

“NURTURING HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CHRISTIAN COMPASSIONATE WITNESS”

A few years ago while I was the NCM Africa regional coordinator, we organized a conference around the theme “Holistic Development through Christian Witness. Our main goal at that time was to generate a productive discussion around the concept of holistic development and the difference between merely social development and the model of the compassionate and evangelism ministries that promote holistic development. We strongly believe that poverty, violence, disease and death are consequences of sin and trying to solve these problems with merely social action is not going to work. There is a spiritual problem that must be addressed together with any social action. Throughout all of Christian history, there has always been the discussion about the dichotomy of social response with the spiritual need of the people. For centuries they have been separated. Unfortunately, this has been one of the main reasons that holistic development does not happen. We believe it happens only when we are able to bring social action with spiritual revival together: the final product: compassion as an incarnated lifestyle.

God has a plan for His people in the entire world. The Bible teaches that God’s intention for his people is for them to be free. When the Bible speaks about freedom, it is speaking about total freedom. Freedom of sin that means freedom from poverty and exploitation; freedom from abuse and violence and what is more important, freedom to be owners of ourselves. The main tragedy of billions of people around the world that are living in poverty today, is because they can not take decision by themselves; someone else is taking decisions that are affecting their lives. One of the challenges that we have all over the world is to empower people through social and spiritual actions to move from dependence to sustainability. Sustainability whenever done properly promotes freedom and development. There are several stories of freedom and redemption that are repeated day by day when people understand that the will of God for all his people is to be free, they start looking at their own problems, generating their own actions and their own resources; turning their lives to God and improving their lives and communities. Here is where compassion is lived.

As holistic developers we have two important tasks; one is to be the conscience of the church, calling the attention of all pastors and leaders working in local churches to see Christian Ministry from a holistic perspective. A second responsibility connected with the anterior is to bring freedom to God’s oppressed people. Here is where a holistic approach is necessary. It is not enough to feed, dress, and heal people, when their souls are lost in their own sins. There are many public and private organizations that try to solve the problems of the world investing billions of dollars without success. Every time that they try to solve the problem of hunger here, a new problem starts somewhere else in the world. The efforts to bring peace without looking at spiritual base have been useless, since the problem of war has also a spiritual root that must be addressed, otherwise

violence and hatred will continue killing innocent people. We have the historical responsibility to promote compassion in each one of our actions, building bridges between God and his people. God through His Son Jesus continues redeeming people bringing them from death to life.

One of the most important values that the Bible teaches us is about the daily life of Holiness that each believer must practice. I grew up believing that Holiness was just a call to live the holy life making each one of the fruits of the Spirit a reality in my life, as the Apostle Paul describe in his Epistle to Galatians 5:22-24. But then reading the Gospel of Matthew chapter 25, I found myself with questions about Holiness. I found that there was something lost in my approach. To live my holy life based on Galatians 5 was not enough since Matthew shows me that Jesus is heavily judgmental on issues related with the poor and how I respond to their needs; “As you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40). Then I found myself dealing with a different perspective of what holiness is. The book of Isaiah 58 and 42:6-7 that was read centuries later at the synagogue by our Lord Jesus in the Gospel of Luke 18:18-21, came to my sight when I read His final word; “Today this Scripture is fulfilling in your hearing.” I finally discover that my dichotomy separating the social and spiritual was wrong. I cannot live a holy life without being Compassionate, or being Compassionate without being Holy. If I’m going to live a life of Holiness, I must walk under the guidance of the Holy Spirit guiding me to live the pure and genuine religion taking care of orphans and widows in their suffering and to keep oneself from being corrupted by the world as the Apostle James said in his epistle, 1:27. Our Lord Jesus Christ throughout his entire ministry approached the spiritual and materials needs at once. He never did divide the time to perform miracles with his time for teaching and winning people for the Kingdom. Just imagine what happened that day when the paralytic was lay in front of Jesus after his friends opened a hole in the roof. What if Jesus had turned to him and said; “Sorry my friend, but today is the teaching day, tomorrow is the day for healing” or “Let me give you a lesson about your spiritual condition and procedure to follow; once you recognize it and confess your sins, come tomorrow early, wait in line and when your turn comes, then I will heal you” Praise God, our Lord Jesus just used the opportunity to perform a healing miracle and to teach a very profound Spiritual lesson. He knew that freedom is the ultimate result of holistic development that only happens when we see the person and respond to his/her social and spiritual needs holistically in a compassionate manner.

Today our world needs the touch of Jesus through his people. Many problems make it urgent:

- Today more than 854 million people do not have enough food
- Today close to 20% of the world’s adult population —771 Million people— are illiterate. At least 65% of them are women.

- Today more than 28,000 children under 5 die every day due to preventable causes, more than 50% of them die because of hunger related causes.
- Today more than 33 million people in the world are living with HIV/AIDS. More than 68% of them live in Sub-saharan Africa
- Today, the population of the world is 6.75 billion people; with more than 5 billion living in poor countries.
- Today the financial economic crisis affects more than 5.5 billion people.
- EEUU has 1 doctor for every 350 people. Sub-saharan Africa has only 1 doctor for every 10,000 people.
- Today the average miles that women and girls walk every day to collect water in poor countries is 3.6 miles. El promedio de millas que las mujeres¹

Looking at all of this, seems to say that our world needs more than ever genuine compassionate Christian witness that is able to show in palpable ways the love and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Today more than ever, Christians need to live Jesus and be His hands and feet. The world is still a very fertile land for nurturing Holistic Compassionate Ministries and this is where the Kingdom of God is built!

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¹ Sources: Millennium Development Goals Report 2007, United Nations, 2007; State of the World's Mothers 2007, Save the Children, May 2007; Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2006, UNESCO; Children and Water: Global Statistics, UNICEF; U.S. International Food Assistance Report 2006, USAID, December 2006; Making Poverty History, Church World Service, 2007; State of the World's Children 2007, UNICEF.