains where shadows plunge
yet our brightness
is unwavering
Kennst du das land
wo die zitronen blühn, im dunkeln laub
die goldorangen ... liebe
art thou singing

It is a question partly
of the tree with our stars and partly
of your radiance brought from the land
where legends flower to this land
but more than these our bright poverty
is a house in the wind and a light
on the mountain

Liebe, our light rekindled
in this remoteness from the other land,
in this dark of the blue mountain where only
the winds gather
is what we are for the time that we are
what we know for the time that we know

How gravely and sweetly the poor touch in the dark.

Criminal brewers in Kenya distilling alcoholic "chang'aa," an addictive drink known to cause death or blindness – photo by Josh Hester ►

Human Rights and Global Wrongs

By Thomas Pogge

Half of humankind is poor, living on less than 3 percent of global household income, as against 69 percent captured by the top tenth.

Even on the narrowest conception of ("extreme") poverty, the number of poor is somewhere around the 1.02 billion counted as chronically undernourished (2009)[1] or the 1.377 billion counted in 2005 as living below the World Bank's international poverty line of $1.25 per person per day at 2005 PPPs (Purchasing Power Parities).[2] About one third of all human deaths – eighteen million per annum – are due to poverty-related causes, mostly diseases that cause little or no damage in more affluent populations.[3]

Surprisingly, the world poverty problem – so unimaginably large in human terms – is also tiny in economic terms. The World Bank quantifies the collective shortfall in 2005 of all those living in extreme poverty at 0.33 percent (at PPPs) of the sum of all gross domestic products.[4] At currency exchange rates this shortfall is merely $76 billion or one-sixth of one percent of world income or about one-ninth of current U.S. military spending.[5] And even the collective shortfall of the 3.085 billion whom the World Bank counts as living on less than twice its poverty line have a collective shortfall from this line ($2.50 per person per day at 2005 PPPs) of only $506 billion or 1.13 percent of world income or about two-thirds of U.S. military spending.[6]

The rich countries' response to world poverty is mainly rhetorical.

Though modest institutional reforms, affecting just over 1 percent of the global income distribution, could overcome severe poverty, existing institutional arrangements drive this distribution in the opposite direction: they induce greater inequality. The nearby table shows how humanity's top few percentiles are growing their share of global household income while the remainder, and especially the bottom quarter, are losing ground.[7]

Segment of World Population	% Share of Global Household Income 1988	% Share of Global Household Income 2005	Absolute % Change in Income Share	Relative % Change in Income Share
Richest 5%	42.87%	46.36%	+3.49%	+8.1%
Next 20%	46.63	43.98	-2.65	-5.7%
Second Quarter	6.97	6.74	-0.23	-3.3%
Third Quarter	2.37	2.14	-0.23	-9.8%
Poorest Quarter	1.15	0.77	-0.38	-32.9%

This pattern manifests itself in the evolution of hunger. The number of chronically undernourished people has not declined from the 800-million level reported in the mid-1990s. In fact, a spike in global food prices (2006-08) and the recent global financial crisis have caused this number to break above the one-billion mark for the first time in human history[8] – even while the ranks of the hungry are continuously thinned by millions of deaths each year from poverty-related causes.

The rich countries' response to world poverty is mainly rhetorical. Though official development assistance (ODA) has in the aftermath of 9/11 reversed its long-term decline, it is still only $120 billion annually or 0.3 percent of Gross National Income (2008) as compared to the 0.7 percent target promised over thirty years ago.[9] More importantly, only $15 billion of annual ODA is earmarked for basic social services.[10]

And even the rhetoric is appalling. At the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, the world's governments pledged themselves "to reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015,"[11] implicitly accepting 25,000 daily poverty deaths in 2015 and some 250 million such deaths in the interim. In the 2000 *UN Millennium Declaration,* they substituted a diluted promise "to halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's people" living in extreme poverty.[12] Because of 2000-15 population growth, this promise requires only a 40 percent reduction in the number of poor. The poverty promise was diluted again in the final formulation of the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG-1), which defines poverty as a "proportion of people in the developing world"[13] and thus takes advantage of even faster population growth in the reference group (denominator of the proportion). MDG-1 also backdates the baseline to 1990. It thereby counts China's poverty reduction in the 1990s toward the goal and, by lengthening the plan period, doubles population growth in the reference group. The 50-percent reduction in the number of extremely poor people promised in Rome for the 1996-2015 period has thus been twisted into a 20-percent reduction of this number; and 496 million were thereby added to the number of those whose extreme poverty in 2015 will be deemed consistent with having kept the grand poverty promise. Half a billion additional extremely poor people mean about six million additional deaths from poverty-related causes in 2015 and each subsequent year.[14]

Bad leadership, civil wars, and widespread corruption in the developing countries are not wholly homegrown, but strongly encouraged by the existing international rules and extreme inequalities.

Helping and Hurting the Poor

Confronted with such facts, citizens of the rich countries may concede that we affluent should do more to help the poor. But they see this as a demand of humanity or charity – not as a demand of justice and certainly not as a moral duty imposed on us by the human rights of the poor. As the U.S. government declared after the World Food Summit: "the attainment of any 'right to adequate food' or 'fundamental right to be free from hunger' is a goal or aspiration to be realized progressively that does not give rise to any international obligations."[15]

The presumption behind this denial is that, internationally at least, human rights entail only negative duties: they require that one not deprive foreigners of secure access to the objects of their human rights. They do not require that one help them attain such secure access by protecting them against other threats. This presumption can be attacked by arguing that human rights do impose positive duties toward foreigners. But, even if the presumption is accepted, it shields the rich from human-rights-based obligations only insofar as they bear no responsibility for the existing ever-more-radically unequal global economic distribution. And this claim to innocence is highly dubious at best.

For one thing, the existing radical inequality is deeply tainted by how it accumulated through one historical process that was deeply pervaded by enslavement, colonialism, even genocide. The affluent are quick to point out that they cannot inherit their ancestor's sins. Indeed. But how can they then be entitled to the fruits of these sins: to their huge inherited advantage in power and wealth over the rest of the world? If we are not so entitled, then we are, by actively excluding the global poor from our lands and possessions, contributing to their deprivations.

Rules of the Game

Moreover, even the causes of the current persistence of severe poverty are by no means exclusively domestic to the countries in which it occurs. The asymmetries inherent in the current global economic (World Trade Organization) regime are well documented: it allows the rich countries to favor their own companies through tariffs, quotas, anti-dumping duties, export credits and huge subsidies. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development estimates that the latter market distortions cost the developing countries $700 billion annually in lost export revenue – a huge amount relative to the needs of their poor.[16] And the constrained trading opportunities the rich countries afford the poor do not come for free. To obtain them, poor countries must spend large amounts on enforcing the intellectual property rights of the rich, thereby depriving their own populations of access to cheap generic versions of patented life-saving medicines, seeds, and clean green technologies.

To be sure, many developing countries are run by corrupt and incompetent leaders, unwilling or unable to make serious poverty-eradication efforts. But their ability to rule, often against the will and interests of the population, crucially depends on outside factors. It depends, for instance, on their being recognized by the rich countries as entitled

to borrow in their country's name, to confer legal title to its natural resources, and with the proceeds to buy the weapons they need to stay in power. By assigning these privileges to such rulers, on the basis of their effective power alone, the rich countries support their banks and secure their resource imports. But they also greatly strengthen the staying power of oppressive rulers and the incentives toward coup attempts and civil wars, especially in the resource-rich countries.

More generally, bad leadership, civil wars, and widespread corruption in the developing countries are not wholly homegrown, but strongly encouraged by the existing international rules and extreme inequalities. The rulers and officials of these countries have vastly more to gain from catering to the interests of wealthy foreign governments, corporations, and tourists than from meeting the basic needs of their impoverished compatriots.

Are the rich countries violating human rights when they, in collaboration with Southern elites, impose a global institutional order under which, foreseeably and avoidably, hundreds of millions cannot attain "a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care" (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, §25)? The *Declaration* itself makes quite clear that they do when it proclaims that "everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized" (ibid., §28).

The existing international institutional order fails this test. It aggravates extreme poverty through protectionism and aggressive enforcement of intellectual property rights in seeds and essential medicines. And it fosters corrupt and oppressive government in the poorer countries by recognizing any person or group holding effective power – regardless of how they acquired or exercise it – as entitled to sell the country's natural resources and to dispose of the proceeds of such sales, to borrow in the country's name and thereby to impose debt service obligations upon it, to sign treaties on the country's behalf and thus to bind its present and future population, and to use state revenues to buy the means of internal repression.

Some parts of international law contain inspiring affirmations of human rights. Other parts contribute massively to the underfulfillment of these same rights. These contributions are foreseeable and avoidable. To avoid them, human rights must be mainstreamed to constrain the design of all global institutional arrangements.

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A New Exodus from Hunger

By David Beckmann

When I worked as an economist at the World Bank some years ago, a colleague, Deepa Narayan, initiated a major program of listening to the poor. Her first study, Voices of the Poor, *was based on interviews with 41,000 poor people in fifty developing countries. One of the defining characteristics of poverty, these interviewees said, is hunger.*

Globally, more than one billion people are hungry, and almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes every day. That's one child every five seconds. In the United States, more than 14 percent of households struggle to put food on the table. Nearly one in four American children is at risk of hunger.

Most people think solving the problem of hunger is absolutely hopeless, an entrenched fact of life we can't change. Trying to "end world hunger" seems quixotic, almost a bitter joke. But dramatic progress against hunger and poverty is possible – and there is evidence to prove it.

Most people think solving the problem of hunger is absolutely hopeless. But dramatic progress against hunger and poverty is possible – and there is evidence to prove it.

According to the World Bank, the number of people living in extreme poverty in developing countries – those living on less than $1.25 a day – dropped from 1.9 billion in 1980 to 1.4 billion in 2005.[1] The fraction of the population living in extreme poverty dropped from one-half to one-quarter. The global economic crisis of 2008-2009 slowed progress against poverty, but the number of people in poverty is still below 1.4 billion.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization, which maintains the world's official estimates on undernutrition, says that the number of undernourished people in developing countries declined from nearly one billion in 1970 to about 800 million in the mid-1990s.

Improvements in health and education have been unambiguous and dramatic. Twenty-six thousand children in developing countries die every day from preventable causes, but that tragic number has dropped from 55,000 daily in 1960.[2]

The ongoing suffering of millions of people around the world is terrible and requires our sustained attention and work, but it is important to identify where progress is being made.

Reducing Human Misery

Some of that progress stems from the work arising from the UN-sponsored Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the common goals countries share toward ending hunger and extreme poverty. Since the MDGs were adopted in 2000, many governments and people around the world have been using them to guide and measure their work – Bread for the World included. My organization focuses on hunger, but we understand that hunger is interconnected with the other aspects of poverty, so we have embraced the MDGs as a framework for our international advocacy. In the period from 2000-2008, the MDGs helped inspire the industrialized

countries to more than double the amount of their total development assistance from $53 billion to $121 billion.[3]

Although the MDGs serve to focus much of the world's current development efforts, progress was already accumulating since the 1960s. The Green Revolution in Asia in the 1960s and the 1970s helped stave off massive famines in Asia as rice and wheat yields dramatically increased with new seed varieties and modern agricultural techniques. The Child Survival Revolution, led by UNICEF in the 1980s, resulted in a jump from 15 percent to an unprecedented 80 percent in the immunization rates for children all over the world. It also changed conventional thinking: instead of using infant and child mortality as measurements of a country's development, a direct attack on mortality rates is now seen as an instrument of development.

Despite these advances against human misery, U.S. public reaction remains ambivalent. When the MDGs are described to Americans, about half of us find them inspiring. The other half regard the idea of a comprehensive, internationally agreed-upon strategy to reduce poverty as utopian. But if you ask about specific goals – letting all the world's children go to school, for example – nearly all Americans are supportive.[4]

Where there is public resistance, the reasons are many. Other debates have crowded out development issues in the public discourse. Development is too often discussed in the abstract, not in human terms. And when goals are met or nearly met, we have often let our guards down – then a development problem we thought we had defeated a decade ago, like food production, is allowed to roar back into view again.

Misperceiving Foreign Aid

Previous successes have lulled us into a false sense of security. We need, frankly, to be better informed as citizens. When we asked the general public how much of our government's budget is spent on foreign aid, their responses range from 10 percent to 25 percent annually. The reality is that we spend only about half of one percent of our national budget on foreign aid. This fact alone has activated our members to press for the reforms to make U.S. foreign aid more efficient, a campaign we started in 2009.

The UN has done a good job promoting the MDGs and monitoring how the world is doing in relation to the quantitative targets. I served on the Hunger Task Force for the UN's MDG Project, led by Jeffrey Sachs, one of the world's leading economists. The project developed strategies for achieving the goals, including estimates of what it would cost and how much of the cost could be borne by poor countries themselves.

Sachs concluded in 2005 that annual development assistance from the industrialized countries would need to increase by roughly $70 billion right away, with the increase rising to $130 billion by 2015.[5] If the U.S. would provide a fourth of $130 billion (arguably our fair share for joint projects among the industrialized countries), the U.S. share of the cost would be roughly $33 billion.

Despite remarkable advances against human misery, U.S. public reaction remains ambivalent.

Increased development assistance will not, by itself, cut world poverty in half and achieve the other MDGs. Hundreds of millions of poor people must – and will – work hard over many years. Corrupt governments need to be reformed or replaced. The quality of assistance and trade policies needs to improve. But the $33 billion figure gives us a rough idea of how much it would cost the U.S. to do its share to achieve the MDGs.

Though progress on the goals has lagged far behind targets in some of the poorest countries and for some of the goals, the accomplishments of developing countries as a whole are striking:

- The proportion of children under five years old who are underweight declined by one-fifth between 1990 and 2005.
- Enrollment in primary school increased from 80 percent in 1991 to 88 percent in 2006. Much of this increase is because girls are now going to school.
- The number of AIDS deaths fell from 2.2 million in 2005 to 2 million in 2007, and the number of people newly infected declined from 3 million in 2001 to 2.7 million in 2007.
- Deaths from measles dropped by two-thirds between 2000 and 2006. The incidence of tuberculosis has stabilized or begun to fall in most regions. Malaria prevention is expanding rapidly.
- 1.6 billion people have gained access to safe drinking water since 2001.[6]

If the pace of progress made against extreme poverty between 1990 and 2005 can be achieved for the decade between 2005 and 2015, the world will cut extreme poverty in half between 1990 and 2015. That is reason for hope.

People of faith are people of hope, and they have been instrumental in this work. The experience of

Photo by Bethany Mahan ►

Bread for the World and its partners over almost four decades demonstrates that faith-based advocates can change the lives of hungry and poor people.

Millions of Christians provide financial support, build schools and hospitals, provide food and medicine, and treat diseases all over the world. They work to address the systems and structures that perpetuate hunger and poverty, through advocacy organizations and by influencing their members of Congress. The U.S. government significantly affects the prospects of hungry and poor people worldwide, and we must shape how it deploys its massive resources and power.

The Politics of Hunger

I have come to see this generation's promising struggle against hunger and poverty as a great exodus in our own time – the ambitious journey of achieving a new scale of success in meeting human need. Thousands of Christians and other peoples of faith are already engaged in this exodus, but we need more people to turn this exodus into a global movement and to hold governments' feet to the fire so that we can change the politics of hunger.

In the biblical story of the Exodus, God did not send Moses to Pharaoh's court to take up a collection of canned goods and blankets. God sent Moses to Pharaoh with a political challenge – to let the Hebrew slaves go free. Moses then led the Hebrew slaves in a great escape across the Red Sea and through a long wilderness journey toward the Promised Land.

God's saving presence is at work throughout world history. May we draw strength from that as we work toward ending the suffering of hungry and poor people.

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Notes

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Voices of the Poor

The World Bank's "Voices of the Poor" report collected comments from thousands of people in order to understand poverty from their perspective.

Poverty is much more than income alone, the report said. Wellbeing is peace of mind, good health, food, safety, freedom of choice. It is a dependable livelihood. It is belonging to a community.

The report describes ill-being as a lack of work, shelter, food, water, and clothing, but also polluted and risky living environments, bad feelings about the self, anxiety, and powerlessness. A few excerpts:

- **"After one poor crop, we need three good harvests to return to normal." – a Vietnamese man**
- **"People place their hopes in God, since the government is no longer involved in such matters." – an Armenian**
- **"Men rape within the marriage. Men believe that paying dowry means buying the wife, so they use her anyhow at all times. But no one talks about it."– a Ugandan**
- **"The waste brings some bugs; here we have cockroaches, spiders, and even snakes and scorpions."– a person in Brazil**
- **"Teachers do not go to school except when it is time to receive salaries." – a Nigerian**
- **"For a poor person everything is terrible - illness, humiliation, shame. We are cripples; we are afraid of everything; we depend on everyone. No one needs us. We are like garbage that everyone wants to get rid of." – a blind woman from Moldova**
- **"I repeat that we need water as badly as we need air." – a woman from the Kyrgyz Republic**

Source: www.worldbank.org

The Sustaining Economy: Overcoming Poverty and Protecting Biodiversity

By Willis Jenkins

The moral problem with a global economy that permits a fifth of humans to live in abject poverty and annually extinguishes an untold number of species is not that it is unsustainable. The problem is that we do *sustain an economy of misery and destruction.*

Markets need not be so unjust and indecent. The challenge of our generation is to use the wealth-producing power of markets both to end extreme poverty and defend ecological integrity.

Is that possible? It might appear that social spending on poverty competes with outlays for biological conservation, and that devoting significant resources to either project undermines the wealth creation of markets. It might seem that humanity faces merciless tradeoffs between justice for the poor, protection of ecological systems, and economic productivity. Especially in a period of economic downturn, efforts to overcome poverty and conserve nature look like unaffordable aspirations.

Markets must serve the economy of justice and the economy of creation – not just return riches to investors.

Things seem that way when we lose sight of the real economy that sustains us. Ecumenical Christian witness insists that overcoming poverty and protecting ecological integrity only seem unaffordable if we accept economic growth as its own end. Markets must serve the economy of justice and the economy of creation – not just return riches to investors. Harmonizing those several priorities is not only possible, Christians have said, but is in fact the only way into a future of real wealth, wherein human dignity thrives on a thriving planet. An economy that tramples the poorest and extinguishes life in pursuit of riches is a false economy.

Projects designed to end poverty and projects undertaken to protect ecological integrity only seem competitive if we think of humanity apart from its habitat. If the hope of sustainability – thriving humans in a thriving earth – is to be more than a slogan, we must look to the practical ways in which communities are recovering the ecology of human dignity and turning economic creativity toward the production of real wealth.

Lessons from Ecuador

Every time I visit poor communities that seek to secure dignity against exploitative economies, I am shown in new ways how justice depends on environmental conditions. Most recently that happened in Ecuador, on a visit with students from Yale Divinity School hosted by the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI). Member churches of CLAI have been especially outspoken about what they see as the global economy's twin impoverishments: entrapping the poor and deracinating the land. Economists, social theorists, theologians, and pastors of CLAI introduced us to community efforts to create economies of sustaining wealth instead.

One community project centers around "food sovereignty." As commodity agriculture spreads in Ecuador, critics worry that it strips land from poor farmers, and thus strips people of the capacity to provide their own sustenance. Trading food for cash may further impoverish the poor by making them reliant on a distant food distribution system not of their own making, by exhausting their land, and by disrupting their cultures. When communities can retain control over their land and maintain enduring

ways of living from it, our hosts said, they resist an impoverishing agricultural economy.

Potatoes, Quinoa, and Memory

To show us how an agrarian alternative can work for the very poor, our host brought us to a self-organized food cooperative. On a side street in Riobamba we found farmers dividing thousands of pounds of fresh produce into shares. A network of quite poor communities worked together to grow and buy large quantities of food, and then distribute it among themselves. More is going on here than a certain quantity of calories obtained at a certain price: dignity for these communities means access to the cultural memory of potatoes and quinoa, prepared in soups made with familiar vegetables and fruits. A sense of being human is sustained by traditions of cultivating and preparing, realized through the practices of being nourished by a land culture. It is no accident that the byproduct is beauty: well-tended, diversely planted farms, a colorful street cornucopia, creative table fare.

We also visited a Christian community of indigenous Qechua people in a high-altitude village. Across the globe, councils of indigenous peoples have raised angry protests against the world's inaction on climate change. Andean theological voices

It is no accident that the byproduct of the Ecuadorans' land culture is beauty: well-tended planted farms, a colorful street cornucopia, creative table fare.

are no exception. At recent climate gatherings they have made their point in a lexicon both biblical and native by arguing that in climate change all creation groans (Rom 8.23), Pachamama (Mother Earth) groans. The indigenous peoples who understand themselves as creation's guardians find their bioregions under stress from invasive outside economies, and with that stress find their cultures of stewardship under threat. The injustice here is especially stark: a worldwide energy economy that benefits the wealthy is taking from some of the poorest people of the world their one most-valued treasure: the dignity of living rightly with the earth. The real wealth of humanity, say these councils, lies in the ecological integrity of home bioregions.

The message in Ecuador was clear: these groups do not want financial offsets, since bioregional and cultural wealth cannot be bought or compensated. They want moral transformation in the cultures of wealth, especially in the cultures of the North, and they want to see from us the will to do something serious about climate change. Overcoming poverty includes changing an energy economy that depletes others of the kind of wealth the industrial North has almost forgotten.

Those two snapshots illustrate how confronting poverty and conserving ecological integrity often converge in human dignity. Indeed, Ecuador's new constitution recognizes the human right to environmental resources and the legal rights of nature itself. Markets focused exclusively on exchanging commodities without regard to the cultural and environmental relations that sustain human dignity can further impoverish those already poor. Yes, markets also drive economic growth that has lifted many out of financial poverty. The unprecedented economic growth of the twentieth century turned the idealist hope of ending extreme human deprivation into a feasible project. However, ideologies of growth combined with unfair market institutions impoverish both the human poor and the earth.

When markets are just, overcoming extreme poverty and conserving the basic processes of life are feasible economic projects. Christian ethics has no special expertise in technical solutions, but among the practical proposals for making global markets work for the common good are two relatively easy measures. A modest carbon fee would help make our food and energy economies more rational by making consumption pay its true cost. It could also generate a decent global conservation fund, perhaps one focused on protecting endangered species. Second, an infinitesimal tax on stock trades would create disincentives for financial manipulations like high-speed trading, which seem to create nothing of value except paper profit for traders. It could also generate a global development fund finally capable of meeting the basic needs of the very poor.

Real Wealth: Human Dignity and Biodiversity

Support for these measures languishes because market cultures struggle to know how to value the real wealth of human dignity and biological richness. Here Christian ethics may have an important public role to play by emphasizing two key practices:

First, Christian teachings, from ancient to contemporary times, go beyond calling for mere fairness in dealings with the poor, beyond even charity: they consistently hold that God's justice begins in love for those who are suffering and in need. As Susan Holman has helped us remember, in the early church welcoming the poor was not just an obligatory duty but an opportunity to host the incarnate God.[1] For those with food and shelter, welcoming

the poor was a chance to dedicate those goods to their final purpose: accepting the friendship of God. Christian ethics still holds that we learn the meaning of wealth by loving our neighbors, especially the poorest, who represent for us the gifts of God.

A market economy that makes the poor invisible and expendable thus dispenses with a central biblical metric for measuring a people's humanity. Liberation theologians declare that an elemental part of Christian hope is the sense that the poor

For those with food and shelter, welcoming the poor was a chance to dedicate those goods to their final purpose: accepting the friendship of God.

mediate what really matters in the world. Jon Sobrino put this pointedly in his book *No Salvation Outside the Poor.*[2] On this view, responding to abject human deprivation must not stop at donating, but rather come to understand the economy of life in a certain pattern: we learn the meaning of real wealth in solidarity with the poor.

Second, Christian thought has long held that people learn God's economy by interpreting the economy of creation. The rest of the living, flying, buzzing, creeping, roaring, growing world does not exist simply to stock grocery stores. Christian teaching has indeed often held that the created world exists "for humanity," but in a different sense than our greed has made of it. The earth exists for humans to learn what is good and sacred. Thomas Aquinas taught that God created other creatures primarily so that humans would have names and ideas by which to bless God and learn to live into God's friendship. Real wealth lies in knowing how to use creation to praise God. The upshot is that humans learn their dignity by receiving the earth as sacred. Overcoming poverty includes drawing people into the wealth of the earth.

Respecting the Greed Line

Some aspects of our economic context discomfitingly invite the invective of those biblical prophets who associated injustice to the poor with destruction of the earth. In Isaiah, the land turns barren when the people are unjust; the deserts bloom when they are faithful. Hosea observes that when the people are unfaithful "even the fish of the sea and the birds of the air disappear." In the prophets, God's covenant with humanity includes the other creatures as well, and is knit together by justice. When the poor suffer and creatures disappear, it is a sign that a people are losing their way, disoriented by the pursuit of false wealth.

We need a new culture of prosperity, in which we measure wealth not by increase of GDP or net worth, but by the real value it makes for humans in need and for the earth. The World Council of Churches' "Wealth, Ecology, and Poverty" project has renewed prophetic criticism of the pursuit of prosperity, its power to make a global community obtuse to the basic claims of the poor and inured to the fantastic destruction of the earth. This project proposes a "greed line," as counterpart to poverty lines, above which lies not only injustice and shame, but another sort of impoverishment, the poverty of losing a meaningful sense of wealth. The greed line means to remind us of our propensity to sacrifice real wealth in relentless pursuits of money. What lets our generation suppose that mining coal by mountaintop removal is anything like a decent thing to do? Who wants to count for their grandchildren just what that destruction was worth? By what reckoning must a billion people barely cling to life while massive riches accumulate to others?

The WCC greed line reminds us all that we are responsible for the economies in which we participate and are complicit in the ways we do not think about them. Devotion to the pursuit of riches requires certain pieties of indifference to human suffering and ecological destruction. Pious about growth, we look away from human needs and solemnly accept the destruction of biological life. If that is the way of wealth, we cannot afford it. We must deflate pieties of indifference to the disappearance of other creatures and the suffering of other humans. The idea of a greed line suggests that all those seeking justice might look for ways to disinvest from this economy of misery and invest in real wealth. The returns are much better.

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The Body Politic of the Body of Christ

By Kelly Johnson

In this nation where most citizens identify themselves as Christian, most citizens agree that global poverty is not a political priority. In a recent Economist/YouGov *poll, 71 percent said they would favor cutting foreign aid in order to balance the budget.*[1]

Another study finds American Christians today are surprisingly stingy givers.

"Contemporary American Christians are among the wealthiest of their faith in the world today and probably the most affluent single group of Christians in two thousand years of church history. ... And yet, despite all of this, American Christians give away relatively little money to religious and other purposes," according to Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith in their study of Christian giving.[2]

"A sizeable number of Christians [at least 20 percent] give no money, literally nothing."

Once upon a time, emperor Julian "the Apostate" complained that pagans were shamed by Christian generosity to all those in need, Christian and pagan alike.[3] Christian generosity, at present, is not exactly making a strong witness to the gospel.

The problem is not that Christian leaders do not talk about poverty. Some very sound church teaching exists, anchoring human dignity in Christology and creation and presenting the economy as a moral rather than merely scientific reality.[4] But Christians encounter such teaching, if they encounter it at all, as just talk; it rarely becomes part of their devotion or their habits. I make moral arguments professionally, but I do not kid myself that people's moral life is determined by such arguments alone. Far more important are those aspects of our lives we take for granted. The world we see everyday sets the terms for our moral action.

In that ordinary way, people learn to talk about social issues in terms set by mainstream politics, through the news reports we listen to, the elections we may or may not vote in, the scandals we gossip about. In the political "ordinary" as defined by two U.S. parties, poverty is hardly a topic at all. Not that no politicians care about poverty. Poverty just doesn't get the votes. Our ordinary economic lives have trained us to consider poverty and wealth as matters of purely private responsibility. We don't discuss how much we earn. No one, we feel, whether a beggar at a traffic light or a third world nation, has any right to ask for what we legally hold. Even politically aware Christians, their moral skills shaped by dueling red and blue, talk little about how to address the misery of more than a billion people worldwide. The U.S. political scene is not the place where the church or anyone else can truly turn in order to face the reality of poverty.

In political life, poverty is hardly a topic at all. Our ordinary economic lives have trained us to consider poverty and wealth as matters of purely private responsibility.

A Church Steps Up

What we need, then, are ways of living ordinary Christian lives so that we can see the world more truthfully and encounter the truth of Christianity. And it is possible. A Midwestern church I'll call Greendale is located in a neighborhood that by the 1970s had become increasingly urban and impoverished. Attempting to cope with these changes,

◀ Photo by Bethany Mahan

the congregation divided into camps committed to church growth, social action, and charismatic revival. Then, some fifteen years ago, members made an unusual decision. They began to meet together weekly to talk, in an extended way, about being church. They didn't agree. Some people left. And after all these years, they still don't always agree. But they keep meeting together to talk. Along the way they came to one shared view: they should love one another and bear with one another for the sake of the Body of Christ.

That commitment has reshaped their ordinary Christianity. Many of them live near the church, and they committed not to improve their properties in a way that would gentrify the area, but to be neighbors to each other. Some of them started up small businesses that would meet local needs. They built a community garden. They improved housing by pooling their personal savings to pay the bills. They became advocates for urban neighborhoods, not because a political ideology dictates it, but because they took the risk of talking about the gospel together.

Greendale's story is peculiar to its own personalities and circumstances. But they are grappling with a problem crucial to all Christians in the U.S. – not just whether Christians can fix global poverty, but whether the gospel matters at all for our shared lives, our ordinary politics. Their example shows how being the Body of Christ together in ordinary time revives theology and challenges conventional political reality.

Theology in 3-D

The example of Greendale makes certain elements of Christian theology leap into 3-D. Suddenly, Paul's talk in First Corinthians 11 about "discerning the body" becomes newly disturbing. Paul says that to celebrate Eucharist while some members continue to go hungry is to "despise the church of God." He continues: "anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself." In communities safely isolated from the human bodies of those of other classes and other races (Sunday morning is still the most segregated time of the week in the U.S.), we fail even to notice that we are living with outlandish inequality within the Body of Christ. A worshipping community that deals with its brokenness openly is a place where we can begin to discern the Body of Christ, broken by immigration status, by race, by residence in deeply indebted countries, and so on.[6]

Nevertheless, angst over such scandals is not what I notice at Greendale. What I notice is joy. I do not mean everyone there is in a good mood all the time. These are hard-working people who do get frustrated. Joy is the fruit of charity. Joy comes from being with Christ where Christ is, and that's not in safety and comfort. If we lack joy, and my experience is that many Christian congregations in the U.S. do, then we lack charity, which means we lack the presence of the Spirit making us into Christ's own members. At stake here, for Christians, is something more fundamental than even the injustice of global poverty. Hell is only an extension of that loss of charity.

Church members made an unusual decision. They began to meet together weekly to talk about being church. They didn't agree. Some people left. But along the way they came to one shared view: they should love one another for the sake of the Body of Christ.

Charity is a troubled term and a troubled practice among Christians today. Charity gets marginalized as the emotional, personal, feminine, churchy part of social action. In fact, though, Christian tradition holds that charity is "the form of the virtues," that which gives all other virtues coherence and coordination, including justice and prudence. Charity is the core of the everyday hard work of talking with other church members about things that matter. Charity is coping patiently and persistently with people stealing tomatoes from the community garden. Charity is resisting the urge to give up the whole project. It is sharing hard decisions about budgets and even sharing personal debts. That's charity at work making a new "ordinary" in the Body of Christ. Mutual love has to be the hallmark of the church, not because Christians all like each other, but because God has called them to be a sign of resurrection. No moral arguments alone, certainly no political commentator, could have that kind of effect on people's ability to engage the realities of poverty.

Holy Poverty

Churchgoers at Greendale talk much less about poverty than about abundance – the abundance of God's care for them, which should make them joyous and courageous in the face of all that tells them to be afraid. As I see it, their story opens the door onto another misunderstood theological tra-

dition – holy poverty. As we find it in St. Francis of Assisi or in Mother Teresa, holy or voluntary poverty is not a romanticization of misery, not a fantasized way of escaping the rat race. Buying the pearl of great price – relinquishing every lesser good for the sake of companionship with Christ – is part of the daily practice of charity, as prosaic as coping with a neighbor's kids while she attends a neighborhood meeting, as ordinary as deciding to keep the old car another year in order to give more to repairing a neighbor's roof.

Those who assume that holiness must be an afterthought in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, to be pursued after we have satisfied desires for food and sex and creative work and good relationships, could learn from holy poverty. We who live in the historically and demographically unlikely situation of enjoying a surfeit of material goods and relative security about our futures become cowards when faced with the price of that pearl. We evade and rationalize. We explain why renunciation of excess would be a bad idea for everyone. We delight in claiming we can "do good and do well," that economic growth is not a zero-sum game, that improvements in healthcare worldwide are good for everyone – all sidestepping the uncomfortable truth that, in a world of finite resources, improving life for others will mean we have to live with less. As authors Smith and Emerson found when they interviewed people about their habits of giving, many Christians felt uneasy, even guilty about not being more generous. But people were resigned to feeling that way. They could not imagine changing their lives. Skills of generosity have to be learned through everyday practice, where political life is more than majority rule and economic life can be more than strangers cutting deals. The gospel is good news, but not if it's not lived.

We sidestep the uncomfortable truth that, in a world of finite resources, improving life for others will mean we have to live with less.

Greendale's is a little story in a world of overwhelming need. But they show what is so missing among Christians – a Christian life where being a member of Christ's Body defines the ordinary, so that the needs of neighbors are not strange and threatening but a regular part of the day. When the church exists to be the Body of Christ, it makes possible a confrontation with poverty that's substantial, practical. In that extraordinary ordinary, traditional talk of joy, charity, and poverty makes sense, and we may find the courage and the skills to confront that ancient tenet of Christianity, invoked again by Vatican II: "If you have not fed the starving person, you have killed him."[8]

Kelly Johnson, author of The Fear of Beggars: Stewardship and Poverty in Christian Ethics *(Eerdmans, 2007), is associate professor of religion at the University of Dayton. Having earned degrees from the University of Notre Dame and Duke University, she also spent several years working at Catholic Worker hospitality houses in Waterbury, CT, and St. Paul, MN, and working with Peace People in Belfast, Northern Ireland.*

Notes

1 http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2010/04/economistyougov_polling. In the survey, foreign aid was easily the most popular item to cut, even though it is less than 1 percent of total the total budget.

2 *Passing the Plate: Why American Christians Don't Give Away More Money* (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 3. According to their figures, the median Christian giver contributed .62 percent of median annual income of Christians to any cause.

3 Julian the Apostate (331-363 CE), *Letter to Arsacius*.

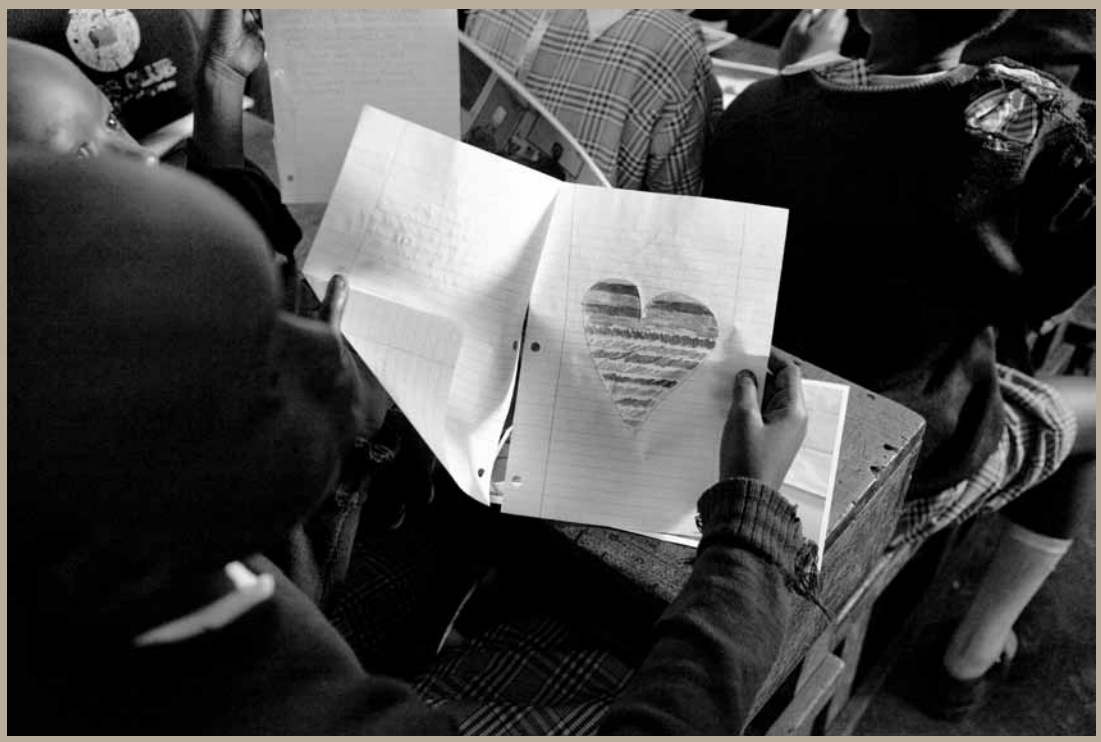
4 Catholic encyclicals on social teaching provide a substantial theological treatment of modern political and economic life. The most recent contribution is Benedict XVI's *Caritas in veritate* (2009).

5 In *The Fear of Beggars: Poverty and Stewardship in Christian Ethics* (Eerdmans, 2007), I discuss the ways in which anxieties about beggars helped form Christian approaches to property in both classical economic thought and modern appeals to stewardship.

6 This line of thought is indebted to William Cavanaugh, "World in a Wafer: A Geography of the Eucharist as Resistance to Globalization," *Modern Theology* (April 1999), p. 193.

7 Smith and Emerson, pp. 108-111, 121.

8 *Gaudium et spes* (1965), paragraph 69.



Purpose and Postcards: American Churches Abroad

By Robert Wuthnow

(an excerpt from Boundless Faith: The Global Outreach of American Churches, *published by the University of California Press, 2009. With publisher's permission.)*

In recent decades U.S. Christianity has significantly extended its activities abroad and is quietly redefining itself at home.

Spending by American churches on overseas ministries has risen to nearly $4 billion annually, an increase of almost 50 percent after inflation in a single decade. The number of full-time missionaries serving abroad has increased steadily over the same period and is significantly larger than a half century ago when the missionary movement was at its presumed all-time high.

Church leaders contend that a congregation that focuses only on itself becomes insular. They want their members to understand that the Christian gospel is for all of humanity.

During the past two decades, nearly every international faith-based relief and development agency has expanded dramatically, and the supporters of these organizations have become more actively engaged in foreign policy initiatives. By all indications, the number of Americans who do short-term volunteer work abroad as church builders, evangelists, religious teachers, technical advisors, and relief workers has also risen to a record high. A majority of U.S. congregations are currently involved in overseas ministries – through special offerings for humanitarian causes, supporting missionaries, hosting foreign speakers, forming committees, and sending out volunteers.

As the world becomes increasingly interdependent, Christianity in the U.S. is becoming transcultural, responding to the realities of globalization by engaging in activities that span borders. Transcultural congregations give priority to programs that honor their commitments at home but also seek to be engaged in the lives of others around the world. Church leaders increasingly stress having a vision that transcends the interests of those who gather for worship each week at the local church building. They contend that a congregation that focuses only on itself becomes insular. They want their members to understand that the Christian gospel is for all of humanity, and they encourage members to become informed about and engaged with the full range of conditions in which Christian teachings apply, whether this involves evangelization, feeding the hungry, ministering to the sick, serving as peacemakers, caring for children, or showing hospitality to the stranger.

Theology of Dislocation

Transcultural Christianity poses new challenges that are only now coming into view. In the past, congregations worked best when they provided a safe, home-like community. The experience of home is nurtured through worship and fellowship, through the mundane intimacies of living in a familiar place and interacting with friends and neighbors. Theologically, a home-like congregation incarnates the mysterious indwelling of God.

In the best-case scenario, transculturalism dislocates this sense of security. Being not at home results in the troubling awareness that the security of home is fragile, not shared by those who have no homes, and even dependent on arrangements of power and exploitation that are inconsistent with the spirit of divine love. Living transculturally is thus

◀ Children in Mathare Community School, Kenya, reading letters from American school children – photo by Josh Hester

to acknowledge the precariousness of being and the possibility of hope. The divine indwelling that manifests itself at home radiates outward.

U.S. churches are currently attempting to strike an appropriate balance between the local and the global in a wide variety of ways, many of which are broadening the horizons of their members. A nondenominational megachurch in southern California sends teams of technical advisors to help start microbusinesses in Kenya. A Baptist church in suburban Atlanta takes in a refugee family from Honduras and helps its members learn English. A Methodist youth group in Oklahoma spends a week in Guatemala painting an orphanage. A Roman Catholic parish in Philadelphia takes up a special offering to help its sister parish in Lithuania.

A woman who decided after several mission trips to enter full-time ministry remembers feeling a "mission high" as she helped people and saw smiles on their faces.

Gospel Tourism

By all indications, short-term mission trips have become quite popular. Nobody knows exactly when amateur volunteers started thinking of themselves as short-term missionaries, but studies of the phenomenon generally locate its origins in the 1950s and 1960s and suggest that it experienced a dramatic increase in popularity during the 1980s and 1990s.

The growing popularity of short-term mission trips has generated considerable debate among church leaders themselves. On the one hand, proponents argue that short-term volunteers greatly expand the work of Christianity in other countries by bringing extra hands to teach Bible classes and repair buildings or supplying technical advice to indigenous microbusinesses and medical assistance at health clinics. Proponents also envision these trips as ways to motivate long-term giving to mission programs and to recruit full-time missionaries.

On the other hand, critics contend that short-term volunteers are often poorly trained or organized and are essentially a drain on the busy schedules of full-time workers and on the scarce resources of those who provide hospitality. Gospel tourism, the pejorative term some critics use, can be a substitute for more serious engagement. As one leader observes, "I'm not sure that going to Cancun to witness on the beach for a few days is what our church should be supporting." Whichever view is correct, short-term missions are an increasingly important transcultural bridge between churches in the U.S. and communities in other countries. They bring Americans into contact with other cultures and expose people elsewhere to American customs and values.

Like other kinds of voluntary service, mission trips seem to have the strongest effects when they are accompanied by adequate preparation and subsequent time for discussion and reflection. A woman who decided after several mission trips to enter full-time ministry remembers feeling a "mission high" as she helped people and saw smiles on their faces. That emotion provided motivation temporarily, but when she returned home she felt depressed because of the suffering she had seen and because her job in software sales seemed completely meaningless. A man who went on a mission trip to India had a similar experience, describing himself after his return as burdened with a kind of "heaviness."

Global Citizenship

For both, the natural impulse was to deny their feelings and get back into their familiar routine as quickly as possible. Having a church group to talk with helped. Eventually, though, the momentary call they had felt to serve others became a permanent part of their identity. To heighten the chances of such beneficial effect, congregations and sponsoring agencies are increasingly adopting uniform standards, encouraging prospective participants to enroll in cross-cultural classes, offering debriefing sessions, and forming oversight committees.

The potential weaknesses of short-term mission trips include not only the actual cost but also the time and energy they require. Although a growing number of international agencies appear to be encouraging these trips, some leaders worry that efforts are being devoted to ameliorative projects at the expense of mobilizing around government policies that could also make a difference. Pastors worry that the trips sometimes become ends in themselves instead of springboards for wider service.

The fact that people who have served in other countries view the world and themselves differently is in itself not surprising (people who travel as tourists often say the same thing). What is interesting is how the world now seems to those who have seen it at its worst. For some, it does become flat, homogeneous, as one man notes in remarking about the common bond he has come to feel with people in vastly different circumstances. For most, it is rather

the distinctiveness and meaning of America that comes into focus in a new way.

One churchgoer's remark about the U.S. not being the "real world" illustrates one of the most common ways in which perspectives shift as American Christians become engaged in ministries abroad. He means not only that the privileges Americans enjoy are not common to much of humanity but also that life in the U.S. is in many ways superficial. Television and consumerism give us a false sense of reality.

"All the commercialism and materialism," sighs a woman who recently spent seven weeks in Mozambique, "the screaming message from every advertisement and all the commercials on TV – I just look at all that and it becomes very frustrating." Being in another part of the world provides a measure of critical distance.

Some ministers say there is danger in people getting addicted to the adventure and missing sight of the larger picture.

Being transcultural, then, is not so much to have lived in two places or even of having realized that one's home is not as secure as it once seemed. Nor does transcultural Christianity mean that a person from the U.S. incorporates an African interpretation of the Trinity into his or her theology or a Latin American appreciation of the Holy Spirit.

Instead, for those most directly involved, the globalization of American Christianity is relativizing how they think about America. With privilege comes responsibility. Living in the U.S. is not a right that somehow has been earned, either by oneself or by the nation's heroes and good practices, but a divine gift. It reinforces the sense that whatever one does must have purpose, even if the accomplishments that derive from that purpose are small.

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Critics of U.S. aid argue that it could be far more generous than it is. Although the U.S. gives more in absolute dollar amounts to foreign aid than other countries, its foreign aid contributions amount to approximately 0.1 percent of Gross Domestic Product, placing it last among the world's wealthiest countries in that comparison. Critics question whether U.S. aid is sufficiently motivated by humanitarian aims or is driven by such strategic interests as deterring communism or stabilizing regions through support for authoritarian regimes.

To the extent that these criticisms are warranted, it is puzzling that religious groups have not been able to bring more pressure on officials to expand foreign aid. Among grassroots Christians, there would seem to be strong support for government efforts to help the needy in other countries. Since the early 1970s, national polls have consistently shown that reducing world hunger is a foreign policy goal supported by most Americans. In a Global Issues Survey, 60 percent of churchgoers thought "combating world hunger should be a very important foreign policy goal of the U.S." This view was shared among all the major denominational traditions, with the highest support from black Protestants (74 percent) and Catholics (64 percent), followed by evangelical and mainline Protestants (each 56 percent).

Other questions elicited even more support for U.S. engagement. Eighty-seven percent (with no significant variation among denominations) said they favored the U.S. "doing more to supply medical help to people in poor countries." More than three-quarters agreed "there should be major new efforts, led by charitable and religious groups, with some taxpayer support, to make sure that fewer people in poor countries suffer from hunger and malnutrition."

However, American Christians also hold mixed views toward poor countries and thus have ambivalent feelings about how much the U.S. government should be involved. On the one hand, various reasons for helping people in other countries resonate with many American Christians. For instance, 48 percent say that "God does not want poor people to suffer" is a very good argument for doing more to fight world hunger. Thirty-five percent think "the U.S. has a moral responsibility to help the poor in other countries" is also a good argument.

On the other hand, 31 percent of American Christians think looking out for people in our own country is a very good reason not to help people in other countries. And more than four in ten worry that the money Americans spend helping people in other countries is wasted.

– Robert Wuthnow

Toshihiro Takami '60 M.Div., founder of the Asian Rural Institute in Japan, which trains grassroots leaders in organic farming techniques and community-building in order to better serve poor and marginalized people.

Working as equals:

"I have experienced the joy of living with the poor. My work was to create a place where participants from all over the world, mainly from the poorest regions, can think for themselves and develop ideas about their particular situations. People are coming to ARI from more and more countries. They come here and work as equals no matter who they are. The numbers of visitors are increasing every year."

Hazards of affluence:

"People are longing for equality. The hope of people to be equal with others is moving the world now. However, in general everybody is seeking affluence. That is a problem. Responsibility comes with freedom. Everybody should be aware of their global responsibility to others."

The Mahatma:

"The life of Mahatma Gandhi was a symbol of people's longing for freedom and equality. He was a lawyer certified in Britain, but he was discriminated against in South Africa and kicked off the train just because he was an Indian. He decided to go back to India and work for freedom and equality of people. The British government monopolized the salt business in India at that time, a symbol of colonization. Gandhi decided to do a disobedience walk (the Salt Satyagraha) to stop the salt monopoly. The British government of that time occupied the 'seven seas' of the world. I think it is still true today: the English language still governs the world. Gandhi's statue stands in Lower Manhattan, Union Square. Thousands pass by every day without noticing the statue. Nobody realizes that Gandhi is standing there. That is truly symbolic to me. Americans and everybody in the world are busy wanting affluence. This is where the problem of the human being can be found."

The values of success:

"Everybody, including church leaders and lay people, has a wrong conception about success in life. They believe that the purpose of their life is to seek affluence. They believe that if they become affluent, their life is successful. So while the world is seeking affluence, ARI helps people who try to build a different future, sharing ideas, sharing food, teaching equality, learning to work with the poor and hungry. This is God's will. I hope that we can devote such a world of such values to our Lord."

Navigating Through the Charity Galaxy

Charity Navigator (charitynavigator.org) claims to be the nation's largest charity evaluator, examining the efficiency and financial health of some 5,500 U.S.-based charities.

Its stated goal is to help donors make an informed choice about a charity by promoting accountability and transparency among aid organizations and other charities and by evaluating their efficiency and organizational capacity, their ability to sustain programs over time.

The website includes numerous features, tips and resources ("Tips for Giving in a Time of Crisis," "Tips for Older Donors"), top-ten lists ("Ten Slam-Dunk Charities," "Ten Inefficient Fundraisers"), blogs, and lists of newly added charities.

One characteristic feature is called "Six Questions to Ask Charities Before Donating." The questions are:

1. Can the charity clearly communicate who it is and what it does?
2. Can the charity define its short-term and long-term goals?
3. Can the charity tell you the progress it has made (or is making) toward its goal?
4. Do the charity's programs make sense to you?
5. Can you trust the charity?
6. Are you willing to make a long-term commitment to the charity?

Regarding question six, Charity Navigator explains: "We like to think of giving to charity as a long-term commitment, more akin to marriage than dating. Intelligent giving is motivated by altruism, knowledge, and perspective, not a knee-jerk reaction to a television commercial. ... Ask yourself if your charity is the type of organization to which you're willing to make a long-term commitment. When you do this, you agree to support them through good times and bad, and provide the funding it needs to weather economic downturns. In return, it promises to continue working toward addressing the issue you both think is so vital. Look hard and find an organization you can support for many years to come."

Source: www.charitynavigator.org

A Parched World's Search for Water

By Christiana Z. Peppard

Recall the images. Women balancing heavy plastic barrels on their heads. Girls as young as two, toting whatever buckets they can. Boys riding makeshift carts to haul the precious liquid. Farmlands cracking under the sun. These images of thirst are the faces of fresh water scarcity.

We will go to almost any extreme to find water. If we don't have enough, then it carves an absence through our lives. Our sacramental lives overflow with the rich symbolism of life-giving, purifying fresh water. Where water is present, we find life. Where it is scarce or polluted, it brings disease or death. Yet fresh water constitutes less than 3 percent of all water on earth. The line between sufficiency and insufficiency is the difference between life and death: human beings need twenty liters per day for basic survival needs.

Aridity and water scarcity are not new notions, but our awareness of their social, economic, and political dimensions is unfurling in unprecedented ways. "Water poverty" is today a designation invoked and indexed by development experts and journalists. We refer to communities, nations, and regions as "water stressed" when there is an imbalance between the available water supply and its use.

Bottled and Beleaguered

In the present day, globalization has thrown new variables into the debate – and the fate – of fresh water supply. Fresh water has increasingly become a commodity sold at prevailing market prices. Media attention has been given to the bottled water industry and the trend of privatized municipal water supplies, from Cochabamba, Bolivia, to Atlanta, GA.

In this era of beleaguered economic and environmental regulation, the fact that water has become vulnerable to redesignation as a commodity has borne real impacts worldwide. Corporations find economic incentives to externalize the costs of environmental degradation: the costs and consequences of the degradation of fresh water supplies increasingly accrue to local communities (stakeholders) and to future generations. As advocates of environmental justice have abundantly indicated, people who live in poverty are the first to suffer the consequences.

When thinking about water, we must recognize the dynamic and complicated interplay of these many factors. There is no easy or one-size-fits-all solution. And these issues urgently raise a broader set of questions. Who owns water? Who is responsible for it? How should we navigate its many forms of value – moral, legal, political, economic, cultural, spiritual, ecosystemic? Toward what ends? In the absence of effective conversation and advocacy about these matters, the default value of water will continue to be assigned by the market in ways that dictate the flow of fresh water worldwide. The ethical problem is, as Mark Twain reputedly remarked, that water flows upwards towards wealth.

The ethical problem is, as Mark Twain reputedly remarked, that water flows upwards towards wealth.

Complicating matters, of course, is the fact that fresh water is so unevenly distributed. Water issues in the Amazon of tropical South America are not identical to those in the Sahel of the arid Sahara. Climate change will only exacerbate regional disparities in fresh water availability as dry areas become

drier and wet ones wetter. "Water is the hammer with which climate change will hit the earth," biologist Travis Huxman has declared.

Population growth will increase demand for fresh water – for domestic, industrial, and agricultural uses. The needs of agriculture claim roughly 70 percent of water use worldwide. This has made possible an unparalleled rate of food production in the twentieth century. But it also means water security and food security are deeply intertwined, pointing to a challenge that stretches from India to the farmlands of America: water used for current production is drawn from non-renewable stocks of water in deep aquifers. Wells are running dry, crops are withering. Beijing and Mexico City are sinking under the weight of unsustainable aquifer extraction.

Crucially, for the more than one billion people living in egregious impoverishment, fresh water scarcity is also the dire result of pollution – whether from industrial outputs, fertilizers and pesticides, or insufficient sanitation. Again, people living in poverty are almost always the first to suffer – either because of their location in vulnerable areas, or an inability to pay for relief. For them, the ultimate cost is not written in dollars. It is borne on their bodies.

The Long Journey

The script of water is gendered. In many regions, the longer and longer walk to retrieve potable water is written most severely on the lives of women and girls, to whom fall the primary responsibility for finding fresh water for domestic uses. When miles must be walked each way, many hours of the day are spent in pursuit of water instead of education or enterprise. The problem is one of equity and flourishing. As is well documented, all forms of development depend on the empowerment of women.

In so many ways, the theme of insufficient fresh water supply permeates the grinding cycles of poverty. Sanitation, health, economic opportunity, gender equity, and more depend on availability of clean water. Yet the challenges are embedded in specific contexts – shaped by cultural practices, trajectories of use, and patterns of privilege under globalization. The judicious use of technology will surely play an important role in sustainable solutions, but technology alone will not solve these problems.

What is a person to do?

If the situation feels overwhelming, then you are not alone. A BBC commentator has quipped, "If you want to induce mental meltdown, the statistics of the worsening global fresh water crisis are a surefire winner." This quote certainly resonates with me. It can be destabilizing to realize that there is no consensus about how to envision – much less enact protections for – a substance so fundamental to life.

Certainly, a growing number of relief efforts (including many Christian outreach organizations) have brought fresh water to desiccated communities by building wells or providing other forms of infrastructure. The first eruption of water from a faucet can be nothing short of miraculous, and it is vital for the survival of local communities. This work is important and necessary, but it is not sufficient; the need for solidarity extends well beyond the realm of charity. Mobilization of hearts and minds in politics, economics, and law is required if the pervasive structural features of fresh-water scarcity are to be addressed in any enduring way.

When miles must be walked each way for water, many hours of the day are spent in pursuit of water instead of education or enterprise.

We see in water's contemporary geopolitical contours some pervasive aspects of structural sin. But we can also experience its transformative potential. The United Nations, for example, has pressed the question of fresh water onto global agendas, especially insofar as it strives to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – one of which aims, by the year 2015, to "reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water." Nearly one billion people lack safe drinking water and nearly 2.5 billion lack sufficient sanitation.

In 2002, the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights stated that "access to adequate amounts of clean water for personal and domestic uses is a fundamental human right of all people," and added that "the human right to water is indispensible for leading a life in human dignity" as well as a "prerequisite for the realization of other human rights."

Historic Resolution

This statement was abetted significantly in July 2010 by the UN General Assembly, which adopted a resolution on the right to sufficient clean water and sanitation, stating that they are "essential for the full enjoyment of life and other rights." Though the document does not stipulate precisely how this right is to be imagined and enacted, it calls for international cooperation with regard to finance, technology transfer, and capacity building.

This is an important step forward in the struggle to address the problem of thirst and the interdepen-

dence of various human rights. But significant questions remain about implementation, international cooperation, the roles of both governments and multinational corporations, and the moral claims of impoverished communities. This is no time for complacency. Prophetic voices – Canadian activist Maude Barlow, Indian physicist-activist-philosopher Vandana Shiva, and others – are necessary to call us to attention, to encourage us towards sustainable and just solutions. Non-profit organizations such as the Blue Planet Project, Food and Water Watch, and International Rivers also steadily advocate for the common good.

What To Do: An Inquiry

But what are we to do, you ask? The scale and multiplicity of the problem overrun our paltry efforts. Yes, we need good habits of personal water conservation, but they are insufficient. So let's consider that aggravating question a little more closely.

First, we must know what we're talking about. Learn. Research. Read. Witness. Describe. Then, it is incumbent upon us not merely to recapitulate those facts. Theological and ethical work takes root in imagining a more robust sense of the common good – that is, the flourishing of individuals and communities, broadly understood. Theological imagination is no small thing. Live up to, and beyond, your training. Risk believing in possibilities that seem, at the moment, impractical; others who prevailed were once memorably called fools, too.

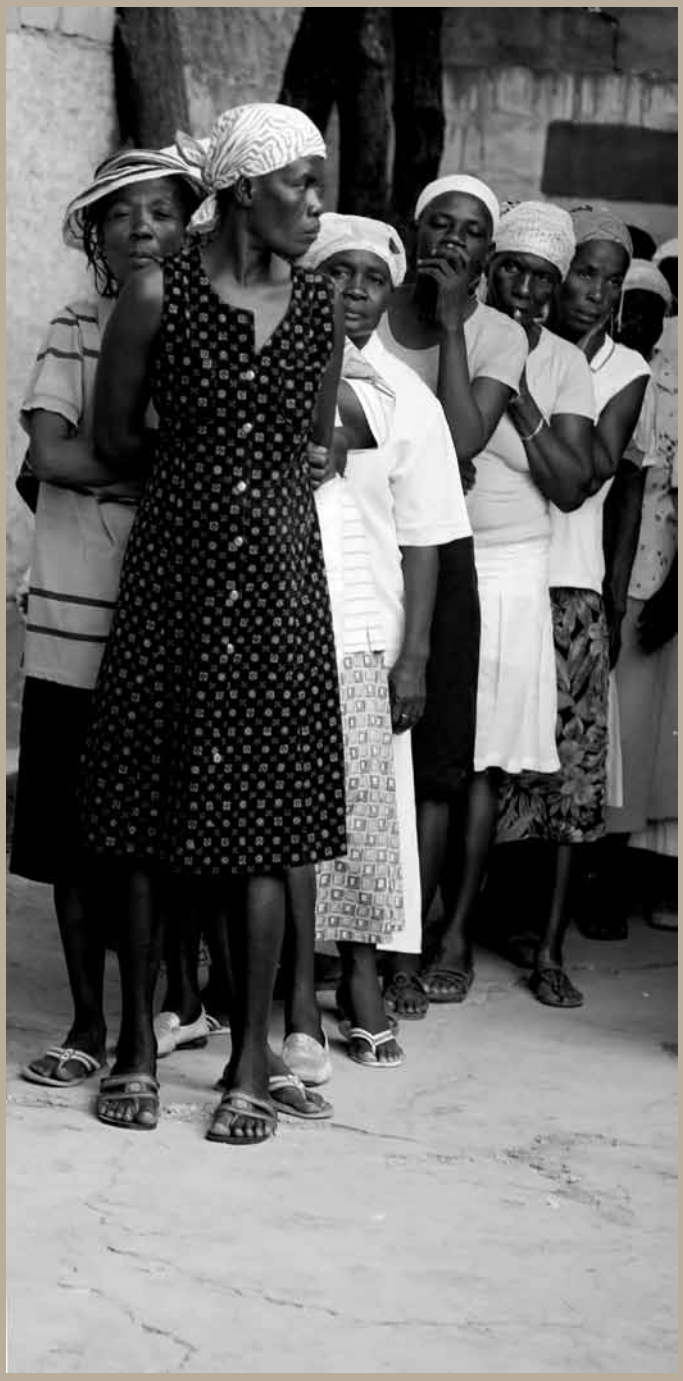
We must go outside of what we have thought possible, outside of what we have been trained, outside of what we have previously understood.

Bringing what we know with us, we must then go outside – outside of what we have thought possible, outside of what we have been trained, outside of what we have previously understood. Be interdisciplinary. If you are an economist, work on the many problems facing water economics, and tackle those issues of value head-on. If you are a lawyer, learn about the construction of water rights worldwide. If you are an engineer, seek sustainable solutions that are context-savvy. If you are a businessperson, work to internalize your environmental and social costs; respect your stakeholders as much as you do your shareholders. If you are a minister, then preach, teach, and ritualize what it means to be neighborly in an era of globalization.

In the U.S., we inhabit a culture of privilege that also accrues a moral debt. How do we confront and correct it, not just ignore or defer it? Writing checks to worthy organizations is important. So too is the pursuit of solidarity beyond one's bank account: listen, listen, listen to those whose wisdom comes from hard lessons, to those who have devoted their lives to thinking better about water and the structures that shape its availability. Be humble. As author and advocate Lila Watson has said: "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

The pressing issues of fresh water are contextual, variable, elusive – but also fundamental and enduring. Just as there is no singular way to define the problem, neither is there a magic solution to the challenge of sustaining that which sustains us. The slippery, agonizing question of thirst is one of the great moral – even theological – questions of our time.

Christiana Z. Peppard '05 M.A.R. is a doctoral candidate at Yale University. She is the Scholar in Residence at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and Visiting Scholar at the Center for Ethics Education at Fordham University. Her dissertation, "Valuing Water," explores the ascription of value to fresh water in an era of economic globalization and charts a fresh water ethic from resources in moral anthropology and Catholic social teaching.



At Women's World Banking we believe lending to women is a more efficient way to end poverty.

Decades ago, the pioneering microfinance institutions sought to provide credit to poor entrepreneurs who had been denied access by the formal banking sector because they had no assets to pledge as collateral. It quickly emerged that female entrepreneurs invested the profits from their businesses in ways that would have a longer-lasting, more profound impact on the lives of their families and communities.

WWB's research confirms that the key economic priorities for poor women – to a far greater extent than for men – continue to be healthcare, the education of their children, and housing. The woman entrepreneur as the gateway to household security became a fundamental premise of the microfinance business model and the success of microfinance as a poverty-alleviation tool.

Our three decades of working globally with poor women empirically shows that access to financial services has a notable impact on the lives of women and their families and also on their own sense of empowerment by changing their status within their home and communities.

Every day we see examples such as Joyce Wafukho, a microfinance client in Kenya, a mother of five supporting her family because she was able to access credit. In 1994 Joyce saw a need for a retail hardware store in her farming community in western Kenya. She invested her entire savings to buy a small amount of inventory and opened a hardware store in a rented storefront. However, her plans for a fully stocked hardware store were hampered by lack of investment capital, and initially she was able to sell only tomatoes and charcoal. Joyce contacted numerous banks seeking loans to expand her business, but her loan applications were denied or simply ignored. Finally, after years of rejection by creditors, Joyce heard about Kenya Women Finance Trust (KWFT). Joining other women in her area, Joyce received training from KWFT in accounting, simple bookkeeping, and leadership.

In April 2004 she received her first loan from KWFT for 50,000 Kenya Shillings (Sh), or $680. Since then, Joyce has received, and promptly repaid, five loan installments from KWFT, for a total of Sh 1.2 million (or $16,500). Joyce currently employs twenty-five full-time workers, including her husband. Joyce's business has enabled her to build a permanent home for her family and provide her children and siblings with better nutrition, healthcare, and education.

It is critical to understand that this kind of change does indeed take time. Our research shows it takes a minimum of three loan cycles – a minimum of three years – to see evidence of these changes. In many countries, change might not occur until the fourth or fifth loan cycle. The changes themselves are often small and very gradual – making a home improvement from a mud floor to one of wood, or from a cardboard roof to metal, or the ability to keep a girl in school for another year instead of ending her education so that she can work to help support the family.

Microfinance brings about other important changes. Evidence suggests, for instance, a distinct decrease in domestic violence against women if we can help them get listed on a property title. One of our members conducted research in southern India that showed a rate of household violence of 49 percent among married women who did not own either a piece of land or a home. For women who owned land, the incidence of violence dropped to 18 percent; for women who owned a home, 10 percent. The ownership of property also offers women the option of leaving an abusive environment.

It is clear from our research that credit alone is not a sufficient tool to change lives. We talk about "financial services," not just credit. Access to products and services beyond enterprise credit for growing a business is vital. The poor, particularly women, need access throughout their lives to the same array of financial services, including savings and insurance, that anyone else does.

By now, microfinance has grown to include nearly 2,000 institutions reporting more than $44 billion in gross loan portfolio. We are not arguing that microfinance will solve all the world's problems. It does, however, provide an opportunity for some of the three billion people who live below the poverty line to have access to credit to start businesses, savings accounts, and protect their assets – all of which can change lives.

Adapted from a report provided by Women's World Banking, based in New York. a global network of forty microfinance providers and banks working in twenty-eight countries to bring financial services and information to low-income entrepreneurs. The network serves more than twenty-four million clients, primarily women. (see www.swwb.org)

◀ Haitian women waiting for food – photo by Bethany Mahan

Testing the New Resolve

By Ray Waddle

The Broadway stage doesn't usually subject audiences to a painful ethical meditation on poverty.

But that's what theatergoers got a couple of years ago with *The Fever*, a scripted monologue by a man of affluence who sits in a comfortable chair and ponders aloud why the rich world's good intentions fail to improve the lives of poor people.

The play, written by Wallace Shawn, is unflinching. It is keen to expose a core dishonesty in modern life: we believe we are decent and generous people, when in fact we are assiduous exploiters of the poor. Our privileges and purchasing power depend on their continual poverty.

"We need the poor," the narrator declares, staring at us. "Without the poor to get the fruit off the trees, to tend the excrement under the ground, to bathe our babies on the day they're born, we couldn't exist. Without the poor to do awful work, we would spend our lives doing awful work. If the poor were not poor, if the poor were paid the way we're paid, we couldn't afford to buy an apple, a shirt, we couldn't afford to take a trip, to spend a night at an inn in a nearby town."

Lecturing the Poor

He includes himself in his indictment. He was raised to love beautiful things, be cheerful, and have sympathy for the less fortunate. But his sympathy doesn't actually help the poor, he admits. He could choose to give them his money, but he doesn't. He doesn't want them knocking on his door. No one does. Instead, we lecture the poor, telling them that reforms must be gradual, not sudden, not revolutionary, not violent. We set the terms. The poor must wait, and wait.

Staggering out of the theater, I was impressed by his relentless logic that says modern economies make conflict inevitable between rich and poor. Is it even possible to have an ethical relationship with the greater world? That's what *The Fever* asks.

Yet how different is today's mental climate from the atmosphere of the play, which was written twenty years ago amid Cold War gloom, when communist revolution was still plausibly debated as a solution to poverty.

Today, the world's anxious list of threats no longer puts proletarian revolution at the top. (Global warming and nuclear terrorism, yes; dialectical materialism, no.) This shift since the Soviet Union's demise has changed the very debate about poverty. It has become far more optimistic.

The spread of global capitalism and internet media has turned poverty into an entrepreneurial challenge. We talk now of microcredit, wealth creation, fair trade, debt forgiveness, immunization campaigns, interconnectivity, and anti-malarial bed nets, not communist manifestos. Even as the global gap between rich and poor has widened scandalously in the last generation, at least some regions have reduced poverty in the wake of global prosperity. This has given the debate a shot of business-like uplift that is alien to *The Fever*'s despairing conclusions. The new assumption is: the globalized world can help poor people, and they can help themselves.

The spread of global capitalism and internet media has turned poverty into an entrepreneurial challenge. We talk now of microcredit, wealth creation, fair trade, debt forgiveness, immunization campaigns, interconnectivity, and anti-malarial bed nets, not communist manifestos.

The book *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (2007) by economist Paul Collier exhibits the change. The title gives the poverty debate a new metaphor, and the text offers some tough-minded, plainspoken analysis. The bottom billion are the extremely poor who live in fifty-eight nations that are desperately stuck. They are falling behind, he says, and sometimes falling apart.

The successes of the Millennium Development Goals in other (less) poor nations obscure the festering failures of the bottom billion. The bottom includes Chad and several other African nations; also Haiti, Bolivia, Laos, Yemen, and the Central Asian countries. The rest of the world, interconnected as never before, will eventually suffer if these continue to suffer.

A Rescue Mission?

Some are failing because of civil wars, coups, or bad governance, or because they are resource-poor and land-locked in a bad neighborhood. But their problems are not hopeless. They are fixable, but it will take a combination of strategies – smarter use of aid (to build up infrastructure and reverse capital flight), fairer trade policies, possibly military intervention.

At issue is whether current optimism about eliminating poverty will wilt before the usual powerful obstructionism and habitual inertia – or create a historic breakthrough for human civilization.

It will require a change of attitude by everyone. Collier has stern words for ideologues. The left, he says, needs to get over its suspicion of growth. The right needs to overcome its suspicion of aid. Problems of the bottom billion require both aid and growth, help from the world community but also commitments from the very poor nations themselves to take responsibility for their futures.

"Let me be clear: *we* cannot rescue *them*," he writes. "The societies of the bottom billion can only be rescued from within. In every society of the bottom billion there are people working for change, but usually they are defeated by the powerful internal forces stacked against them. We should be helping the heroes. So far, our efforts have been paltry: through inertia, ignorance, and incompetence, we have stood by and watched them lose."

In this wired world of pragmatic expectations, scrutiny of the lives of the poor has never been more energized: it's in everyone's self-interest to know them better. "The poor" are no longer such a distant abstraction. They are part of the global conversation. Novelist William Vollmann captured some of that spirit with his non-fiction book *Poor People* (2007), his narrative glimpse into the daily lives of the poor (he interviewed, paid, and befriended dozens of people).

"Why are you poor?" was his customary opening question, whether in Bogotá, Bangkok, or Miami. Answers from the street varied. "Because too few people own too much money." "We suffer because our ancestors were guilty." "Some people are fast thinkers and some are slow thinkers. The fastest make the most money." "Epilepsy." "Lack of documents." "Because I'm a drunk." "Allah gives and He takes." "Half destiny, half character."

Some critics were puzzled by Vollman's far-flung exertions. ("What's the point exactly?") But the result testifies to real people who are more thoughtful and resilient than prejudices about them allow.

Poor people are observed more systematically in *Portfolios of the Poor*, a study of the spending habits of hundreds of impoverished families abroad (see excerpt, p. 19). They are remarkably resourceful and eager for better financial services, the authors discovered.

This undoubtedly ensures further evolution and influence of the microcredit industry, which in the last thirty years opened the financial world to the disenfranchised by making small loans to poor entrepreneurs. As microfinance matures, key themes will center on broadening its services, reforming abuses, providing better assessments of results, and adapting to relentless economic change in order to give poor people a claim on the world's riches.

The hazard of any discussion about poverty is the risk of being too abstract or too anecdotal, too sentimental about the poor or too unfeeling. *The Fever*'s warning still haunts: the rich world ruthlessly calls the shots and does what it wants on its own timetable. At issue is whether current optimism about eliminating poverty will wilt before the usual powerful obstructionism and habitual inertia – or create a historic breakthrough for human civilization.

Ray Waddle is editor-in-chief of Reflections.

Income Inequality and the Damage Done

By Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett

Why do the poor suffer more from almost every health and social problem? Death rates are higher from cardiovascular disease, infections and many cancers among the least well-off. So too are violence, drug abuse, obesity, teenage births, and school failure.

Some suggest these problems are caused by lower material standards of living – poor housing, poor diets, etc. Some think that intelligence or genetic factors are the explanation.

But, increasingly, people doing research on inequalities in health have suggested that low social status itself is the problem. Whatever the reasons for the common link with poverty and deprivation, all of these problems tend to be treated separately. Different academic researchers study health and crime, different governmental departments deal with education and justice.

An Overlooked Trend

After many years of research, we have discovered another feature that is shared by all these health and social problems. They are all more common in more unequal countries. By more unequal, we mean bigger differences between rich and poor.

Among the rich market economies of the world, there are stark differences in income inequality. Among the more equal societies, such as the Nordic countries and Japan, incomes of the top 20 percent are three-to-four times as big as the incomes of the poorest 20 percent. Among the more unequal societies are countries, like the U.S., Portugal, and the UK, where the richest 20 percent are eight or nine times as rich as the poorest 20 percent. It looks, then, as if the problems associated with deprivation within a country all become more frequent as material differences increase.

What is surprising is how big the differences are. Mental illness is three times more common in more unequal countries than in the most equal. Obesity rates are twice as high. Rates of imprisonment are eight times higher. Teenage births increased ten-fold.

Another surprising finding is that there is no relationship at all between average levels of income, such as Gross National Income per capita, and health or child wellbeing. A country can be twice as well off as another, and still not have better life expectancy, infant mortality, or standards of child wellbeing. Everyone getting richer appears to make no difference to the levels of health and social problems in a society. Yet, within each country, all these problems are closely related to any measure of differences of income, education, social class, etc.

Mental illness is three times more common in more unequal countries than in the most equal. Obesity rates are twice as high. Rates of imprisonment are eight times higher. Teenage births increased ten-fold.

Paradoxes of Wealth

So differences in living standards *within* countries seem to matter, but differences in living standards *between* countries don't. How can we explain this paradox?

If health and social problems are concentrated among the poor because the vulnerable and un-

◀ Photo by Bethany Mahan

healthy drift down the social scale, this doesn't explain why they are so much more frequent in more unequal countries. Similarly, it can't be explained in terms of any fixed factor, such as genetics, because levels of these problems change over time – think of the current obesity epidemic or the rise in imprisonment. If they were the result of low material living standards, they would surely diminish with economic growth. What seems to matter is not absolute standards of living but the differences between us.

Ills of Inequality

In our book, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger,* we test these patterns in two separate test-beds, not only among the rich, developed countries, but also in comparisons of the fifty U.S. states. The picture that emerges is almost identical in both settings. Our findings confirm the widely held intuition that inequality is socially corrosive.

Although it has been said that there are "lies, damned lies, and statistics," statistical methods provide us with a sort of social microscope: they show us important patterns that we fail to see unaided. For example, civil servants working in government offices were completely unaware that age-adjusted death rates were three times as high among staff low down in the office hierarchy, than among those in more senior positions.

The picture that emerges from the statistics is that inequality damages social relationships. Measures of trust and social cohesion are higher and violence is lower in more equal societies. Similarly, studies show the reason that rates of imprisonment have increased in more unequal countries (and in U.S. states) owes much more to harsher sentencing than to rising crime rates. Even small differences in inequality seem to make a huge difference to our quality of life: we're not examining the effects of some imaginary egalitarian utopia but analysing the effects of existing differences in the amount of inequality among advanced market economies.

The picture that emerges is that inequality damages social relationships. The reason why almost everyone benefits from greater equality is that more equal societies are more collaborative, with less status competition.

It might be thought that more unequal societies do worse because they have more poor people, but this is only a small part of the explanation. Just as health inequalities are not simply differences between the health of the poor and everybody else, but instead go all the way up the social ladder, with even those close to the top doing a bit worse than those above them, nor is the impact of inequality confined to the poor. Indeed, you cannot explain such big differences in rates of health and social problems between more equal and more unequal societies by what is happening among the poor. The differences are big because everybody is affected. Greater inequality seems to harm almost everyone.

Where the data allow us to compare people at each level of income or education or social class between one country and another, it is clear that even the comfortably middle class does better in more equal countries. Even well-educated people with good incomes will likely live longer and enjoy better health, and their children will do better in school, will be less likely to take drugs and less likely to become teenage parents. Everyone will enjoy the benefits of living in a more trusting, less violent society. Although the benefits of greater equality are much larger lower down the social scale, they are still apparent even among the well-off.

Humiliation and Healing

The reason why almost everyone benefits from greater equality is that more equal societies are more collaborative, with less status competition. With bigger material inequalities, people become more worried about how they are seen and judged, more vulnerable to status anxieties. So much so, that more unequal societies become more consumerist – people work longer hours, save less of their income and are more likely to get into debt. Greater sensitivity to how we are valued or respected explains why violence is more common in more unequal societies. Disrespect, humiliation, and loss of face are common triggers to violence. Perhaps the reason why rates of mental illness are so much higher in more unequal countries is because the quality of social relationships and feeling valued have always been crucial to human wellbeing.

Other human beings have the capacity to be our most feared rivals or our greatest support, cooperation and security. We have evolved to be very sensitive to the quality of social relationships. Status matters but so does friendship among equals. Material inequalities play a crucial role in putting barriers between us. When these differences are larger, the balance shifts from us trusting other people and viewing them as friends, to mistrust and competition for status.

More equal societies don't just function better internally; this seems to carry over into their external relations. More equal countries give more in foreign aid and score better on the Global Peace Index. They

More equal societies don't just function better internally. They give more in foreign aid and score better on the Global Peace Index.

recycle a higher proportion of their waste and think it more important to abide by international environmental agreements.

Injustices of wealth and poverty have always been central to the Christian message. In our book, we include a cartoon that shows a rich business man instructing his secretary to buy up the rights to the Bible and "get that part changed about the rich man and the eye of the needle." It is of course one thing to explore these issues from an academic standpoint but quite another to change the society we live in. As well as outlining the evidence in our book, we have also helped to set up The Equality Trust (http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk) – with the help of a grant from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust – to campaign for a fairer society, to benefit us all.

Richard Wilkinson, emeritus professor of social epidemiology at the University of Nottingham, and Kate Pickett, professor of epidemiology at the University of York, are the authors of The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger *(Bloomsbury Press and Penguin, 2009).*

Evalyn Wakhusama '01 M.Div., '02 S.T.M., founder of Women's Initiative in Knowledge & Survival (WIKS), based in Kenya.

Our work:

"The rich experience at YDS confirmed in me the dream to return home and do something meaningful for the impoverished society I grew up in. WIKS runs seminars to empower targeted groups and identifies needy intelligent girls for sponsorship in education. The highlight of our efforts is the Nambale Magnet School (NMS), now in its second year. Most of the children are orphaned through HIV/AIDS and do not have extended family to support them. We also target parents and guardians, addressing h ygiene and nutrition. A long-range objective is to empower guardians in some skill for their livelihoods."

Winning the fight:

"I have hope that the global village seems to be winning the struggle against poverty. Whatever happens in one corner gets broadcasted all over the world. Thanks be to our communication systems: the poor are known, and the world can do something about them. I believe that the gravest mistake in history would be failure to restore hope to the hopeless when given the opportunity. There is increased pressure on impoverished nations to enact policies that address poverty. By creating wealth, sharing in the world's resources and strengthening accountability, we can win the war against poverty."

Lethargy, frustration:

"Yet there is concern that the world is not giving sufficient attention to poverty issues. A number of reasons could account for this lethargy – perhaps donor fatigue, or frustration that resources have not been fully accounted for, leaving the masses desperate. Change may be slow to detect overnight, but gradually this enormous foe will be diminished."

Breaking the cycle:

"There are misconceptions, such as: the poor are lazy and hence responsible for their situation, and poverty is a permanent thing and therefore nothing need be done to change it. Poverty is indeed a very dehumanizing condition. It is often caused by a diverse set of power relationships that deny life skills, assets, and resources. Lack of information, lack of exposure, and ignorance make it difficult to break the cycle of poverty. It requires an understanding of these complex interactions to confront it. But poverty is relative; it can change hands. The saying that there is not a king who has not had a destitute person in his lineage and not a poor man who has not had a king in his line may be correct. The curse of poverty can be broken; nothing is permanent. God is on the side of the poor. Let the world join God."

WHERE ARE YOU, GOD? A PRAYER

Where are you, God?
You are with me. I have everything I need.
You are with her. She has only one dollar for today.

Where are you, God?
You are with me. My stomach is full of good food.
You are with them. They are hungry –
they have only a little corn to eat all day today.

Where are you, God?
You are with me. I have healthy children.
You are with her. Her baby just died in childbirth and she is sick.

Where are you, God?
You are with me. I am educated. I can read and write and teach.
You are with her. She hasn't had the opportunity
to learn to read or write or be a teacher.

Where are you, God?
You are with me. In spite of feeling ill from time to time, I am healthy.
You are with her. She is dying of AIDS.

Loving God, you are with us all. We are all your Beloved, aren't we?

So what can I possibly do to help and serve her?

Compassionate God, instill compassion in me.
Passionate God, instill passion in me.
Holy Spirit, open my eyes to see Christ in her.

Lead me to love her,
to advocate for her,
to pray for her,
to serve her,
to give enough to help make her life better.
Amen.

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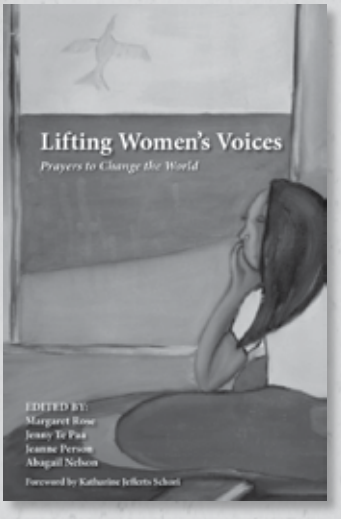

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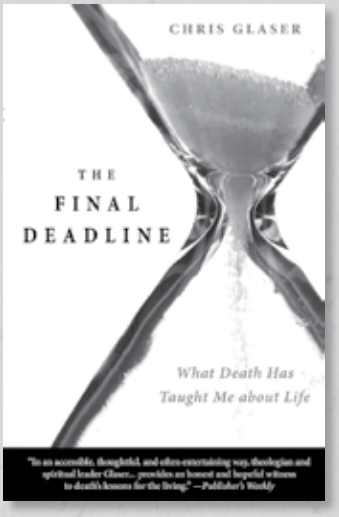

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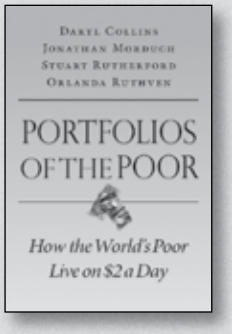

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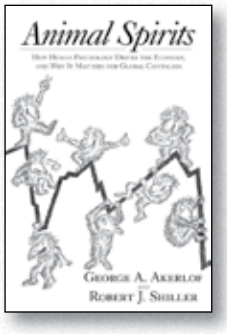

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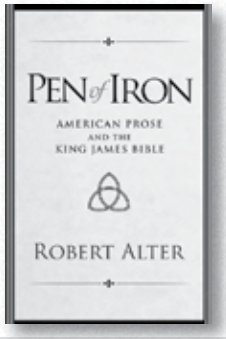

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From the Editor: Moments of Truth

By Ray Waddle

Mathare Valley in Nairobi, Kenya, is considered one of the worst slums in Africa. What that means is 600,000 people are crowded into three square miles, including thousands of children orphaned by parents who died of HIV/AIDS. It means the unemployment rate is 70 percent, people sleep on cardboard and dirt, and the stench of feces is unforgettable. It means no running water, no paved roads, no police protection.

Photographer Josh Hester of Springfield, IL, visited Mathare Valley last year, documenting the place for Bright Hope International, a Christian-based aid organization. Accompanying Hester was a small group of people from his own church, Hope Evangelical Free Church, which has a partnership with a Mathare Valley congregation.

Hester, 31, had never seen anything like this – the squalor, but also the love. During his six-day visit, he was invited to attend a home church service in a tiny tin shack. It turned out to be one of the great moments of his own spiritual life.

"The intensity of the worship I witnessed, the level of faith expressed, the testimonials, the extensive time spent praying for those who are sick, their love for each other – I didn't know what faith really looked like until then," he recalls.

"It was humbling to see. They have more faith than I have in anything in my life. I felt immature among them."

After he returned to the U.S., Hester exhibited his photos to help raise money for the Mathare church, which heroically operates two schools and an orphanage. Some of his photos are featured in this *Reflections* issue.

Struck by the surreal extremes of the slum he saw in far-away Kenya, Hester came home convinced that such poverty can no longer be dismissed as irrelevant to our lives over here. Dismissals are an excuse and an illusion.

"We tend to see ourselves as separated from that world and say 'Africa is far away, and they're just not like us,' " he says. "But we underestimate the power we have as individuals. We are not helpless. There's a lot we can do to improve conditions there. Suddenly Kenya isn't so far away anymore."

Images from his time there stay with him. He visited a woman dying of malaria. He witnessed a person hit and killed by a car.

"When I came back I was impatient. Our culture conditions us to devalue what's really important – relationships, family – and to take for granted what we have, the food and shelter."

Hester had come face to face with a human mystery. Poverty is an outrage and a calamity. It is also an enigmatic force. It can change the sojourner it confronts. Poverty forces an indelicate moment of truth that flowers with each encounter between rich and poor. It asks: Will I act? Will I, this time, admit this impoverished person is in fact a human being? Will I acknowledge my connection to this person's dire condition? Can I honestly return to the old ways?

This theme is a stubborn gravitational force in the Bible. The story of the rich young man, the widow's mite, the pearl of great price, the feeding of the 5,000, the blessings on the poor in the Beatitudes – so many situations clarify a paradoxical moment of revelation: I find my own humanity by somehow touching the untouchable.

Photographer Bethany Mahan, 39, senses this spiritual drama in the faces of young people she befriends on the streets of Spokane, WA, her hometown. Working at a downtown street ministry some years ago, she got to know their stories, and they came to trust her. She saw a spark of nobility in them even if society had written them off. She started taking their pictures in order to testify to that overlooked dignity.

"I was looking at people and seeing their beauty," she says. "There is more to people than their poverty."

Our issue includes some of her images from Spokane as well as from her recent visit to Haiti. Her work was featured last year in a "Faces of Poverty" exhibition at Gonzaga University in Spokane.

"We have such prejudices against people we don't understand," she says. "We really need to look at our own poverty."

A paradox lurks inside the rich world's turbulent relationship to poverty: the indictment persists daily that the west's glittering materialism and noisy sense of entitlement have made us spiritual paupers who have lost our way. Poet Tomas Tranströmer once wrote,

We made an effort, showing our homes.
The visitor thought: you live well.
The slum must be inside you.

Stirred by our century's bold hope of eliminating poverty from human experience, the writers contributing to this *Reflections* identify many of the world's encounters with the dynamic of poverty, and they share their moments of truth.

CREDITS

ARTWORK

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POETRY

Hayden Carruth (1921-1998) was born in Waterbury, CT, and had a long career as a poet and critic. He spent many years in Vermont, won national awards for his work, and was known for writing about themes of political action and rural poverty.

Cornelius Eady, born in Rochester, NY., is an award-winning poet whose books include *Hardheaded Weather: New and Selected Poems*, *Victims of the Latest Dance Craze* and *Brutal Imagination*. He teaches at the University of Notre Dame and is co-founder of Cave Canem, an organization in Brooklyn that sponsors retreats, prizes, and workshops for African American poets.

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Lunch distributed to school children at Mathare Community School, Kenya – photo by Josh Hester ►

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