

## JESUS' DEVELOPMENT AND THE CONCEPT OF ADEQUACY

by Bob Moffitt

Jesus' life on earth gives us a model of human development that is radically different from the modern, secular view. Jesus' development can serve as a biblical model, or pattern, for our own lives. However, modern Christians often make the tragic mistake of ignoring or neglecting this biblical view of human growth.

What is the modern view of development? Modern secular society defines development largely in economic and material terms. Education, science, and technology are the principal mechanisms by which poverty will be alleviated, human need will be met, and peace and happiness will be found. Higher education, advanced technology, industrial production, growing national economies, and high GDPs are synonymous with development. It is true that education, technology and other benefits of Western culture are often helpful in raising the material and intellectual quality of life. As good and helpful as these can be, they are not the basic requirements for growth toward God's intentions.

Unfortunately, many Third World Christians believe in the secular development model. They have been seduced by trinkets of materialism. Their behavior portrays their belief that "development" is measured by the ownership of Western values and things. They have believed the lie that Western education and technology are like ships, carrying them into the harbor of happiness.

Third World Christians are not at fault for this perspective. Their Western brothers and sisters were seduced first. Then, missionaries from the West carried the Christian faith to the Third World. They, as well as their message, were wrapped appealingly in a shroud of Western education and technology. Just as a virus is passed along from one person to another, Third World Christians often "caught" a materialistic view of development.

Missionaries and Christian relief and development workers don't have to use words to promote a materialistic view of development. They do it, unintentionally, by how they live. If a poor man comes to Christ through the witness of a "rich" man (one with a watch, camera, computer, car, or new clothes), what could the poor man perceive about the relationship between being a Christian and having material things? If a Christian relief and development agency attacks human need in a poor community by using technology that costs more than the combined annual income of all the residents, what impression could the community have about the relationship between Christian faith, high technology, and development?

Scripture, by contrast, presents a very different view of the goal, process, and material requirements for human development. Modern Christians need to compare Scripture with their own beliefs about the material requirements for development. In Luke 2:52 and surrounding verses, we have one of Scripture's clearest presentations of a biblical view of human development. We see the goals and processes of development, as well as the context in which it takes place. Luke 2:52 reads:

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

This passage refers to the development of Jesus. Jesus Himself grew in wisdom. He also grew physically, spiritually, and socially. Christians agree that Jesus was the

"perfect man." As such, He is our model; and His development can serve as a model for our own.

It is important to see that Jesus achieved His full human potential in these four areas of life in the context of relative material poverty. He was born in a stable. His first years were spent as a political refugee in Egypt. He grew up in the home of a laborer, in a town with a poor reputation—a Roman military garrison town. He, too, was a laborer. He did not have a higher formal education, but His education appears to have been adequate by local standards—He could read, and He knew the Scriptures. In Jesus' home there were none of the signs of modern technology. There was no running water. No flush toilet. No electricity. No television. He had no watch, automobile, or computer. Jesus might have had some or all of the things in the above list if He had come into the world during our era. Yet, He achieved His full potential in the absence of modern technological advantages.

We also need to be clear that Jesus did not live in abject poverty. He was poor, but not destitute. Destitution is clearly not God's intention. God made sure that Jesus had the love, community support, educational opportunities, and material possessions necessary for Him to reach God's intentions. **The material context that God provided for Jesus' development was not one of affluence—or destitution—but one of adequacy.** If we look at a wide spectrum of possible conditions—with affluence on one end and destitution on the other—we see that Jesus' development occurred at neither end but at a place between the two extremes, in a condition of adequacy. "Adequacy" implies that resources are sufficient enough to meet needs. Adequacy is articulated, also, in Proverbs 30:8-9; II Corinthians 8:13-15; and Hebrews 13:5-6.

Jesus' material condition should give great hope concerning the development of many people throughout the world. It demonstrates that people can reach their full potential in the physical, spiritual, social, and wisdom areas of life without having the abundance of the material "things" of an industrialized society—including running water, electricity, high-paying jobs, or higher education.

The model of Jesus' growth also implies that those concerned about the development of others must work to see that there is a context of adequacy—that there are adequate resources to meet basic human needs. Physical destitution is clearly *not* God's intention, and Christians should work against it.

Yet, to believe that Western materialism is a requirement for development is to believe in the idolatry that has crippled the spiritual vitality of Western Christians. To believe that Western materialism is a requirement for development is to focus on things, rather than God, as the source of fullness.

The biblical perspective of development can be marvelously liberating! If people have adequacy but lack access to the "things" of Western development, they are *not* hindered from being all that God intends them to be. Biblical development *can* help move people toward the fulfillment God has for them in all areas of their lives. People's energy *can* be directed toward becoming what God intends, rather than striving to be like those who possess more "things."

The Western worldview often embraces a dependence on "things" for happiness and fulfillment, but a biblical worldview expresses a dependence on *God*. "Things" are not necessarily bad; in fact, they can be great aids to development. However, when they are seen as *the* path for development, then our focus and expectations are looking to the wrong source. Instead, God is our source and provider, just as He was for Jesus. Those who have material adequacy but are poor—like Jesus—*are* able to develop and reach God's full intentions for them in every area of their lives—just

as He did.

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