Book Review

**Development In Mission: A Guide for Transforming Global Poverty and Ourselves**

*By Monty Lynn, Rob Gailey, and Derran Reese*

Reviewed by Katrina T. Greene



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Lynn, Gailey, and Reese have written a thought-provoking, theologically-informed, and engaging book that challenges Global North Christian congregations and individuals to humbly, reflectively, and relationally engage in poverty alleviation. According to the authors, such engagement involves listening to the poor and partnering with them and organizations, both Christian and secular, to address the needs of the poor and vulnerable. They argue that just as Christ emptied himself of his power and privilege because of his love for people, that Christians should also empty themselves and relinquish their power and privilege to care for others, especially the poor. In this review, I identify multiple strengths of the book as well as provide two critiques that are apparent to me, especially as a socio-cultural anthropologist.

One of the strengths of the book is the authors’ provision and examination of seven principles of effective transformational development. These are (1) Cultivate Loving Relationships, (2) Empower to Sustain, (3) Give It Time, (4) Attend to Context, (5) Invest in Friendships and Partnerships, (6) Seek Out Insight, and (7) Assess and Improve. These principles are vital to effective engagement in poverty alleviation, and they also connect well with other Christian scholarship. For example, in the authors’ discussion of the principle “Attend to Context,” which involves Global North Christian congregations and individuals participating in a contextualization of the cultures in which they intend to serve, I was reminded of the scholarship of Al Tizon. Tizon emphasizes the need for intercultural competence within the Church, arguing that the Church “needs to enter boldly into the multicultural fray that increasingly describes our neighborhoods and communities today with a humility that is eager to learn and with enthusiasm for bearing witness to the gospel for all cultures” (2018, 16). In the context of explaining another principle, “Assess and Improve,” Lynn, Gailey, and Reese explore the need to understand whether an initiative is helping others and, if not, what needs to be changed. They also encourage participation in the design and implementation of assessments and promote an examination of unintended and targeted consequences. Such an argument coincides with the scholarship of Bryant Myers, who argues that monitoring and evaluation “is not ultimately about program efficiency as much as it is about effectiveness, which includes both the hoped for and the unanticipated” (2011, 291).

Another strength of the book is the authors’ strategic use and placement of personal narratives and experiences as well as scripture to introduce, elucidate, or support themes within the book. The inclusion of personal narratives, for example, at the beginning of chapters one, two, and five make the book even more accessible to those who have limited development or theological training, but desire to better understand and relate to the concepts being examined.

As a socio-cultural anthropologist, however, I note that while the authors do acknowledge the value of anthropology to engage in poverty alleviation, more integration of anthropological insight into the book would help support the authors’ arguments. Chapter 1, for example, commences with a story involving the gifting of a pumpkin to Doris, a first-term American missionary in Swaziland (now Eswatini), from Patricia, a Swazi woman. The story wisely illustrates how Christian congregations and individuals need to understand that the poor often desire to give and share what they have (e.g., resources, ideas, and experiences) with those who are giving to them. When Global North Christian congregations and individuals do not acknowledge or accept what the poor have to offer, they may prevent the poor from seeing how they can be a blessing to such congregations and individuals. But I would go still deeper, for such a reality also links to the work of Marcel Mauss, a French social scientist who argues that gifts always create obligations and reinforce or reflect social relationships. An application of Mauss’ (2000) work, first published in 1925, to the Lynn, Gailey, and Reese book would help provide an anthropological lens for understanding why unhealthy relationships, miscommunication, and even dependency manifest when Global North Christian congregations and individuals do not leave space for reciprocation in their relationships with the poor.

My second critique involves the authors’ discussion of various transformational development sectors without more explanation of how some Global North Christian congregations and individuals may be more open to engagement in some sectors than in others. While the authors do provide a biblical foundation or a “theological warrant” for “the lesser-known sectors” and detailed field-based insights and practices for each sector, I suggest that it would also be helpful to place the various sectors along a continuum of openness to engagement related to Global North Christian congregations and individuals. In my view, for example, the sectors of Children, Youths, and Older Persons; Education; Food; Health; Relief; Scripture Translation; Shelter; Sport; and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene, are more culturally embedded within the Church due to its historic missions work within these sectors. This reality may lead Christian congregations and individuals to be more open to effective engagement in poverty alleviation efforts in these arenas. The existence of less cultural embeddedness with regard to other sectors within some Global North Christian congregations, however, may engender less openness to engagement with those sectors. Such sectors include Creation Care, Freedom and Liberation, Income Generation, Migration and Refuge, Peacemaking and Peacebuilding, and Technology. Increasing openness to these sectors may require strategies, in addition to sharing scripture and best practices, that involve educational and motivational strategies that interact with Christian congregations and individuals on a personal level and utilize the social capital and influence of younger generation Christians in such discussions.

Despite these critiques, the book is of great value to the Christian Relief, Development, and Advocacy (CRDA) community due to its inclusion of relevant secular and Christian scholarship with regard to poverty alleviation and its encouragement of Christian congregations and individuals to pursue public and lifestyle advocacy. Such encouragement is reflective of the thoughts of Arthur Simon, founder of Bread for the World, who argues that Christians can engage in effective change by combining their individual actions and helping others with efforts to change public policy. Simon (2003, 138) explains, for example, that while it is important for individual Christians not to throw litter into a river, it is also important for them to work to get laws established and enforced that discourage the dumping of industrial and agricultural waste into a river. Another value of the Lynn, Gailey, and Reese book is its promotion of partnerships to combine efforts between Christian congregations and individuals and various organizations, Christian and secular, in the alleviation of poverty. While such partnerships should not compromise Christian development efforts, the sector-organized list of faith-based and secular non-governmental organizations, parachurch agencies, and intergovernmental organizations presented as potential partners for engagement at the end of the book is extremely valuable. I look forward to incorporating the book into the curriculum of my development-focused courses in order to reinforce some foundational understandings of effective poverty alleviation engagement.

**References**

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