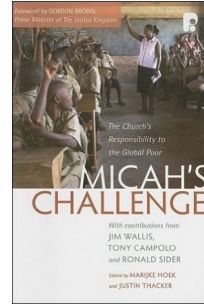


Book Review

Marijke Hoek and Justin Thacker, ed.
Micah's Challenge: The Church's Responsibility to the Global Poor.
(Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster, 2008).

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Micah's Challenge: The Church's Responsibility to the Global Poor, is a succinct volume that is a summation of several important elements concerning the Christian world's attempt to cut the poverty rates of the poorest nations by 50% by the year 2015. In recognition of the initiative that has its roots in the Global Jubilee of 2000, the book is a geopolitical and theological response by Christian leaders from both the east and the west; the book is based on their meeting in 2007 to develop and communicate an action plan to support the United Nation's goal of ending global poverty. The common thread of the book is an evangelical view of how God as Jesus Christ saw the poor and disadvantaged and how we as Christians might meet the challenge God gave in the Old Testament to the prophet Micah: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic 6:8).

Several chapters of the book take the Old Testament passage in Micah, among others issued in the New Testament, to paint a theological picture of what poverty is, how it is important to the Kingdom of God and how it is the duty and responsibility for every Christian to recognize poverty as something to be faced and eradicated. Using the biblical model of the apostle Paul, passages describe in detail the

power in suffering and how we as Christians have an obligation to mirror the "radical righteousness and costly servanthood" to God's people that Jesus modeled in His ministry (82). Contributors describe the importance Jesus showed in His ministry to the poor and the role of God's love and faithfulness in sending Him to champion the cause of the poor, sick and suffering in His world. Through this example of Christ, a challenge is issued to the governments of the world to tie the Kingdom of God to the mission of today's Church. Dr. Rene C. Padilla deftly relates the promises of God to the coming of the Messiah and through this His coming, God's kingdom mission is defined. He maintains that the mission of the church is to be an active force for change especially in the areas of faith, justice, and mercy. As several authors remind the reader, when the proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel becomes realized in a government's treatment of those in poverty, the Holy Spirit is truly revealed through the church (83).

A portion of the book is devoted to the geopolitical state of the world today, and the power structures involved in creating and maintaining poverty. Social change is also discussed with an eye to the responsibility of governments as well as NGO's (nongovernmental organizations) to change certain paradigms that were valid in the past. More attention as one author reminds us is being placed on cross cultural and transcultural efforts to lift societies

out of poverty. He maintains that no longer can a “one size fits all” strategy be used. Old societal structures like the caste system and feudal tribal arrangements must be accounted for by outside forces wishing to change the plight of the people who live within them. Cultural sensitivity becomes as important as actual resources and technological availability in some of these lands and a plea for this cross cultural sensitivity is called for.

An undeniable strength of this book is the theological and exegetical groundwork it builds in relation to the end of poverty being a God mandated activity. While the focus is placed on God’s charge to Micah, the authors build a case for the responsibility of all Christians to answer Christ’s call for justice to the poor and underserved. Half of the chapters draw a nearly complete picture of how the poor are defined in God’s kingdom and outline in great detail using passages from both the Old and New Testaments to make the case for global social justice. Any Christian reading these verses would understand the importance of Micah’s Challenge and should feel compelled to prioritize these goals within their abilities to do so, particularly those from the industrialized and rich nations. With regards to the responsibility of governments, Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane of Cape Town writes, “They need to hear that their citizens truly want to take the hard steps that are required, so we may truly live in a world where there is some for all, not all for some; in a world where loving kindness and mercy are valued above naked profit at the expense of the poor and weak” (18).

Half of the book introduces the reader to strategies and acts for reducing global poverty. Chapter 12 shows the relevance of this book for the local church. Andrew Bradstock outlines

and explains steps that individual churches can make toward social justice. I am confident that those who read this stimulating chapter will be able to generate ideas for change even as church members will find ways to initiate change in their own lives and neighborhoods.

Micah’s Challenge is easily readable on the topics of social justice and caring for the poor. While the chapters on governmental responsibility are written in a broad brush approach, there are concrete suggestions for the local church to become involved in this initiative. It is an exceptionally important introductory book for those who seek to do the will of God: provide for the poor, underserved and disenfranchised in God’s kingdom here on earth. The question left after reading and re-reading it, is do we have the will to do it?