

# RECRUITS OR DEPENDENTS?



GLENN SCHWARTZ

/ Glenn Schwartz is Executive Director Emeritus of World Mission Associates. He continues to have an international ministry encouraging the discovery and mobilization of local resources for the Kingdom of God. His book *When Charity Destroys Dignity: Overcoming Unhealthy Dependency in the Christian Movement* can be ordered on the website of World Mission Associates at [www.wmausa.org](http://www.wmausa.org)

Over the years I have written and spoken quite a lot about discovering and using local resources for the furtherance of God's kingdom. My heart's desire is to see the church around the world become deeply rooted in the society of which it is a part and then draw resources from that society for both its own existence and for outreach. Why is this so important?

When I began thinking about this, two different pictures of the Church and how it spreads came to mind. One picture is the church which sends out emissaries or evangelists who tell the world who Jesus is and what a commitment to Him will mean for them and others. In reality, those emissaries and evangelists are seeking to recruit others who will help to get this message to the whole world. When the gospel is properly presented, it is for the purpose of seeking recruits for God's army that is spreading out across the world in search of more recruits. When done appropriately the new recruits help to take the message further – giving themselves and their resources to help promote the gospel.

Consider the second picture of what sometimes happens. Let's say that this army going out to spread the message does not

gather recruits, but rather people who become dependent on those carrying the message. This means that some of the resources the emissaries need for furtherance of the gospel are shared with the people they are trying to recruit. As they try to move on, their progress is hindered, rather than being helped. Instead of getting new resources to help in the cause, the people in this army are being drained of resources, slowing their progress toward world evangelization. Sometimes those in the army decide to settle down and live there for the rest of their lives or their ministry. They make a commitment to help needy communities engage in what is sometimes called the syndrome of church development rather than the dynamic of spiritual outreach.

So, there you have the two pictures of missionary activity. One gathers recruits to help further the cause, and the other gathers dependents who consume precious resources originally designated for world outreach.

There are other things that keep the Church from being the Church, but my purpose here is to show that the gospel could be preached in many more places if the simple shift were made from gathering dependents to raising recruits.

Obviously along the way the carriers of the gospel will meet people in need. A serious reading of the New Testament reveals that the Church is to assist those who are in need. The challenge is to discern whether people are facing absolute poverty, which demands immediate assistance, or relative poverty; which means that they most likely have something they could give. Time and again we see places where people—who appear to us to be in need—actually have something to contribute to the church, however small, such as a handful of rice from each meal, joyfully given to further God's kingdom.

I often use the example set before us in II Corinthians chapter 8 where the Apostle Paul tells about the believers in Macedonia pleading for the privilege of giving to those in need in Jerusalem. This was a generous act on the part of the Macedonians - who were living in severe trial and extreme poverty (verse 2), yet wanting to help the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem (verse 4). It is interesting to note that in the New Testament there is no record of "mother churches" sending funds to the "mission churches." In other words, the pattern in the New Testament is giving which goes from the mission churches to the mother church.


In a few places, the mother church sent support to missionaries like Barnabas and the Apostle Paul, even though Paul himself did not prefer that kind of support (I Cor 9:15). He chose to get his support from the new recruits or the labor of his own hands. Why was he so adamant about that? He was countering those who were preaching the gospel for personal gain, and he did not want the gospel to be tainted in this way.

In practical terms, what can be done in places where the church has become characterized by “dependents” rather than

“recruits?” First, it is necessary to find out whether the gospel is truly transforming the hearts of those who hear it. If there is only marginal commitment to Jesus Christ, we should not be surprised when adherents act like dependents rather than recruits. We should not expect people who do not have a personal relationship with the Lord to become enthusiastic supporters of his kingdom. So the whole gospel must first be preached, along with a call to serious commitment to God’s cause.

Second, if this transition to recruits is going to be successful, then

the challenge must be to join the world-wide spread of the gospel. The Church will need to stop hiding behind their inadequacy and discover that apart from the filling of the Holy Spirit, they will never become adequate. This means moving from the syndrome of church development to the dynamic of missionary outreach. When this is done appropriately, people will become “World” Christians, not just Christians in name only.

So, let us press on to disciple recruits not just gather dependents. 

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## TRANSFORMING WORLDVIEWS THROUGH THE BIBLICAL STORY

D. BRUCE GRAHAM

*...continued from page 9.*

But something new began to develop among my students when we started going through the whole biblical story. We approached it inductively, seeking to discover God’s message within each story. How were the stories connected? What was at the heart of the whole story? Their worldview and perspective began to change. They felt part of what we called the “Seed-Man Mission” (the term we used to describe the heart of the story from Gen 3:15). They were energized and felt part of something significant.

But knowing the story did not necessarily make them good storytellers. They had to practice telling the story. And they had to understand the people they wanted to reach in order to effectively communicate the biblical story. Rather than reading books about the people (usually written by outsiders), we encouraged the students to study the people inductively. They spent time in teashops and homes, discovering the concerns and interests of the local people. They took part in their celebrations and traditions, always asking God for insight and wisdom that would help them tell the biblical story most effectively.

This led to creative ways of communicating the story—song, drama, pictures or simply storytelling, are all common forms of expression among Indians. One student drew pictures of successive stories through the Bible, one page per story, and hung them on his living room wall. Another invited friends to his home for discussion weekly and eventually had religious leaders going through the whole biblical story. One woman spent months, even years, listening to the stories and concerns of the Muslim women among whom she worked. Eventually they began to open up to her, and she had biblical stories to share with them that captured their interest. They wanted to hear more.

So, let’s multiply storytellers who understand the whole story. Let’s help them internalize it for themselves inductively so this story becomes their story. Let’s encourage them to take the time to know the local people and their stories so they meaningfully connect that peoples’ story with God’s story. This will transform a people’s worldview. 