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Two Concepts of Poverty: A Theological Analysis

Justin Thacker

Individual versus relational concepts of poverty

Some years ago, I knew a widow in Uganda called Charity.¹ Charity lived in a ramshackle dwelling with a dirt floor, no electricity and a shared, outside long drop toilet. One of her children had died of malaria and out of her three remaining children, Charity could only afford to pay the school fees for one of them. One of her children had recently been taken to hospital, showing evidence of early malnutrition. Charity primarily cooked with wood and charcoal, and she did not own a TV, telephone, bike, motorbike, refrigerator or car. According to one well-established definition, Charity's household was suffering from multidimensional poverty.² This index seeks to define poverty in a more meaningful manner than mere economic measures. It consists of ten indices in three domains covering health, education and living standards. It has been widely praised as moving definitions of poverty beyond an obsession with gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. One possible response, then, to Charity is to observe the multiple deprivations in which she finds herself and seek to remedy them.

Charity could be provided with an improved dwelling, perhaps a stone- or brick-built house. It could be connected to the recently developed electricity grid and might have a stone floor and an inside, flushing toilet. A direct cash transfer might help her with the school fees or better nutrition for her children, and perhaps a micro-loan would enable her and her family to build up a small enterprise and in time find the funds to purchase one of the 'luxury' goods mentioned in the multidimensional definition of poverty.

The reason I tell this story, however, is that this is only one way to interpret the poverty that Charity experienced. For as I got to know Charity, one of the things that

In addition to the discussion here, see more fully Justin Thacker, *Global Poverty: A Theological Guide* (London: SCM, 2017).

¹ In order to protect anonymity, some of the details of this case have been changed. The overall thrust of the example, though, is of a real person whom I knew well.

² S. Alkire et al., 'Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2015', *Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative* (June 2015) (http://www.ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Global-MPI-8-pager_10_15.pdf, accessed May 2016). See also <http://www.ophi.org.uk/multidimensional-poverty-index/mp-2015/> (accessed February 2017).

became clear was that she was very intelligent and hardworking. Initially, this puzzled me, for I could not understand how Charity could be so bright and yet only find employment in a very low-status, poorly paid position. On one occasion, I commented on her clear intelligence and her relative lack of status within her work, and she told me her story. The senior manager at her workplace had demanded that Charity sleep with him. She refused, and as a result, she was told she would stay in that low position despite her clearly having the ability to take on a more demanding role.

I tell this story because it illustrates two different ways in which we can conceive of poverty. On one level, Charity undoubtedly did suffer from a series of individual material deprivations. This 'poverty as individual lack' framework represents the dominant paradigm for understanding poverty in much of the literature. At the same time, one can also interpret her poverty in terms of disempowerment and a failure of relationships. Transparently, her relationship with that senior manager was deeply flawed, but, in addition, the whole relational dynamic of the workplace was also flawed. How was it possible for one individual to wield such power? Where were the necessary checks and balances? The relational dysfunction did not just end at the institution's gates though. Charity did not have access to due process of law, which speaks of a wider relational breakdown within the whole of her community affecting in particular widowed women, and of a gender discrimination that continues to plague much of our world. Indeed, one could extend this argument even further to argue that Charity's material deprivation is actually the result of a dysfunctional relational dynamic not just at a local or even national level but also includes the whole globe across both space and time. It has been argued by some that one of the reasons why 'big man leadership' exists in a range of African communities is because during the colonial era, it was the West that fomented the development of internal elites and a strategy of internal corruption.³ In short, it was because of the way in which our Western forebears acted some 200 years ago, combined with the relative absence of good global governance today, that Charity exists in a state of multidimensional poverty. On this understanding, then, the nature of her poverty is fundamentally (dis)relational.

We have then two distinct ways in which to conceive of poverty. Following Amartya Sen, Alkire and others have helpfully moved us beyond an understanding of poverty as just economic deprivation towards a broader conception that encompasses the multiple indices that she and others have developed. However, even with a multidimensional understanding of poverty, there remain these two different conceptual frameworks that impact any discussion of poverty. The first of these is what is best characterized as an individualistic concept of poverty. Within this understanding, the object of concern is the individual or perhaps the family unit, and poverty is described in terms of the multiple deprivations that such an individual (or family) might experience: lack of adequate nutrition, lack of access to healthcare, lack of clean water, poor sanitation and so on. This is the primary form of poverty analysis in the biblical, theological and social scientific literature.

³ James M. Cypher and James L. Dietz, *The Process of Economic Development*, 4th edn (London: Routledge, 2014), 87.

There is, though, another way to conceptualize poverty, and that is to think of it in relational terms. Conceptually, this means not just noting that this person lacks access to clean water but also exploring why, in relational terms, this is the case. Is it due to gender disempowerment, tribal allegiances, local favouritism, national – or even international – policies? All of these could represent the ultimate reason why an individual (or family) lacks access to clean water. Under a relational framework of thought, one does not just seek to meet the particular material deprivation that is being experienced, but rather one seeks to bring about a state in which right (or at least healthier) relationships exist between the relevant parties. Returning for a moment to Charity, one could, in principle, directly address all of her multiple deprivations. In the short and possible medium term, this would be beneficial. Or, one could ensure that her relationship with that senior manager was healthy – which of course might and probably would mean his dismissal from a position of power – thereby enabling her to use her God-given potential to flourish. In the rest of this chapter, I will be exploring how in recent biblical scholarship these two concepts of poverty have been in play, and I also discuss the theological significance of this. In the process, I argue that as biblical theologians, we should more clearly be seeking to frame our concepts of poverty in relational terms, not least because such a relational understanding implicates us in the West in the ongoing maintenance of poverty to a far greater extent than we may realize.

Oakes's deprivation concept of poverty

In 2004, Peter Oakes published a paper in which he argued for a more 'sociological' and 'multidimensional' definition of poverty than was currently doing the rounds in New Testament scholarship.⁴ In particular, he had in mind a paper by Friesen which had sought to develop an economic poverty scale for Graeco-Roman society.⁵ In response, Oakes drew on work by Peter Townsend to argue for a broader conception of poverty that identifies a wide range of deprivations. He quotes with approval Townsend's definition of poverty as 'the lack of the resources necessary to permit participation in the activities, customs and diets commonly approved by society'.⁶ In the course of developing this argument, Oakes lists examples of such deprivations:

- adequate diet for survival
- adequate diet for good health
- diet suitable to status
- adequate living space
- living space suitable to status
- support for immediate family

⁴ Peter Oakes, 'Constructing Poverty Scales for Graeco-Roman Society: A Response to Steven Friesen's "Poverty in Pauline Studies"', *JSNT* 26.3 (2004): 367–71, here 371.

⁵ Steven Friesen, 'Poverty in Pauline Studies', *JSNT* 26.3 (2004): 323–61.

⁶ Peter Townsend, *Poverty in the United Kingdom* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 88.

- support for extended family
- provision of dowry
- purchase of medical help
- freedom to control use of time
- liberation from slavery
- liberation from abusive relationship
- freedom from likelihood of periodic want
- retention of inherited land
- carrying out of religious obligations.⁷

While it is undoubtedly clear that many of these deprivations have a social dimension – liberation from an abusive relationship being the obvious example – it is also clear that the focus of attention is the individual experiencing these deprivations. It is person Y who has an inadequate diet or poor living space or is prevented from carrying out their religious obligations. This individualistic approach to poverty analysis is also one that characterizes the work of Amartya Sen, on whom Oakes also draws. Oakes nominates the deprivations listed above as ‘inabilities’ and so writes regarding his ordered poverty scale that it ‘can be characterized by combinations of inabilities’.⁸ It is unclear whether this was intentional or not, but such language echoes that of Sen and his capabilities approach to poverty. In a seminal work on international poverty, Sen – a Nobel Prize-winning economist – describes poverty as ‘deprivation of basic capabilities’.⁹ Perhaps an even clearer parallel between the two authors can be observed when we compare their respective definitions of poverty:

(Sen) For example, in the capability view, the poverty line may be deemed to represent the level at which a person can not only meet nutritional requirements, etc., but also achieve adequate participation in communal activities.¹⁰

(Oakes) I took current sociological work on poverty in places such as Britain and India¹¹ and argued that it is best defined in terms of deprivation, that is, the economically enforced inability to participate in the normal activities of society.¹²

This approach to poverty in New Testament scholarship has been the dominant paradigm and is often simply assumed.¹³ There is of course much to commend it,

⁷ Oakes, ‘Constructing’, 371.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 20.

¹⁰ Amartya Sen, ‘Poor, Relatively Speaking’, *Oxford Economic Papers* 35 (1983): 153–69, here 167.

¹¹ Sen’s primary studies on poverty were undertaken in India, and, therefore, it is quite likely that this is a reference to Sen’s work.

¹² Peter Oakes, ‘Methodological Issues in Using Economic Evidence in Interpretation of Early Christian Texts’ in *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception*, ed. Bruce Longenecker and Kelly Liebengood (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 9–34, here 30.

¹³ See, e.g., Bruce Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty and the Graeco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), especially ch. 3, “‘The Least of These’: Scaling Poverty in the Graeco-Roman World’.

not least, as Longenecker points out, its heuristic value in helping us analyse Graeco-Roman society.¹⁴

Individual versus relational poverty in international development

However, there remains a problem with this approach, which is best illustrated by analysing in more depth the individualism that characterizes it. In respect of international development, which Sen defines as the ‘process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy’,¹⁵ which he goes on to explain are ‘the capabilities – to choose a life one has reason to value’,¹⁶ he writes, ‘The analysis of development presented in this book treats the freedom of individuals as the basic building blocks.’¹⁷ Sen’s concern is to protect the individual freedoms of individual people to choose a life that they have reason to value. This is what he means by capabilities. Poverty, then, represents the inability to exercise such freedoms. The obvious critique of this approach is that it would appear to tend towards an individualism in which what matters is what *I* choose to value, not what is of value to my whole community, let alone my group, my nation or the world. Sen’s purpose in this is to avoid a utilitarianism in which the individual becomes merely the tool of the state for some greater good. Alkire and Deneulin defend Sen by arguing that he is merely offering us a form of ethical individualism – what ultimately matters ethically is the individual – rather than some form of methodological or ontological individualism.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the possibility of critiquing Sen’s framework as too individualistic remains, for in respect of any freedom I wish to exercise, one cannot avoid the relational aspects of that capability. I may choose to value education and so choose to pay for my child to attend school, but in so doing I am also contributing to the salaries of teachers, the learning experience of other children and the potential loss of business to other traders who now do not receive my money as it is being spent on education. My point, therefore, is not so much that we should reject an individualistic analysis of poverty as such. It is more that such an ethical individualism does not sufficiently comport with reality.

Klaasen draws attention to this point when he juxtaposes the Alkire/Sen definition of development, concerning which he writes, ‘There is not a strong sense of mutually enriching interaction’, with one developed in South Africa: ‘a process of planned social change designed to promote the wellbeing of the population as a whole.’¹⁹ He writes,

¹⁴ Longenecker, *Remember*, 53.

¹⁵ Sen, *Development*, 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁸ Séverine Deneulin and Sabina Alkire, ‘The Human Development and Capability Approach’, in *An Introduction to the Human Development and Capability Approach: Freedom and Agency*, ed. Séverine Deneulin and Lila Shahani (London: Earthscan, 2009), 22–48, here 35.

¹⁹ John Klaasen, ‘The Interplay between Theology and Development: How Theology Can Be Related to Development in Post-Modern Society’, *Missionalia* 41.2 (2013): 182–94, here 185.

‘Sen’s definition of development restricts development to the increase of the choices of the individual . . . Unlike the capability approach that compartmentalizes the person, development of the person happens in relationships with other persons and the rest of creation, including structures, societal units or material resources.’²⁰

Klaasen writes from an African perspective, and although he bases his argument on Trinitarian theology and definitions of personhood derived from the Cappadocian Fathers, it is perhaps not surprising that he writes such theology in that particular social context, for, of course, a relational ontology is precisely what is found in the African concept of *Ubuntu*, ‘I am because we are.’ Ilo explains it thus:

Ubuntu is today one of the most current categories from African communitarian ethics in reconciling communities, in building interdependent relationship, and encouraging the service of charity in truth. It is being embraced in international development discourse as a way of showing the mutuality of human living on earth, and the bond that could be established across racial, economic, political, and religious lines based on love and friendship. It is also another way of expressing the triple bottom line of people, prosperity, and planet (God + 3BL) as irreducibly inter-twined in any authentic and sustainable development praxis.²¹

Newbiggin draws clearly the contrast between this conception and the Western individualistic model:

For African society, the human person is seen as a partner in a whole network of relationships binding him or her horizontally across a widely extended family and vertically to the ancestors who have died and to children yet to be born. To be human is to be part of this closely woven fabric of relationships. By contrast, the Western post-Enlightenment understanding of the human person centers on the autonomy of the individual who is free to make or to break relationships at will.²²

The key phrase here is ‘irreducibly intertwined’. Sen appears to advocate an approach in which the individual *qua* individual evaluates the freedoms that they desire and is enabled to pursue those freedoms. For him, that is *development*. But, as Ilo indicates, such freedoms are ‘irreducibly intertwined’ with the freedom of others. The coffee I choose has an impact on the wage earned by a day labourer in Kenya, and therefore whether his or her child can pay for the medicines they require. Given this state of affairs, *development* has occurred not when all individuals have maximal capabilities – for such a situation is theoretically, let alone practically, impossible. Rather, *development* has occurred when in our relating to one another we do so with justice and righteousness.

²⁰ Klaasen, ‘Interplay’, 192.

²¹ Stan Chu Ilo, *The Church and Development in Africa*, 2nd edn (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 265.

²² Lesslie Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1994), 187–8.

Green's relational definition of the poor in Luke

In contrast to the somewhat individualistic concept of poverty expressed by Sen, and to some extent followed by Oakes and Longenecker, Joel Green, in his analysis of the poor in Luke, strikes a somewhat different note. In 1994/1995, Green published two chapters in two different books (with some overlapping material) that addressed the question of the 'poor' in Luke-Acts.²³ He draws attention to the way in which most New Testament scholarship interpreted Luke's use of the 'poor' in largely, or even exclusively, economic terms. 'Our tendency today is to define "the poor" economically, on a scale of annual household income or with reference to an established, national or international poverty line.'²⁴ However, Green argues that this is to interpret Luke through our own cultural lenses and that in reality, Luke's concept of 'the poor' was far more multidimensional than that (though that is not the terminology he uses). The real issue for Luke was not so much economic prosperity but 'status honor', one's standing and acceptance within the community, and so he writes,

Status honor is a measure of social standing that embraces wealth, but also other factors, including access to education, family heritage, ethnicity, vocation, religious purity, and gender. In the Graeco-Roman world, then, poverty is too narrowly defined when understood solely in economic terms.²⁵

In support of this argument, he points, in particular, to the pericope of the poor widow (Lk. 21.1-4) and highlights the contrast between this 'poor' widow and the 'rich' teachers of the law oppressing her. While the latter are characterized by honour, power and standing, she is characterized by dishonour, shame and exploitation. In other words, while she certainly did suffer from economic poverty, that was not the whole of the picture that Luke presents to us, and not wholly what he means when he describes her as 'poor'.²⁶ In addition, he notes how Luke repeatedly juxtaposes the word 'poor' with a range of words that flesh out its meaning. These include: captive, blind, oppressed, hungry, mournful, persecuted, lame, deaf and leper.²⁷ He concludes by saying, "The impression with which one is left is that Luke is concerned above with a class of people defined by their dishonourable status, their positions outside circles of power and prestige, their being excluded."²⁸ He notes how Zacchaeus, though materially wealthy, could be included within the Lukan 'poor' because he enjoyed the status of social outcast.²⁹

²³ Joel B. Green, 'Good News to Whom?', in *Jesus of Nazareth Lord and Christ*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 59–74; Joel B. Green, 'To Proclaim Good News to the Poor: Mission and Salvation' in his *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 76–101.

²⁴ Green, 'To Proclaim', 79–80.

²⁵ Green, 'Good News', 65.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

What is certainly clear in the Lukan narratives is that even when the focus of Luke's attention is someone who is economically poor, Luke frequently draws attention to the relational dynamics of their poverty. So as already indicated, the woman with two small coins is presented as someone whose house has been devoured by the powerful. Similarly, the leper in Lk. 5.12-14 is healed, but also touched and thereby restored to the socio-religious community. For Luke, then, economic poverty is never the only thing which matters. He does not, for instance, portray Jesus as merely healing the leper or merely observing the poor widow's plight. Rather, he always draws attention to the relational aspects of their material poverty.

Green's versus Oakes's definitions of poverty

What is interesting about Green's analysis vis-à-vis Oakes is that while both emphasize the multidimensional aspects of poverty that go significantly beyond mere economic measures, the emphasis in Green seems to lie in the relational dynamics of such poverty rather than in the individual deprivations that may be experienced. So while Oakes talks in terms of an inability to participate in society due to a 'lack of resources', Green writes,

'Poor' has become a cipher for those of low status, for those excluded according to normal canons of status honour in the Mediterranean world. Although 'poor' is hardly devoid of economic significance, for Luke this wider meaning of diminished status honour is paramount . . . 'Poor' is not to be narrowly understood along economic lines, but also as a measure of belonging, a matter of group definition. In the Third Gospel, 'good news to the poor' is pre-eminently a gracious word of inclusion to the dispossessed, the excluded.³⁰

My point in all this is not to criticize Oakes and commend Green as if they are sitting on two different sides of some putative debate in which I am in favour of Green. Rather, I suspect somewhat unconsciously that two distinct conceptions of poverty are in circulation. As such, it is not that Oakes has intentionally *decided* for the individualistic conception and Green has *decided* for the relational (though, of course, I may be wrong about that and there is far more intentionality than I perceive). Rather, their different emphases (and it is only a difference of emphasis) lies in the respective origins of their work on this issue. Oakes, it would appear, draws heavily on Townsend and Sen – both of whom have drunk deeply at the Enlightenment well of knowledge, and so both reflect the Western individualism that characterizes most enlightenment thinking since Descartes. In contrast, Green is, I would suggest, performing a perhaps less-conditioned exegesis of the relevant texts. I am not suggesting that Green can bracket out his Western, and doubtless individualistic, education, but his goal is more clearly to simply elucidate what the texts say. And in this regard, his conclusions reflect the Graeco-Hebraic background to the Lukan narrative – a background that is not

³⁰ Ibid., 69.

tainted by Enlightenment individualism but reflects, in particular, the more relational ontology that characterized Jewish thinking of the first century. It is for this reason I suggest that Green's description of poverty is more relational.

Of course, another way to characterize this difference in emphasis would be suggesting that Oakes's framework is more informed by a Pauline analysis, while Green's analysis is based on Lukan texts. Perhaps it could be argued that Luke's Galilean emphasis reflects a rural concept of poverty while Paul's more urban context reflects poverty as experienced there. The argument would be that status honour and, therefore, relationships, are more significant factors in rural than urban contexts. The problem with this argument is that intuitively one would expect the precise opposite: that the rural environment would have relatively less social stratification than urban environments, and, as such, status honour would comparatively be less of a factor in the rural (Lukan) context than the urban (Pauline) one. Hence, it is hard to argue that Paul was individualistic in a way that Luke was not. While we know far more of the personal history of Paul than we do of Luke, it is not at all clear that they occupied different cultures. Indeed, it is almost certain that they both lived and breathed Hellenized Judaism. To that extent, the difference between Oakes and Green cannot be ascribed to their respective fields of study: Pauline and Lukan texts.

The corporate image of God

Theologically, this difference in emphasis finds a ready parallel in differing interpretations of the *imago Dei* ('image of God'). For most of Christian history, the disputes regarding the *imago Dei* terminology have focused on the precise locale of God's image. Westermann provides a careful history of this debate and notes the way in which the *imago Dei* has been variously located in particular spiritual capacities (e.g. the soul or mind), corporeal capacities (e.g. ability to stand upright or communicate), functional capacities (e.g. as representatives of God on Earth) and relational capacities (e.g. as counterparts to God) of humans.³¹ The third of these has the greatest support in terms of other Ancient Near Eastern texts.³² However, it is in regard to the last that I would like to develop some thoughts here. Westermann comments, 'The uniqueness of human beings consists in their being God's counterparts. The relationship to God is not something which is added to human existence; humans are created in such a way that their very existence is intended to be their relationship to God.'³³ Westermann does not mention him, but such language echoes of course the work of John Zizioulas. In discussing the ontological nature of Trinitarian theology, Zizioulas writes, 'The person is no longer an adjunct to a being, a category we *add* to a concrete entity once we have first verified its ontological hypostasis. *It is itself the hypostasis of the being.*'³⁴

³¹ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11* (London: SPCK, 1984), 147–58.

³² This concept has particularly been developed in J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005).

³³ Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 158.

³⁴ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary, 1985), 39 (emphasis original).

For Zizioulas, this means that our fundamental identity is as persons-in-relation. We do not, first of all, exist and then discover our relationships to God or others, but our identity as extant persons is bound up with our relationship to God.

All of this is standard fare in much contemporary theological anthropology, at least that influenced by the twentieth-century Trinitarian revival.³⁵ However, it is possible to take Westermann's description of the *imago Dei* even further by adding one more idea: 'The uniqueness of human beings consists in their being God's counterparts. The relationship to God is not something which is added to human existence; humans are created in such a way that their very existence is intended to be their relationship to God [and other human beings].'³⁶ If we add this description – and, at least according to Westermann, there are good critical reasons for doing so³⁷ – then we have transitioned into a direction for *imago*-speak that has been most fully expounded by Jürgen Moltmann and, in particular, his concept of a corporate *imago Dei*. For most of Christian history, it has undoubtedly been the case that even though we have debated the precise capacity that corresponds to the image of God, there has been a consensus that the relevant capacity is one that exists in the individual human being. A particular man or woman has a soul, intellect, ability to communicate, ability to represent God on Earth, ability to relate to God – and in that capacity lies their image of God. In contrast, Moltmann makes the case for a corporate sense of *imago Dei*. In other words, it is not the individual human that images God in some way, but that we image God collectively as humans in relation to one another. He describes the earlier forms of *imago* thinking as showing 'a tendency towards monotheism in the concept of God, and a trend towards individualism in anthropology'.³⁸ Moltmann sums up this way of thinking thus:

The individual human in his spiritual subjectivity corresponds to the absolute subject, God. So it is to the spiritual subjectivity alone that the dignity of the likeness to God is ascribed. Human relationships, mediated through body and soul, are secondary to this. Every individual soul must be esteemed as an *imago*.³⁹

In contrast to this, his argument for a corporate sense of the *imago* proceeds along these lines. The Jewish Scriptures had no concept of a separated body and soul. As such, the *imago Dei* must rest in the whole of our humanity – both body and soul, or, more precisely, a whole human being. Yet, humans are created as both male and female, and this characteristic seems to be a particular focus of the *imago* narrative – 'in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them' (Gen. 1.27). For Moltmann, this means that the image of God does not reside in the 'sexless soul', nor does it reside in the individual man *qua* man, for men alone do not represent the image of God on Earth. Rather, the image must reside in humans *as* men and women. And if the image only exists in both men and women, then that means the image necessarily

³⁵ For an alternative perspective see Stephen Holmes, *The Holy Trinity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012).

³⁶ Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 158.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 156–7.

³⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (London: SCM, 1985), 234.

³⁹ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 239.

requires humans *as* community. In this way, the *imago Dei* is not an individualistic concept, some attribute of a single human. Rather, the *imago Dei* refers to the whole human community as it exists in relation both to God and to one another. Indeed, we could add – and to the rest of non-human creation – but that is a topic for another day.

Contrasting this corporate view with the individualistic anthropology that pervades much theological discussion, Moltmann writes, 'But if we instead interpret the whole human being as *imago*, we then have to understand the fundamental human community as *imago* as well.'⁴⁰ And so he writes,

This community already corresponds to God, because in this community God finds his own correspondence. It represents God on earth, and God 'appears' on earth in his male-female image. Likeness to God cannot be lived in isolation. It can be lived only in human community. This means that from the very outset human beings are social beings . . . Consequently, they can only relate to themselves if, and to the extent in which, other people relate to them. The isolated individual and the solitary subject are deficient modes of being human, because they fall short of the likeness to God.⁴¹

As we have seen then, in parallel to the individualistic and relational concept of poverty already noted, there exists an individualistic and relational/corporate concept of the 'image of God' (*imago Dei*).

This point is well illustrated by Kang's work regarding HIV stigma. He draws attention to the fact that increasingly the social scientific literature is no longer conceiving of HIV-AIDS as a purely medical, individualistic problem: a disease to be cured. Rather, HIV-AIDS is considered primarily as a social phenomenon.⁴² Kang then links this to Moltmann's Trinitarian concept of the *imago Dei* and, in the process, argues that our efforts to address the social dimensions of HIV-AIDS are of a piece with our efforts to image the corporate *imago Dei*.

HIV-stigma cannot be singularly framed as an intrinsic spoiled identity based on illness. . . . As such, efforts to reduce or mitigate the destructive vestiges of stigma that linger must address social relationships that are embedded in socio-economic and political structures that insidiously exclude and devalue these groups. Moltmann's doctrine of the social *imago Dei* provides an important framework to challenge and guide how Christians begin addressing this complex web of factors.⁴³

Kang's example serves to demonstrate the practical import of this reframing of the concept of poverty. It reminds us that poverty is not merely a problem affecting *them*,

⁴⁰ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 241.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁴² Ezer Kang, 'Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Stigma: Spoiled Social Identity and Jürgen Moltmann's Trinitarian Model of the *Imago Dei*', *International Journal of Public Theology* 9 (2015): 289–312, here 289.

⁴³ Kang, 'Human', 311–12.

for which we have the solution. Rather, poverty is a problem affecting all of us – albeit in different ways.

Swart, a South African theologian, has written of this in terms of a ‘double movement’ in our poverty alleviation efforts. The first is a movement towards the poor, providing relief and assistance; the second is a movement towards the wealthy and a call for repentance and change in our complicity in sustaining economies of deprivation. In this context, he writes,

Within the aforementioned framework, the most important innovation has certainly been the shift away from the conventional perspective that development should be viewed as the exclusive ‘problem of poor people’ and ‘poor communities’. Instead, the point has been emphasized that development should be considered as much if not more so a ‘problem of the rich’ and ‘rich communities’ and their preservation of the current capitalist system. In turn, this shift in emphasis has led to the rather radical social theological insight of the necessity of a new ‘double movement’ in development in which the imperative of renewal, conversion, and change should as much be directed to the life-worlds of the economically rich and privileged.⁴⁴

This point has also been made by Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury. He is not especially well known for his writing on poverty and international development, but in an important excursus on this topic, he makes the rather telling point that when we work with someone in a situation of poverty seeking to free them from the ravages of nature, the one being liberated is not whom we might think:

We are not trying to solve someone else’s problem but to liberate *ourselves* from a toxic and unjust situation in which we, the prosperous, are less than human. The way forward is not simply the shedding of surplus wealth on to grateful recipients but an understanding that we are trying to take forward the process by which the other becomes as fully a ‘giver’ as I seek to be, so that the transaction by which I seek to bring about change in the direction of justice for another is one in which I come to be as much in the other’s debt as they are in mine.⁴⁵

This is a profound point, and one that far too often seems to escape the international development community. In 2016, the *Guardian* newspaper published a pseudonymous blog in which the author bemoans critiques of the aid industry and wrote this, ‘You can parse it many ways, but in simple English the purpose of the aid system is to facilitate the continued flow of resources between donors and beneficiaries . . . The purpose of

⁴⁴ Ignatius Swart, ‘Meeting the Challenge of Poverty and Exclusion: The Emerging Field of Development Research in South African Practical Theology’, *International Journal of Practical Theology* 12.1 (2008): 104–49, here 134. See also Bretherton, who argues that a faithful response to poverty is not so much altruism as ‘repentance’: Luke Bretherton, ‘Poverty, Politics and Faithful Witness in the Age of Humanitarianism’, *Int* 69.4 (2015): 447–59, here 453.

⁴⁵ Rowan Williams, ‘A Theology of Development’, 5 (emphasis original) (<http://clients.squareeye.net/uploads/anglican/documents/theologyofdevelopment.pdf>, accessed July 2015).

the aid system is to move resources – money, stuff, knowledge or expertise – from the hands of donors to the hands of beneficiaries. It is that basic.⁴⁶

In contrast, for Williams, in a situation of poverty there exists a double (at least) condition of slavery in which humans are not fully imaging God as intended. In the first place, the one subject to creation – the one experiencing any of the multiple indices of deprivation mentioned earlier – is not fully imaging God, because to fully bear the likeness of the Creator is to exist in a state whereby creation is stewarded by us, rather than we being subjects of creation. But *at the same time*, those of us in the rich West are also not fully bearing the likeness of the Creator. We are, in Williams's words, being 'less than human', because we too are embroiled in a situation in which the corporate flourishing of humanity is not taking place and we are participants in that corporate failure. Paul reminds us that when one part suffers, all parts suffer with it (1 Cor. 12.26). Thus, what is being proposed here is that the image of God is only fully displayed when *every* human is in a state of creaturely flourishing, characterized by good relations with one other and the planet.

The fundamental problem, then, with the paradigm presented by the *Guardian* blog is that the authors assumes that we – those of us in the rich West – have arrived, and that the job of the aid community is to help others climb up the same ladder that we ourselves have climbed.⁴⁷ The value of Swart's and Williams's point is that it forces those of us who live in the West to recognize not just that we are part of the problem, but that we are in need of salvation too. When one is working with an individualistic concept of poverty, then the solution to poverty rapidly becomes providing individuals with more things – especially things that the West has come to value. In the process, the individual becomes an object of charity, an aid recipient, someone to whom we extend our largesse. In contrast, a relational concept of poverty reminds us that corporately we are failing to display the *imago Dei*, that the problem is not *them*, but *us*, or, more precisely, *all of us*, and that the solution to poverty is not about trying to make them like us but consists in bringing about right relationships across the whole of our globe. In short, the transformation that is required is a transformation of all.

⁴⁶ J, 'Is Humanitarian Aid Really Broken? Or Should We All Just Calm Down?', *The Guardian*, 6 Jan 2016 (http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/jan/06/is-humanitarian-aid-really-broken-or-should-we-all-just-calm-down?CMP=share_btn_tw, accessed May 2016).

⁴⁷ In terms of development theory, this approach is called modernization theory, and while it is rejected by many scholars, it is alive and well in much practitioner thinking. Such an approach has been criticised by Melba Maggay, a Filipino theologian; cf. Melba Maggay, 'The Influence of Religion and Culture in Development in the Philippines', in *Carnival Kingdom: Biblical Justice for Global Communities*, ed. Marijke Hoek, Jonathan Ingleby, Carol Kingston-Smith and Andy Kingston-Smith (Gloucester: Wide Margin, 2013), 177–205.