



 **FORUM FOR SOCIAL  
TRANSFORMATION**  
The Balkans and Eastern Europe

# COMPASSION, WITNESS AND TRANSFORMATION



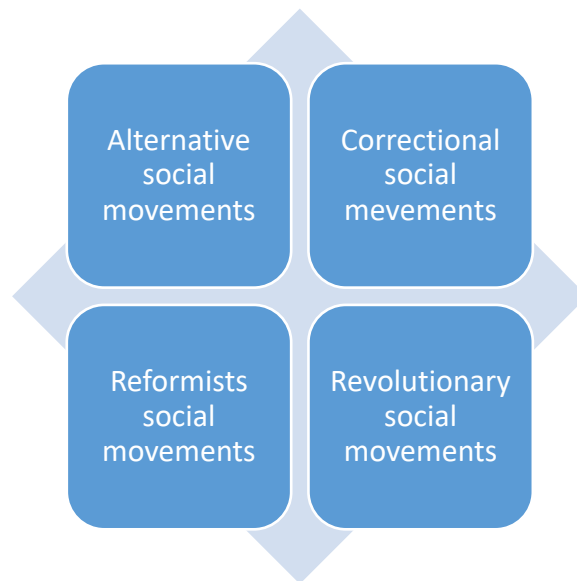
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# Introduction

Forum for Social Transformation in its name already proclaims a necessity for some transforming processes. The final goal of this forum to see the Balkan societies transformed. Forum is one of the tools, which aims to be a catalyst for churches, NGOs, social activists and even authorities in transformative movements. In the same time, can we pretend that one day we will see a society, which is ideally transformed on a such level, that it does not need any changes? Of course – no. So, because of that we need to separate two concepts: social change and social transformation, where change refers to the social progress, an evolution in a dialectical way, in most cases it goes evolutionally, and sometimes it can go revolutionary. Social transformation focused on the structural changes, when the whole system should be changed and it should be changed completely. The Greek word *metamorphoo* means the change of something from one form to another<sup>1</sup>. The 1983 Wheaton Consultation defined transformation as “the change from a condition of human existence contrary to God’s purposes to one in which people are able to enjoy fullness of life in harmony with God.”<sup>2</sup> It means that transformation touches every part of the human beings lives, creation and even spiritual powers. Transformation is not just improving physical realities of the societies. Sociology says that social movements are the only instrument to bring social transformation and / or social change.

## 1. Social movements

One of the typologies talks about social movements as the vital core of any society, showing them in a diagram



### 1.1 *Alternative social movements*

ASM aim on some changes in a small part of society. As an example can be a project, which trains high school students to write CV and how to go through the interviews.

### 1.2 *Correctional social movements*

CSM are focused on deep and radial changes in a small part of society. A rehabilitation center for drag addicted people can be an example.

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<sup>1</sup> Rupen Das, *Compassion and the Mission of God: Reveling the Invisible Kingdom* (Langham Global Library, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Tizon, *Transformation after Lausanne*, 8-9.

### **1.3 Reformists social movements**

RSM are directed on limited changes for the whole society or its majoritarian part. For example – anti-tobacco campaign, or recycling movement, etc.

### **1.4 Revolutionary social movements**

RevSM see their goal in fundamental changes in the whole society.

So, talking about social transformation, we should be revolutionary. Otherwise, the only object of our transformation would be transformers themselves. I think that every agent of social transformation should identify its role and position itself from a right perspective (Example from Mission without Borders – when team sees their final goal the complete transformation of Moldavian society, in the same time working only with orphans and vulnerable children).

## **2. A Missional strategy for transformation**

We don't ask ourselves – should we be involved in transformative processes or not. These kind of questions are resolved and we have a positive answer. Our questions are from another level: how we can do this in a more effective way? How we can motivate local churches to be involved in social transformation? How we can help to the people without creating unhealthy dependency? How social transformation relates to *missio Dei* and integral mission of the Church in a practical way?

Trying to find an answer on such difficult questions, I addressed to a very helpful book, written by S. Corbett, B. Fikkert, "When Helping Hurts. How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor... and Yourself". The authors suggest three stages of help to the particular groups of people or individuals: 1) humanitarian aid; 2) rehabilitation; 3) development. They take a New Testament story on Good Samaritan, demonstrating how three stages work in practice.

### **2.1 Humanitarian aid**

When people from the Balkans or Eastern Europe hear the words 'humanitarian aid', he immediately imagines tracks with clothes, furniture or food from Germany, Sweden or Switzerland. We see an opinion which becomes more popular in last years, that humanitarian aid created more problems than helped to the people in need, saying that aid can be relevant only in the times of catastrophes.

We need to make a clear understanding about this topic. Corbett and Fikkert defines humanitarian aid as urgent and temporary services and material goods in crises<sup>3</sup>. When we talk about crises, we don't have in mind only natural cataclysms, but also social shocks and shakes, as objective, when the whole society can suffer (wars, revolutions, collapse of the old economic system), as well – subjective, from which only individuals suffered (such as single parenthood, physical sicknesses, etc.). It is very important to notice that by humanitarian aid we mean not only food and clothes, which came from abroad, but as John Hosier writes, that we can serve to the poor and by our hospitality, and by our example in relations to the material goods, and by providing our friendship<sup>4</sup>. So, by humanitarian aid we understand any kind of help, which does not require any efforts from a beneficiary and which helps to him survive through this critical period of life.

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<sup>3</sup> S. Corbett, B. Fikkert, 104.

<sup>4</sup> J. Hosier, *The Local Church and the Poor in Embracing the Poor. Releasing, resourcing and equipping the poor for world mission* edited by David Adams (RoperPenberthy Publishing Ltd., Newfrontiers International, 2011), 130-131.

A few important questions should be raised on this regard: how we define those people, who need our support? How deep is their crisis? What was the role of this particular person, that this crisis happened? What this person can do to help himself? What kind of support this person received in the past and what are the results and consequences of this support?<sup>5</sup>. Each church and organization which was involved in aid distribution has examples when support made the crisis deeper and people degraded faster, when a victim's syndrome aggravated, the powerless was cultivated and unhealthy dependency was created. After all, poverty is not only a lack of material resources, it is a worldview, when people become blind, believing in lie that they don't have hope. "Poverty is a mindset, in which the broken relations lay in the roots, the lack of Shalom in all its meanings"<sup>6</sup>. It means that support should be as comprehensive as the crisis is. So, "effective support should come in time, should react on the needs and it should be temporary, and the beneficiaries should know for how long they can get it and what is a plan for next step for rehabilitation and development"<sup>7</sup>. Very often churches and agencies suggest aid in times when people don't need it, but instead of it they need rehabilitation and assistance in development. "Until a person keeps for mentality of poverty, the societal changes will not help, because he needs to change his way of thinking. A society can be changed only because of the changes of thinking of its citizens"<sup>8</sup>.

## 2.2 Rehabilitation

The second stage is rehabilitation.

If humanitarian aid we can characterized as 'work for the people', then rehabilitation we can call as 'work with the people'<sup>9</sup>. During the rehabilitation processes beneficiaries participate in planning, monitoring and evaluation of the provided services<sup>10</sup>. If we will come back to the Good Samaritan story, then rehabilitation begins when 'bleeding was stopped and recovering starts, when the situation is close to the conditions before a crisis happened<sup>11</sup>. Beneficiaries become partners. Equality in such partnership depends from many factors, including mental capacities of the beneficiaries. As an example, I can bring stories from Beginning of Life ministry<sup>12</sup>, when we saw people, whom our professional staff qualified as 'lifelong beneficiaries'. Such people have different levels of mental disabilities and they are rejected by their social environment. And even in such cases rehabilitation is possible, the difference will be in the levels of their involvement in the processes of shaping methodology of their recovering and coming back to a normal life.

In all other cases we need to avoid paternalism. We should not do on the behalf of people what they can do by themselves<sup>13</sup>. As sooner a beneficiary will see an equal attitude to himself, as faster he will get confidence and will see the options how actual situation can be changed.

Another difficulty in rehabilitation process can create variety of organizations in the same location or region, which provide similar services and they will be focused only on the first stage. In such situation beneficiaries will get move from one organization to another

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<sup>5</sup> S. Corbett, B. Fikkert, 106.

<sup>6</sup> B. Myers, *Walking with the Poor. Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 143.

<sup>7</sup> S. Corbett, B. Fikkert, 109-110.

<sup>8</sup> Д. Миллер, 71.

<sup>9</sup> S. Corbett, B. Fikkert, 110.

<sup>10</sup> Там же, 111.

<sup>11</sup> Там же, 104.

<sup>12</sup> [www.bol.md](http://www.bol.md)

<sup>13</sup> S. Corbett, B. Fikkert, 115.

without any desire to change their lives by themselves. Only partnership and collaboration of different agents can help to escape from crisis not only to the individuals but also to the whole society in general.

### **2.3 Development**

Development is a process of ongoing changes, which touches everybody, who are involved in this process, as beneficiaries, who got the services, as the supporters.

From a perspective of missional ministry re-integration begins at the third stage, and the agents of transformation play roles of assistance, providing advisory services, who stay depart, giving opportunities to the beneficiaries to make their own mistakes, and to achieve their own results, leaving back a victim syndrome and mentality of a poor person, who 'viewed the world through the glasses of poverty, when people say: "I am poor, and I will be poor always, and I can change nothing"<sup>14</sup>." They break a vicious cycle of poverty, saying: "I can, I will manage, I go forward".

At the development stage and beneficiaries and agents of social transformation see the final goal, to which they move together. In the same time, they need to be aware of a risk, which B. Myers described in a following way: "One of the common mistake in long term transformation is, that many people think that poverty problem can be resolved in a mechanical way, in a linear way of thinking, rational and logical. From such perspective people think that transformation can be forecast, including the terms of achieving final goals. In reality, poverty problem is more complicated<sup>15</sup>." Especially in a context of links with relatives, taking into consideration that often social environment instead of support can bring new burdens, and the results which seemed so closed, could be delay on an undefined terms. In such cases more people can get in a maelstrom of transformation, and the process can be prolonged. But in a case of positive result, the outcomes can be bigger, because the transformation will touch not only one person, but as well so called indirect beneficiaries. The final goal "of Christian witness and development programs can be and transformed lives and transformed relations"<sup>16</sup>.

### **2.4 Liquidation of the roots of social injustice**

This fourth level is not discussed by the authors, which were mentioned above. Liberation theology opened this discussion in the middle of the XX century, and it is not finished yet. Helping to the individuals, we cannot expect social transformation in a visible perspective. Many Christian thinkers and activists say about social injustice which was created by the colonial era and supported today by so called free capitalist market, which probably was free two hundred years ago, but it is not free anymore. So, they describe a picture of the ocean, when we, as Christian ministers seat on the beach, trying to empty the ocean with some bowls or glasses, but cannot resolve the main problem – corrupted systems which are ruled by corrupted people. The system can be transformed only using the systemic tools. We hardly can call ourselves social transformers if our activities are around aid, rehabilitation or even – development. "In any attempt at social transformation, not only the practices and policies of the institutions that are not aligned with the values of God would need to be changed, but the institutions themselves will also need to be redeemed, the underlying values and attitudes prevalent in the institutions and system would need to be addressed"<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Д. Миллер, 62.

<sup>15</sup> В. Myers, 243.

<sup>16</sup> Там же, 316.

<sup>17</sup> R. Dus, 150.

### 3. Witness with compassion and transformation

In the same time, talking about Jesus' method, do we see any attempts to transform the systems? One of the most significant characteristic of Jesus was that His calling is not to be a victorious warrior. His example shows that He humbled Himself and called His disciples to the lives full of sufferings and to be ready to die. Only suffering with the others, together with the others, the Church plays its priesthood role. Trust to God in sufferings, following Jesus and taking participation in suffering of others is the best witness and is the best fulfilling the *missio Dei*<sup>18</sup>. In the same time, we understand that social transformation is and a spiritual phenomena, because without spiritual Christian values it can not be sustainable. Leslie Newbigin, refers to Micah 6:8, said that the verbal proclamation of the Gospel cannot be separated from addressing physical and social needs<sup>19</sup>. But is seeking justice for the poor and the oppressed the same as transformation as development practitioners and economists understand the concept to be?

We see that running for transformation can be an utopian idea. Starting from Plato and his 'The Republic', later Francis Bacon, Karl Marx and even Ivan Prohanov dreamed about a just society, and these dreams remained dreams. When we hear the testimonies about success stories about transformed communities, they give us a hope, but this hope is based on the lack of information, because going deeper, we can find that the success stories have their own embellishment or they happen for a very short period of time for a very limited number of people. The examples of such transformed communities are: Amish, the Mennonites, the Moravians brothers and some others, but creating a just community, they withdraw themselves from a wider society. In the Lord's prayer Christians ask God that His will should be on the Earth as it is in heaven, it means that in our human nature we have an existential thirst for a just society or complete Shalom society. It can be a nostalgia for the lost paradise in the Garden, or it can be an eschatological hope towards New Jerusalem, nevermind, anyways it is a hunger for the ideal society, which can be realized in our sinful bodies and corrupted societies as a not complete and temporary model.

"In any attempt at social transformation, not only the practices and policies of the institutions that are not aligned with the values of God would need to be changed, but the institutions themselves will also need to be redeemed, the underlying values and attitudes prevalent in the institution and system would need to be addressed"<sup>20</sup>. And further: "Efforts put into social, economic and political transformation have tremendous value and do benefit many over the short to medium term, but at some point the reality of sin changes relationships and the objectives of transformation"<sup>21</sup>. "While change is possible, evil pushed back, and the quality of the life improved, complete, lasting and sustainable social transformation on this side of eternity will never be a reality, because we live in the in-between times where evil and the kingdom of God coexist in this world"<sup>22</sup>.

It means that transformation can be seen only from *missio Dei* perspective, only from an integral dimension. Transformation cannot be anthropocentric, where human beings see themselves as central and the main actors of social change.

So, does it mean that we should give up and to live a waiting-for-a-train-model life? Of course – no, because "being involved in addressing social issues is not only an act of compassion or about transformation, but it is also about being a prophetic witness to the kingdom of God"<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> P. Penner, the missional nature of the church

<sup>19</sup> The open secret, 5.

<sup>20</sup> R. Dus, 150.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 162.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 167.

“Being a witness is not just about proclaiming a biblical and theological truth about what God has done, but also about sharing the experience of the reality of the living God who has revealed Himself through Christ”<sup>24</sup>. We should focus and on the kingdom, and on the King, because proclaiming only the King, we are in temptation of becoming the contemplative worshipers. Focusing only on the Kingdom, we can become utopian social activists.

There are two level of being a witness. 1) Transformed life of individuals, which have compassion to the poor and whose ethics, behavior and acts are in ensemble with God’s will. 2) Transformed life of the Christian communities, which we traditionally call ‘church’.

John 13:35 Jesus said that “everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”. “Jesus is not referring to having good feelings towards other Christians, but rather the practical demonstrations of love by caring for one another, being reconciled in relationships, and having compassion for those within the community who are broken and living on the margins”<sup>25</sup>.

“Therefore efforts at social change and transformation by the people of God are acts of prophetic witness that point to what the kingdom of God is like. But prophetic acts and symbols have little value unless they are explained. Their meaning need to be understood”<sup>26</sup>.

The church in Jerusalem, at least at the early stage, was such a prophetic symbol, a community of people, who lived like they live in the New Kingdom, where God’s presence was visible in their worship, communion, serving to one another, healings, miracles and ministering to their larger community. Living in a sinful world and having the sinful natures, this Kingdom’s atmosphere could not continue forever, and the Jewish society was not completely transformed, but at least for a period, people in Jerusalem had a taste, a flavor of a new reality. “It is naïve to think that aid can be provided without any kind of power dynamic between the provider of assistance and the beneficiaries in any context. The only thing that can be done is to be aware of the power dynamics and to ensure that there is no manipulation or conditionality”<sup>27</sup>. “Being a witness is never about conversion, because conversion is only something that God does in an individual’s life”<sup>28</sup>.

There is another temptation, which should be noticed – transformation or witness without compassion. We have hundreds of examples, when churches want to transform the societies because they hate them. The hate speeches in sermons is heard many times, when preachers convince their listeners bad the people are, how wrong are the churches which spend their resources to serve to the people, who will never change. Mt.9:36, 14:14, Luke 7:13 and in many other places we see that Jesus “was moved with compassion on them”; “And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her...”. Evangelical world became very much ‘purpose-driven’, but not ‘driven by motivation’. There is a deficit of right motivation, and compassion is the best among them. This term is not popular anymore, because people believe that compassion is only for weak people, but very rare people are able to recognize their weaknesses. People still believe that they are strong. In the same time, people are ashamed to show their compassion, because are afraid that this way they will affect human dignity. And this is possible, when compassion comes with arrogance. Compassion without love is not compassion, but another way of showing superiority.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 168.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 172.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 179.

## Conclusion

We are at a crossroad at the Balkans and Eastern Europe. People are tired from corrupted societies, they lose last hope, and living among them, we can become the followers of liberation theology, initiating the revolutionary movements in our countries, destroying the actual systems, or we can go by a witness with compassion road'. Both ways will not transform our societies completely, but they have different consequences.

The topic of our conference is 'What do we need for social transformation?'. At the end of my presentation I can suggest two ways:

- 1- A revolutionary movement
- 2- A witnessing community

What do we choose?