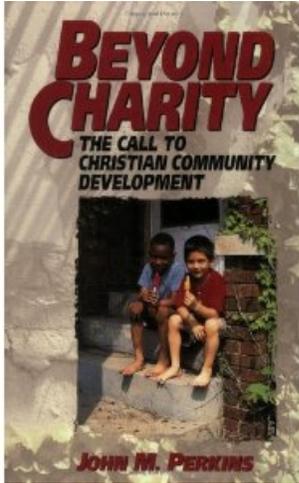


Beyond Charity



Dirt-poor son of a black Mississippi sharecropper, he would have starved to death in infancy after his mother's death apart from the intervention of a kind neighbour. The unjust death of his brother at the hands of a white policeman at the height of segregation in the 1950's led to an intense hatred of whites, and escape from Mississippi poverty to California. Yet today, in his early 80's, Dr. John Perkins is widely known as a pioneer in Christian Community Development, a movement that seeks to demonstrate the love of God "across racial, cultural, social and economic barriers." He attributes the miraculous transformation in his life to a profound experience of God's love that led him to move back to Mississippi with his family in 1960 to live and work among the poor to help alleviate poverty and oppression.

As a result of his experiences, The Christian Community Development Association, www.cdda.org, was formed in 1989 "when Dr. Perkins called together a group of Christian leaders from across America who were committed to expressing the love of Christ in America's poor communities, not at arm's length, but at the grassroots level." CCDA models a "wholistic approach . . . that deals with the spiritual, social, economic, political, cultural, emotional, physical, moral, judicial, educational and familial issues of each person" in ways that empower people without creating dependency.

In his book, Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development, John Perkins offers a powerful challenge to go beyond quick fixes and easy answers to a humble willingness to learn and grow in our attempts to help others. *"Acts of charity can be dangerous because givers can feel good about actions that actually accomplish very little, or even create dependency. The result is that their sense of satisfaction takes away any motivation to seek more creative long-range development strategies. Overcoming an attitude of charity is a difficult task because it requires givers to demand more of themselves than good will . . . Christian charity should never be discouraged, and there will always be a place for acts of sharing and kindness, but charity is only a beginning point, not the final strategy or solution . . . Sometimes our giving is motivated by guilt. When this is the case, we are giving for selfish reasons – to make ourselves feel okay. This can be very dangerous for the poor."* From anyone else, these challenging words might seem offensive, but from a man who has spent over 35 years living out the principles of Christian Community development, and training indigenous Christian leaders in three desperately poor communities in Mississippi and California, they ring out as a prophetic challenge for the church to wrestle with tough questions in order to become more effective at loving God and loving our neighbour.