

STEWARDSHIP 101-9

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Poverty – The fruit of failed Stewardship

“Poverty” is a word whose meaning we tend to take for granted. Everyone knows what poverty is, we recognize it with ease – but when it comes to actually defining it . . . even Christians have to be very careful about their various assumptions and biases. Do we really know anyone who is poor that fits our assumptions?

“Poor”—tends to become an abstract label—but “the poor” are real people with individual names and families, to whom God has also given gifts, and whom He loves, and is working among, just as He is with us.

The poor are people, imbedded in families, communities, and corresponding social systems. The poor live in households in which each member either helps and contributes, or disrupts and consumes – three-dimensional moral human beings living in dynamic interactions with others. “Poverty” may mean different things to children, youth, the mentally or physically challenged, and the old. The poor are always found among those who are non-poor. The poor are neither lazy, nor stupid they live on the edge and struggle to survive. While we make distinctions between “deserving” poor, “working” poor, and the “undeserving” poor; we have to remember that the non-poor can be poor too – it is just a different form of “poverty”, expressed in the opposite way.

The causes of poverty are in people, not concepts or abstractions. The world tends to view the poor as a group that is helpless, thus we give ourselves permission to play god in their lives. The poor become nameless, and this invites us to treat them as objects of our compassion, as a thing to which we can do what we believe is best. We, the non-poor, take it upon ourselves to abstractly name them – homeless, destitute, indigent, working poor, and so on. But they are not just objects for professional study and social engineering, wards of the state, social groups to be organized. It is easy to blame greed, systems, the market, corruption, and culture, but these are abstractions and cannot be changed. People—the poor and non-poor—have to change. . . this is the nature of poverty and oppression. Everyone is sinner and sinned against.

Poverty can be seen as:

- **Deficit** – not having enough to eat, no place to sleep, lack of water, land, roads, schools, etc.
- **Entanglement** – in the “the poverty trap” – isolated, vulnerable, powerless, exploited.
- **A lack of access to social power** – fallen through the “holes” of the state, politics, civil society and corporate economy.
- **Disempowerment**: by captivity to god-complexes of non-poor; deception by principalities and powers; inadequacies in worldview; weakness in mind, body, spirit; with a marred identity – the “web of lies.”
- **A lack of freedom** to grow mentally, socially, physically and spiritually.

These “causes” are complex and multi-faceted, but fundamentally, they are relational and spiritual – the effects of sin breaking and distorting the “five relationships” which we were meant to be stewards of: within ourselves, with our community and “others”, with our environment, and with God.

“But there will be no poor among you; for the Lord will bless you . . . you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow, . . . “If among you, one of your brothers should become poor. . . you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. . . You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work. . . For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’” Deuteronomy 15:4-11

Some “Descriptions” of Poverty

[Quotations and illustrations from Walking with the Poor, by Bryant Myers]

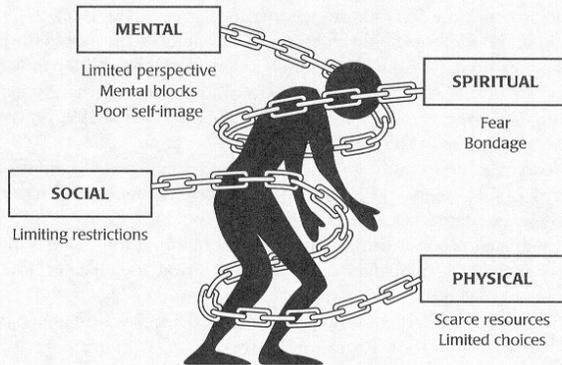


Figure 3-9: Poverty as a lack of freedom to grow. (Jayakaran 1996, 14)

“Like our understanding of the nature of poverty, our understanding of the causes of poverty tends to be in the eye of the beholder. If care is not taken to understand our unwitting biases, our understanding of the causes of poverty tends to be an outworking of our place in the social system, our education, our culture, and our personality. Our understanding of the causes of poverty also depends on where we start looking at poverty, and more important, where we stop looking.”

“Looking at poverty as deficit, as entanglement, as lack of access to social power, as powerlessness, and as lack of freedom to grow – these all add important elements to our picture. We can conclude that poverty is a complicated social issue involving all areas of life—physical, personal, social, cultural, and spiritual. . . . a complex multifaceted phenomenon. There are unlikely to be any simple answers

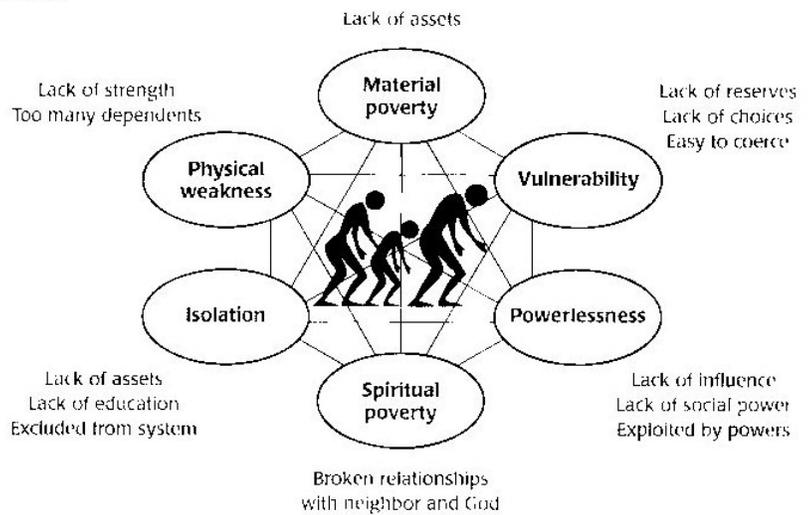


Figure 3-2 : The poverty system of the household. (Adapted from Chambers 1983, 110)

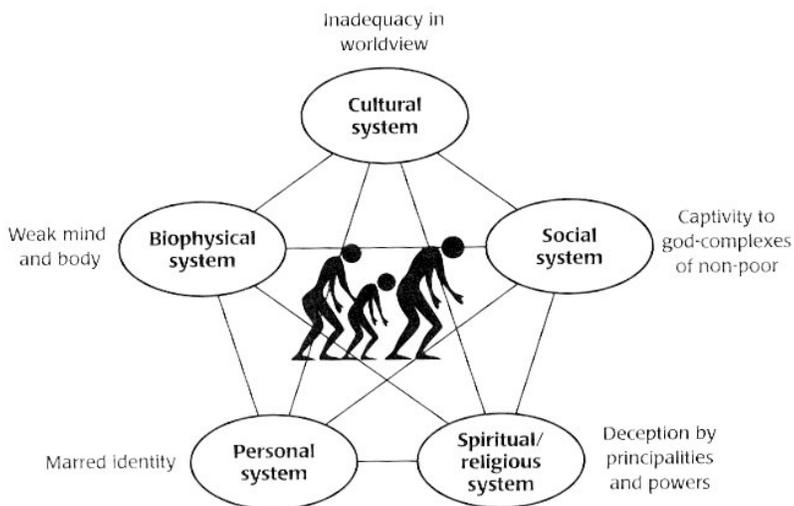


Figure 3-5: Poverty as disempowering systems. (Adapted from Christian 1994)¹

“Our point of departure for a Christian understanding of poverty is to remember that the poor are people with names, people to whom God has given gifts, and people with whom and among whom God has been working before we even know they are there. When we reduce poor people from names to abstractions we add to their poverty and impoverish ourselves. People are the cause of poverty, and it is people who must change for things to change.”

“Poverty is the result of relationships that are fragmented, dysfunctional, or oppressive. . . Sin is what distorts these relationships. The scope of sin affects every one of the five relationships in which every human lives. At its core, poverty is relational. . . Without a strong theology of sin, comprehensive explanations for poverty are hard to come by.”

“The assertion that the poor are ignorant and stupid does not survive any informed understanding of real poor people. The depth and breadth of their indigenous knowledge frequently astounds us. The poor are no more lazy, fatalistic, improvident, stupid or arrogant than anybody else. All people suffer from these problems, poor and non-poor alike. But only the non-poor can afford to indulge in these behaviors. People so close to the edge cannot afford laziness or stupidity.”

“The poverty of the non-poor is the same kind of poverty as the poor, only differently expressed. The poverty of the non-poor is fundamentally relational and caused by sin. The result is a life full of things and short on meaning. The non-poor simply believe in a different set of lies. The only difference is the poverty of the non-poor is harder to change.”

Christian Views of The Poor

View of the Poor	Theological Frame/ Bible texts	Expressions	Why the poor are poor	Christian Response
Poor made in the Image of God	Creation Gen 1-2	Poor as creative As a work of art See God's hidden Glory	The poor lack skills, knowledge and opportunity	Enable the poor to be fruitful and productive
Poor as people in rebellion	Fall Gen 3	Poor as lazy Poor make bad choices God helps those who help themselves	The poor are in rebellion and their culture keeps them poor	Challenge the poor with the gospel and encourage them to make better choices
Poor as Christ incarnate	Incarnation Gospels	Christ in the distressing guise of the poor What you did for the least of them ...	The poor lack love	Accompany the poor and relieve suffering as possible
Poor as God's favorites	Prophetic Exo, Prophets	Blessed are the poor for theirs will be the kingdom Liberation theology	The poor are oppressed by the non-poor Poverty is structural	Work for justice. Help the poor find their voice in the socio-political-economic system
Poor as lost Souls	Salvation Matt 28, Acts	The better future lies in eternity Save as many as we can The poor will always be with you	The poor are lost from God, and the kingdom is coming soon	Proclaim the gospel and encourage the poor to respond.

This is simple classification of ways Christians think about the poor done by Richard Mouw, from Byrant Myers' book: Walking with the Poor, pp. 59-61.

“Poor as made in the image of God: This view draws on the creation narrative and tends toward a romantic view of the poor. Their poverty is the result of lack of skills and opportunity. What they need is a “leg up.”

“Poor as people in rebellion: This view draws on the fall as the defining reason why the poor are poor. They are lazy and make bad choices. The poor need to accept the gospel, go to work, and make better choices.

“Poor as Christ incarnate: Drawing on Matthew 25, this view of the poor center on the Incarnation and, with Mother Teresa, “sees Christ in the distressing guise of the poor.” The poor lack love and relation-ships; they do not belong. The poor need accom-paniment; we should relieve as much suffering as we can.

“Poor as God's favorites: This view draws on the prophetic literature and the Exodus account. The poor are the ones who are blessed, for theirs will be the kingdom. They are poor because they are oppressed by social systems that keep them poor for the benefit of the non-poor. The poor need justice and help in finding their voice and place in the economic and political system.

“Poor as lost souls: This is a category that Myers took the liberty of adding to Mouw's typology. This view draws selectively on the gospels and reflects the dichotomy between the spiritual and the physical of the moderm world. The poor are lost. The kingdom is coming when Jesus comes, and that will be soon. The poor need to be saved.

“Seen in this light, the conclusions are obvious. First, Christians sometimes are selective in their use of Scripture and thereby support a view of the poor they already hold or that they received from somewhere else. Second, it would seem more fruitful to develop an understanding of the poor that includes all and excludes none of these images. The poor are made in the image of God. They are fallen. Christ did use the poor as a metaphor for himself and our need to serve the less fortunate. There is a bias toward the poor and against the non-poor, and the poor are often lost souls.”

How our View of Cause shapes our Proposed Response

The poor are sinners	Evangelism and uplift
The poor are sinned against	Social action, working for justice
The poor lack knowledge	Education
The poor lack things	Relief/ social welfare
The culture of the poor is flawed	Become like us/ ours is better
The social system makes them poor	Change the system

The all-encompassing web of lies.

For the Christian, the identity of the poor is distorted, and kept distorted by a “web of lies” that entraps the poor in ways far stronger and insidious than physical bonds or material limitations. The non-poor are socialized into a culture with mythic stories, structures, and systems that make their position of power make sense, even seem ethically defensible. These delusions are widely believed. They are the way of the world, largely taken for granted by poor and non-poor, Christian and non-Christian alike.

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Social System</u>	<u>Lie</u>
Captivity to the god-complexes of the non-poor	Social Political Economic Religious	<i>You are outside the social system. Your purpose is to serve us. You have no assets, nor should you. We will speak to God on your behalf.</i>
Marred identity of the poor	Social Political Economic Religious	<i>We are not worthy of inclusion. We are not worthy of participation. We have nothing to contribute. We are not worthy of God's concern.</i>
Inadequacies in worldview	Social Political Economic Religious	<i>Our place in the social order is fixed. They are supposed to rule over us. Our poverty is ordained. We sinned: God gives us what we deserve.</i>
Deception by the principalities and powers	Social Political Economic Religious	<i>Social systems are not for the likes of you. Political systems are not for the likes of you. Economic systems are not for the likes of you. God is not for the likes of you.</i>
Weakness of mind, body, and spirit	Social Political Economic Religious	<i>I'm not smart enough. I'm uneducated. I'm too weak to matter; I have nothing. I can't understand these things anyway</i>

The need to prevent social chaos requires that some should dominate others

Men are better suited at being dominant than women; some races are more naturally suited to dominate others

A valued end justifies any means

Violence is redemptive; it is the only language enemies understand.

Ruling or managing is the most important social function.

Rulers and managers are entitled to extra privileges and wealth.

Those with the greatest military strength, the most advanced technology, the biggest markets and the most wealth are the ones who will and should survive.

Production of wealth is more important than production of healthy normal people and sound human relationships

Property is sacred and property ownership is an absolute right.

Institutions are more important than people.

God, if there is a God, is the protector and patron of the powerful.

Tackling the Causes of Poverty

Like our understanding of the nature of poverty, our understanding of the causes of poverty tends to be in the eye of the beholder. If care is not taken to understand our unwitting biases, our understanding of the causes of poverty tends to be an outworking of our place in the social system, our education, our culture, and our personality. Our understanding of the causes of poverty also depends on where we start looking at poverty, and more important, where we stop looking. Consider this example taken from India: The poor do not have access to clean water.

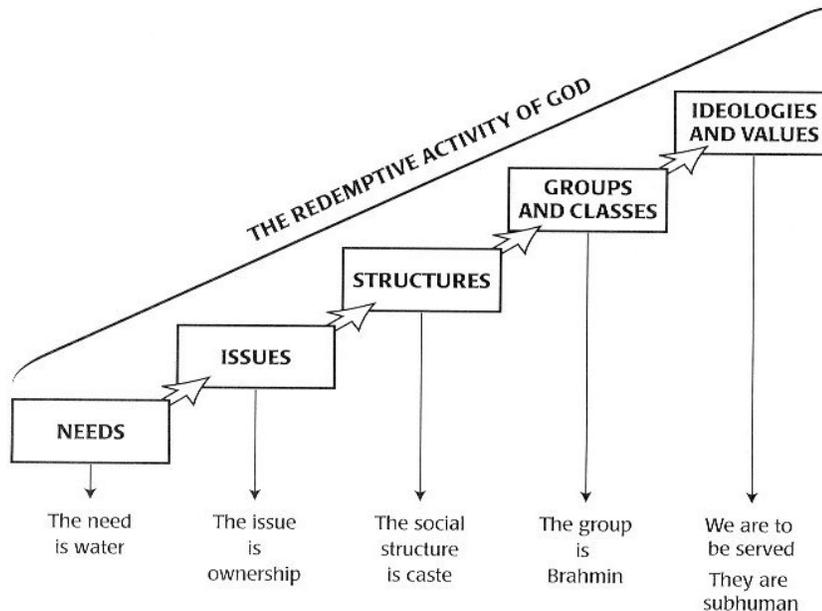


Figure 3-11: From needs to causes.

For example, if we are only concerned with needs, we will only see lack of water. Without further thought, lack of water is the cause of poverty and providing water is the answer. However, behind needs are issues, such as ownership of the water. If this is the cause of the lack of water, then the response is to work on ownership or access. Yet behind issues there are structures, such as caste, that influence who gets access to water, and which often create insurmountable barriers to access. Behind structures are groups who inhabit and enforce the structures by insisting that it is our water and our right to control its use." Behind these groups are the ideologies and values that inform the group and shape the social structure, the unspoken assumptions that "we are to be served and they are subhuman and aren't supposed to drink where we drink." This is worldview.

This kind of social analysis deepens our understanding of what causes poverty. We raise our view from physical need and the individual person to the social and cultural norms within which the poor live. We begin to understand that ideas, values and worldviews need to change. This is good.

There is a downside, however, against which we must guard. Sometimes this kind of analysis results in the development practitioner ignoring the immediate need and going single-mindedly after the underlying causes. While ideas and values must be addressed, leaving the poor without water or with even angrier custodians of water is questionable good news. Change the ideas or the worldview and you change the world. This can lead to depersonalisation, forgetting the web of lies and the value systems that created it are believed by human beings; they do not live in abstractions like "systems" or "ideologies" or "worldviews." At the end of the day, people are the cause of poverty, and it is people who must change for things to change.

Will The Poor Always Be With Us? By Bryant L. Myers

One sometimes hears Christians, tired with the news of poverty and exploitation around the world, try and deflect the news by reminding us that Jesus said, "The poor will always be with you."

This is offered as a way to stop the conversation.

Did Jesus say this? Yes. Does it mean what it appears to mean? Not really. So what does this troubling phrase mean?

The unforgettable woman

Jesus' statement comes in the context of a story that really has nothing to do with the poor directly. It does have to do with a woman whom Jesus said we would all remember as long as the gospel is proclaimed. Late in Matthew's account of the life of Jesus, just before the Lord's supper and his arrest, we are told that a woman, whose name we do not know, poured expensive perfume from a jar onto Jesus' head and worked the perfume reverently into Jesus' hair. Jesus knew that the woman was honoring him by mimicking the preparation of the dead for burial. She understood before most of the rest of Jesus' followers that the cross is where Jesus was headed. The disciples, full of self-righteousness, criticize this act of devotion. What a waste of money, they say. The perfume could have been sold and given to the poor. Jesus reply is withering: "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me." Jesus understood the meaning of her act and considered it a wonderful gift. Perhaps we are to remember her because of her insight into the future sacrifice of Jesus and her costly sacrifice to her Lord. It is at this point that Jesus says, "The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me," referring to Deuteronomy 15. Only he and the woman seemed to understand that Jesus would not always be with the disciples.

The mistaken activist

There is an important lesson here for Christians who do relief and development work among the poor. Too many Christian activists are ruining their health and destroying their families while justifying the zeal because of their commitment to the poor. In the name of the poor, activist workaholics suffer from poor health and burnout, and they damage their spouses and children. This is not a gospel stance. This is not what Jesus asks us to do. Our devotion

must be directed at Jesus, not the poor themselves. While we certainly are supposed to love our neighbor, especially our poor neighbor, we are to worship only Jesus. The woman understood this and the disciples did not. Getting your spirituality and worship right is key to sustaining one's service to God and the poor. The unintended poor By now you've probably figured out that I am not comfortable with the way some Christians take this statement of Jesus out of context. I am not. But my disappointment is deepened by the fact that a little curiosity as to where Jesus came up with this statement reveals a rich and challenging understanding about God, his people and the poor. The section of Deuteronomy that Jesus refers to begins with a complete contradiction of the claim that the poor will always be with you. "There should be no poor among you," states the Law in Deuteronomy 15:4. Really? This unambiguous claim is followed by the reason why this is so. "For in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you." The land that God is going to give Israel has more than enough for everyone. There are to be no poor because there will be enough. And more than enough. "For the Lord your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none." (Deut. 15:6)

There will be a surplus, a surplus that can be traded with the nations of the world. I can believe this, because I believe that the loving, caring God, who created the world for humankind could never have intended a world of scarcity. The God whom I worship would never place humankind in a land that was unable to provide for life and life abundantly. I can believe this before I can believe that God intended that the poor would always be with us. But there is a condition to the promise. "He will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today." (Deut. 15:4-5)

The blessing and abundance of the Promised Land are dependent on the faithfulness of God's people to God's commands. It is at this point that an apparent contradiction enters the text: "If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be

openhanded and freely lend to him whatever he needs."
(Deut. 15:7-8)

How can this be? We've just been told that "there should be no poor among you," and then we are given instructions as to what to do if there is a poor person. Did Moses get confused? Is this a contradiction? I don't think so.

The ones who failed There will be poor in Israel, not because God's Promised Land failed to provide, but because human beings were not faithful to God nor to each other. There has to be provision for the poor in the Promised Land, not because God failed or intended it, but because Israel failed. And so it is today, I suspect. It is a fact that there is enough agricultural production today to feed every human being on the planet. Yet people are dying of hunger, and children are stunted because of chronic malnutrition. It is not that God's planet cannot provide; it is that we do not follow God's commands. We neither love God nor love our neighbors.

What Jesus really meant

So what did Jesus mean when he said, "The poor you will always have with you"? Did he mean that poverty is something we should tolerate because it is just the way things are? Was Jesus asking us to tolerate poverty? I don't think so. First, Jesus was making a point about worship. The only reason Jesus brought the poor into the conversation was in response to the self-righteous misreading of the devotion of a woman we are never to forget. Second, Jesus was being ironic. By referring to the passage from Deuteronomy, Jesus was reminding the disciples that the only reason there are poor in God's abundant creation is because of human sin and self-centeredness. The disciples did not care about the poor as much as they did about trying to make points at the expense of the woman. "The poor you will always have with you," was a rebuke to Jesus' disciples. The passage in Deuteronomy closes with a command. After the verse, "There will always be poor people in the land," we find this: "Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land." (Deut. 15:11)

I think God knew that God faced a profound contradiction. God's world is productive enough to meet the needs of all. Further, human beings created in the image of God are creative and productive enough to make it so. Yet the sin in the human heart and the curse of a fallen creation

means that God's world will not be what it was created to be. Even though God never intended that there be any poor, he also knew that there would always be poor people as long as there are sinful people in the world. Jesus' statement about the poor always being with us is intended to shame us, to remind us that this is a true statement only because we have failed. Jesus never intended to justify tolerance for the presence of poor people in the land.

The message for us What can we conclude from all this? First, Jesus was not excusing the presence of poor among us. He knew full well that his Father provides more than enough through his creation. Jesus was reminding us, with some considerable irony, that the poor are here because we have failed to keep God's commands. Second, the real lesson from Deuteronomy is that unrighteousness-of those who are not poor and of the poor themselves-is the cause of poverty. At the most fundamental level, sin distorts our relationships with God, with each other and with our world. Our relationships do not work for our well-being, and the result is poverty, racism and other expressions of injustice. Poverty was and is not part of God's intention. Third, to tolerate poverty by excusing it in Jesus' name is an insult to our Lord who so consistently extended his affection and touch to those who were poor, sick and suffering. It makes a mockery of Jesus' statement of his mission in Luke 4:18. God's commands in Deuteronomy regarding the response to the poor among us are clear. Finally, our response to the poor is to be openhanded. Moreover, we are to enjoy sharing what God has given us. "Give generously to him (the poor) and do so without a grudging heart." (Deut. 15:10)

The result of this attitude of sharing is that the "Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to." Caring for the poor is good for us! As long as we live in a fallen world, we are to be openhanded, to lend freely and to do it without grudging. If the loans are not repaid after seven years, we are to write them off. The goal is caring for our family, not running a business. After all, if we were doing our job, there would be no poor. It's our fault, not God's.

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<http://www.worldvisionresources.com/newsletters/marc03-2.pdf>

<http://www.pastornet.net.au/jmm/articles/1720.htm>

Why Are People Hungry? By Darrow Miller

One billion people, 20% of the world's population, live in absolute poverty. Of these, 500,000,000 people -- 10% of our fellow human beings -- go to bed hungry every night. Thirty-five thousand of those people die everyday of hunger and hunger-related causes, and 80% percent of them are children under the age of five. This is truly a holocaust of immense proportions.

Why are people so poor? Why are people hungry? There is a direct correlation between the way we analyze a problem and the solutions we pose to that problem. So, in this paper, we want to not only answer those questions, we want to see where those answers "come from," and analyze the types of solutions they produce.

While there is a myriad of answers to these questions, the most common answers may be grouped into two broad categories: a) hunger and poverty are caused by factors internal to, or within, a country or region, or b) hunger and poverty are caused by factors external to, or outside of, a country or region. Examples of the former would be that a region has too many people or too little food. Examples of the latter would be "acts of God" or colonialism.

These two major groups form answers that could be considered the "majority report." They are answers found in the physical world, in the environment whether defined locally or globally. These are answers found outside of man.

After examining the answers of the majority report, we will examine a third perspective of why people are hungry and poor. This "minority report" will argue that the root cause of hunger and poverty is found inside of man, in a person's heart and mind, in the values of both the individual and a culture.

The Humanist Critique (The Majority Report)

In response to the questions of the causes of poverty and hunger, a majority of people would assume that the answers are found outside of man, in the physical world. Within this set of answers are two very different analyses: hunger and poverty are caused by factors internal to the country or region; hunger and poverty are caused by factors external to the country or region.

Internal - Within a Country or Region

Simply defined, this answer states that the causes of hunger and poverty are found within the nation or region itself. Several examples can be given.

1. No Natural Resources: Somalia, a country located in the horn of Africa, is a good example of this problem. Somalia is defined by some as a "Fourth World country"¹, a country so poor in natural resources that it has no hope of developing. Somalia is a desert topography whose main exports are grapefruit and camels. Other examples of so-called "undevelopable" countries are Chad, in central Africa, and Bangladesh, in Asia.

2. Too Many People, Too Little Food: In this answer, hunger and poverty are caused in a region because of overpopulation or food resources that are inadequate to support population densities. In 1798, the English political economist Thomas Malthus put forward a theory of population growth, known as the Malthusian Theory, in his

"Essay on Population." He argued that the population of the world would grow faster than the world's food supply. Famine and wars over scarce resources would be the result, and these would in turn limit population growth. Malthusian Theory dominates current population analysis.

3. Lack of Infrastructure: Hunger and poverty are caused by lack of an adequate base for commerce, communication, transportation and energy production in a country or region. A good example is India, which was a net food exporter during the decade of the 1980s, yet millions of people were poor and hungry, and tens of thousands died of hunger. India lacks adequate storage facilities, and the means of transporting food from regions that produce bumper crops to those suffering drought or underproduction.

Poverty can also be caused by lack of communication and the infrastructure for communication. In Ethiopia, for instance, 100 different languages and dialects are spoken, and the national language, Amharic, is spoken by only thirty percent of the nation's population. The inability to communicate severely limits commerce and can result in poverty.

4. Lack of Western Technology: Hunger and poverty exist because people refuse to adapt Western technology. If poor countries simply adapted Western agricultural practices, they would be able to feed themselves. Why don't they?

5. Urbanization: The rural poor, looking for jobs and the hope for a better life, flood into already overcrowded cities. They find no jobs there and end up homeless and hungry. Mexico City, with currently the largest urban population in the world, is expected to have a population of 23,000,000 people by the end of the century, compounding its poverty and misery.

6. Land Degradation/Deforestation: Short-term use of land that brings about deforestation and soil erosion makes the land infertile. This may be caused by simple "slash-and-burn" agricultural practices or massive clear cutting by the timber industry. At the turn of the century Ethiopia was 43% forested. By 1990 it was only 3% forested.

7. Totalitarian Political Systems: Corrupt political systems where one man, family or clan rules for its own benefit. Many poor countries begin political life with such a feudal or oligarchical system.

8. Mercantilistic/Socialist Economic Systems: The elite in society, whether wealthy merchants or "experts," control the economy for their own purposes. Such economic systems combined with a totalitarian political system is feudalism at its best -- or worst.

9. Tribalism: Racial strife pits one race, tribe or clan against another. The ethnic fighting in Yugoslavia and clan warfare in Somalia brought massive death and poverty in the early 1990s.

Why are people poor and hungry? Some people argue it is because of circumstances and events within a country. "If they would just stop having babies and would adopt Western ways, their problems would be solved."

Who presents the problem in this way? This is the parochial view, the isolationist or neo-isolationist point of view. In the United States of America, it is known as "America First." "The world begins and ends with me, on my block, in my town." It is the view of the uncompassionate "Right," and the "conservative." "I have no responsibility for the poor and hungry. It is their problem; let them solve it!" Too often, this is the position of many fundamentalist and evangelical churches.

When the problem is defined in this way, the typical solution is to get rid of the people. Garrett Hardin, a biologist at the University of California at Santa Barbara, developed the concept of Lifeboat Ethics.² In this view, a big ocean liner is sinking, and there are too many people on the lifeboat. The

ethical dilemma is to determine who is to survive. The rich people are in the lifeboat and want to keep the multitude of poor out. In contrast, the poor argue that it is the over-consuming rich that are putting the greatest stress on the world's resources. Hardin's is a modern parable for triage, of assigning priorities for who will receive medical care during a battle or following a major disaster.

For Garrett Hardin, there are too many people on the planet. Some will have to die. Hunger is simply nature's way of taking care of the overpopulation problem.

Similarly, Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood, saw the poor and minorities in the United States as "human weeds."³ She first established her abortion clinics in the urban centers as a way to reduce the population of poor minorities.

External -- Outside A Country or Region

Simply defined, answers to the questions of hunger and poverty state that they are found outside the nation or region. In this broad category there are two major causes: acts of nature and acts of men.

Acts of Nature In the first category are events that occur in nature beyond the control of man. Floods in Bangladesh, drought in northern Africa, and volcanic eruptions bring devastation to the marginalized and chronically poor, and death to the chronically hungry. These events come from "above," from "outside" the region. They are often unpredictable, especially by those caught in the disaster, and certainly not preventable by the people in the region.

Acts of Men The second category, that hunger and poverty are primarily caused by a human agency from outside the nation or region, includes reasons commonly held as "politically correct" in the last four decades of the 20th century. Examples abound.

1. Colonialism: The Third World is poor because of years of domination by European colonial powers. A map of the world from the 1930s and 1940s would show much of the world divided by the British, French, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and other colonial powers. It is said that a map of the continent of Africa indicates that all roads lead to the coast. The colonial powers enslaved the people and carried off all the natural resources to enrich themselves.

2. Neo-Colonialism: With the collapse of traditional colonialism in the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, a new and more insidious neo-colonialism developed. The rich

nations maintained their dominance over poor nations with a new set of institutions and structures. Some of these are identified below.

a. Multi-National Corporations: International corporate giants such as General Motors and Coca-Cola know no national boundaries. Their gross production exceeds that of most nations and dwarfs that of Third and Fourth World countries. As with colonialism, they exploit cheap labor and rape the natural resources of the poorest countries in the world.

b. Trans-National Organizations: Like multi-national corporations, trans-national organizations know no national boundaries. These quasi-governmental agencies like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and UNESCO possess massive amounts of political and economic clout. Decisions made by these agencies can have profound effects on struggling Third World nations. A case in point is the multi-billion dollar investment of the World Bank to tame the Amazon basin and exploit its natural resources. World Bank decisions have brought about the rapid deforestation of the Brazilian rain forest -- with devastating environmental consequences not merely for the region, but for the world.

c. Global Politics: Until the collapse of Communism, the world's superpowers divided the globe into spheres of influence. Each power had their client states and treated these as expendable pawns in a global chess game. The absurdity of this game could be seen in Ethiopia and Somalia. Ethiopia was a client of the United States when Emperor Haile Selassie was in power. Ethiopia's arch enemy, Somalia, was a client of the Soviet Union. When the Emperor was deposed by a Marxist, Mengistu Haile Mariam, the superpowers immediately switched sides in the conflict.

d. Global Marketplace: In a global market, countries are encouraged not towards self-sufficiency, but towards doing what they do best. Because of this, poor countries encourage their farmers to take their fields and gardens out of cultivation of food crops and into the production of "cash crops." Instead of growing corn, farmers are encouraged to grow coffee, tobacco, rubber, tea or cocoa to sell on the world market for hard currency. Food production declines, and the poor go hungry.

e. Foreign Aid: Often the well-intended gifts of foreign aid bring more poverty. Government-to-government aid programs often end by lining the pockets of a few Third

World politicians and businessmen with money, and thus ensuring the maintenance of their positions of power and influence. Likewise, grants of large amounts of food aid may undermine the prices given to local farmers for their crops. This does not allow them to recover even their costs and drives them out of business into poverty.

f. Cartels: These monopolistic associations attempt to control the world markets of a given product for their own advantage. Perhaps the most successful of these was the oil cartel. By driving up oil prices, the countries of the cartel enriched themselves, crippling the industrialized world and destroying the fledgling economies of the Third World. As developing countries were relying more and more on oil for agriculture and power, the tripling and quadrupling in oil prices wrought havoc and increased poverty.

Why are people poor and hungry? Not because of internal problems, this argument says, but because of the imperialism and exploitation of the West. Underdevelopment and hunger are a direct result of the oppression of the poor through complex social and economic structures. People are hungry because we in the West are well-fed. For each Big Mac we eat, the equivalent of four pounds of edible grain are "consumed" (it takes 16 lbs. of edible grain to produce one pound of edible beef). In the United States, six percent of the world's population consumes 40% of the world's resources.

Who presents the problem in this way? The New Internationalists, the One Worlders, the "left" or the "liberals." These people hold to Utopian ideas and ideals -- man is basically good; structures are the problem. This position is often called "dependency theory." Western capitalism has developed structures that exploit the natural and human resources of poor nations and minorities. Because the West has created the structures that have caused poverty and hunger, it is our responsibility to solve the problem. Within church circles, Ronald Sider, in *Rich Christians in An Age of Hunger* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 60515, 1977), and Jack Nelson, in *Hunger for Justice* (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 10545, 1981), have expounded this position.

When the problem is defined in this way, the typical solution is to change the structures and redistribute the wealth. This may be called the "Robin Hood solution." In the United States the welfare system was devised to transfer wealth from the rich "back" to the poor. On the international level,

the New International Economic Order has been proposed to "return" the wealth stolen by the rich industrial nations to the rightful owners in the developing world. The modern attempt to redistribute resources has been highlighted by the recent Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. If new structures cannot be established peacefully, then violence is justified to overthrow oppressive structures.

Both those who see the causes as internal to a nation and those who see it external to a nation, would say that the "root cause" of hunger is physical poverty. No matter what the cause, the fact that people are physically poor means they cannot buy their own food or have a sustainable food supply through agricultural means.

Analysis of the Humanist Critique

The internal and external responses to the questions of hunger and poverty, making up the majority report, are at the same time both antithetical and similar to each other. As we critique these two reports, we will first examine each position separately and then analyze the common elements of these positions.

The internal response is characterized generally as too many people and/or too little food or other resources. This is challenged by such national examples as Japan and Taiwan. Japan has a higher ratio of population density to natural resource level than most poor and underdeveloped countries, and yet Japan is not poor. Taiwan has a higher population density to resource level ratio than the Peoples' Republic of China, and yet it is significantly wealthier.

In contrast, it is estimated that the "Three Zs" of southern central Africa -- Zaire (now the Republic of Congo), Zimbabwe and Zambia -- have enough farmland and water available to produce enough food to feed the entire continent of Africa. The current disastrous hunger that is rampant throughout Africa is not a result of over population or inadequate resources.

The "too many ...too little" response sees people numerically, impersonally, as digits. People are the problem.

Malcolm Muggeridge, the late BBC political commentator, author and journalist, relates a story about Mother Teresa of Calcutta. In interviewing her for a BBC documentary he asked her why, when there were so many children in the world already, was she trying to save the sick and orphaned of Calcutta? She responded only with a quizzical look. Upon returning to the hotel after completing the taping, Muggeridge contemplated Mother Teresa's response, or rather lack of one. He realized that to ask Mother Teresa "Aren't there too many children in the world?" was like asking her "Aren't there too many flowers in the field or too many stars in the sky?" From Mother Teresa's point of view, the question was nonsense. How could there be too many stars? How could there be too many flowers? How could there be too many children? For Mother Teresa of Calcutta, children are precious.

Those who see the number of people as the problem also see people, in George Gilder's words, as "mouths, not minds." If people are mouths, they are part of the problem. Seen as minds, they are part of the solution. The next child born may be the next Bach, Einstein, Mother Teresa or Anwar Sadat.

If space permitted, similar responses could be outlined for the other illustrations of the internal answer.

The external response is generalized by the colonialism of the Old World and the neo-colonialism of the modern industrialized world. The argument says that both the old and new systems have created dependency between the dominant colonial powers and their poor colonies.

As the renown English developmental economist P.T. Bauer pointed out, there are empirical examples that show this is not true. First, some wealthy nations, such as Switzerland, Sweden, and Denmark, never had colonies. Second, some wealthy nations, such as Hong Kong, Australia, Canada and the United States, were formerly colonies. Third, some poor nations, such as Ethiopia, Thailand, Liberia and Afghanistan, never were colonized. In addition, Bauer argues, contrary to politically correct assumptions, there is a direct correlation between a developing country's contact with the Western world and the economic growth in that country. The less contact a Third World country has had, the poorer they have remained; the more contact, the greater the economic development.

Ironically, an unintended consequence of dependency theory is the creation of further dependency. Dependency theory teaches that wealthy oppressors, usually white Europeans, created the systems that imprisoned people in poverty. These systems robbed poor countries and poor minorities in the United States of their wealth and dignity. Because the wealthy created the problem, they have a responsibility to solve the problem. In fact, poor nations and poor minorities have been so oppressed, there is little they can do to get out of their current state of oppression. Dependency theory unintentionally reinforces dependency.

While each of these positions is unique, they do have a number of points in common.

First, each stems from materialist assumptions. Hunger and poverty are defined and perceived primarily in physical terms. The "external" and material are all that exists because the physical universe is all that exists. Non-material concepts such as ethics, values, character, substance, content and ideas are downplayed at best, and at worst do not exist. Because the problem is defined in material terms, the solutions to the problems of hunger and poverty are limited merely to the economic and political realm.

Second, both reports stem from a "zero-sum," "limited-good" view of resources and wealth. Because the universe is ultimately physical, resources are, by nature, limited. In Western parlance, zero-sum is the term describing limited resources. The argument says that because resources are limited, Western wealth is secured at the expense of Third World poverty. In poor Third World cultures, limited good refers to the assumption that there is only a limited amount of food or oil; for me to have more than my neighbor means that I have stolen from my neighbor.

Because of the assumptions of zero-sum thinking, the logical solution to the problems of hunger and poverty are to "get rid of people" (internal response), or to redistribute the resources (external response) so that everyone has equal amounts.

Third, each position posits an imbalance in its approach to the problems. Those who say the problem is internal to a country or region absolve themselves of any responsibility for the problem or for its solution. Those who say the problem is external to the country or region limit the liability of the people affected by hunger and poverty, and assume that the outsiders who caused the problem carry the weight of solving it.

As long as hunger and poverty are blamed solely on causes outside of man, people and cultures will remain imprisoned in poverty and development will be thwarted. If the origin is outside of man, there is little the impoverished can do, for nature and outsiders control their destiny. Solutions must await well-intentioned outsiders. Problems are described in impersonal rather than personal terms. The result? Dehumanization is reinforced; paternalism is extended.

The great Russian novelist and moral philosopher, Leo Tolstoy, summarized it clearly: "Everybody thinks of changing humanity, and nobody thinks of changing himself." ⁴

We will now examine a third alternative: one that posits that the problem of hunger and poverty is in man -- in his heart and mind, in his values, both personal and cultural, in his ideas and ideals.

Before we examine this minority report, however, we must first make some qualifications very clear. First, some hunger and poverty is caused by problems found internal to a country or region -- by limited resources, for instance. Second, some hunger and poverty is caused by the external conditions of exploitation, oppression, greed, and corruption. Third, while the natural environment explains some of the conditions of hunger and poverty, they are symptomatic rather than substantial, surface rather than root. They explain some of what we see -- but not all of what we see. Fourth, a materialistic approach to the problems will, by its very nature, limit solutions to the physical realm.

On the other hand, a holistic approach to the problems will allow a comprehensive analysis that deals with both physical and non-physical factors which contribute to the problems of hunger and poverty.

The Judeo-Christian Critique (A Minority Report)

We now move from discussing what may be called the symptoms of hunger and poverty to addressing the causes and root cause. Underlying all that has been said to this point is chronic (physical) poverty. Chronic poverty causes hunger. But what causes the chronic poverty?

We will argue that chronic poverty is caused by a culture of poverty the worldview, values, ideas and ideals of a culture. This in turn is fed by personal poverty of the mind and heart, a spiritual, moral and intellectual problem. As Lawrence E. Harrison has said, "Underdevelopment is a state of mind." ⁵ Personal and cultural poverty, however, only point to something deeper. We submit that the root cause of hunger is man's alienation from creation and the God of creation because of sin.

Why are people poor and hungry? This critique places the root of the problem internal to man. Poverty is more than material condition and circumstance; it is a way of looking at the world, man and ultimate reality. That way of seeing things stifles life and leads to underdevelopment.

As Richard M. Weaver says, "ideas have consequences."⁶ There is a logical relationship between an idea or a value, and its outworking in behavior and life. Ludwig von Mises, the internationally known economist, stated: "Action is always directed by ideas; it realizes what previous thinking has designed." ⁷

For example, a culture which values human life will function very differently than a culture which does not. What does a woman carry in her womb? Is it a "baby," or is it a "product of conception?" The answer given reflects a person's or a culture's ideas concerning life; those ideas, in turn, result in distinct patterns of behavior. If a woman carries a baby in her womb, it is cared for and nurtured. If it is considered simply a product of conception, it may be removed from her body and destroyed.

What is culture? Culture may be referred to in both material and non-material terms.

In material terms, culture refers to the artifacts of a society; its inventions, tools and technologies, its music and art, its architecture and buildings and more. Those objects are the subject of archeological discovery and anthropological research.

The non-material side of culture deals with values, ideas and ideals, tradition, language and language structure, morals and mores. Non-material culture guides the thinking

and decision-making process of a people -- it is the grist of the mind and the passion of the heart. These are derived from the culture's sacred belief system and in turn establish the theories and philosophical insights which are the foundation of a society's laws and a government's policy, ultimately enlivening a people's behavior and lifestyle.

Personal and cultural values create a grid or matrix which either defines and enhances, or retards, the development of individuals and whole societies.

Culture, not physical environment or circumstance, is the major determining factor in a nation's rise from poverty.

In 1959, Oscar Lewis, writing in his book *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty*, makes a distinction between poverty and the culture of poverty:

As an anthropologist I have tried to understand poverty and its associated traits as a culture or, more accurately, as a subculture with its own structure and rationale, as a way of life which is passed down from generation to generation along family lines. ⁸

Stockwell and Laidlaw, writing in *Third World Development*, say: Economic development, or any kind of economic change, does not occur in isolation, but is part of a much larger and more general cultural transformation In other words, economy and culture are dynamically interrelated; economic development will both influence and be influenced by other aspects of culture.⁹

They continue: Finally, we would suggest that development requires a socio cultural milieu that will encourage the kinds of behavior that are necessary to achieve more adequate resource development and utilization. To the extent that such behavior is discouraged or not fully encouraged, culture may act as a serious obstacle to economic development. ¹⁰

Examples abound.

In India, the Hindu caste system has imprisoned whole classes of people in poverty. Likewise, slavery in the United States and apartheid in South Africa, institutionally immobilized blacks in poverty. While the slave owners may have materially prospered, it was at the expense of their own moral and spiritual health and the physical poverty of those they oppressed.

Animistic cultures fuse the natural and spiritual worlds and, as a result, lack an understanding of physical law and of

germ theory. Natural catastrophes are to be stoically endured, and disease is caused by an angry god who must be appeased.

Similarly, most underdeveloped cultures believe that good is limited. If one person has more than another it is because he has stolen from his neighbor. This stifles any sense of material advancement or "getting ahead."

Past time frames and "life on the wheel" mark Hindu, Buddhist and animistic societies. There is no future, or only limited time orientation; history is not going anywhere. This leaves little or no room for development, because development is a concept born in the future where progress can be made as time marches forward.

In other words, lack of interest in the material world also stifles development. There are no grounds for hard work or ownership of the product of one's creative efforts. The contemplative life is favored; business, labor and agrarian work is shunned.

Who holds to this type of analysis? People operating from a Judeo-Christian worldview. Those who begin with an objective, theocentric starting point rather than a subjective, anthropocentric starting point.

There are 49 countries in the world with personal GNP of under \$500. This represents three billion people, or more than 57% of the world's population. The 10/40 Window, shown in the following maps, is home to four major non-Christian belief systems: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Communism (China). A simple comparison of these two maps reveals that 82% of the poorest of the poor live in the 10/40 window.

This is no surprise. Ideas have consequences. Some ideals and values support the ending of poverty and hunger, others imprison people in poverty and hunger.

Endnotes

¹ According to this classification, a First World country is the Western, industrialized world; a Second World country is the ex-Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the Communist bloc; a Third World country is a developing country; a Fourth World country is an undevelopable country.

² From *Food First: Beyond the Myth of Scarcity* by Frances Moore Lappe and Joseph Collins with Cary Fowler (New York, NY: Ballantine Books), page 6.

³ Quoted in *Grand Illusions* by George Grant (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1988), page 91.

⁴ Frank S. Mead, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations* (London: Peter Davis, Ltd., 1965), page 400.

⁵ Harrison, Lawrence E., *Underdevelopment is a State of Mind* (University Press, 1985).

⁶ Weaver, Richard M., *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

⁷ Von Mises, Ludwig, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books, Inc., 1965), page 188.

⁸ Lewis, Oscar, *La Vida* (New York, NY: Random House), page xliii.

⁹ Stockwell, Edward, and Karen Laidlaw, *Third World Development* (Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall, 1981), page 110.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, page 111.

When the problem is framed in this way, what is the solution to the problem? We need to change people. There must be a transformation of minds and hearts. Development and the end of hunger and poverty must proceed from the inside out. One example will suffice.

In the early 1980s a young couple went to the Dominican Republic with the Hunger Corps to live and work among the poor. A micro-enterprise loan program they administered made a loan to a single parent who made a living as a baker. Within six months, the loan was paid off and the woman's household income had increased five-fold. A model success story! Not quite. The Hunger Corps couple noticed that the woman's children still were dressed in rags, had distended bellies and no shoes. Upon investigation it was discovered that the woman was spending the additional income on cigarettes, booze and lottery tickets. It was only after the woman's life was transformed from the inside out by Jesus Christ that her new income began to impact the lives of her children.

The problem of hunger and poverty is not primarily a physical problem, but a moral and spiritual problem. Individuals and whole societies are alienated from creation and creation's God. The solution to these tragic problems must be comprehensive, dealing with all of man and his whole world. This process begins in the minds and hearts of individuals. As lives are transformed, ideals and ideas, values and mores are changed. As enough lives are transformed, reformation of culture occurs. This in turn leads to the building of new structures that favor the value of the individual human life, and the cultures reaching for God's intended purpose.

Why are people poor and hungry? One's worldview will determine how this question is answered. The way the problem is defined will determine the solution put forward.



DARROW MILLER

Darrow Miller is Vice President for Staff Development of *Food for the Hungry International*. His experience of living, studying and traveling in more than 40 countries is invaluable to his work at *Food for the Hungry*, where he provides leadership for a team of staff development workers.

Two life-molding events occurred during Miller's late teens and early twenties. While in college, on a student work team to Mexico, he was confronted by poverty for the first time. His heart was broken and he was determined to spend his life fighting against this absurdity.

After college, he studied under Francis Schaeffer at L'Abri Fellowship in Switzerland. While there he was challenged to see that Christianity was objectively true. Though he was a Christian, he came to see that he had a thoroughly secular mind. His life's calling has been worked out at the intersections of the heart-molding for the poor and hungry and the mind-molding objective truth of Christianity.

In the past, Miller has been the vice president for Food for the Hungry's International Hunger Corps volunteer program and its innovative Desert Center. He also has been a popular speaker at conferences and seminars for 20 years on topics including hunger, servant hood, worldview and development, biblical mandates for development, volunteerism in missions, Christianity and culture and Christian apologetics.

Prior to joining Food for the Hungry in 1981, Miller was pastor of the Sherman Street Fellowship in Denver. While there, he helped to develop both student and street ministries in addition to performing regular pastoral duties.

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Miller is author of **Discipling Nations: The Power of Truth to Transform Cultures** a highly regarded book uniting worldview analysis and sound perspectives on development. He has authored a chapter in the book **Christian Relief and Development** (Word Publishing, 1989) entitled, ***The Development Ethic: Hope for a Culture of Poverty***. He has also authored the popular ***Servanthood Bible Study*** series, as well as the ***Worldview and Development*** workshop and ***The Development Ethic*** workshop.

He has a master's degree in higher adult education from Arizona State University. In addition, he has pursued graduate studies in philosophy, theology, Christian apologetics, biblical studies, and missions in the United States, Israel and Switzerland.

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