Walton, Steve. "Response to Helen Hekel." *Poverty in the Early Church and Today: A Conversation*. Ed. Walton Steve and Swithinbank Hannah. London: T&T Clark, 2019. 86–87. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780567677747.ch-013>>.

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Response to Helen Hekel

Steve Walton

I found reading Helen Hekel's essay very moving, as she conveys graphically the difficulties and frustrations of providing resources which actually make a difference in situations of poverty, rather than perpetuating a situation of dependence on 'charity' from those with greater means. She speaks from experience in the field, and that means her words and examples carry weight.

In both of our essays, the issue of inequality is very significant. I argue that Paul addresses this by calling his churches to think differently and, in consequence, to act differently. The challenge which Helen presents us is how to carry this transformation of thinking through into real participatory development, where the people receiving 'aid' are making real decisions about what receives aid and how the money is used – rather than the wealthy donors controlling the use made of their money. I am heartened to read of Tearfund's relational approach to this delicate negotiation, engaging deeply with local churches and their needs and concerns. This connection raises a couple of questions for me.

First, how do we in the Western church pursue what it means for us to see ourselves as neither superior nor inferior, but genuine partners with Christian people in the majority world? My Anglican Church near Cambridge had the privilege of a partnership with a church in Rwanda through our diocesan link with the Diocese of Kigali, and we learned a great deal both from a team from the church in Rwanda visiting us and a team from our church visiting Rwanda. Having our Rwandan sisters and brothers visit meant we learned of the painful realities of the murder of many of their families and neighbours during the Rwanda Holocaust. Their response of generous forgiveness – in the midst of great pain – taught us Westerners much and challenged the easy way in which we hold grudges over minor matters. They gave us a sense of proportion and of reality about what it means to live as Christians.

Secondly, how can Christian development organizations better communicate to their donors that partnership is the key feature of the relationship with the recipients of 'aid'? Tearfund's website and their magazine are good examples of doing this well, in my view. What I wonder further is how they can inform and educate future church leaders about the realities and principles of such Christian development work – those

training in the theological colleges and courses of the churches. I cannot recall such issues ever being raised in my own training, back in the 1970s, and am not aware that things have changed much in that regard. Yet, convincing the church's leaders about partnership as the prime model of Christian development work is critical to convincing the churches they will lead. So how can this be done better?