



Creating shared resilience: The role of the church in a hopeful future by David M. Boan and Josh Ayers. Langham Global Library, 2020

Pieter Nijssen^a

^a Bi-vocational pastor at Crossroads Christian Church, Woodstock, CT, former Executive Director, Tri-Town Shelter Services, USA

Introduction

In the book of Deuteronomy, we are encouraged to love God with every aspect of our personhood. This is played forward in Dr. Luke's first writing to Theophilus and is supported by fellow gospel writers, Matthew and Mark. Taken collectively, the aspects of personhood are heart, soul, mind, body, and strength (Deut. 6:5; 11:13; Col. 4:14; Luke 10:27; cf Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30). This is prayed forward in Paul's correspondence to those in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 5:23). J. Knox Chamblin noted,

Paul writes as a whole person whose reason, emotion, and will constantly interact with each other as he writes. Just as Paul writes by the united exercise of his reason, emotions, and will, so the informative, affective and directive are woven together in his letters.¹

Carl F.H. Henry, former (1968) editor of *Christianity Today*, explained that,

the dearth of evangelical social concern is partly due (1) to neglect of the good news of salvation by social gospellers, (2) to the decimation of evangelical capability by liberal control of such ecclesiastical resources as the denominations and schools, and most of all (3) to the reaction against Protestant liberals' attempts to achieve the Kingdom of God on earth through political and economic changes,

excluding the supernatural redemptive facets of Christian faith.²

Franz Delitzsch stated that,

Biblical Psychology is no science of yesterday. It is one of the oldest sciences of the church. As early as the second century, we find, in the literature of the period, a book by Melito of Sardis, of which Eusebius and Jerome make mention; and early in the third century the work of Tertullian pursues the history of the soul from its eternal source and temporal mode of origination.³

In more recent views on integrative theology, Lewis & DeMarest write,

Coherent thinking and authentic living in the modern world require that a person view life holistically rather than in fragments. A coherent understanding of reality begins with God's perspective mediated by general and specific revelation. We propose that Christians consider the paradigm of integrative theology.⁴

In 1981, Jim Wallis wrote, "Churches today are tragically split between those who stress conversion but have forgotten its goal, and those who emphasize Christian social action but have forgotten the necessity for conversion."⁵ Wrestling with this tension, along with the ongoing rediscovery of the biblical concept of *shalom* and its relationship to human development and communal thriving takes resilience.



In *Creating Shared Resilience*, David M. Boan and Josh Ayers share their experiences and reflections and make valuable contributions to other laborers in the growing harvest field of development. This book seeks to answer the question, “How is it that some individuals and communities seem to suffer less harm than others when faced with comparable crises or disasters and seem to cope with these impacts better and recover from harm more quickly?” (p.1)

Summary

The authors draw attention to the tensions that exist within local faith communities (LFCs) regarding their own identities. “In fact, some LFC leaders argue, quite fairly, that focusing on disaster can harm the LFC by allowing disaster work to compete with or confuse the true identity of the LFC.” (p.3) While expressing this as a legitimate concern, they encourage LFCs to collaborate with Non-Government Organizations and Government Organizations for the betterment of the communities of which they are a part. Each of these community-based entities share a compassionate concern for others, and when they are brought into a relationship with one another, this can result in cross-pollination of best practices. The question they pose, “what better demonstration of the healthy influence of the LFC than to help create a healthy, resilient community?” (p.3) is unpacked in the chapters that follow.

The authors rightly discern another long-standing tension when stating that “the evangelical church has wrestled with the tension between seeking converts and seeking justice.” (p.3) LFCs stepped inside the ring with *The Great Reversal: Reconciling Evangelism and Social Concern* by David Moberg. This was a prophetic call to the church at-large and ignited a movement that has gained considerable traction. LFCs have increasingly moved from an either/or mentality to one of both/and. Strongholds have been broken as inroads have been restored. Words and works have

become linked, and communities and individuals within them have been seen, supported, and serviced. Resilience is the result of collaborative efforts at building resource capacity within communities.

The question as to what is resilience is answered in chapter one. Several definitions from differing disciplines and metaphors are given that are helpful and which demonstrate the broadness and fluidity of the term itself. A search in academic journals published between 1960 and 2018 for the words “resilience,” “disaster,” and “development” showed “a nearly 1700-fold increase, demonstrating the increase in usage of resilience by relief and development practitioners and academics.” (p.9-10) Over this same time period, LFCs have learned to think both theologically and developmentally, although oftentimes using different language. The chapter addresses the relationship of LFCs to resilience and worldviews. “To start with, we suggest that faith is not simply an element of resilience. Faith, when understood broadly, is central to resilience insofar as it shapes our worldview.” (p.14) The reference to the factors that result in the ability of the individual to access and make use of resources touches LFCs and connects them to development and relief initiatives at their core. “The LFC speaks directly to the moral, ethical, and spiritual uses of resources for the common good.” (p.38)

Chapter two brings theology to bear on resiliency and its relationship to *shalom*. They are not the first, nor will they be the last among evangelicals to make this connection. Referencing Rene Padilla’s work, they cite the requirements for a Christian church to practice integral mission, *i.e.*, a commitment to Christ as Lord of everything, discipleship as a lifestyle, and being incarnational. (p.41) Dr. Abraham Kuijper delivered a public address entitled, “Sphere Sovereignty,” on Oct. 20, 1880 at the inauguration of the Free University, Amsterdam. In this address he declared, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’” Indeed, if Jesus is not



Lord of all, He is not Lord at all. “Integral mission is a call to awareness that our lives are created socially and have social consequences, whether we choose to recognize these or not.” (p.43) Their referencing of The Cape Town Commitment is particularly relevant, given the churches difficult history regarding evangelism and social involvement. Ironically, while they spoke out against Apartheid as structural sin, they did so while blind to their own Spiritual Apartheid regarding proclamation and demonstration. Chapter two suggests a helpful reordering between facts and documentary evidence and that of stories and meaning. They place facts as secondary to meaning, arguing that meaning determines influence. (p.44) Introducing advocacy as “part of God’s nature” (p.46) is consistent with Jesus, Himself, referring to the promised Holy Spirit as the Advocate (John 14:26). Regarding LFCs, “As Evangelicals, we possess robust theologies for dealing with personal sin, but limited resources for dealing with structural or institutional sin.” (p.47) To this, Scripture presents Jesus as the Advocate (1 John 2:1-2). “We see resilience as a holistic process – one based on access to resources, quality of relationships, a commitment to justice and respect for all members of the community – then shalom is a valuable way to capture this concept.” (p.51) Chapter two calls Evangelicals to make room for *shalom* in their understanding of salvation, personally and communally.

Chapter three introduces several principles promoting resilience, along with the four essential practices of seeking justice, building social capital, creating restoration, and engagement. (p.64) This important groundwork provides the underpinning for chapter 4, which deals with application within LFCs. While both NGOs and LFCs are valued, their distinctive contributions to resilience are outlined.

The author’s use of case studies is a very helpful way to ensure that the principles are applied, and it helps us to see what resilience can look like. Chapter 5 contains several such case studies that reflect the diverse ways in which LFCs can foster

resilience. Evangelicals have long recognized that the Bible occurs within a cultural context, resulting in the need for responsible contextualization within respective cultures.

Review

The creation mandate and prophetic call continues to restore balance and resource capacity building collaboratively (Gen. 1:27-30; Micah 6:8; Phil. 2:3-4). The conversation regarding the reversal continues to reawaken the church to reclaim her place as “vessels of and vehicles for change” (2 Cor. 5:16-19), especially during times when faced with disasters.

Creating Shared Resilience weighs in on the conversation and brings focus to our vision and helps define best practices moving forward. The authors give the conversation begun by others traction. When “evangelicals learned firsthand the conditions under which people lived and quickly added social welfare programs, their large numbers and fervent commitment made them the most important force in the nation’s first war on poverty.”² *Shalom* builds resource capacity in others, thereby strengthening resilience. Resilience is an important part of sustainable development.

The insights shared in *Creating Shared Resiliency* can bring clarity to the other disciplines addressing development work fostering wellness within communities. Drawing on the best practices of others offers the best hope of creating a more flourishing world, thereby mitigating the effects of the fall. “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). Much like the Global Community Health Education (CHE) Network with 962 organizations serving impoverished communities in urban and rural settings in 136 countries, *Creating Shared Resilience* provides CROSS Pollination that ensures LFCs are good stewards of the earth and its abundant resources, especially in times of crisis.

The word resilience is a much-needed word to be added to our vocabulary regarding development.

Creating Shared Resilience focuses on the concept of resilience, and, if it is released in a second edition, it would be beneficial to draw from the works of others, such as Miller,⁶ Myers⁷, Corbett & Fikkert,⁸ and Rowell⁹ in the field of transformational development. Those on the front lines of promoting *shalom* need to engage one another in the pursuit of best practice, good stewardship, and maximum transformation. This sharing of concepts and practices fulfills “as iron sharpens iron, so one (practitioner) sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17).

Creating Shared Resilience comes at a time when the whole world is dealing with a current crisis brought on by COVID-19. This pandemic has resulted in disastrous economic downturns and social isolation to such a degree that every level of society has been affected. Sociologists define society as having three levels: the macro (society at large), meso (groups, communities, and institutions), and micro (individuals). These circumstances provide LFCs with an opportune time to model Biblical community and express resilience. By adhering to the public health regulations, having smaller gatherings provides support and an environment where confession can indeed be curative (James 5:13-16). God made us social beings and declared, “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him” (Genesis 2:18). Even God, Himself, lives in relationship with the Son and the Spirit. Furthermore, He lives in relationship with creation and the church. The benefits of linking Spirituality to health are well attested to. Harold G. Koenig’s review of original data-driven quantitative research published in peer reviewed journals between 1872 and 2010 makes

this case clear, citing 596 sources.¹⁰ In moments of disaster or crisis which inevitably come, as LFCs practice authentic Biblical care and promote resilient communities, this gives proclamation of the gospel credibility. This builds resiliency for all.

References

1. Chamblin JK. Paul & the self: apostolic teaching for personal wholeness. Grand Rapids: Baker Books; 1993. p. 17,29.
 2. Moberg D. The great reversal: reconciling evangelism and social concern. Portland: Wipf & Stock Publishing; 2006. p. 35, 28-29.
 3. Delitzsch F. A system of biblical psychology. Edinburgh: T& T Clark; 1855.
 4. Lewis GR, DeMarest, BA. Integrative theology: historical, biblical, systematic, apologetic, practical. Grand Rapids: Zondervan; 1987. p. 7.
 5. Sider RJ. Good news and good works: a theology for the whole gospel. Grand Rapids: Baker Books; 2007. p. 101.
 6. Miller DL. Discipling nations: the power of truth to transform cultures. 2nd ed. Seattle: YWAM Publishing; 2001.
 7. Myers BL. Walking with the poor: practices of transformational development. Maryknoll: Orbis Books; 2008.
 8. Corbett S, Fikkert B. When helping hurts: how to alleviate poverty without hurting the poor . . . and yourself. Chicago: Moody Publishers; 2012.
 9. Rowell J. To give or not to give? Rethinking dependency, restoring generosity & redefining sustainability. Downers Grove: Intervarsity; 2007.
 10. Koenig HG. Religion, spirituality, and health: the research and clinical implications. ISRN Psychiatry. 2012;278730. <https://doi.org/10.5402/2012/278730>
- Submitted 3 Dec, accepted 12 Dec, published 21 Dec 2020

Competing Interests: None declared.

Correspondence: Pieter Nijssen, Connecticut, USA. phl.nijssen@gmail.com

Cite this article as: Nijssen P. Creating shared resilience: The role of the church in a hopeful future by David M. Boan and Josh Ayers. Langham Global Library, 2020. Christian J Global Health. Dec 2020; 7(5):99-102. <https://doi.org/10.15566/cjgh.v7i5.489>

© Author. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are properly cited. To view a copy of the license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

