

Practicing a Distinctive Christian Development

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Introduction

The country has been devastated by war. Cities and towns are in ruins. Many have fled as refugees. Others had been forcibly taken by the victorious army for torture, interrogation and servitude. All the infrastructure of the country is badly damaged or gone. Roads damaged, agriculture disrupted, crops destroyed. Central and local government functions are crippled and unable to operate in any cohesive way. Famine, despair and death on all sides. Meanwhile global politics have moved on. The country is not significant in the world scene, and so is abandoned in this damaged and fragile state many years. The people are disheartened, and unable to organise themselves to do anything about the state they are in. They are divided by tribal and clan loyalties, and encroached on by the peoples of neighbouring nations, who see the opportunity to exploit them.

Into this scene comes a man stirred by God to a strong sense of compassion. He weeps at the news, and spends days in prayer and fasting. Then he gets to work. He raises funds and donations of goods in kind. He enlists the support of the government of the country where he is living, and he goes to work with a massive rebuilding and development programme.

Keep this story in mind, because we will come back to it as we go along.

1. Best Practice Principles in Development

My commission today is to talk about the distinctives of Christian initiated development, but I want to start by talking not about Christian development, but about the requirements of any development. In sectors such as medicine, engineering, economics or business there is a term used called 'Best Practice'. This refers to a set of agreed core principles that define the professional standards that need to be met by those carrying out any activity in that sector. What are the core issues in development that define 'Best Practice' for us?

1.1 Do No Harm

There is a novel called *The Sparrow*¹ which tells the fictional story of the first missionary journey to another planet. Astronomers tracking radio signals from space hear what has to be music, and identify it as coming from a distant planet. A group of Christians organise to be the first to land on the planet. They make contact with an intelligent species near the site of their landing, and settle in to learn the language and culture of the planet. Everything seems to be going well, until suddenly and inexplicably civil war erupts around them. Some of the missionaries are killed, some taken captive, and some flee with the 'people' that they have been studying.

It is only much later that they discover that they were the cause of the war. The simple act of planting a vegetable garden for themselves by where they

have been living upsets the political and economic balances between the species that live on the planet and sparks a genocidal war.

With the best of intentions they have in fact been the cause of the death of many thousands.

“Sentiment and good intentions are not enough. We must scrutinize our actions to see if they achieve the ends we intend. If they do not achieve our ends, we risk the perverse circumstance of damaging the people we intend to help, even as we seek personal solidarity with their suffering.”²

1.2 The Values of Development

The following words describe some of the VALUES of Development.

Freedom	Progress	Charity
Equality	Self sufficiency	Compassion
Justice	Self reliance	Human dignity
Liberation	Sustainability	Empowerment
Peace	Environment	Love

Amartya Sen, the Nobel prize winning Indian economist writes of ‘Development As Freedom’³, and sees this as the most fundamental value that should be the foundation of any sort of development. What are the most fundamental values that ought to be behind what we do? What are the values that we want to promote and build in the people that we are working with? We need to be asking ourselves “How does what we are doing (or planning to do) contribute to each of these values?”

- Take a few moments to think about projects that you know, and how any of these values are demonstrated in those projects.

1.3 The Aims of Development

There are several ways of listing the aims of development:

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Extreme poverty & Hunger 2. Education 3. Gender 4. Child health/mortality 5. Maternal health 6. Major diseases 7. Environment 8. Partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve living conditions and welfare • Productive economic capacity • Employment opportunities • Vulnerable groups • Gender • Cultural development • Environmental care • Transfer of skills and knowledge
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Social	Community cohesion, peace, unity, social action
Education	Adult literacy, children's education
Health	Primary health care, sanitation, major diseases
Economic	Income generation, employment, Trade, micro finance, international economic development

They are all different ways of listing much the same things. The first of these lists is of course the Millennium Development Goals or MDGs. The bottom one groups the issues into four categories, based on what are seen as some of the core issues for each.

The question here is "What needs to come first?"

- **Social goals come first:** When communities can learn to live and work together they can solve all their other problems.

In the 1980s I was involved with a project in Chandpur, Bangladesh. The project was based around the production of jute handicrafts. The women making these were formed into village groups, and were required to put a portion of their earnings into a group savings scheme. When the savings reached a reasonable level we then encouraged them to think of projects that they could use the money for. In one village many of the men were rickshaw pullers in the town. Each day they had to hire their rickshaws from an owner. Half the day would be spent earning the money to pay the hire fee, before they could start to earn the money they needed to support their families. The suggestion was made that some of the men could take loans from the savings scheme to buy their own rickshaws. The money they would have paid to hire a rickshaw would then be used to pay off the loan. This suggestion caused a panic in the village and each of the women withdrew her own savings from the scheme. Why? Because they didn't trust each other enough to believe that those who got the first loans would ever repay them! Each family ate better for a few days, but then there was nothing left of the savings scheme. We had to spend some time building social cohesion and trust before the micro-finance part of the scheme could work.

- **Education and health come first.** When the children are educated, and the community is healthy, then they will be able to sort out all their other problems. Historically many Christian projects have started from this point, giving priority to the setting up of schools and hospitals. Christian schools and hospitals are rightly famous in many countries for the quality of service that they give.
- **Economic issues come first:** When people have a stable income they will send their children to school; they will eat more healthy diets and organise their own medical treatment. People know what they want to do and need to do. They just don't have the resources. If the development project will provide access to resources then they will do the rest.

What do you think? Which of these needs to come first? Think about the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

A holistic approach requires that all of these issues are dealt with together, but inevitably one or another tends to get priority. Think for a moment about the projects that you are involved with. Which of these approaches is getting priority, and why?

Each approach has been tried. An important point for us is that the current trend from government level funding is to give priority to the third approach – that is economic development has the greatest priority. Increasingly funding will be available to projects that can show clear economic goals. This is seen as a sustainability issue.

2. Christian Initiated Development – Why?

Having thought about the basic principles of development we are in a position to consider Christian development and what makes that different or special. Using the same framework as I have laid out in the first part of this discussion, we will start by looking at the values of Christian development.

- When you looked at the list of development values above, were there any that you felt were wrong, or that should not be included in a Christian initiated development project?

Why do Christians feel a need to get involved in development activities? My wife and I arrived in Bangladesh as young missionaries in 1979. We attended the local church and began to get to know the church members. One of our first responses to the issues of poverty was to help a man from the church to buy a small boat and fishing nets, so that he could support his family by fishing.

Why did we do this? I want to say that it began from a sense of compassion, and that compassion needs to be the starting point for any Christian development. Compassion, not gospel, not evangelism, not mission. There are many places in the stories of Jesus where it says that He saw the crowds and had compassion on them; He saw the demon possessed and the sick and had compassion on them. He saw the people needing direction and taught them.

Reason 1: Compassion
Jesus had compassion

- Matt 14:14;
- Matt 20:34;
- Mark 6:34

What does this word “compassion” mean? In some of the modern translations of the Bible it says Jesus “felt sorry for them”. The dictionary definitions give ‘sympathy’, ‘concern’, ‘concern for the sufferings of others’. The word comes from the Latin word meaning ‘to suffer with’.

In the story that I began with, the man reacted with compassion to the news of the people’s condition. He wept when he heard the stories of what was happening.

There are many biblical reasons to show compassion for the poor. In the story of creation and we read

*So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;*

Reason 2: Identity
Made in the image of God

male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)

What is the “image of God” that is in us as human beings? At its most basic there is something special in each of us humans that is from God. Regardless of our race, our gender, our cultures, our languages, our poverty or our wealth. Even regardless of our religion. In every human being is something special from God. This is a reason to feel compassion for anyone who is suffering, who is sick, who is in poverty, who is being exploited by others. In every human person, whatever their condition, we have to see the image of God.

As we move forward into the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy we find the laws given to the people of Israel through Moses. These include an enormous amount about the responsibility of God’s people to care for the poor, both for their own poor, and for the stranger who is living among them. Again and again this is linked to Israel’s own experience of slavery: “You have known what it is to be slaves. Now that you are free, you must care for each other and for the foreigner among you”. The laws of Moses acknowledged that there would always be poor people in society, and laid down clear provisions on how they were to be treated so that they could survive with dignity.

Reason 3: Empathy

- The Old Testament “Books of the Law”:
- Exodus
 - Leviticus
 - Numbers
 - Deuteronomy

The presence of these requirements in the legal constitution of the nation of Israel highlights a slightly separate issue which is the legal responsibility for governments to care for the weakest and the poorest in their nation, and the political responsibility of Christians to exercise leadership in promoting and advocating for the legal rights of those who are vulnerable and powerless. This leadership is important for both those of us who live in the wealthy countries, and for those who live in the poor countries. Micah Challenge is a Christian organisation that has taken up this call to advocacy.

Reason 4: Ethical & Legal Responsibility

To again return to the story I began with, the man of God began his campaign by going to the highest legal authorities of the country where he was living, which was the wealthiest and most powerful nation of the time, and enlisting their support. When he got to the country for his project he had to spend a lot of time overcoming the resistance of the local authorities (haven’t we all experienced this at times!). As the project gained momentum the establishment of law and order in the community was one of the issues that they had to deal with. Corruption and the exploitation of the poor even within that local community was a challenge, and an issue where he took a strong line.

Jim Wallis of the Sojourners Community in the United States says “Our involvement in the world of politics is always based in and motivated by the way that it affects the lives of real people, and especially poor people. We need to be focused on those who are left out and left behind, not who is up or down in politics and the polls.”⁴ Effective leadership and good governance is the topic for one of our Focus Groups, and will be discussed in detail there.

By the time we get to the books of the prophets there is a new dimension to the issue of poverty and justice. The prophets speak very strongly against the exploitation of the poor. Isaiah goes so far as to declare that God will not accept the worship of those who are exploiting the poor.

**Reason 5: Spiritual Integrity
“This is true worship”**

³ *The people ask,
Why should we fast if the Lord never notices? Why should we
go without food if he pays no attention?*

*The Lord says to them,
The truth is that at the same time you fast, you pursue your
own interests and oppress your workers.⁴ Your fasting makes you
violent, and you quarrel and fight. Do you think this kind of fasting
will make me listen to your prayers?⁵ When you fast, you make
yourselves suffer; you bow your heads low like a blade of grass and
spread out sackcloth and ashes to lie on. Is that what you call
fasting? Do you think I will be pleased with that?*

⁶ *The kind of fasting I want is this: Remove the chains of
oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free.⁷
Share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the
homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear,
and do not refuse to help your own relatives.*

⁸ *Then my favour will shine on you like the morning sun, and your
wounds will be quickly healed. I will always be with you to save
you; my presence will protect you on every side.⁹ When you pray, I
will answer you. When you call to me, I will respond.*

*If you put an end to oppression, to every gesture of contempt, and
to every evil word;¹⁰ if you give food to the hungry and satisfy those
who are in need, then the darkness around you will turn to the
brightness of noon.¹¹ And I will always guide you and satisfy you
with good things. I will keep you strong and well. You will be like a
garden that has plenty of water, like a spring of water that never
goes dry.¹² Your people will rebuild what has long been in ruins,
building again on the old foundations. You will be known as the
people who rebuilt the walls, who restored the ruined houses.*

Isaiah 58:3-12

This makes the work that we do for the poor into a part of our worship of God! Acting to set people free from oppression and injustice; giving food, housing and clothing to the poor are acts of true worship that will bring the blessing of God. This is not something that is in the secular list of development values, but is something that drives us to some of those other values – justice, peace, equality and freedom.

When we come to the New Testament we start with the story of Jesus. We can begin with the *Magnificat*, the song that Mary sang when she met her relative Elizabeth, and the two women rejoiced over the babies that they were to have. Mary praises God who “gives the hungry good things to eat, and sends the rich away with nothing” (Luke 1:53). In fact in the Gospel of Luke the whole of Jesus’ ministry is framed around his ministry to the poor and the oppressed. It is possible to find poverty references in every chapter of Luke’s Gospel.

Reason 6: Following the example of Jesus

Jesus himself commences his ministry with the words from Isaiah 61

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free the oppressed
and announce that the time has come
when the Lord will save his people. (Luke 4:18,19)*

There has been a tendency at times for Christians to ‘spiritualise’ these references, and to try to say that these are talking about spiritual poverty, spiritual captivity, spiritual blindness, spiritual oppression, not physical, economic, political. There are some grounds for this in the account of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s Gospel. Here Jesus says “Blessed are the poor in spirit...”. However even here, if you read down further through what Jesus says the economic, physical and political issues are still important and Jesus is very clearly calling his followers to a radical and new interpretation of the narrow requirements of the law. He talks about those who show mercy to others, those who make peace, dealing with disputes, dealing with anger, faithfulness in marriage, and giving to the poor. It cannot be limited to a spiritual interpretation!

The Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 5:1ff

This becomes clear when we come to the story of the Good Samaritan. The context of this is a teacher of the law who asks Jesus how he can receive eternal life. Jesus turns the question back to him, and says “You are a teacher. What does the Law (meaning the law of Moses) say?” The answer which comes out of the teacher’s understanding of the Old Testament laws as given by Moses is that the most important commandment is love God; and alongside it that you must love your neighbour as yourself. Loving your neighbour as yourself is not something that Jesus added to the law, it is what the teacher acknowledges is already there. The question the teacher then has is how to define who is a neighbour. When Jesus is asked to define who is the neighbour we are responsible for he tells the story of the Good Samaritan. This is a story of helping the person who is in need across national, cultural and religious divisions.

The story of the Good Samaritan
Luke 10:25-37

Reason 7: Bringing The Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God on Earth. When we pray the Lord’s prayer we are asking for God’s Kingdom to be established here on earth, for God’s will to be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven. We are not just praying about a future kingdom in heaven, but about what is happening here on earth in our lifetime. God’s Kingdom is a place of justice and equity, a place without hunger or pain, a place where everyone is able to have what they need. We don’t just pray for it, we work towards it! [also Isaiah 65 – new heaven and new earth]

The Lord’s Prayer
Our Father who is in heaven,
Holy be your name
Your kingdom come
Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil
For yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever Amen
Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4

Faith and Works. One of the criticisms that is sometimes made against Christian development projects by other Christians is that they are a ‘social Gospel’, a Gospel of works rather than faith. The fear is that in some way doing projects to help the poor gets away from the core Gospel message that we are saved by faith alone, not by works.

This is to confuse Christianity with other religions. In other religions people do ‘good works’ in order to earn merit or salvation. The Gospel message is that it is not possible to earn our salvation by good works. The best of our good works are still not enough. Salvation is by faith alone – the key message of Martin Luther’s reform. So, the Christian message is that we do good works not to earn salvation, but because we already have the certainty of salvation. Our faith must result in compassion and in caring concern for

James 2:14-18
“Show me how anyone can have faith without actions. I will show you my faith by my actions”.

those around us. Saint Paul himself says “I went to the gentiles and said ‘Stop sinning and turn to God! Then prove what you have done by the way you live’” (Acts 26:20). James is very clear about it: “Faith that doesn’t lead us to do good deeds is all alone and dead!” (James 2:17) John’s first Epistle repeats the same message:

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3:17-18).

This is not a social Gospel that avoids faith. It is a holistic faith that reaches out to demonstrate the grace of God to the vulnerable. If we go back again to the parable of the Good Samaritan, the commandment is “Love God and love your neighbour”. The teacher of the law knew that he couldn’t stop with just “Love God” – he had to also include “love your neighbour as yourself” in order to have a full statement of what God requires of us.

We will come back to issues of the interactions of faith and our projects again later.

- These are some of the Christian values that give us the reasons why we do development. Stop and think again about how these are both the same and different to the list of secular values for development. What differences might these make to how we do development?

Poverty and Justice Bible

There are many hundreds of references to God’s concern for issues of poverty and justice throughout the Bible. World Vision and the Bible Society have published an edition which highlights over 2000 verses.

The Christian values of development:

- Compassion & Empathy
- Respect for the ‘image of God’ in all humans
- The ethical requirement of the laws of Moses
- True worship is to act on behalf of the poor
- The command to love God and love your neighbour as yourself
- Bringing the Kingdom of God on earth

3. Christian Initiated Development – Principles

3.1 Participatory

In Matthew 20, when the two blind men were brought to Jesus, he asks them “What do you want me to do for you?” Surely it is obvious – they are blind and they want to see! Why did Jesus have to ask the question? Our Southern Baptist friends in Bangladesh had a great project to take young men away from begging on the streets of Dhaka. They would take them and give them training as carpenters, and give them a set of tools so they could work instead of begging. Driving through Dhaka with R T Buckley one day he saw one of these men again begging on the street corner. RT asked him what had happened? The answer was – he had given his tools to his cousin and had come back to begging as a job that he preferred!

Aung San Suu Kyi, the famous advocate for democracy in Myanmar/Burma is reported to have said "I am such an admirer of Victor Hugo because he understood that true revolution begins within yourself. So we have to make those that are not yet committed to the path of reform understand that a revolution from within themselves is the best way to improve the situation in the country." This is equally true in development. The change has to begin within the communities that we are wanting to help. Until they can begin to answer the question of what they want none of our projects are going to have any lasting effect.

Linked with participation must also be a principle of freedom of choice. A part of being created as humans is being created with the freedom to choose. Adam and Eve had the ability to choose between good and bad,

³⁰ Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”³¹ The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”

³² Jesus stopped and called them. “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

³³ “Lord,” they answered, “we want our sight.”

³⁴ Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

Matthew 20:30-34

obedience and disobedience. Since then God has not taken that freedom away from us. Faith is based on the fact that we have this freedom. If there was no freedom of choice, then there would be no faith. In our projects we must ensure that we do not take from people the freedom to choose!

3.2 Church based

As Baptist agencies we all start from a church base. Churches have an enormous advantage – we have branches in every community. Our people are there living in the community. Our people are part of what is happening, and so we have a great start to a participatory approach.

As local congregations become the real manifestation of Christ in their local communities they are able to have the truest impact on individual and social life. We are truly “In the thick of it”, which is the title of a study by Tearfund on “why the church is an essential partner for sustainable development in the world’s poorest communities”.

A vital first step is acknowledging the scale of the church’s involvement. The church is one of the few movements which are both global and local. Through its larger organisational structures, it is robust enough to support national health services. And its influence is such that it can mobilise hundreds of thousands of people worldwide to lobby on issues such as climate change and international debt relief.

And yet much of the church’s work remains hidden and undocumented. Outside communities where it has a presence, its work at the grassroots is virtually invisible. Tearfund has worked with and through churches from across the denominations for 40 years. We believe that the church’s greatest potential lies in local congregations rooted in the local community and culture.

The local church is the poor – its members share in the suffering. As the hub of many communities, it endures even when other community structures collapse, outstaying even the most dogged NGO. And it has vast reserves of motivated volunteers keen to respond to the needs around them.

Crucially, its root-and-branch approach to tackling poverty means it meets poor people’s physical needs and offers spiritual support to restore their self-esteem, their dignity, their hope.⁵

3.3 Integral Mission

Integral Mission is a bringing together of the issues of faith and development. Micah Network is an organisation that many of you will know (some are going on from here to a Micah Network conference). Micah Network has produced a definition of integral mission as follows:

Integral mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we

call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.

If we ignore the world we betray the word of God, which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God we have nothing to bring to the world. Justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together. As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task.⁶

Compassion requires that we do development regardless of whether people are coming to faith or not. Projects must be open to all, regardless of their religious beliefs, and must not be used as an inducement to conversion. Generally this is a condition of our registration with the governments of the countries where we work (if we are to access secular funding sources, then it will also be a funding condition from the donors). However it is also good faith practice – converts who are bought with project funding or activities will not be ‘true’ believers! When the project ends the converts may also move on...

One argument put forward is that when people change their faith they become more open to development, and so conversion can be seen as the first and best step in development... But this raises lots of issues and dangers. There must not be any use of pressure or inducements, or any suggestion that the benefits of the project are only available to those who are prepared to convert. Compassion requires that we do development regardless of whether people are going to come to faith. c.f. 10 lepers healed, only one comes back to thank Jesus (Luke 17:11-19).

Ten Men with Leprosy

¹⁷Jesus asked, “Weren’t ten men healed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸Why was this foreigner the only one who came back to thank God?”
¹⁹Then Jesus told the man, “You may get up and go. Your faith has made you well.”
Luke 17:11-19

Bringing evangelism and development together raises some critical issues that have to be dealt with carefully and with sensitivity. These are the topic of one of our focus groups, so I will not go into more details here.

4. New Directions for Christian Development

4.1 Sustainability

My parents were missionaries. I was born in Egypt, and spent much of my childhood in Eritrea. For one period in Eritrea my father was sent to a remote village to carry out an extensive building project. He built a school, a clinic, and a large storage barn where the village people would be able to bring a portion of their crop each year to store it up for the bad years.

The school, the clinic and the storage barn were all completed. Around that time Eritrea was hit with an independence war as they sought freedom from Ethiopia. It was to be a long and bitter war. Within three years of completing the building project the village was forced to move. The buildings were stripped of all their fittings and abandoned. In a very short time there was nothing left to show for the project.

That story happened because of politics and war. However there are many projects where the question can legitimately be asked “What is going to be

left when the project finishes? In 5 years? In 10 years?" How much is the project creating a dependence in the participants, so that they expect the project to always continue?

This is the question of *sustainability*. There is coming to be a new emphasis on sustainability as donors get tired of giving over and over again to the same cause, the same group of recipients, and finding that at the end of the project they are no better off than they were at the start. As Christians we need to take a serious look at the sustainability of our projects.

Micro-credit was supposed to be one of the solutions to the problem of sustainability. If credit is available the project beneficiary will take a loan, start a small business and very quickly become self supporting... well, that was the theory, anyway. In reality, as we all know, loans are taken for a lot of other purposes, not just for income generating ideas. House repairs, medical emergency, school fees, or even just to pay off another loan from another source. Even when they are used for income generating purposes, there are many failures. There are some people who just do not have any business sense, and who will never be able to make a business idea work.

We rejoice in the times when a micro-credit based business succeeds, and we all use those examples in our publicity materials, but we know that those examples are a small percentage of the stories. Sometimes we have to look at a larger business model that will provide wider employment for the community.

4.2 Economic Development

The current trend to give a higher priority to economic development is one that sometimes raises concerns and suspicion for Christian organisations. There are two parables that Jesus told that might seem to contradict each other:

There was once a rich man who had land which bore good crops. ¹⁷ He began to think to himself, I don't have a place to keep all my crops. What can I do? ¹⁸ This is what I will do, he told himself; I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, where I will store the grain and all my other goods. ¹⁹ Then I will say to myself, Lucky man! You have all the good things you need for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself. (Luke 12:16-19)

This is the growth economy, the capitalist dream. The man is a success! He has done all the right things by the capitalist model. There are lots of good examples around of businesses doing exactly this.

However we know what Jesus said about this man:

²⁰ But God said to him, You fool! This very night you will have to give up your life; then who will get all these things you have kept for yourself?

²¹ And Jesus concluded, This is how it is with those who pile up riches for themselves but are not rich in God's sight.

As Christians we take this on board as a warning to be wary of economic growth models of development.

The contrasting parable is the parable of the talents:

A man going on a journey, ... called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more.

¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.'

²¹ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

²² "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.'

²³ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

²⁴ "Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

²⁶ "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. (Matthew 25:14-27)

By contrast with the first, this is a parable of economic investment. The men who invest the money wisely are praised, and rewarded for their achievement. This is not a story of micro-credit. The traditional translation is 'talents' – 5 talents, 2 talents and 1 talent, which might sound like micro-credit, but the 'bag of gold' translation of the Good News Bible starts to give a better idea of the scope of this investment. Scholars tell us that "a talent was worth about 20 years of a day labourer's wage."⁷ We are talking about investments of hundreds of thousands of dollars in today's terms!

This may seem to contradict the first story of the foolish rich man, who was condemned for multiplying his investments into ever bigger store rooms!

Those who are wary of growth models look at the man who was given only one talent. When he says "I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed" some consider that he is describing the capitalist system, and that he has good reason to refuse to participate in the system. The master in the story is not a good man, but a politician travelling overseas to gain more power to exploit his own people. Those who follow this line see the parable more as a warning against those who use their wealth to exploit the poor, and not as a model of wise investment.

However I think we can clearly see that the foolishness of the man in the first parable was in storing his wealth up for his own leisure and pleasure. By contrast the servants in the parable of the talents are praised for the wise use of wealth. Wealth in itself is not inherently evil. The question is in how it is used. The parable of the Talents in Matthew is followed immediately by the story of the separating of the sheep and the goats, where one group is condemned for their lack of care for the poor, and the other group is told that ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ (Matthew 25:40). I don’t think that it is an accident that these two stories are put together. The wise investment is used for the care of ‘the least of these brothers and sisters’.

Matthew 25:40
“whatever you did for one of the least of these”

I don’t believe that we need to be afraid of the economic growth model for development. Rather I believe that we need to be discovering how to use it wisely as a tool to help the poor.

One of the focus groups will be looking at the business investment model for development, which looks at market based approaches and offers one path to sustainability.

5. Conclusions

The scene in the story that I started with could be in a number of countries around the world today, but in fact it is the story of Nehemiah from the Old Testament. Nehemiah was a Jew, and going back to help his own people. As has happened so often in the course of history, the small land of Israel had been caught up in global politics. The country torn apart by war, the people scattered as refugees and exiles, those who remained immobilised by poverty.

*Beside the rivers of Babylon
we thought about Jerusalem,
and we sat down and cried. (Psalm 137:1)*

Wait a minute! These refugees were living in the richest and most powerful city of the world of their time. This was the equivalent of living in Washington, USA. Many of them had achieved good jobs. Nehemiah had a job that put him in daily contact with the most powerful man in the world – equivalent to being the chief of staff of the White House! Beside the grandeur of Babylon, Jerusalem was the devastated capital of a third world poverty stricken state.

And yet Nehemiah wept for Jerusalem. He prayed and he left the comfort of the palace in Babylon for the ruins of Jerusalem. God stirred in him a deep compassion for his own people, and a drive to lead them in rebuilding their city and their nation.

That too is a scene that is repeated in modern day situations. In 2009/2010 BANZAid was involved in the building of a new village school in Samoa following the devastation of the September 2009 tsunami. The initiative for that project came from Samoans living in New Zealand. They were concerned for their own people back in Samoa, and they took a leading role in getting that project through to completion. The school was built, not by contractors coming from outside, but by the village people themselves.

BANZAid provided the materials, but the village built the school themselves.

Here then is a good place to conclude our session today. We can provide the resources and the ideas, but in the end, for development to be effective it is not something that can be done ‘to’ or ‘for’ people; it has to be done ‘with’ them. In the end we come back to that vision of a church that is in amongst and a part of the people that we are working to help. This is the most powerful distinctive of Christian initiated development.

Profile – Paul Thompson

Paul is the Manager of BANZAid. BANZAid is the aid and development department of NZBMS, the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society.

Paul is the son and grandson of missionaries. His grandparents served in China, and his parents in Egypt and Eritrea. Paul himself was a missionary with the New Zealand Baptists in Bangladesh for 20 years. He was based in Chandpur, working with the local church and training village pastors. He was also Director of the Christian Literature Centre, the publishing programme of the NZBMS, and in the final years of his time in Bangladesh was team leader for the New Zealand Baptist team.

Paul returned to New Zealand with his family in 1999, and worked in the national office of Scripture Union NZ for 5 years in promotions, fundraising and as deputy national director. In 2006 Paul returned to study and in 2008 completed a Masters in Development Studies from Victoria University of Wellington.

Paul and his wife Adrienne live in Wellington, and are members of the Wellington Central Baptist Church. They have four adult children who have all left home but continue to live in Wellington city.

¹ *The Sparrow* by Mary Doria Russell. Ballantine Books 1997

² Claar, Victor (2012-01-31). *Fair Trade? Its Prospects as a Poverty Solution*

³ Sen, Amartya 1999. *Development as Freedom*. Anchor Books, Random House

⁴ Sojourners email, July 2012. Sojourners is a Christian organization in the United States committed to a “biblical call to social justice, inspiring hope and building a movement to transform individuals, communities, the church and the world”. See <http://sojo.net/>

⁵ *In The Thick of It* Tearfund 2009.

⁶ See www.micahnetwork.org/integral-mission

⁷ <http://www.biblegateway.com/> Matthew 25 NIV version footnote