

4-1-2021

## Book Review: Undivided Witness: Followers of Jesus, Community Development, and Least Reached Communities Edited by David Greenlee, Mark Galpin, and Paul Bendor-Samuel

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### Recommended Citation

Bahena, D. (2021). Book Review: Undivided Witness: Followers of Jesus, Community Development, and Least Reached Communities Edited by David Greenlee, Mark Galpin, and Paul Bendor-Samuel. *Great Commission Research Journal*, 13(1), 91-94. Retrieved from <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/gcrj/vol13/iss1/7>

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## **Book Review**

### *Undivided Witness: Followers of Jesus, Community Development, and Least-Reached Communities*

Edited by David Greenlee, Mark Galpin, and Paul Bendor-Samuel.

Oxford, United Kingdom: Regnum Book International, 2020

218 pages, Kindle.

USD \$15.99

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In *Undivided Witness* the authors explore the intersection between the Community Development (CD) and the Vibrant Communities of Jesus Followers (VCJF) that serve among the least reached in a conceptual and practical way (p. 14). This book joins the debate to overcome the dividing wall between evangelism and social action. The authors show us how a correct understanding of the nature of the mission and the Kingdom of God can lead us to bear undivided witness. The church is seen as an essential actor to achieve integral transformation.

In Chapter 1, Jonathan William lays the foundation for understanding the Kingdom of God and appreciating the relationship between CD and the rise of VCJF. The concept of the Kingdom of God is rooted in Scripture. Salvation points to Shalom, a “right, healed and restored relationship on multiple levels” (p. 39). This way, the VCFJ have a special place in the integral transformation since the church is the sign of the Kingdom of God

and not the development agencies. In Chapter 2, David Greenlee explores how people enter the Kingdom of God and how this affects the way we do ministry. Later, in Chapter 3, Rizalina (Sally) Ababa helps us understand the integral mission is living our following of Jesus "in an undivided way in every aspect of life" (p. 61).

In Chapter 4, Gabriel Markus invites us to view our task in light of God's glory. There is no room to prioritize between proclamation and compassion; both are for the glory of God. In his reflection essay, Mark Galpin addresses the ethical dimension of evangelism in the context of CD. In Chapter 2, Greenlee warned us that we cannot ignore that CD workers are in a position of power. For Galpin, many mistakes are made by ignoring the context or having a limited understanding of God's kingdom. In Chapter 5, Holly Stewart helps us become aware of the spiritual conflict in the transformation process.

Robert Sluka invites us to see creation care as worship, witness, and obedience in Chapter 6. The Kingdom of God aims at the reconciliation and restoration of all creation. In Chapter 7, Mark Galpin argues for the VCJF. Real transformation occurs when experiencing freedom in Christ and is only possible if the vision of planting churches is included, since they contribute to discipleship to consolidate the transformation. Scott Breslin presents an excellent reflection, in Chapter 8, of how worker CDs are accountable to seven stakeholders: the affected people, the host Government, the donors, the international development sectors who have developed proper practice criteria, their organization, their conscience, and for the faith-based NGOs they consider God as the primary stakeholder.

A second reflection essay points to the issue of corruption. Martin Allaby mentioned the Bible denounces corruption, bribery, denial of justice, oppression, obtaining wealth by unjust means, and dishonesty (p. 147). In the least-reached context, the church is invited to bear a good witness, to pray, and to influence society and be ready to make a prophetic denunciation. In Chapter 9, Andrea C. Waldorf addresses seven shared principles of community development and church planting. Rosemary Hack, in Chapter 10, helps us understand who the least reached are. Some are hidden

and separated not only from us but also from their society by hostility, danger, stigma, poverty, or complex webs of sin. They are less reached because the followers of Jesus do not live among them or have not seen them.

A third reflection essay is also dedicated to the theme of the least reached. It is an anonymous testimony that raises questions: Who are the least reached? Why are there least-reached people? Why are they not visible? Whose fault is it? The author warns us, "if we choose to ignore disability, illness, street children, refugees or migrants, we will continue to miss out on great foci of society" (p. 185). Paul Bendor-Samuels closes the book with a call to bear an undivided witness.

I want to highlight two significant contributions from this book. In each chapter there are stories from many communities. They challenge us to pay attention to our mission contexts so that they are the source of our theological and missional reflection. The second is the emphasis on trying to destroy the wall that divides evangelism and social action. For William, there is no distinction between verbal proclamation, physical help, or miraculous healing; all are expressions of the Kingdom. For Ababa, there is an unintegral approach when only the physical dimension is recognized or when one wants to share the gospel without recognizing the physical needs. For Markus, seeing the task from the perspective of God's glory does not leave space to prioritize between proclamation and compassion; both are important. Sadly, Waldorf mentioned, "our ministry and our lives could be testier to those around us when we live as whole people presenting a complete gospel" (p. 155). All this for the purpose of encouraging church planters to see CD not only as "a platform but as an integral feature of truly holistic mission" (p. 25). Likewise, it is a wake-up call so that the CD does not forget or reject the spiritual dimension in the transformation. Only then can it be possible to bear an undivided witness.

I would like to make two observations. The authors argue in favor of the VCJF in the integral transformation. While I recognize several authors repeat their calling to serve regardless of whether people accept Jesus or not, I wonder, should the Christian values of an NGO be evaluated only in the light of people's conversion? These

questions lead me to the second observation. Galpin, in his reflection observes that, for some, an integral mission is to do social action and proclamation at the same time (p. 83). This creates tension in the people who serve in the context of suffering. In these contexts, verbal proclamation is easily coercive.

Overall, *Undivided Witness: Followers of Jesus, Community Development, and Least-Reached Communities* challenges us to rethink our concept of integral mission, and to bear a complete witness in the places that God has called us to serve. This book is a must-read for all missionaries and leaders of mission organizations.