



by Jason Benedict

As an evangelical believer I count myself as a beneficiary of the Protestant Reformation. The dependence on Scripture as the source of truth, salvation by faith, the priesthood of the believer and other biblical truths are dear to me, yet there may be other traditions established in 16th century Protestantism that have negatively impacted global Christianity: namely, the negative impact stemming from the exclusion of holism in mission. Simply put the mission of the church was too narrowly defined.

Preaching (including biblical interpretation), prayer and evangelism held such an important role in the life of the reformers that the good news was confined to the hereafter. When Protestant training institutions were conceived they confined their training to the important subject matter: preaching, prayer and evangelism. Almost 500 years after the Reformation, I received theological training at a Protestant training institution and the subject matter was confined basically to preaching, prayer and evangelism (with some emphasis on pastoral care). Similarly, when I began a theological training institution in Africa, I structured the curriculum around various facets of preaching, prayer and evangelism. The exigency of these three disciplines was virtually unchallenged in my life until I began reaching out to the urban poor in Africa.

In the face of rank human suffering and need, I realized an important part of the picture was missing. I am not alone in this experience: many classically trained Christian workers have been awakened to the need for a holistic model of mission. For the purposes of this article, I would like to call this holistic model a transformational model. Similarly, I would like to refer to the

paradigm typified by preaching, prayer and evangelism as the proclamational model. This is not to say that the proclamational model lacks validity—simply that it is incomplete.

A larger question in this discussion is, does the word of God have anything to say on themes other than preaching, prayer and evangelism? A survey of Christian devotional materials might give you the impression that God has restricted his commentary to these subjects. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Bible has five times as many verses addressing the topics of money and possessions than the subjects of prayer and evangelism, combined. This is not to say that in God's economy prayer and evangelism are of lesser importance—simply that the scriptures have a great deal to say about other aspects of life. A prime example is Deuteronomy 23:12-13:

“Designate a place outside the camp where you can go to relieve yourself. As part of your equipment have something to dig with, and when you relieve yourself, dig a hole and cover up your excrement. For the LORD your God moves about in your camp to protect you and to deliver your enemies to you. Your camp must be holy, so that he will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you.”

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I have never seen this verse in a devotional work, but the truth contained in these passages is of tremendous importance. 6,000 children will die somewhere in the world today due to inadequate sanitation. I love this verse because it speaks of the practical nature of a loving God. The word Gospel means good news: to the mother losing a child from chronic dysentery this verse contains good news.

This is not to dilute the reality that our greatest human need is reconciliation to God through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ. However, I contend the Good News does not end with the born-again experience. In fact, I believe we need look no further than the earthly ministry of Christ to find a transformational model of mission.

Theologians agree that Luke 4:16-19 was almost like an inaugural address announcing the beginning of Jesus' ministry. It is as if He is expounding on the Gospel of the Kingdom using the Isaiah scroll. Therefore, I would like to examine the text of Isaiah 61 in search of a model for transformation. My commentary is thematic and confined to brackets.

1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor [alleviation of poverty]. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted [wholeness], to proclaim freedom for the captives [liberty and liberation] and release from darkness for the prisoners, [illumination, cf Luke 4 "recovery of sight]

2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor [reference to Jubilee] and the day of vengeance of our God, [Justice] to comfort all who mourn [comfort and wholeness],

3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion— [provision] to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. [Hope] They will be called oaks of righteousness, [righteousness, resilience vs. vulnerability] a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. [God glorified]

4 They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. [Urban renewal & community development]

5 Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. [Job creation and upward mobility for God's people, diversification of assets]

6 And you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, [access to markets and capital] and in their riches you will boast.

7 Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, [empowerment] and instead of disgrace

they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, [ownership of assets] and everlasting joy will be theirs.

8 "For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity. [Justice, reduction of corruption] In my faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them.

9 Their descendants will be known among the nations [Favor, opportunity, access to markets] and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the LORD has blessed."

10 I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. [Restoration of relationship with God] For he has clothed me with garments of salvation [salvation] and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

11 For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations. [God's glory to the ends of the earth]

The themes are summarized here as follows:

- Restored Relationship with God
 - Salvation
 - Righteousness
 - Priesthood
- Economic Lift
 - Poverty alleviation
 - Provision
 - Ownership of assets
 - Urban renewal (and community development)
- Hope
 - Comfort
 - Wholeness
- Empowerment
 - Illumination (knowledge)
 - Freedom
 - Resilience
 - Influence, favor and access (markets, capital, etc.)
- Justice
 - Jubilee
 - Reduction in crime and corruption
- The Glory of God

This is a very holistic gospel! Bryant Meyers (Walking with the Poor, 1999) talks about the nature of poverty and describes it as a matrix of the following factors:

- Spiritual Poverty (broken relationship with God and others)
- Material Poverty (lack of assets)

- Physical Weakness (poor health and inadequate nutrition)
- Vulnerability (no reserves, vulnerability to disasters and misfortune)
- Isolation (lack of access to infrastructure, capital and markets)
- Powerlessness (disenfranchisement)

It is amazing how Isaiah 61 addresses these same themes. I suggest this passage is descriptive of a biblical model of transformation. If these verses are descriptive, we must ask are there any prescriptive truths in scripture for transformation. The verse that jumps to mind is:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2 NIV).

This essentially says that in order to carry out the will of God

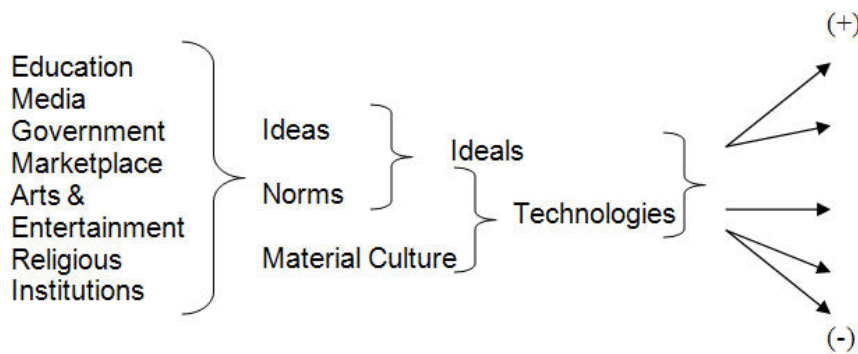


Figure 1

we must have our minds renewed: we need a transformed mindset that corresponds with biblical truth. We could restate it this way. To carry out and demonstrate the will of God for transformation as described in Isaiah 61 we must first be transformed ourselves by renewing our minds.

This would imply that our minds must be transformed by biblical truth not only with regards to redemption, justification, sanctification, propitiation, etc, but also with regards to the other themes of Isaiah 61: justice, empowerment, economic development, etc.

Typically, renewing of the mind has been seen as a discipleship issue, and properly so. If we propose discipleship along the lines of a transformational model, then the question of methodology remains. Do we find any biblical clues to this process?

Certainly, a review of the books of Moses will reveal that God encouraged the development of institutions that were responsible to carry out certain roles within society. These institutions were to obey and propagate biblical truth: Government, Priesthood,

Family, etc. Whenever, these institutions would err from the truth God would raise up prophets to bring correction. These prophets were God's emissaries called to bring truth to bear on the situation.

I would propose that likewise we need emissaries today who can speak to, teach, and coach the institutions of society in transformational truth. In Figure 1 (see left center of page) society is represented by a construct of ideas, norms, material culture, ideals and technologies.

According to this construct any impact you have on discipling individuals and the institutions they comprise will have a direct impact on society and that will have a positive (+) or negative (-) effect on development. To use biblical terminology for development we would speak in terms of blessing.

“See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse- the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God

and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.” Deut 11:26-28 NIV

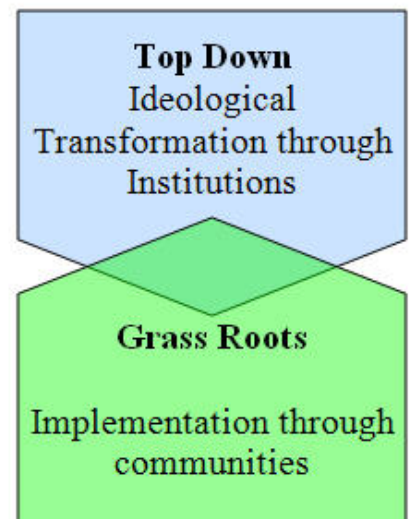
Research indicates that the best efforts in transformational development always involve empowerment and strong community ownership. This grass roots facet is integral to sustainability of development. Therefore there is a need to influence the institutions of society through training leaders (a kind of top down approach) and a need to ensure that implementation of transformational strategies is owned by communities (a grass roots approach).

(a grass roots approach).

If the key to transformation is ideological change, then there is a need to systematically train emissaries that can bring biblical truth to the various

institutions of society. This being the case we should look for strategies that will allow us to do this for each of the institutions of society: Government, Education, Business, Media, etc.

Let's take the case of business and the marketplace. We need strategies that will empower Christian entrepreneurs



to start and grow businesses that will bring economic development, blessing and transformation to society. This means that

these entrepreneurs would need to be disciplined in truth relating to the themes of Isaiah 61.

Isaiah 61 Theme	Discipleship (formation & competency)
Restored Relationship with God	How to walk with God as salt and light in the marketplace. Contextualized evangelism strategies for the marketplace.
Economic Lift	How to use enterprise to alleviate poverty and bring renewal to communities.
Hope	How to bring dignity, comfort and wholeness into the lives of stakeholders.
Empowerment	How enterprise can give people the knowledge, means and tools to walk in freedom and resilience.
Justice	How enterprise can influence society in the area of justice.
The Glory of God	How to glorify God in and through business.

Methodologically this kind of discipleship could take place through training programs, coaching, mentoring, peer groups, and on the job training. Ideally, the church would grasp the importance of bringing truth to bear on all the institutions of society, and view this kind of discipleship as part of her mandate.

In conclusion, protestant churches have all but omitted the

transformational model of mission from theology and practice for the better part of the last five centuries. There are a few shining exceptions to this norm: the Moravian movement, William Carey, and a few others. Now is the time for us to take inspiration from witnesses like these and from God's word and begin to take a fuller gospel to the least and the last. ■

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