

# SALVATION & SOCIETAL EDIFICATION

BY DON RICHARDSON

**L**inking personal salvation with societal edification is our duty.

I recall that some Sawi tribesmen who worked for me or brought me food, firewood, etc. wanted to be paid with colorful beads or tobacco. Unlike Roman Catholic priests in the region, I declined to be a bead or tobacco merchant on the grounds that steel tools, salt, fishing line, fishhooks, soap, nails, etc., would benefit the people much more than baubles and smoke (though these latter items of course would have cost me much less, especially in terms of air freight).

I dispensed medicine free of charge to the ill but strengthened the remarkable work ethic the people already had by requiring them to work for everything else they wanted from me. Learning that a Roman Catholic priest in another area was reputedly doling out goods free of charge to anyone who asked, three Sawi men asked me, "Can he do that because he is richer than you, or is it just that he loves the people of that other tribe more than you love us?"

I replied, "If indeed he gives them things other than medicine free of charge it is because he sees them as children and himself as their father. If I saw you as children I could do the same. But I know you are men just as much as I am a man; that is why I require you to work for the things you need." They were quite pleased to know I regarded them as men, so that was the end of that.

Some missionaries teach the Ten Commandments by rote but fail to exemplify lessons such as these, lessons so basic to helping redeemed people contribute to the edification of the overall society. I taught key Sawi men how to teach the gospel, yes,



but I also taught them to own and operate their own retail stores and tithe their weekly profits.

Exploitive outside merchants are loathe to come in and compete with reasonable markups set by honest local merchants, so I deflected considerable predatory encroachment by teaching Sawi Christians how to be merchants.

If Christianity in some regions is "a mile wide and one inch deep," I suspect missionary failure in matters of common sense teaching of ethics is partly responsible. I also believe that failure to link the gospel effectively with redemptive analogies may leave converts with a weaker appreciation for the marvel of God's grace.

In our work, medicine, hygiene, economics, introducing new crops and education progressed hand-in-hand with the work of church planting. This was largely true of all the ministries carried out by evangelicals in what was then Irian Jaya, now Papua. Eventually, though, if the missionary stays too long, he generates a dependency syndrome which hinders both the growth of the church and the social and economic development of the society. People have to be given space and time to apply what they have been taught, thereby claiming ownership of it by fitting it to their own culture and environment. f



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