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Book Review

Development in Mission: A Guide for Transforming Global Poverty and Ourselves

By Monty Lynn, Rob Gailey, and Derran Reese
Abilene Christian University Press, 2021
269 pages
US\$20.99

Reviewed by Nathaniel (Than) Veltman, who currently serves as Mission Scholar in Missiology and Community Development with United World Mission's Theological Education Initiative at the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

What makes development *transformational*? And does transformation include the giver as much as the receiver? Distilling insights to answer these questions is the focus of *Development in Mission*. In this collaborative work by Monty Lynn, Rob Gailey, and Derran Reese, readers are presented with “fresh perspectives on holistic mission and transformational development” (28). The end goal is a contribution to the transformation of missionaries, relief and development workers, congregations and individuals, primarily from the Global North, who aspire to alleviate global poverty. Principles and practices rooted in a biblical understanding of holistic mission are offered as a guide for those seeking to engage transformational development around the world.

The book consists of three parts. Part One focuses on “deepening understanding” of mission and transformational development. In Chapter 1, the authors issue a call to balance the blessing of giving and receiving, acknowledging that historically the poor are limited to the receiving end. Instead, the rich should not “keep all of the blessings [of giving] for

[them]selves” (25) and learn to both experience the blessings of receiving while simultaneously allowing others to experience the blessing of giving. This is followed in Chapter 2 by an examination of holistic mission and *missio Dei*. The authors note that the mission of God extends to all of creation, and they highlight the central role of Christ’s work of salvation. They also present an argument for including poverty alleviation in holistic mission. Part 1 concludes in Chapter 3 with a consideration of “what is unique, if anything, about *Christian* efforts to care for vulnerable populations and mitigate poverty” (64). The authors suggest that the end of Christian transformational development is God and the means of getting there is the “way of Jesus” (71-75). Such a pursuit is grounded in seven principles to guide congregations: cultivating loving relationships; empowering to sustain; giving it time; attending to context; investing in friendships and partnerships; seeking out insight; and assessing and improving (76-92).

Part Two is one chapter and the longest in the book at 83 pages. The focus here shifts to examining transformational development sectors. For each sector, the authors “offer an introduction, including theological warrant for some less-known sectors, along with research- and field-based insights and practices” (95). Discussion includes well-known development sectors such as education, food, health, and water, sanitation and hygiene as well as less-known sectors of freedom and liberation, sport, technology, and others. Readers may be surprised to read about scripture translation and relief. Engagement with each sector is primarily descriptive, but the authors point readers to additional resources in Appendix B that provides lists of organizations working in each sector.

Part Three consists of two chapters focused on “moving forward.” Chapter 5 focuses on tools and processes for engagement with transformational development at the congregational level (including potential subgroups contained within churches, such as mission boards and ministry teams). As the authors note, “the steps outlined...are intended to be not a formula for success but, instead, suggested mindsets and practices that will help churches discern and engage faithfully while also maturing as disciples and co-laborers in God’s mission in the world” (183). They begin with prayer and self-reflection, recognizing the spiritual nature of such engagement. This is followed by tools for discernment, including mental models of poverty and development (189-191), and it ends with a discussion of the transformational nature of development (207-209). Part Three concludes in Chapter 6 with an eye to “looking ahead”- recognizing the world today has changed significantly with global shifts in religion and the broader field of development itself.

Taken together, this book addresses an important need: providing congregations, and individuals, with a resource for engaging the broad and diverse field of international development. The authors rightly note that “[c]ongregations or individuals wanting to engage in global mission have much to consider and a multitude of available paths. The task ahead can leave us unsure of how to take a step forward” (182). Indeed, the field of transformational development can be overwhelming, perhaps explaining the many observed shortcomings of much international engagement efforts by congregations in the Global North as they rush to enter the fray of poverty alleviation. The remedy presented in this book is to slow down, consider individual and congregational gifts and skills, and embody a process that transforms both the giver and receiver. Perhaps most significantly, the book does not ignore the spiritual dynamics of mission and transformational development, giving brief attention to transformational liturgies (207). Although much of the book addresses congregations, individuals would benefit from this book as well.

Although a helpful guide, there are two critiques that stand out. First, the authors pack in a lot of description in the chapter on development sectors. This is perhaps inevitable given the broad range of development work, but this limits the authors to description, and it elides an in-depth examination of each sector from the perspective of holistic mission. Readers may feel inclined to skip to sections deemed relevant to them, as the authors note, but the overall result is a rather quick overview. As an introduction to the basic names, focus and practices of various development sectors, this book hits the mark. Readers will need to look elsewhere for deeper engagement with particular development sectors. Secondly, discussion of some development sectors requires more nuance. A discussion of disabilities under the health sector, for example, ignores important distinctions highlighted in recent research in disabilities studies. This book unnecessarily embraces a medical model of disability without giving sufficient attention to the need for addressing the social model of disability, which requires deeper social transformation. Similarly, including relief and humanitarian aid under the broad scope of development ignores fundamental differences between relief and development. Finally, the sector of scripture translation lacks necessary warrant for inclusion as a development sector beyond the observation that “an encounter with God in Scripture can enhance flourishing in multiple areas of life” (164). This is true in any context; left unexplored are questions of what is the explicit connection to transformational development and what specific encounters might occur in the process engaging the transformational development process?

With an overall aim of distilling what makes development *transformational* and how both the giver and receiver are transformed, this book achieves its goal. Teachers and church leaders seeking to provide a basic introduction to transformational development in mission will find in this book a useful resource. Deep engagement with the principles and practices outlined will contribute to greater human flourishing and *shalom* for those in the Global North and the Global South.