

# VOLUNTEERING

## Where Mission and Development Meet

*Sarah Broscombe*

IN 1967, *POPULORUM PROGRESSIO* STATED that 'Development [is] the new name for peace'.<sup>1</sup> Increasingly over the last forty years, across the Christian Church, calls for benevolence have been superseded by calls for justice. At the same time, aid and development organizations, both secular and Christian, have been repeatedly challenged by the inadequacy of their own efforts. As any newspaper archive can testify, it is easy to sling mud at development agencies for their high-handedness, their lack of consultation or their failures. Working for justice is always complex, because it challenges vested interests and the asymmetry of power, and because it is about people, not about finite facts: as Richard Bond and David Hulme point out, 'the challenges of development are not well-structured problems that can be "thought through" by clever people'.<sup>2</sup> Understandably, 'when people search for an alternative model of development they often turn to their religion for answers'; ways of understanding justice are deeply embedded in Christian values.<sup>3</sup>

When 'Christian development' is mentioned, many people think first of big organizations, such as CAFOD, SCIAF and Christian Aid, or of giant coalitions such as Make Poverty History.<sup>4</sup> But here I would like to explore the distinctive contribution that volunteering programmes can make. I shall examine some of the pros and cons of volunteering, as it is seen both in the media and among theorists, and explore the specific potential of Christian volunteering and its contribution to development. I shall then turn to the first-hand

<sup>1</sup> *Populorum progressio*, 76.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Bond and David Hulme, 'Process Approaches to Development: Theory and Sri Lankan Practice', *World Development* 27/8 (1999), 1339–1358, here 1340.

<sup>3</sup> Sarah White and Romy Tiongco, *Doing Theology and Development: Meeting the Challenge of Poverty* (Edinburgh: St Andrews Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>4</sup> CAFOD is the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development; SCIAF is the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund.

experiences of volunteers within the Jesuit Volunteer Community, and to their own interpretations of the impact of Jesuit volunteering.<sup>5</sup> I conclude with some thoughts on volunteering and solidarity, arguing for the centrality of volunteering in any schema of Christian development.

### ***The Pros and Cons of Volunteering***

The London-based African Foundation for Development (AFFORD) sends ‘resource persons’, not ‘volunteers’. Why? Because to them, ‘*Volunteer* means middle-class white person saving the world’.<sup>6</sup> Volunteering is both a minefield and a goldmine—because it is based on good intentions and generosity. This opens the door not only to principled, heartfelt endeavour, but also to soteriological delusions.

The academic consensus on the pros and cons of volunteering is based on research into gap-year programmes. Briefly, it concludes that the majority of volunteer programmes have a ‘myopic concentration on the individual’—on volunteers themselves—which prevents them from building respectful relationships with the developing world.<sup>7</sup> The formation and personal development of the volunteer becomes so central that the developing world is instrumentalised into a kind of ethical zoo. ‘It’s an “all about us” attitude ... whereby it is assumed that just because a young person is from the UK, they will be of benefit to their host community.’<sup>8</sup> Volunteers see real poverty at first hand, feel lucky to have been born where they were, and return to the ‘real world’ with some anecdotes about poor but happy natives and a confirmed sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ which reinforces stereotypes about poverty and underdevelopment. Kate Simpson concludes that,

<sup>5</sup> The Jesuit Volunteer Community was established in Britain in 1987, and offers young adults the opportunity of full-time volunteering in UK inner cities, living simply in community, exploring spirituality and working for social justice.

<sup>6</sup> Jessie Kenya, AFFORD’s volunteer programme coordinator, in interview, 22 July 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Kate Simpson, ‘“Doing Development”: The Gap Year, Volunteer Tourists and a Popular Practice of Development’, *Journal of International Development*, 16 (2004), 681–692, here 689.

<sup>8</sup> Judith Brodie (Voluntary Service Overseas), quoted in Alexandra Frean, ‘Gap Years Create New Colonialists’, *The Times* (15 August 2006), at [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/travel/holiday\\_type/gap\\_travel/article609259.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/travel/holiday_type/gap_travel/article609259.ece), accessed 15 September 2008.

... gap year projects create a publicly accepted 'mythology' of development ... the very legitimacy of such programmes is rooted in a concept of a 'third world', where there is 'need', and where European young people have the ability, and right, to meet this need.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, volunteering can destroy the cross-cultural understanding that it aims to nurture, showing a disturbing tendency towards ethical voyeurism and neo-colonial patriarchy. The newspapers seem to enjoy simplifying these findings. Every six months or so,<sup>10</sup> particularly when a volunteer is injured (or worse), these familiar problems are repackaged and trotted out as a 'new' challenge to charities and individuals.

In contrast, governments are increasingly supportive of volunteering as effective and cost-efficient.<sup>11</sup> Money pours into it; volunteering is promoted to young people at risk and to ethnic minorities as a step towards social cohesion;<sup>12</sup> and research (largely undertaken by government think-tanks and volunteer agencies)<sup>13</sup> collects together positive findings, leading to the conclusion that 'volunteering and citizenship are mutually intertwined'.<sup>14</sup> In government-sponsored reports, volunteering is defined as 'pro-social behaviour'.<sup>15</sup>

On a more personal level, careers advisers, parents of middle-class teenagers, and politicians despairing of the socio-political ennui among 'the youth of today' all rejoice at the rise of volunteering. They celebrate its impact on the skills, career prospects, and sense of

<sup>9</sup> Simpson, "Doing Development", 682.

<sup>10</sup> Frean, 'Gap Years Create New Colonialists'. This article in *The Times* sparked off a particularly representative and continuing dialogue. Carol Sarler, 'Heads Down—There's an Aid Tourist Coming', *The Times* (9 December 2006), at [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest\\_contributors/article665098.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article665098.ece) also makes colourful reading.

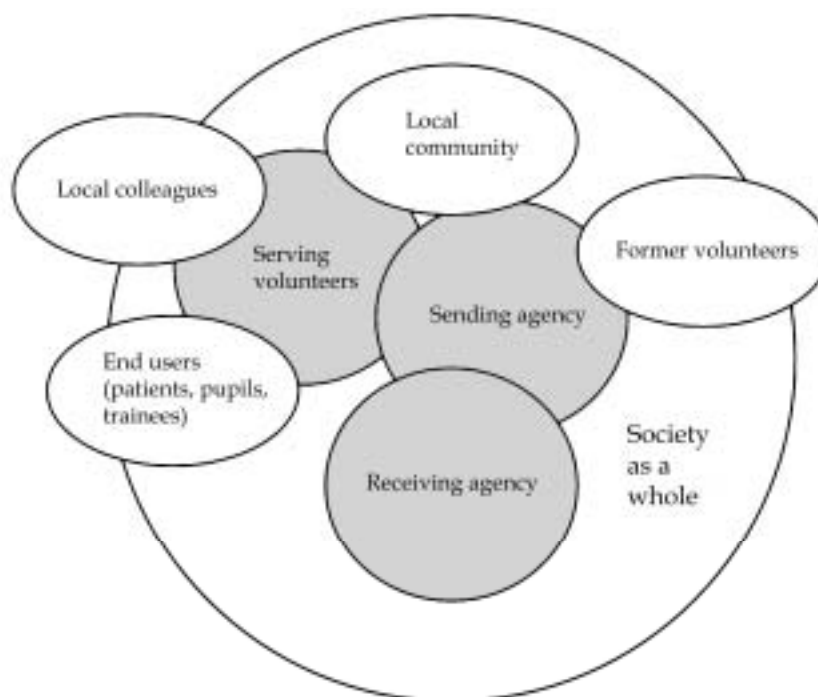
<sup>11</sup> Rebecca Hardy, *Employer-supported Volunteering and Giving: Findings from the 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey* (London: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> The V website ([www.vinspired.com](http://www.vinspired.com)) is one of the more recent initiatives from the UK government.

<sup>13</sup> See for example *UK-wide Evaluation of the Millennium Volunteers Programme* (Nottingham: DfES Publications, 2002) and Andrew Jones, *Review of Gap Year Provision* (Annesley: DfES Publications, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Heginbotham, *Return to Community: The Voluntary Ethic and Community Care* (London: Bedford Square, 1990), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Hall, *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2004 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2006).



individuality of volunteers, and the resulting enhancement of social and cultural capital.<sup>16</sup>

Volunteering is also affirmed as benefiting the communities where volunteers are placed. Gap year agencies claim that their opportunities ‘make a difference’ (Projects Abroad), ‘give something back’ and ‘build futures’ (i-to-i).<sup>17</sup> VSO and Skillshare International, which target experienced professionals, attest that volunteers increase the capability and self-sufficiency of local agencies, provide a form of aid that is more accountable and more difficult to misuse than financial aid, value individuals in poverty and thus empower them, and share skills in a sustainable way. They argue that people ‘work themselves out of a job’, leaving partner agencies fully able to operate independently.

Entrenched parties on each side of this debate cherry-pick evidence in support of opinions that are already formed. Whom should we

<sup>16</sup> See Jones, *Review of Gap Year Provision*.

<sup>17</sup> See [http://www.projects-abroad.co.uk/\\_downloads/press-pack/press-pack-2007.pdf](http://www.projects-abroad.co.uk/_downloads/press-pack/press-pack-2007.pdf) and <http://www.i-to-i.com/volunteer-building-abroad/>.

believe? The best starting-point is first-hand testimony. Ideally, evidence of the value of volunteering would be collected from everyone involved. This is rarely done, partly because only governments can afford to collect large enough data samples to make findings generalisable. My diagram shows the main stakeholders in volunteering, with overlaps indicating where they influence one another. This influence is often, though not always, mutual. In practice evidence comes mostly from volunteers themselves, and inevitably tells us most directly about how volunteering affects them—although, as we shall see, this evidence is also important for the value of their work to its beneficiaries.

From my own experience with several different volunteer programmes, secular and Christian, the question that has begun to interest me increasingly is: what is different about Christian volunteering and how does this affect its impact?

### ***The Potential of Christian Volunteering***

The key advantage that Christian development work has over secular programmes is that where ethical organizations say about their beneficiaries, ‘this person has dignity’, Christian organizations also say ‘this person is my family’. This attitude has its origins in the Gospels (‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’, Matthew 12:48) and in the principle of solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching.<sup>18</sup> It goes beyond an approach based solely on human rights by recognising every human’s preciousness in God’s eyes, which springs both from creation and from the incarnation. If the image of God can be found in all people through the act of creation, and if Jesus’ incarnation has transformed the world,<sup>19</sup> the implications are enormous. As Wendy Tyndale says:

If this is the case, then each human being not only ‘has capacities that must not be overlooked’, but is potentially a wellspring of extraordinary power and creativity.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Romans 8:16–17.

<sup>20</sup> Wendy Tyndale, *Visions of Development: Faith-based Initiatives* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 78.

A second, well-attested advantage is that local populations often trust volunteers who work with faith-based programmes because there is a real relationship already in existence, based on shared religious affiliation. Also, Christian development operates from a basis of hope. This is not foolish optimism but an orientation towards the world. 'Hope may be a choice we make and not a conclusion we draw.'<sup>21</sup> Christian agencies have a source of strength in the face of despair, disaster and multiplying problems which is not available to their secular counterparts.<sup>22</sup>

Sadly Christian development activity does not always live up to these standards. Charles Elliott's *Comfortable Compassion? Poverty, Power and the Church* explores the mixed history of Christian development work.<sup>23</sup> His key criticism is that unfocused generosity maintains the social *status quo* while giving the wealthy peace of mind. He argues that patterns of generosity by which the rich give to the poor from their abundance perpetuate asymmetries of power and reinforce neo-colonial attitudes and relationships of dependence. Elliott points to the historical Christian preference for emergency relief work over long-term development in support of this view. While a great deal has changed since he wrote in 1987, giving money to the poor is still frequently presented to Christians as a way of discharging religious obligations.<sup>24</sup> Tamsin Bradley believes that this is because Christian compassion needs the poor to remain an object of pity:

In order for compassion to be expressed it must be directed towards an object of pity. In the context of the Developing World an image of an underdeveloped Other has emerged. This symbolic construction of Other blocks the potential for direct dialogue with target communities and groups. The relationship is one-sided in that the compassionate being is attempting to communicate with a

<sup>21</sup> Michael Taylor, *Poverty and Christianity: Reflections at the Interface between Faith and Experience* (London: SCM Press, 2000), 126.

<sup>22</sup> See Tyndale, *Visions of Development*.

<sup>23</sup> (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987).

<sup>24</sup> Sometimes this is done subtly, sometimes through charity advertising. For a relatively extreme example, see [http://www.stewardship.org/resources/best\\_practices/top10\\_diff.html](http://www.stewardship.org/resources/best_practices/top10_diff.html): 'When people realise that God owns it all, that we are His money managers (stewards), and that God blesses us to bless others, giving becomes a path to joy, peace, freedom, and purpose.'

fictional image created by them for the purposes of fulfilling their religious obligation.<sup>25</sup>

This is why volunteering, as opposed to simple giving, is such a vital contribution to Christian justice work. The global North, the powerful and the wealthy, need to be changed. Volunteering does this far more effectively than giving does, and Christian volunteering exemplifies 'the movement from working for, to working with, to being with'.<sup>26</sup>

While volunteers are often most motivated by 'making a difference', a permanent transformation of their own attitudes and approach may be a more evident result than the direct alleviation of poverty. This is not necessarily a negative. Of course it is important that volunteers have a positive impact in the environments where they work, but there can be a hidden arrogance in assuming that the impact on 'poor people' should be greater than the impact on volunteers. It is up to volunteer programmes, not individual volunteers, to ensure that their work has a positive effect over time; and it is precisely when volunteers and beneficiaries change one another that this can and does happen.

Tom Gaunt's research into the Jesuit Volunteer Corps in the US has noted the enormous impact of volunteering on people's key relationships, and on their spirituality and their social justice commitments in the long term.<sup>27</sup> In the UK many former volunteers go on to work for



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<sup>25</sup> Tamsin Bradley, 'Does Compassion Bring Results? A Critical Perspective on Faith and Development', *Culture and Religion*, 6/3 (2005), 341.

<sup>26</sup> White and Tiongco, *Doing Theology and Development*, 12.

<sup>27</sup> See Tom Gaunt, 'Enduring Influences from a Year of Volunteer Service: JVC and Adult Faith Formation', paper given at the Religious Research Association Conference, Washington DC, 5 November 2005.

development organizations or in social and caring occupations; many also go on to further study. Volunteers themselves testify that volunteering has an impact on their lives, not just in terms of career and attitude, but in terms of vocation and spirituality—I shall explore this in more detail below.

And receiving agencies also talk about the specific benefits they have experienced. This feedback about the Jesuit Volunteer Community came from St Paul's Church in Glasgow:

*It makes a huge difference. If it wasn't for the Jesuits, we would no longer have a youth project. In an area where one in nine males goes to prison, a positive influence at the beginning of our young people's lives cannot be overestimated. This is a direct result of our being involved with the Jesuits. The benefits are tangible—to society and to the community—in money saved, in lives changed and in preventative measures. The impact of it being a Catholic programme is fascinating: Glasgow, particularly this area, has big sectarian issues. We're Presbyterian in an 80% Catholic area. The sight of us working together, with the same goal and values, destroys sectarianism. The prevailing attitude of powerlessness in this community, 'this is the way it is', influences people so negatively, but our work blows it out of the water. The young people realise that volunteers from outside their community can teach them something.*

*It is of particular benefit to us to have overseas volunteers. It gives us such credibility in schools: what an example, that a non-sectarian Christian group is leading the way on global citizenship! When Simon came from Germany, he withstood the Nazi jokes and enabled the young people to understand that historic prejudices no longer make sense. When Juliet came from Zambia there was a stream of name-calling and a genuine assumption that black people are of no value at all. Now, young people ask me in bewilderment, 'Why was I told that?' Imagine the transformation of these attitudes in a city with such a big immigrant population. These people have never even been to the other side of the city. When the big bad world comes to them, it is extraordinary and empowering to find that it is not always threatening. Perhaps they can do something or go somewhere after all. Volunteers handle the prejudice, and their consistency makes a difference. The peer to peer education that springs out of this has transformed our*



community. You might think it's not so much, one wee person coming for a year. But the lasting impact is huge. The Jesuit nature of the programme means a lot to us: such support for volunteers, taking them away for retreats where respect is accorded to their difficulties, and they are helped to reflect and grow. This is not an ordinary gap-year programme.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Testimony of Jesuit Volunteers**

While my own experience with Jesuit volunteers confirms other research findings on the career and personal development benefits of volunteering, several distinctive additional threads emerge from what volunteers have said which I believe to be characteristic of good Christian volunteer programmes. These affect both the volunteers themselves and their effectiveness in the work that they do.

The first is that JVC volunteering is founded on exactly what Kate Simpson feels that gap years lack: a *pedagogy of social justice*. One former volunteer, Lorna Mundy, explained:

*... working with refugees brought me close to current human experiences, not least how our own state colludes in the perpetuation of human suffering. This caused me to think deeply about how change can be brought about, and what kind of change I want to be part of.*<sup>29</sup>

Juliet Lombe gained a greater sense of her own place in promoting justice:

*I gained ... awareness of justice and injustice in society: pretending to be small and weak does not serve the world because there is nothing enlightened about avoiding responsibility, shrinking and turning a blind eye to issues affecting ourselves and others.*

This sense of social justice reduces volunteers' naive idealism about 'helping' or 'saving' the poor: Paola Toledo Merlos pointed out that service and knowledge of justice issues benefit from reciprocity:

<sup>28</sup> Neil Young, St Paul's Youth Project, Glasgow, in interview, 6 January 2006.

<sup>29</sup> All the interviews with volunteers and former volunteers took place between January 2006 and May 2008.



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*Service is really important, but the better you understand, the more effectively you can act.*

Secondly, Christian volunteering is also *overtly vocational*. Chris Docherty noted:

*JVC gave me a chance to test out the 'me' I wanted to be. I was able to serve people and discover a new kind of relationship that was different from friendship and family ties. From this new vantage point, more focused on Christ, I slowly practised new skills and began to notice new vocational possibilities. My JVC year led directly to a job in youth ministry with the Archdiocese of Glasgow. Eleven years later I'm still there, still attuned to the same four values and challenging/enabling others to do the same.*

However, this does not mean that Christian volunteering is prescriptive: the volunteers whom I interviewed did not feel that volunteering had pushed them in a particular direction. Rather, it had freed them to follow their own passion. In Peter Cousin's words:

*JVC found me the area of study and work that I feel drawn to, that energizes me. It orientated me.*

Two years after JVC, Sean Brockbank noted:

*When reflecting on my 'career' as a volunteer with the Jesuits, I am constantly amazed by how much I was made aware of God's plan for me. For the first time, through my work and spiritual direction, I was presented with God's hopes for my life—what He wanted me to do, where He wanted me to be, and what He wanted to say to me. I hope that this one lesson has been carried into my life post-JVC and I know that it is the most precious gift I have ever received.*

Thirdly, reflectiveness is a priority for many good volunteering programmes, secular and religious, but Jesuit volunteering gives particular priority to *Ignatian reflection and discernment*. For Lorna Mundy,

*... after JVC, simply returning to my previous professional life would not give me the space to process or reflect on the experience.*

She went on to further study, and felt on returning to work that,

*... the process of discernment, my way of making choices, has changed. Therefore I'm more confident about bringing my values into my work. I bring my integrity into the workplace.*

Patrick Hannon took the balance between reflection and action into his further studies:

*Since JVC, I have more first-hand experience of poverty and social exclusion. Not only do I have a greater understanding, but I also don't aspire to be academically objective about these issues. Academia is just one way to relate to people's lives—it cannot be a panacea, or a magic bullet with the answer to society's problems. Volunteering at the Booth Centre gave me a different way of relating to people's lives from the theoretical ones I had encountered.*

Fourthly, while the nurturing of *faith* would not be an aspiration for secular volunteer programmes, the faith development in Christian

volunteering leads to *deeper and more clearly articulated values*. Paola Toledo Merlos noted that volunteering:

*... had a big impact on my faith. I am more intentional about my values, and more conscious about my mission and vocation. I am more confident in myself, and about my relationships, and about what my deepest desires are.*

Patrick Hannon reinforces this:

*It has brought me closer to God. This is especially true in integrating my faith with the other values I live by. It has given me confidence that they can and do fit together.*

Juliet Lombe says:

*My Jesuit Volunteer experience is now one of the important events in my life. I drew so much strength and ability to take on new things. Here are things that definitely have been influenced by the four values (spirituality, community living, social justice and simple lifestyle) of JVC. A change of career: I have found fulfilment and joy in working with marginalised people in society. My ambition is to become a community*

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*support worker and head a community project for young people who are marginalised in Zambia, or anywhere around the world. My understanding of God through Ignatian spirituality—that God is in all things—has made a huge difference to my faith in worship and prayers. God’s presence automatically liberates us to do things for ourselves and other people.*

This sense of personal integration, of liberation and of valuing marginalised people more may help to assuage the ‘underlying anxiety about engaging with religion which is embedded in the assumptions and methods of the western development project’.<sup>30</sup> All of the elements mentioned above—discernment, reflection, a pedagogy of social justice, sense of vocation, the deepening of faith and values—allow Christian volunteering to contribute to volunteers’ *self-knowledge* in a unique way. The value and preciousness of volunteers is set in balance with their weakness and inadequacy: they are ‘sinners loved by God’. The insoluble problems created by poverty thus do not undermine them or their work, because these problems are not within human control. This gives a sense of liberation which frees volunteers to be honest about their own capacity. For Peter Cousins, this had implications for his career:

*I am not a front-line activist: I do not feel drawn to crisis management or fire-fighting styles of work .... I am not drawn to working against direct violence, but working against structural violence.*

For Martin Vittek,

*... probably the biggest influence is in the way I relate to people—acceptance and compromise. I am more attentive to other people’s needs.*

Steve Cann found that JVC helped him to be realistic rather than idealistic about his sense of direction:

<sup>30</sup> Emma Tomalin, ‘Religion and a Rights-based Approach to Development in Progress’, *Development Studies*, 6/2 (2006), 94.

*JVC gave me a sense of what I am good at: although I like working with people, I am good at procedural and strategic work. It was a stretching and opening-up experience.*

These first-hand reflections from Jesuit volunteers suggest that Christian volunteering uses its pedagogy of social justice to avoid soteriological delusions. Volunteers are encouraged to understand the issues of poverty and injustice, and to keep their own modest contribution in perspective. There is little evidence that Jesuit volunteers show ‘a myopic concentration on the individual’, but rather they pay attention to relationships and to how they fit into the bigger picture. Volunteering does not take place within a them-and-us, rich-and-poor dichotomy, but in a world where we are all equal in God’s eyes. Certainly the challenges of resisting complacency and the sense of power are just as great for religious development programmes as they are for secular ones; but Christian programmes are accountable to unchanging and exacting values which should inspire them to maintain their focus on ‘a preferential option for the poor’.<sup>31</sup>

### ***The Future of Volunteering***

We need to move away from the old paradigm of volunteering belonging to ‘youth’. The notion of ‘formative years’ is only helpful in so far as it encourages us to be attentive to the specific personal development and knowledge formation processes of young people. But all periods of life can be formative. Volunteering is about engagement with others at least as much as it is about individual growth.

However, in practice opportunities for this engagement are far more prevalent for young people than they are for most busy adults. As Andrea Kelly observes:

*The London Jesuit Volunteers programme came along at a critical moment for me. I was feeling increasing discomfort at that gap between the faith I profess in church, and what happens in the rest of my daily life.*

<sup>31</sup> This phrase is most commonly associated with liberation theology, particularly Gustavo Gutierrez’ *A Theology of Liberation* (1971). Pedro Arrupe SJ used the phrase ‘option for the poor’ in his 1968 letter to the Latin American Jesuits. But the idea is also rooted in Vatican II, and John XXIII’s commitment to a ‘Church of the poor’.

*I also felt that over the years my home and working lives had become much less aspirational than they were in my twenties, and that I had little or no contact with the people who are marginalised by our society.*<sup>32</sup>

Volunteering later in life gave her an opportunity to rediscover the aspirational faith of her early adulthood through engagement with marginalised people.

What distinguishes between good and bad volunteering programmes are values and preparation. The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire states that any educational system or process that ignores prejudice and oppression becomes complicit with them.<sup>33</sup> If volunteering is deeply formational, as all parties agree, then it must take responsibility for being educational as well. This places a high level of responsibility on programmes to educate their volunteers according to their own mission and their most deeply held values. ‘Getting them out there’ is not enough, because as Simpson notes, it increases the risk that volunteers will benefit at the expense of people in poverty.<sup>34</sup>

**‘Getting them out there’ is not enough**

Removing the glamour helps with this, and here JVC has an advantage: inner-city volunteering does not attract the kind of person who may be drawn to overseas volunteering by its mythology of adventure. Nonetheless, ethical voyeurism is not the preserve of volunteering. All branches of development work are vulnerable to it, as Sarler observes:

At its most grotesque, I have seen aid tourism first-hand ... ‘But we were *promised* a tour of the orphanages’, sulked their leader. ‘We even brought toys.’<sup>35</sup>

Frean, Sarler and Simpson rightly warn against volunteering becoming a form of ‘conscience-offsetting’. But idealistic volunteers are not the problem; the problem is volunteer programmes that do not challenge their preconceptions. The attitude with which volunteers

<sup>32</sup> Andrea Kelly, ‘Don’t Do Anything—Just Be There’, *Jesuits and Friends*, 68 (Winter 2007), 16.

<sup>33</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated by Myra Bergman (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

<sup>34</sup> Simpson, “‘Doing Development’”, 689.

<sup>35</sup> Sarler, ‘Heads Down’.

approach their placement determines whether they see themselves as serving or 'rescuing', and whether they treat encounter as a privilege or a right. Without thorough preparation, the 'white man' becomes the 'burden'.<sup>36</sup> But the evidence suggests that Christian volunteering can rise above this.

Pope Benedict has called on the Society of Jesus to go to 'the physical and spiritual places where others do not reach or have difficulty reaching'.<sup>37</sup> Jesuit volunteering exists in these places, and exists to serve them. The 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, which took place in the spring of 2008, affirmed the deepening collaboration between Jesuits and lay people which is occurring around the world. Decree 6, 'Collaboration at the Heart of Mission', spells out the relationships which already exist between Jesuit volunteering and the Society. The vocational aspects of volunteering make it a helpful bridge of understanding between lay and religious; and its developmental aspects make it a bridge between formation and mission.

### **Solidarity**

What is the opposite of poverty? My own answer keeps changing, but one thing remains stable: the answer to that question for Christians is different from the answer given by people involved in secular development. That is why I believe that volunteering is central to Christian development. In their mission statement CAFOD aspire to a world where 'the lives and choices of rich and poor alike have been transformed by solidarity'.<sup>38</sup> Their ambition is to be changed by the poor, not simply to change them. I believe volunteering has a unique contribution to make to this solidarity because it is incarnational. In Andrea Kelly's words, 'certainly I have learnt that the poor teach us about our own poverty'.<sup>39</sup>

When structured badly, volunteering can harden 'them-and-us' divisions, but when done well, volunteer programmes build bridges of

<sup>36</sup> See Rudyard Kipling's notorious poem about the responsibilities of imperialism.

<sup>37</sup> Benedict XVI, allocution, in *Decrees and Documents of the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (Oxford: Way Books, 2008), 142.

<sup>38</sup> Available at <http://www.cafod.org.uk/vision/vision-mission-and-values>.

<sup>39</sup> Kelly, 'Don't Do Anything', 16.



real, warm relationship across all kinds of divide. Christian volunteering can build a solidarity which goes far beyond human rights and beyond sympathy: ‘Solidarity here is not a matter of standing by everyone else on your side. It means changing sides and in a thoroughgoing way.’<sup>40</sup> It is the solidarity that motivates the righteous in Matthew 25, where action is taken not for religion’s sake, but for the sake of the one suffering.<sup>41</sup>

‘I say more: the just man justices ... Acts in God’s eye what in God’s eye he is.’<sup>42</sup> By turning ‘justice’ into a verb, Gerard Manley Hopkins powerfully expresses how a person’s actions are intrinsic to his or her identity. Kate Simpson’s ‘pedagogy of social justice’ is not enough. A justice that springs from anger will not build the kind of solidarity we are seeking. Christian justice is not focused on the amelioration of anything: its source is love.<sup>43</sup> It is God who delivers justice, not us. As Oscar Romero is said to have prayed,

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realising this. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord’s grace to enter and do the rest.

Faith brings the heart as well as the head to questions of development and poverty; volunteers bring their physical and their professional selves too.

Charity interventions such as sponsoring a child, giving a goat, and walking the Great Wall give the participant an illusory sense of engagement. The sponsoring of children can create an uneven playing field between one child and another, one village and another. You do not *really* give



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<sup>40</sup> Taylor, *Poverty and Christianity*, 104.

<sup>41</sup> Matthew 25: 34–46, particularly 37–40.

<sup>42</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, ‘As Kingfishers Catch Fire, Dragonflies Draw Flame’.

<sup>43</sup> See Taylor, *Poverty and Christianity* and White and Tiongco, *Doing Theology and Development*.

a particular goat to a particular person. The Great Wall of China runs for 3000 km, and charity fundraisers walk the reconstructed section of it for about one-thirtieth of its length. Volunteering, on the other hand, places us in daily mundane contact with real lives lived in poverty. If programmes are structured respectfully, that life is shared at some level. A real engagement occurs, which some see as profoundly Jesuit in character:

There is a distinctively Jesuit way of approaching poverty, based on solidarity, on being with the other in strong and authentic relationship—a mutuality. We stand with struggling people, and are transformed by it.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Mark Falbo, Head of Community Service at John Carroll University, in interview, 22 November 2005.