

MISGUIDED ATTEMPTS TO ERADICATE GLOBAL POVERTY

Analyzing the National Council of Churches Study Guide on the Millennium Development Goals

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Christians throughout history have been at the forefront in taking care of people's needs—during natural disasters, by establishing hospitals and missions outreach, through service, programs and policies for the unfortunate and disadvantaged, and by individual and church-wide acts of compassion and mercy.

The thesis of the National Council of Churches (NCC) booklet, *Eradicating Global Poverty*,¹ is that for the first time in human history we have the ability to eradicate poverty and the way to do it is through the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. In other words, the NCC is saying that the United Nations is the salvation of the world, not the Church of Jesus Christ. The NCC is surrendering leadership to a secular entity and offering utopian solutions to the problems of the world instead of Biblical ones. To add insult to injury, the NCC is using its member churches as "foot soldiers" to carry forward the UN's agenda around the world.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) present a plan developed in 2000 that, supposedly, will cut extreme poverty in half by 2015. The goals were developed through a controversial process and adopted by consensus in the UN General Assembly with some hesitation. Specifically, the plan has 8 goals: in addition to eradicating poverty and hunger, it proposes to achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and establish a global partnership for development.

What is notably missing from these goals is language from earlier versions about "sexual and reproductive rights." Such language, of course, is interpreted by UN agencies as approval for and promotion of abortion-on-demand around the world. Last year, though, pro-life and pro-family groups successfully lobbied and were able to get "reproductive rights" language out of the final document. In spite of that democratically achieved victory, the pro-abortion groups have continued to insert language about "reproductive rights" and "reproductive services" into subsequent planning documents that are unofficial working documents that become the guidelines used by nations to implement the Millennium Development Goals. Further, the goals of "gender equality" and "empowering women" include quotas and set-asides that are hugely problematic for Americans who believe in full opportunity for women, but are firmly against the idea of quotas and special treatment or exceptions.

Basically, the purpose of the NCC initiative as described in their Study Guide, *Eradicating Global Poverty*, is to use the church to strengthen the United Nations' effort to implement the Millennium Development Goals around the world. This purpose is specifically mentioned in the NCC Study (page 31) where the authors claim that "development experts recognize that the churches are among the most effective 'distribution networks' for information and skills."

Putting aside the pervasiveness of the abortion agenda and the “women’s rights” agenda, there are at least four other major problems associated with the NCC study.

First, the NCC proposal substitutes the United Nations (UN), a corrupt and bloated international organization with a long record of ineffectiveness and corruption, for Christian missions that historically have a strong record of integrity and success.

- Increasingly, those who know the inner workings of the United Nations are exposing its failures. In addition to the Oil-for-Food scandal, merely the tip of the iceberg of UN corruption, third-world nations are beginning to speak out about the ineffectiveness of UN policies, personnel and programs. For instance, at the 2005 Millennium Development Summit, then Prime Minister of Haiti, Gérard Latortue, spoke for numerous other undeveloped nations where poverty is endemic. He explained that 50 years of UN aid had made “no noticeable change.” Latortue’s criticism is quite an indictment of an international organization with a gargantuan budget targeted specifically to helping nations like Haiti.
- Literally *billions* of dollars have been squandered in misguided utopian efforts that failed to accomplish the stated goals or were misdirected into the hands of corrupt officials through the UN’s poor management, cronyism or support for harsh dictators and ruthless regimes.
- Further, United Nations personnel around the world have been in the international headlines for their involvement in child abuse, bribery, human trafficking, financial mismanagement and embezzlement.
- The UN’s easy money has become a trough at which some of the most aggressive despots in the world survive. Worse, that money has become the means through which the UN maintains international control—giving UN funds as a “carrot” to attract cooperation and withholding funds as a “stick” to punish those who fail to comply with UN provisions and recommendations.

Second, the NCC proposal substitutes a leftist agenda for Biblical Imperatives.

- The UN is actively anti-American; both the Security Council and the General Assembly work to thwart American interests.
- In an unprecedented attack against the United States, the Deputy Secretary General of the UN, Mark Malloch Brown, criticized Americans before a partisan audience in New York City, using a “condescending and patronizing” manner that was characterized by U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton as a “serious affront” to America. Further, Bolton told UN General Secretary Kofi Annan that Brown’s remarks were the “worst mistake” by a UN official in more than 25 years.²
- A Gallup poll from March 2006 revealed that 64 percent of Americans said that the UN was “doing a poor job;” this is the lowest approval rating in the history of the UN. A mere 30 percent had a positive view of the UN’s job performance.³
- In terms of the specific items on the list of MDG objectives, many are not a priority development need of the various UN member nations. HIV/AIDS, for instance, is only the seventh leading cause of death (following heart conditions, cancer, injuries, respiratory diseases, prenatal conditions, and respiratory infections). Also, many of the world’s women have more urgent needs—such as access to food, clean water, housing, basic health, sewerage and income generating options—than those promoted by the left’s agenda.

- It is worth noting, too, that the original Millennium Declaration included principles that were omitted in the MDG—principles more in line with faith priorities, such as: human rights, protecting the vulnerable, meeting Africa’s needs, promoting democracy and good governance.

Third, the NCC proposal is basically a political document representing a naïve view of the UN, a critical view of the U.S. and is riddled with inaccuracies, overstatement and utopian rhetoric.

- The NCC study begins with an introduction asserting that the MDG are “congruent” with biblical principles (no examples or proof—just assertion); that perhaps this time is a *kairos* moment where the impossible becomes possible; and that a global movement has emerged joining people of many different faiths to work toward implementing the 8 MDGs.
- The introduction boldly calls for a “re-alignment of national policies”—making the whole effort a political statement that moves on to identify the U.S. government as part of the problem.
- The proposal complains about the lack of U.S. support for the UN, however, the United States leads the world in generosity—America is the world’s largest donor of official development assistance at \$34 *billion* per year.
- The NCC study directly attacks the United States over its generosity (page 25): “The question is not whether the U.S. is doing more than others; the question is whether we are doing our share.”
- Further, the study attacks the U.S. military (page 25): “We’ve been so focused on military responses to the world’s problems that we’ve lost track of the fact that our relative contribution to solving the root causes of poverty has fallen behind our own commitments.” They don’t seem to realize that the military efforts are targeted precisely at THE root causes of poverty—regimes that deny freedom and democracy to its people and use all the nation’s resources to enrich the elites at the expense of its poor.
- The NCC study declares: “God cares about percentages.” The study repeats again and again that the U.S. gives less than 0.2 percent of its income to overseas aid. And, it often adds “most of which goes to military aid for non-poor countries.” Again, the “action” section pressures the readers to find 0.7 percent for overseas poverty alleviation, asking “how soon can you achieve” this goal?
- Private and corporate assistance adds another \$48 *billion* in international gifts.
- The United States leads the world in contributions to major international development organizations—including the United Nations.
- U.S. military support for disaster recovery and humanitarian relief missions totals hundreds of millions annually; gifts from private American citizens totaled nearly \$700 million for the tsunami relief effort in addition to the federal assistance at \$950 million.
- The U.S. provides 22 percent of the UN’s operating costs—well over \$362 million per year.⁴
- In terms of development initiatives, the U.S. provided \$18 million of the \$49 million that launched the UN Democracy Fund, established to promote freedom and liberty for the world’s people.
- The U.S. has contributed nearly \$300 million to the International Labor Organization since 1995 to fight child labor abuses and to keep children in school.

- The U.S. established the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) as a five-year, \$15 billion initiative to combat AIDS in 120 nations.
- A recent reform vote at the UN was supported by a 50 member coalition of nations that contribute nearly 90 percent of the UN’s total budget (86.7%). The reforms were blocked by the G-77 nations—over 120 nations who contribute barely over 10 percent of the UN’s budget (12%).
- The U.S. is usually the first to react—generously—to emergency needs around the world. In late July 2006, the United States authorized \$30 million in immediate humanitarian assistance to victims of the conflict in Lebanon. The U.S. also sent two large-scale medical deliveries with enough basic medical supplies to meet the needs of 10,000 people for three months.
- The U.S. has contributed over \$18 *billion* for reconstruction effort in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- The Human Rights Council consistently is composed of rogue nations who are among the worst abusers of human rights—such as: Algeria, China, Cuba, Pakistan, Russia and Saudi Arabia.
- Tyrannical regimes such as Burma, Syria, Libya, Sudan, Zimbabwe and North Korea favored establishing the new UN Human Rights Council in the face of criticism that it would repeat the disasters of the widely-discredited Commission on Human Rights.
- It is important to note that Iran’s leader has publicly questioned the historical reality of the Holocaust and has called for Israel “to be wiped off the map.”

Fourth, leftist rhetorical manipulation permeates the NCC Study.

- **Session One – Poverty:** The NCC study likens poverty to natural disasters by claiming that global poverty claims the lives of 30,000 children a day (page 15); the study calls this a “daily tsunami” (page 28). The first lesson challenges Christians to “alleviate people’s suffering” because it is “not biblical or Christian” to tolerate the “poverty that kills.” The lesson focuses on the question: “Can one nation become vastly rich without impoverishing others?” The lesson recommends that individuals give 0.7% of their annual income to organizations that work to eradicate poverty and hunger. Absolutely nothing is mentioned about the role of corrupt regimes and despots who get rich while starving their people; nothing is mentioned about the funds and assistance that gets diverted from those in need and turned into wealth for the dictators who rule despotic nations.
- **Session Two – Education and Gender Equality:** Examples focus on those who are excluded from education—the destitute, those orphaned by AIDS and females. The NCC solution is UNICEF and the World Bank. An “inspiring” story from “Christian tradition” is told and the “moral” of the story is forced down the readers’ throats (page 22): “educating women and girls brings good things to them, their families and their communities.” The study mentions several benefits from women being educated, but it pointedly does not mention that women are less likely to be promiscuous or have children out of wedlock—a primary cause of poverty. Obviously, most of us would agree that education is a “powerful intervention to break the cycle of poverty” though we might want to modify their assertion that it is the single “most” powerful.
- **Session Three – Child Mortality and Maternal Health:** The manipulation of facts begins at the outset of this section when Mary, mother of Jesus, is called a “homeless refugee single teenage mother” (page 28). Actually, Mary was Joseph’s finance (at that time, the equivalent of wife); they had a home; they were just in Bethlehem to pay taxes. It is an unconscionable

distortion to call Mary homeless and a single mother. Another manipulation of facts in this section is the reference to the major childhood diseases that could be eradicated so easily with antibiotics and vaccinations (page 28). For at least the past decade the United Nations has been so focused on abortion that it has totally neglected other health issues that could have been eliminated by now—and that sad fact has caused millions of deaths around the world. While the study recognizes that improvement in education solves most of the living standard, birth rate, health and nutrition problems of nations, the study—once again—hammers home their major emphasis that “American families consume at much higher levels than those in developing countries, and the ecological ‘footprint’ of a child in the U.S. is estimated to be 10 times greater than that of a child in India” (page 30). Further, the study asserts that the root causes of the U.S. over consumption of the world’s resources include both individual over consumption as well as national overpopulation. The study shamelessly advocates participants to “assess whether candidates and their platforms include the eradication of extreme poverty” (page 32). The third section of the NCC study includes a sidebar discussion of theology: portraying women as victims of male patriarchy in biblical times, though it does emphasize Jesus’ positive interactions and relationships with women (page 31).

- **Session Four – HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases:** This session is astounding in its distortion. The authors compare AIDS to the ancient disease known as leprosy (because it is associated with poverty, stigma and uncleanness). AIDS is not primarily a disease of poverty; nor are those with AIDS quarantined. The authors call for the church to react to AIDS by “inclusion, engagement, connectedness and continuity.” (page 34) While the study stresses the number of girls, women and children who contract AIDS, there is absolutely no mention that it is primarily the promiscuous men who are perpetuating the disease. To their credit, the authors emphasize the tragedy of malaria—giving it equal attention with AIDS. So often, the public ignores the fact that Malaria kills up to 3 million people a year and costs \$12 billion in lost productivity in Africa alone. (Page 35). The study iterates the various low-cost ways that malaria can be combated and it admits that foreign aid ought to move people “away from dependence into self-sufficiency.” The study does not acknowledge that the major health organizations, such as the World Health Organizations, are, once again, emphasizing the vital role that DDT can play in disease control.⁵ Nor does it mention that scientific evidence negates the need to ban DDT. In addition to discussing Malaria, the study admits that there is a need to support “efforts to clean up corruption.” (page 37) Then, it gets to the big push—debt cancellation—the all-encompassing solution to the world’s problems. And, finally, the sidebar dealing with the theological lesson for the session is particularly inane—claiming that Jesus healed, not people’s diseases, but their social isolation and re-integrate them into their communities. These sidebars are typical examples of “soft sentimentality” posing as theological insights. Session Four’s action requires the participants to assess their church budget to determine the percentage given to eradicate poverty; it also recommends that the participants lobby for the MDGs on Capitol Hill.
- **Session Five – Environmental Sustainability:** The NCC study links poverty and “environmental degradation” through all the old arguments about toxic dumps in poor neighborhoods and the polluted urban slums (page 39-40). The big issue, though, when it comes to “sustainability” according to the NCC is the United States—we are right to object to corruption, but corruption itself is all the U.S.’s fault. After all, the U.S. encouraged corruption by buying allies during the Cold War. Now, they accuse, the U.S. uses foreign

aid to “signal support of our allies (for example in the war on terror).” In effect, they imply that the U.S. “invests in politics, not people.” The only specific ways that the study identifies national corruption are through “tax havens and secret bank accounts.” Their recommendation? “Make sure corporations are not party to the corruption that hurts poor people” (page 43). They ask if it is acceptable that the U.S. has “higher-per-person energy consumption” since the U.S. economy is so large and productive and generates so much wealth for people around the world?” The study challenges the readers to find out how close their denomination comes to giving 0.7 percent to eradicate poverty.

- **Session Six – Global Partnerships for Debt Relief:** This session begins with a sappy poem about God’s disappointment with His people who kill one another in His name or claim that God is on their side. The poem goes on for three, cliché ridden and politically correct pages castigating those Christians who believe in “war” and lifting up those who believe in “love.” The overwhelming message is that a Christian can afford to “fall short on our theological reflections” and make wrong theological judgments on moral and ethic issues, but we can’t fall short on love. The study declares that God is “generous and loving” and “gives us all we need” so that we can share with others (who presumably God doesn’t love enough to give what they need). There are three keys: compassion, repentance and reconciliation. Compassion, of course, entails relationships with those in poverty. The second key is the sticky wicket, of course, because the NCC believes that repentance is required of those whose political, economic and religious systems and structures benefit them (page 47). Those people must repent of their “abuses.” The third key, reconciliation, requires action—we have to pay others (the poor) for our excesses and our unearned privileges. All it would take, according to the NCC, is the amount that “France, the U.K. and the U.S. spend exporting arms to the developing world” (page 48). There is no plan, of course, about how this would be distributed equitably or managed effectively. Instead, the study complains about the amount the U.S. spends on its military (page 48) especially the money that goes to our strategic allies. Further, there is a lengthy and passionate case made for debt forgiveness (page 49). The NCC even estimates that the cost of debt forgiveness would be a little over a dollar per U.S. citizen (no clues as to how that was calculated). The U.S. is challenged to increase trade, give drugs and enhance technological development for third-world nations. In other words, global trade and global aid are essential for greater financial equity around the world; translation: globalization means robbing the U.S. and giving to Africa. Christians, finally, are called to “monitor market forces” [whatever that means] (page 50). The sidebar defines “shalom” as globalization: a biblical vision of one world—a global community that is the household of God.
- **Appendix A – Africa:** A one-page appendix deals with two common criticisms of Africa. The answer is that Africa would be doing great except that American giving has been “paltry.” Also, since Freedom House ranks 66 percent of African countries as “free” or “partly free” we shouldn’t withhold aid based on corrupt governments. (How’s that for comparing apples and oranges?)
- **Appendix B – Resources:** The recommended resources include Ron Sider’s book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, as well as a book on the *Pathologies of Power*. There is also a book about the “conspiracy of silence” regarding AIDS and a book about how globalization will “heal a broken world.” There is a book about “rich nations” that must “pay the price.” There is a list of recommended organizations where Christians can invest their 0.7%—they are the usual groups.

- **Appendix C – Advocacy Advice:** The NCC notes that while religious groups cannot support candidates, they can and should lobby on behalf of issues, positions and policies. They recommend contacting the denominational offices in Washington, D. C. for guidance. They specifically advise readers to push the U.S. to give 0.7 percent of income to the MDGs and to push for debt cancellation for all heavily indebted nations. They also recommend advocating against counting military aid as development aid.
- **About the Author – Lallie B. Lloyd:** It is always tremendously important to know the author of study materials as well as those behind its publication. In this case the National Council of Churches and, especially Robert Edgar are identified as providing the impetus and financial backing necessary for publication. The author is a consultant on “ecumenical solutions to global poverty.” She is Episcopalian; a Yale graduate, Wharton MBA and has a theology degree from Episcopal Divinity School. Her specialty is connecting “spirituality and social action.”

Conclusion

The National Council of Churches’ Study Guide on the Millennium Development Goals spends 61 pages describing the problem of global poverty as boiling down to America’s “paltry” giving, over consumption and our strong commitment to our military.

The solution to global poverty is to increase giving to the United Nations from the developed nations so that the UN can fully implement its Millennium Development Goals. To that end, Christians ought to ensure that the U.S. embraces policies that are consistent with the U.N.’s. Further, individual Christians need to repent of their own and their nations’ over consumption and work toward transferring wealth from the developed nations to the underdeveloped nations so that, in the future, there will be greater equity.

Ah, such a nice little package of politically correct, utopian manipulation. Church groups around America can sit together and write up their ideas on newsprint for all the assembled participants to see. They can gather thoughts about calling Congressional representatives and they can feel good about their compassion for those who are less fortunate. They can increase the amount that they send to the liberal organizations and encourage greater support for the United Nations’ efforts. But I remind them of the remarks by the president of Haiti—after 50 years of aid, there has been no noticeable improvement in that nation which has been the focus of so much UN attention. Pouring more money into a failed experiment won’t bring better results. Perhaps the National Council of Churches and its member denominations ought to consider sending Christian missionaries into Haiti and other third-world nations; we just might see some transformed lives that would, in turn, transform communities and those nations.

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¹ Lallie B. Lloyd, *Eradicating Global Poverty: A Christian Study Guide on the Millennium Development Goals*. National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 2006.

² Mark Malloch Brown, “Power and Superpower: Global Leadership in the 21st Century,” address to the Century Foundation and Center for American Progress, New York, June 6, 2006.

³ “Americans’ Ratings of United Nations Among Worst Ever,” Gallup Poll News Service, March 13, 2006.

⁴ “U.S. Participation in the United Nations: Financial Contributions,” United States Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, September 8, 2005.

⁵ Paul Driessen, “The Truth about Malaria and DDT,” Grassroot Institute of Hawaii, 2006, p.1.