

Relational Giving

Submitted by Lynn Green

The movement which labels itself as "Make Poverty History" has made a huge impact on young people in their teens and twenty. For me it's a most encouraging development, one which marks the rise of hope and the belief that the concerted actions of ordinary people can change the world.

I grew up in a generation like that and we did change the world, but in many aspects it was not for the better. Partly in reaction to my generation of baby-boomers, the next couple of generations of young people were less prepared to be idealistic and generally tended to be more cynical about the possibility of positive change. There were some wonderful and notable exceptions, but by and large we have not had a hopeful season like this since the late 1960s.

I am also encouraged by the fact that the younger generation was happy to be inspired by older people. I certainly don't want to leave out those who are in-between the ages of 25 and 55 -- people of all ages are engaging with sacrificial efforts to make this world a better place -- but there is a healthy security about this generation that is not rejecting the people of Bono and Bob Geldof's generation. Therefore, the opportunity for intergenerational cooperation is stronger than it has been in a long time.

Nevertheless, I also had reservation about the Make Poverty History movement. The outcomes that were being advocated were a reform of trade laws which is an absolutely vital objective. It must happen if poor agrarian societies and nations are to develop; however, I am not sure that I can make a connection between the £10 I give and the change of trade laws. In fact, it seems that all the objectives associated with "making poverty history" were dependant upon government and large institution for implementation. To date, our experience with government and large institutions has not lead us to optimism.

As you know, the debt of many third world nations incurred because they borrowed in order to invest in infrastructure, such as roads, telecommunications, airports, etc. Now the money is gone and the infrastructure is not there. Where did the money go? As we forgive the debt what makes us think that the infrastructure will get built? If we manage to find more money to put into the governments that didn't build the infrastructure the last time, what makes us think they will build it this time? This cycle of fraud and deception has occurred more than once in the last fifty years.

My generation demonstrated, gave, became Peace Corps volunteers. Many invested some of the best years of our lives to change the lot of poverty

stricken and war-ravaged people around the world. When there was no evidence of a great leap forward, many became cynical and selfish. Members of my generation have now become responsible for Enron, World-Comm and countless smaller fruits of self-interested cynicism.

Now for more than two generations we look back on relief and development efforts that have been non-relational by nature, working through large institutions and governments, and we find that it has by and large been a failure. We shouldn't really be surprised. So what am I advocating -- that we all keep our money in our own pockets, and continue our selfish existence? Of course not, but what I do want to advocate is relational giving.

One of the great advantages of living in this era is that relationships can be established right across the globe. We travel and have plenty of means of staying in touch with people we meet. Nearly all of us know people in other parts of the world, and when it comes to the body of Christ we have this great global network of trust and relationships. As a Christian, I know Christians in Africa who can be trusted with money. I know Christians in South Asia who have a good track record of stewarding resources well, who understand the principles of sustainable development.

What I am saying is, when I give through relational networks I have great confidence that what I have given will be used for the purpose for which it's intended. In many respects relationships are the glue that holds all societies, all cultures, everywhere around the world. We intuitively work relationally in healthy living; we trust people whom we know and are more cautious about those we do not know. When we look for a mechanic or a plumber or an accountant, we try to find somebody we know or at least someone who has been recommended by a person we trust. This intuitive dependence on relationship should extend to all of our transactions including to our giving to the poor. If we do not have those direct relationships then let's go for the indirect ones. I can give through someone I know and trust who knows someone who can be trusted, a friend of a friend. Again that's where the body of Christ comes into its own.

As members of Youth With A Mission, we stand in a unique place of strength within the body. We have well over 1,000 operating locations in more than 150 nations equipped with over 15,000 staff, through this network we must have trusting relationships with millions of people. We can help just about any need anywhere in the world through relational giving.

I have a conviction that people today have never wanted to give so much and yet never have they been so skeptical about the channel through which giving is normally applied. We have an opportunity to change that. Let us strengthen the relationships we have and look for the opportunities to put resources into the hands of those who can be trusted to use them well and efficiently. By applying the principle of relational giving through a network of

relationships, I think we truly do have a chance to “make poverty history.”
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