

# 9.1

## “I Recommend to You My Beloved Poor ...”

Magdalene of Canossa

### پیش The Goals of Transformation

The challenge to the poor is to recover their identity as children of God and to rediscover their vocation as productive stewards, discovering that they have been given gifts to contribute to the social well-being.

**The point of greatest transformational leverage is changed people. It is a transformed person who transforms his or her environment.**

Isaiah quotes God as saying that when **the poor** hear the good news and receive freedom and release, they become “**oaks of righteousness** ... that rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated.” (Is 61:3-4) People, not money or programmes, transform their worlds.

The fulcrum for transformational change is no longer transferring resources or building capacity or increasing choices, as important as these things are. But these things count only if they take place in a way that allows the poor to recover their true identity and discover the vocation God intends for them. A flawed process can make the poor poorer by further devaluing their view of themselves and what they have.

**Transforming people begins with helping people discover that “their human dignity and identity are intrinsically related to God in Christ** through his redemptive purpose in salvation history.” The moment people discover who they truly are is the moment in which their story takes on a new trajectory as a new future breaks in that cannot be contained, even by the cleverest of lies. With a recovered identity, the next step is the development of character, instilling and forming values that permit a better vision of the future and that allow the poor to love others as themselves, seeking to be life-enhancing for all. Finally, with a rediscovered identity and a character to match, transformational development works to empower people to live out these values in search of their new vision. **This means teaching people to read, to understand and interpret their context**, to figure out what and who is contributing to their current situation, and then to decide what they want to do about it. Transformation begins with a changed person. All other transformational

frontiers are now more easily breached in a more comprehensive way with a greater hope of being sustainable.

Finding that their story makes most complete sense and finds its best hope for the future in God's larger story opens up and invites a wide range of transformational responses. The web of lies is unmasked for what it is, an enormous deception serving the interests of both the evil one and the non-poor (who choose to ignore their complicity).

**Helping people to recover their identity and vocation also requires that they learn to reread their history.** God did not come into the life of the community with the arrival of the missionaries and certainly not with the arrival of the development agency. God has been active in the story of the community since the beginning of time. Although God is never without a witness (Rm 1:19), God was not always recognized for who God is or for what God has done. For the community to move into a new future, it must rediscover and recover its past, albeit understanding it in a different way. Perhaps no conversion is complete without the conversion of the past. This is important because the community needs to make the universal Gospel story, the true story of history, its own story as well. "Once this basic, universal relevance of Jesus Christ is granted, it no longer is a question of trying to accommodate the Gospel in our culture; **we learn to read and accept the Good News as our story.** Our Lord has been, from the beginning, the Word of God for us as for all people everywhere."

For a Christian understanding of transformational development restoring identity and vocation is the goal. This is the only path that leads toward life and that holds the promise of shalom. **We must work alongside the poor and non-poor alike, helping them and helping ourselves uncover and accept our true identity as children of God.** We must both work toward the recovery of our true vocation as productive stewards of God's earth, obedient to the claims and promises of Christ and His Kingdom.

## پیش Just and Peaceful Relationships

Our identity and vocation are expressed through our relationships. Thus, recovering identity and discovering vocation require that **transformational development focus on restoring relationships.** In the nature we have identified a relational framework that links everyone to God, to themselves, to the community, to those who are "other", and to the environment. **The central relationship in need of restoration is one's relationship with the Triune God, the God of the Bible.** The Good News is that God desires this restoration and has already taken the steps necessary for this relationship to be restored. If people are seeking God, many other good things will follow and become possible. If they are not, the horizons of change are more limited and difficult.

پیش **Being in a healthy relationship with oneself** is also an important transformational frontier. Many have suffered from the disempowerment that arises from a web of lies inside the mind, lies about oneself. Some of these lies arose externally and were internalized. Others are lies we told ourselves. This competing and conflicting voices inside ourselves the root of the mental dimension of poverty. Seeking peace within ourselves requires truth and justice within ourselves as well.

Then, within oneself is the location of character and values formation. Development has to start with the development of character that is according to the values of the Kingdom of God.

The quality of relationships within one's community is also important. There are many things that need changing that can only be addressed by the community working together. It is hard if the community is divided or cannot work together. Seldom can single individuals or households sustain change if they are working alone.

Healing the divide between the poor and non-poor is critical to significant long-term change. This means that the poor need help to recover their true identity and vocation while the non-poor need help to deal with the god-complexes that he or she has accepted to justify their privileged position in relationship to the poor. The divide between the poor and non-poor is exacerbated by the fact that, even though they share a common language, culture and place, the poor have become "other" to the non-poor and vice versa.

**پیش** **Being at peace with those who are "other" to us** means adding the ministry of reconciliation to the transformational agenda. Yet reconciliation is often very hard because the most frequent reason for declaring someone "other" is that they have done harm to you and your community.

The beginning of reconciliation and hence the path to justice and peace is the embrace of the other, in spite of all that the other has done. There can be no justice without the will to embrace. This call transcends the issue of who is right or wrong, who is righteous or unrighteous. We must embrace the other because this is what Christ did and continues to do. Yet the embrace is not complete until the truth is said and justice is done.

This requires a particular kind of stance toward the other, a way of understanding them. The will to embrace sheds light; its metaphor is the open arms of the Father whose son made himself wholly other. (Lk 15:11-31) The will to exclude creates blindness. With the will to embrace comes the possibility of seeing that there is some good in the other, bringing hope that this may be a point of convergence, a way of coming together.

**پیش** **Finally the community must be in a healthy and respectful relationship with the environment** on which it depends for food, water and air. At the heart of our true vocation is the call to be stewards caring for the world in which God has placed us so that it is productive and supportive of life. In Celtic tradition "we find a holy intimacy of human, natural and divine ... we see everywhere ... an abandonment to spiritual work and simultaneously a cultivation of the earth."

To move toward a better human future we must encourage and develop relationships that work, relationships that are just, peaceful, and harmonious. This is the heart of shalom and the only way leading toward abundant life for all. Thus transformational development that enhances life works to promote relationships that work as well as they can in a world of fallen people. Life and relationships are inseparable. **Development should aim at a blessed life, a life at peace with itself, others, the environment and with God.**

پے **Make up your mind to work in a “network”:**

use every letter you write, every conversation, every meeting in which you take part to express your convictions and your precious dreams.

**Communicate to others your vision of the world.**

Work in a “network” using thought, action, love, spirit.

You are the centre of a “network”, you are the centre of the world, you are a free source of life and goodness which is extremely powerful.

**Confirm it, spread it, irradiate it, think of it day and night.**

And you will see a miracle: your life will blossom again even in a world dominated by great powers, mass media and total control.

**For five billion people, working in network is the new freedom the new democracy: a new form of happiness.**

*Robert Muller*

پے **A river**, driven by the current, day and night runs towards the sea, receiving from the banks new earth. Once it has reached the sea it does not collect anything, but it gives all it contains to the point of losing itself totally in the sea. **But it is precisely in the total giving of itself that it receives fullness.** Tagore

پے **A community** has a future when its members discard the clothing of comforts, self-interest, individualism and they take on the spirit of service. When **one puts on an apron and kneels before a brother or sister**, the greatest become the smallest and the first becomes the last.

*Teresino Serra*

پے **Laws!** Jesus did not have an easy relation with the laws and with their defenders. He realized that the laws had become unbearable mill stones that crushed the poor and guaranteed the interests of the powerful. **He asked his disciples to respect human life above everything.** What can we say of today’s laws? Which attitudes should we have in their regard?

پے **Man**, my brother, all creation observes and questions you.

All that it has given you: intelligence and freedom, why do you waste it?

Why do you use it to go against your Creator?

**You have betrayed your Father!** *Helder Camara*

## پس The Word of God

### **Praise the Lord, it is good to sing**

in honour of our God, sweet is His praise.

The Lord, Restorer of Jerusalem!

He brought back Israel's exiles,

healing their broken hearts, and binding up their wounds.

He decides the number of the stars and gives each of them a name;

our Lord is great, all-powerful, of infinite understanding.

**The Lord who lifts up the humble, humbles the wicked to the ground.**

### **Sing to the Lord in gratitude, play the lyre for our God:**

who covers the heavens with clouds, to provide the earth with rain,

to produce fresh grass on the hillsides and the plants that are needed by man,

who gives their food to the cattle and to the young ravens when they cry.

**The Lord is interested only in those who fear Him,**

**in those who rely on His love.**

Praise the Lord, Jerusalem, Zion, praise your God:

**for strengthening the bars of your gates, for blessing your citizens,**

**for granting you peace on your frontiers, for feeding you with the finest wheat.**

He gives an order: his word flashes to earth;

to spread snow like a blanket, to strew hoarfrost like ashes,

to drop ice like breadcrumbs, and when the cold is unbearable,

he sends his word to bring the thaw and warm wind to melt snow.

**He reveals his word to Jacob, his statutes and rulings to Israel:**

He never does this for other nations, he never reveals his rulings to them.

*Psalm 147*