

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

School of Religious Education

Critique of

Restoring At-Risk Communities

Edited by

John M. Perkins

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Co., 1995.

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Synopsis of Each Chapter

Chapter one, authored by the editor of the book, John M. Perkins, focuses on explaining what Christian community development entails. Perkins opines that it is meeting felt needs, particularly three universal needs (to belong, to be significant and important, and to have a reasonable amount of security), communicating the gospel wholistically, through evangelism and social action, relocation to live among the poor, facilitating reconciliation between people and God, as well as neighbor to neighbor, establishing the principle of redistribution, which he believes is best done by empowering the poor through leadership development and church-based programs which affirm the dignity of humanity. Perkins closes this first chapter by reviewing success stories, thus suggesting his

principles are time-tested and proven.

Chapter two, authored by Phil Reed, is devoted to establishing a theology of Christian community development. Reed echoes Perkins' three Rs (reconciliation, redistribution, relocation), as does nearly every author in the text. First, Reed addresses the vision of Christian community development, which requires developing people to the point that they are using their God-given skills and abilities in satisfying work that benefits the community, promoting a state of general well-being wherein one experiences the fullness of all the blessings God has for His people, and empowering and equipping indigenous people to assume positions of leadership. Reed proceeds to elaborate on the three Rs and relating each to Scripture, diagraming a wheel of ministry and discussing its components (call, evangelism, social action, economic development, and justice), all of which he says ought to revolve around the church.

Chapter three is written by Lowell Noble and Ronald Potter, and is designed to help the reader understand poverty. The authors begin by exploring theories as to why the poor are poor, asserting that liberals would strongly support the idea that the poor are poor due to systemic oppression, while conservatives would counter by arguing that the poor shape their own life situation. The authors use the eclectic approach and surmise the problem of poverty includes both systemic oppression and personal

shaping of one's own life situation (p. 48). Noble and Potter close their chapter by positing that there is hope for the city.

Chapter four is authored by editor John M. Perkins, and focuses on the character of a developer, asking whether or not the reader has what it takes to be a leader. Perkins then describes necessary leadership qualities in terms of courage and commitment, moving quickly to an examination of Nehemiah 1:1-11 and a model leader in the person of Nehemiah. Perkins points out that Nehemiah prayed before he acted, sensed God's timing, counted the cost, did his homework, recognized God's control, identified with his people, tested his plan, sought God's continued direction, inspired a spirit of cooperation, and refused to let his enemies distract him. Perkins closes his chapter by urging his readers not to let prayer be a substitute for action.

Chapter five is authored by Bob and Peggy Lupton along with Gloria Yancy, and addresses relocation. The authors assert that living in a community is a growing trend, then advance to discuss the negative effects of the urban exodus and subsequent missing theologies. At this point the writers propose elements which they feel make a healthy community, including indigenous leadership, indigenizing leadership, gentrification (immigration of middle-class people into a deteriorating or recently restored area), economics and relocation (relocation differs slightly from

gentrification in that the motive for moving in is prompted by the needs of the poor and needy), and neighboring and church involvement. The authors offer some suggestions relative to relocation, namely do not do it alone, consider neighboring versus fixing, and understand that relocation does not always equal reconciliation. Next, the writers discuss the calling to relocation, offer several personal examples, then close the chapter by exploring relocation in the form of returning.

Chapter six, co-authored by Spencer Perkins and Chris Rice, is devoted to discussing reconciliation in terms of loving God and loving people, which the authors believe is the most powerful sign or wonder to authenticate the gospel. The authors compare and contrast competing models of Christian community development (homogeneous, multicultural, and integration), arguing that all three are inferior to the reconciliation model. They build their theology of the reconciliation model on the greatest commandment (Matt. 22:36-40), and emphasize the fact that love for God and love for neighbor go together. Perkins and Rice see reconciliation as a three step process of admitting, submitting, and committing. Regarding admitting, they assert that racial residue must be dealt with, white blinders removed, institutional blinders dismantled, skin-deep relationships enhanced, and caseworker mentalities confronted. The authors argue further that minorities must do their part too, reminding that love without

truth lies, and truth without love kills. Relative to submitting, a brief section posits forgiveness as a way of life. Then, regarding committing, Perkins and Rice discuss the transition from caseworkers to comrades, kingdom choices and intentionality, reconciling different cultures into one body, then they close the chapter by distinguishing friends and yokefellows.

Chapter seven, authored by Mary Nelson, addresses redistribution in terms of empowering the community. Early on she establishes a biblical basis for her strategy (Lev. 25; 2 Kings 4:1-7; Matt. 14:16-21; Acts 4:32-34; 2 Cor. 8:13-14; Phil. 2:4), explores economics and values, and insightfully describes Christian community development's roles in economic development. She then expounds upon how to start a neighborhood business (identify opportunities and community resources, determine feasibility, develop the business plan, consider financing, hire effective people for key leadership roles, and never stop learning from others), explores the collective wisdom on redistribution (local intelligence, moral authority, and ministry motivation), then persuasively argues that Christians are developers, not merchants. She concludes her essay on redistribution by addressing housing and human services as economic development, offering a word of caution, then providing several success stories of effective redistribution.

Chapter eight is authored by Glen Kehrein, and focuses upon

the local church and Christian community development. His conviction is that development be done only from a church base, never a parachurch substructure. Kehrein discusses the faith community, the truly reconciled community (integration does not automatically bring about reconciliation), and evangelism as well as discipleship. He proceeds to explore wholistic partnerships in terms of faith and works, addressing commitment to the poor and the parish concept, and commitment to partnership, all the while opining that the church is the rudder. Kehrein closes his section by reminding that no one-size model fits all, and that models are helpful because they put meat on the bones and illustrate principles.

Chapter nine is written by Wayne L. Gordon, and deals with indigenous leadership development. Gordon focuses first on establishing leaders in the communities, committing to believe leaders are already there, and committing to empowerment. He moves then to exploring scriptural bases for picking leaders (Matt. 4:18-22), teaching them (Matt. 5-7), choosing a few from the many (Matt. 17:1), being a servant to them (Matt. 20:26-28), and making disciples (Matt. 28:19-20), then proposing eleven insights to successful discipling. He closes his chapter by discussing how to promote interest in attending college among youth, and how to help maintain that momentum.

Chapter ten, authored by the wife of the editor, Vera Mae

Perkins, focuses on Christian community development and the family, namely, counting the costs and the rewards. Mrs. Perkins opens with an excerpt from a past experience, then proceeds to discuss the extreme costs of community development, reminding that the demands of discipleship (Luke 14:26-28) not only weed out the faint of heart, but also serve to prepare committed Christians for the journey ahead, lest they run out of steam or courage. From here she writes concerning marriage partners as ministry partners in relationship to home-making and home-moving, and making do with less. Mrs. Perkins concludes her brief chapter by addressing reconciliation regarding giving up the past, new challenges, and counting blessings.

Chapter eleven is co-authored by Mark R. Gornik and Noel Castellanos, and is centered on how to start a Christian community development ministry. They begin by asserting that the place to start is by joining in God's reign, becoming God's copycats, then hearing the call. From here the authors explain how God stirred them up, then write concerning a theology of place, standing on the shoulders of mentors, reminding that it takes humility to learn. Understanding community and city is then explored, along with beginning involvement and team building, leadership as community, starting out, working together, keeping the church at heart, facing tests and trials, and celebrating God as the rebuilders. The authors conclude their chapter by positing

that the task is ongoing, continually growing and expanding.

John M. Perkins authors the conclusion, wherein he interprets and applies the life of the biblical character Esther to Christian community development, pointing out the presence of an extended family structure, a strategy, the attendance of strong family values, never losing sight of who you are, understanding that there is a spiritual battle being fought, and responding to the challenge with courage.

Ensuing sections of the book tell about the Christian Community Development Association, its mission, benefits, members, statement of faith, and address, and finally, its member organizations classified by state. Following the notes section, Mark R. Gornik provides the reader with a bibliographical resource guide divided up by stages, topics, and contexts.

Evaluation and Applicability: Strengths and Weaknesses

The strengths and applicability of the book include the emphasis upon confronting people who put their culture ahead of Christ (p. 129), (a sorely needed reminder in small towns!), the reminder that it is kingdom culture Christians ought to pursue, not Blackness or Whiteness (p. 130) or "countriness" as opposed to being "citified," in this writer's context. The book's distinctions between friends and yokefellows (pp. 130-131) is wise to understand in any setting, as is the fact that any

relationship that is significant to the kingdom will be attacked (p. 133). Also, the position that a parachurch stance cripples new converts, giving them the impression that participation in the church is optional (p. 172) is something that needs to be echoed universally! FCA and AA are poor substitutes for the koinonia offered by a church! Then, the stress on the necessity of a solid foundational belief system (p. 177) sounds the doctrinal bell for all readers. The keys to successful discipling (pp. 186-190) are insightful too, as is the statement that it takes humility to learn (p. 219).

The weaknesses of the book include far too many split infinitives (pp. 37, 66, 67, 90, 116, 117, 119, 131, 135, 165, 174, 203 [2], 212, 213, 216, 218, 228). Also, the statement of being too involved in church to be involved in community life (p. 87) may appear to elevate community over church, or even place it beside church. Likewise, it appears these writers all blend church and community such that distinctions are lost. Lastly, improper uses of me (pp. 114, 200), myself (p. 125), and the ending of a sentence with a preposition ([at] p. 119) call into question the scholarship behind the writing and editing of the book.