



Relief, Rehabilitation, and Development: *Excerpt from an Address*¹

Ted Ward

Relief and development includes three elements or stages: Relief, Rehabilitation, and Development. Each of these stages involves a transition. A key problem in agencies is that they are using the same people to do work at each of the stages. The relief person should be pulled out and another team put in for rehabilitation and so on. Certainly the same person can have skills in each of these areas—but the same person should not use these skills in the same situation. It is not developmental if its primary motive and primary resource are an outside infusion to the problem. Real developmental work is an inside grasping of the reins.

The Pattern of Relief, Rehabilitation, and Development

The three stages are not necessarily sequential. However, if we are in a situation with a relief problem, it is reasonable to presume that it will be followed by rehabilitation, and then by development; rather than to presume that the relief problem or the rehabilitation will go on forever.

Relief workers tend to burn out quickly and need to be cycled through the system quickly. If they stay in the relief mode, they often come to see others as fundamentally inadequate—followed by something like racism. (It is not rare to find people in relief agencies with strong racial biases—relief work can actually foster the bias.) “There’s nothing wrong with these people; they’re nice human beings, but they are just like children. We’re in a position to help them and we’ll just keep doing it.” This attitude signals the creation and fostering of dependency. The sinful condition in the church today is the fostering of dependency which is exacerbated by hierarchical leadership. The problem in humanity is the tension between autonomy and dependency.

Relief, Rehabilitation, Development: The Ethics of Development

Our Lord instructed that we give attention to matters of human need. Hardly a Christian would disagree with that premise. In my judgment, development is thus an issue of Christian ethics. Development intervention, development assistance, the participation of one person in the development of another. The minute we suggest that one person can participate in the development of another, we are into a series of both scientific and theological questions, and we should issue some warnings. For example, it is possible to participate in the development of another person in such a way that the other’s development is stifled. Sometimes that can be done with good motive but bad procedure, and it can harm.

Development, even development methodology, has to be examined in terms of the appropriate behaviors for the appropriate stage of the relationship. Therefore the study of development processes

¹ Ted Ward. Relief, Rehabilitation and Development. Excerpt from an address. The Church and Development Seminar. Wheaton College, July 1981

in families, or churches, or in communities and nations is an appropriate sub-study of the matter of Christian ethics.

Biblical teachings deal with love. Our Lord taught love in radical terms. These radical terms include “love your enemy”—a radical, unnatural act for a human being. Our Lord taught that the proper state of human relationship is redeemed in its capacity, for example, to love enemies; to give to all who ask; to be compassionate to others as one would be concerned for oneself.

I do not believe that the Scriptures provide us a thorough guidebook in terms of how to do development work. We have some interesting examples; but we can take the guidance of Scripture, put it against what we know about the nature of humanity through empirical observations and experiences, and articulate a Christian position on development. In other words, a Christian strategy for development would not follow from a collection of prooftexts from the Scriptures, though biblical passages can enlighten our viewpoint; but we need also to examine our experience, and listen closely to the experiences of other Christians who have attempted to exercise involvement in the development of others.

I subscribe to a gospel that has meaning for individuals, and therefore has meaning for society. How would the Christian community look? How should it look? If you're into development, you really need to deal with that one.