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SCHOOL OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

CRITIQUE OF

BEYOND CHARITY

BY

JOHN M. PERKINS

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BY

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Critique of *Beyond Charity*

Bibliographical Data

Perkins, John M. *Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Co., 1993.

Synopsis of Each Chapter

Chapter one opens the book by arguing the necessity of moving beyond mere charity, and intimating, statistically, the current climate of need, discussing the obstacles to solutions (charity mentality, racial polarization, victim mentality and self-doubt, government programs), and then proffering solutions to overcoming obstacles through the church.

Chapter two addresses quick fixes and felt needs by exposing the quick-fix illusion, recounting and interpreting Jesus' talk with a Samaritan woman, defining ministering effectively, and identifying universal needs (to belong, to be significant, to have a reasonable amount of security). At this point, Perkins introduces the three Rs of community development, relocation, reconciliation, and redistribution, then closes the chapter with the relocation example of Wayne Gordon.

Chapter three surveys the marks of an authentic church, discussing a divided church, and the need for a new theology, then proposing a theology of reconciliation. Perkins then lists and discusses seven attributes of an authentic church (absorbs pain, proclaims hope, points to God's authority, brings people together, spends lavishly on the needy, reflects God's character, protects the vulnerable).

Chapter four promotes Perkins' idea of living the gospel, which he asserts is evidenced by being transformed by God's love. He states that people are not going to church, but rather people are the church.

Chapter five touches upon the burden of proof placed on the Christian, including demonstrating authenticity, connecting words and deeds, and facing the crisis of proving authenticity.

Chapter six discusses filling the leadership vacuum. Perkins argues strongly for indigenous leadership development, modeling of healthy life-styles (relocation, living among the poor), and then cautions his readers to recognize the difference between relocation and gentrification, which he believes is motive.

Chapter seven addresses evangelism, proposing an apologetic for it on the grounds of the uniqueness and universality of Christ, defining what evangelism is (asking people to enter a relationship with God), and then reviewing the consequences of evangelism.

Chapter eight is devoted to exploring wholesome care through applying it, creating an environment of hope, promoting dignity, power, education, employment, health, security, recreation, and beauty.

Chapter nine develops Perkins' ideas on providing services such as affirming dignity, exercising appropriate power, supplementing education, employment, health, security, recreation, and beauty, all of which he believes the church should be involved in providing or facilitating.

Chapter ten tackles the subject of economic development relative to home ownership and local enterprise, and even offers a model of economic development for the reader.

Chapter eleven discusses pursuing justice and draws heavily upon Isaiah 58:5-10 and James 5:1-6. Perkins then proceeds to elaborate upon using wealth to advance God's kingdom, then closes the chapter with a brief essay on practicing justice.

Chapter twelve handles the topic of discerning the call, which Perkins believes involves two steps: learning God's will and hearing God's call. The ensuing section explores the nuances of learning God's will (it is summed up in two great commandments: love for God and love for others; it is plain, it has objectives, it works from the inside out), followed by a discussion of what God's will is not (not culture, not necessarily one's present life-style). Next, Perkins addresses

hearing God's call, opining that God's call is usually a response to a past faithfulness, is perceived in ministry, is in relationship to building God's Body, and is inescapable. The call to urban ministry is then expounded, including the elements of motivation by need, love, a pastoral heart, spiritual gifts, and community.

Chapter thirteen urges the reader to count the cost as it addresses the unfamiliar (culture shock), possessions, security, and emotional pain.

Chapter fourteen describes urban servants, such as the caseworker, the convert, and the comrade, then issues a call for encouragers, investors, and volunteers.

Chapter fifteen delineates how to face the challenges by beginning in prayer, then braces the reader to expect a wide range of happenings including suffering, brokenness, failure, faith, hope, loneliness, and rejection.

Chapter sixteen asks, "Whom shall I send?" In this, his final chapter, Perkins reminds that the Christian community is to incarnate (personify Jesus), and that one alone cannot be the Body of Christ, but that the community of Christendom is the Body, and there is no such thing as a "black" or "white" church in the sight of God. Because of God's act of love, Christians should feel responsible, says Perkins, and respond as did Isaiah, who said, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isa. 6:8).

Evaluation and Applicability: Strengths and Weaknesses

Beyond Charity is an excellent book. It is neatly divided into chapters, and chapters into sections, replete with suggestions that are applicable to all Christians everywhere. Who does not need to be reminded of the necessity of moving beyond charity? Doing good can result in nothing more than enabling, thus perpetuating the very cycle one is attempting to break! Perkins' summons to relocation, reconciliation, and redistribution is creative. Not many would advocate moving into a "hood" in order to transform it! His stories and style help disclose the ministry opportunities right where we are, even in "bedroom" communities (like where this writer serves).

The strengths of Perkins' text notwithstanding, there are some weaknesses. Though his writing style flows well, he allows too many split infinitives (pp. 27, 32, 39, 57, 85, 88, 120, 140, 142, 143, 149, 155, 158, 172 [2]), and misplaces the word "me" (p. 174), all of which serve to raise questions regarding scholarship. One also is left to wonder whether Perkins genuinely believes the shame and humiliation felt by young boys, whose mothers rely on government checks, actually "causes" (p. 27) these boys to grow up and physically, financially, and emotionally exploit women. This seems to be a near-sighted observation that many, including this writer, would be

uncomfortable with. Further, Perkins' states that the homogeneity principle does not mirror the image of God (p. 49). This is nothing short of an affront to a leading model of church growth and foreign missions strategies. What Perkins wants is integration with reconciliation and genuine brotherly love, not segregation, and this is the ideal. However, many will take offense at his "demonizing" of the homogeneity principle (although the present writer sees some of its dangers too). Lastly, suggesting that the church loan money (p. 109) is unsound advice in the estimation of the present writer.