

From Social Activism to Biblical Advocacy



Here's a Christian response to the Millennium Development Goals.

In 2000, global leaders met for a United Nations summit and agreed to "spare no effort" to rid the world of the scourge of extreme poverty, which has kept more than 1 billion people in degrading and inhuman circumstances.

Ten years later, 190 world leaders returned to the U.N. building in New York to assess our progress on those promises to the world's poor, and it was hard to escape a sense of significance, but outright expectations were muted by the "outcomes" document that had already been agreed upon by governments before they even met.

By common agreement it was little more than diplomatic speech for, "We're doing OK, but we still have a long way to go."

But the real weakness of the outcomes document was its total lack of strategy for delivery or implementation. None of the numerous roundtables, plenary sessions and side events that drew in public participation left a sense of real engagement beyond the agreements already made.

Christians

should care about the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) committed to in 2000 not because they are a perfect set of responses to the poor, but because they give us an agreed upon set of targets with measurements. They also give us a universal language by which all nations can respond and evaluate one another's performance on behalf of the world's poor.

When I was in a remote village in Zambia a few years ago, nurses told me that they used the MDGs as a measurement of their own performance. When I was with the then Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, a few days later, he was using the same language. The world has never had that gift before. It is as if we are undoing the tower of Babel to speak the same language with regard to the poor.

But I also believe passionately that the unprecedented global outcry against injustice and defending the cause of the poor is also a movement that is taking place in the slipstream of what the Holy Spirit is doing in liberating captives. This was the heart of Isaiah's prophecy about Jesus (see Is. 61:1-4) and Jesus' manifesto in which He identified Himself so thoroughly with liberation (see Luke 4:18).

When Micah Challenge International first began thinking about a Christian response to the MDGs in 2001, there were many voices who predicted that no one would be talking

about the MDGs by 2005. But that has been as far from the truth as the east is from the west! Today, celebrities, politicians, philanthropists and ordinary citizens are becoming a part of a global movement behind these promises. It is right that this should be the case.

Even more, so many charities such as World Vision and the ONE campaign, which did not set out to focus on the MDGs, have made them a cornerstone of their work in the past couple of years. Political attention on the MDGs is becoming a crowded space, and we think this is good news for the poor.

Now, one of our main tasks is getting more Christians involved and to strip away the feeling that the MDGs are for political nerds who understand complicated politics. We will do that as soon we get more Christians to understand that everyone has a voice, and in many countries everyone has a vote.

Another task is also to get them to understand that the justice and mercy of God is as concerned about our relationship with Him in holiness as it is concerned about justice in our global institutions. We are still short of Christian translators who are able to take complicated ideas away from the specialists and put them in the hearts and imaginations of our people—without making them naïve.

And there is also a massive eschatological challenge for

many of us who are suspicious about anything that is in any way connected to the United Nations or global government. Many Pentecostals and charismatics have an inherent suspicion of these institutions, which we dub to be “Babylonian.” Well, there’s nothing wrong in having theological nervousness about these institutions.

We’re entitled to see the Bible in that way. But we are not entitled to stand back from our commitment to tackle injustice anymore than Daniel was entitled to refuse food to the hungry when he worked as Prime Minister in Babylon. A biblical theology doesn’t use eschatology as an escape clause to do nothing about injustice; it finds ways to help Daniel do a good job in the very heart of Babylon.

Generally speaking Christians can help to reach the goals in one of two ways. Firstly, we must continue doing what we are doing.

Worldwide we are still the biggest single provider of public services outside of government on the planet—and we have been doing this for 2,000 years. We must keep it going because it makes a difference to millions of people on a daily basis.

But secondly we have to make an important shift from being social activists to biblical advocates. This is the difference between Moses being so passionate about justice that he kills an Egyptian and Moses walking into Pharaoh’s house 40 years later to say, “Let my people go!”

And this is very demanding because it needs us to think of our relationship with God, people and institutions in a very different way. And to our amazement we discover that the God who tells us to take our shoes off at the burning bush is the same God who is sending us into Pharoah's house to talk about political liberation.

Christians who form a social and community membrane across the world should realize that this gives us enormous power—not for ourselves but for the poor. And if history has taught us anything it is that when people rise up with angry hope on behalf of the oppressed things really can change. And if 20 percent of the Christian world turned its attention to these promises to the poor over the next five years they would be delivered.

Despite having a long way to go, the African nation of Malawi is a great example of one nation that is beginning to see the impact of the fact that people do care about the MDGs. It has made great progress on the MDG targets, and more than 30,000 Christians will be praying there for those in poverty on , ten years since the Millennium Development Goals were first put into place.

This hasn't all happened because of political benevolence. It's due to good government, transparency at work and the outcome of civil society action.

If, after reading this article, you want to join the Christians in Malawi and up to 80 million other Christians

globally in the
Micah Challenge campaign by praying for the poor in churches,
and
taking political action on Oct. 10, you can find out how it is
done at .

*The Rev. Joel Edwards is the
International Director of Micah Challenge International. He
travels the globe
inspiring the church to get involved in advocacy with and for
the poor as part
of their core mission. As part of Micah Challenge's campaign,
'Jesus House for all Nations'
in London will host hundreds of Christians on , when up to 100
million
Christians globally will join the challenge of praying for the
poor, and
promising to take action to halve poverty by 2015.*