drance than a help, particularly at the hands of an experienced organization. It is believed to be the largest slum in Nairobi, Kenya as "scorched earth," and organizations have made it nearly impossnible to repair. Failing to recognize that either relief nor rehabilitation, out-of-town and human resources, crippling, Kenyan community development churches in Kibera, describes the Kibera stem from chronic issues that need a long-term relationship between individuals and communities are needed to bring out the full potential of the people in Kibera have capacities, skills, and resources that need to be tapped if genuine development is to be realized. The process of identifying and mobilizing these gifts and assets takes time. Unfortunately, for many years nongovernment organizations working in Kibera have tended to operate on the basis of "quick fixes." Frustrations set in because changes in individuals are not forthcoming as quickly as anticipated. Many of these organizations then either close down or move to other parts of the country, leaving people in a worse situation than were before. In the process, individual and community lives have been devastated. It appears that many donors are willing to give to any venture as long as they see pictures of "dilapidated" Kibera.

Of course, there are some occasions in which there is a need for relief work in Kibera. For example, often times there are fire breakouts where houses and businesses are gutted down. It might be necessary to bring in outside resources to provide relief and to rehabilitate these homes and businesses. But even in these situations, caution should be taken so that the relief efforts are not prolonged to the point in which they undermine local people's stewardship of their own lives and communities.

The root issue in all of these considerations is that God, who is a worker, ordained work so that humans could worship Him through their work. Relief efforts applied inappropriately often cause the beneficiaries to abstain from work, thereby limiting their relationship with God through distorted worship or through no worship at all.

THE POISON OF PATERNALISM

Are you feeling overwhelmed yet? Poverty alleviation is more complex than it appears at first glance. However, there is a good rule of thumb that is extremely useful in cutting through a lot of the complexity: Avoid Paternalism.

Avoid Paternalism.

Do not do things for people that they can do for themselves.

Memorize this, recite it under your breath all day long, and wear it like a garland around your neck. Every time you are engaged in poverty-alleviation ministry, keep this at the forefront of your mind, for it can keep you
from doing all sorts of harm.

Paternality comes in a variety of forms:

**Resource Paternalism**

Resource paternalism has been discussed in this book at some length already. Being from a materialistic culture, North Americans often view the solution to poverty in material terms and tend to pour financial and other material resources into situations in which the real need is for the local people to steward their own resources. In addition, legitimate local businesses can be undermined when outsiders bring in such things as free clothes or building supplies, undercutting the price that these local businesses need to survive.

**Spiritual Paternalism**

Spiritual paternalism has also been discussed earlier. Many of us assume that we have a lot to teach the materially poor about God and that we should be the ones preaching from the pulpit, teaching the Sunday school class, or leading the vacation Bible school. We do have much to share out of our knowledge and experiences, but oftentimes the materially poor have an even deeper walk with God and have insights and experiences that they can share with us, if we would just stop talking and listen.

**Knowledge Paternalism**

Knowledge paternalism occurs when we assume that we have all the best ideas about how to do things. As a result, the materially poor need us to think for them concerning the best way to plant crops, to operate their businesses, or to cure diseases. Handling knowledge is a very tricky area in poverty alleviation, because the truth is that we often do have knowledge that can help the materially poor. But we must recognize that the materially poor also have unique insights into their own cultural contexts and are facing circumstances that we do not understand very well.

For example, during the first several decades after World War II, the leading Western economists and agriculturalists concluded that peasant farmers in the Majority World were irrational and culturally backward because the farmers failed to adopt new varieties of crops that had higher average yields. Subsequent research discovered that the farmers were, indeed, acting very
rationally. While the new crop varieties had higher average yields, these new crops also had much greater variation in their yields from year to year than the farmers’ traditional varieties. For farmers living in highly vulnerable situations in which a bad crop could result in starvation for their children, it was better to choose the low-risk-low-return traditional varieties than the high-risk-high-return new varieties, particularly in a setting in which landlords and loan sharks tended to reap the majority of any increase in profits. The failure of the outside “experts” to understand the realities of life on the ground led them to give life-threatening advice to the materially poor and then to demean the poor when they failed to listen to this “expert” advice.

All of us need to remember that the materially poor really are created in the image of God and have the ability to think and to understand the world around them. They actually know something about their situation, and we need to listen to them! This does not need to degenerate into some sort of new-age, “the-truth-is-within-you” quagmire. Like all of us, the materially poor are often wrong about how the world works and can benefit from the knowledge of others. In fact, a key trigger point for change in a community is often being exposed to a new way of understanding or of doing something. But it is reflective of a god-complex to assume that we have all the knowledge and that we always know what is best.

Knowledge paternalism may be a particular temptation for Christian businesspeople from North America, many of whom are showing considerable passion for using their God-given abilities to train low-income entrepreneurs in the Majority World. This passion is a wonderful development and has enormous potential to advance Christ’s kingdom around the world. But the fact that a person successfully operates a software company in Boston does not ensure that this person has the best business advice for a highly vulnerable cassava farmer living on one dollar per day in the semi-feudal institutional setting of rural Guatemala. Humility, caution, and an open ear are in order.

Similarly, pastors of middle-to-upper-class North American churches may be susceptible to knowledge paternalism, making the mistake of thinking that their own ministry styles are normative for all cultural settings. Churches of different socioeconomic classes even within North America differ dramatically in terms of the ways that they handle money, prayer, sermons, staffing,
music, membership, counseling, etc. For example, in a lower-class church, prayers tend to be participatory, with individual members praying for God to heal specific problems that they are having. In contrast, in middle-class churches the pastor tends to offer the prayers, asking God more generally to “help those who are sick.” Finally, in wealthy churches, prayers are often done through highly stylized liturgy.\(^6\)

Wherever the Bible speaks specifically about church life, it must be heeded. But where the Bible is silent, North American pastors must be careful not to impose their own culturally determined ministry styles into settings in which the local pastors might know more about the most effective way to minister.

**Labor Paternalism**

Labor paternalism occurs when we do work for people that they can do for themselves. I remember going on a spring break mission trip to Mississippi while I was in college. I will never forget the sick feeling I had as I stood on a ladder painting a house while the young, able-bodied men living in the house sat on their front porch and watched. I did so much harm that day. Yes, the house got painted, but in the process I undermined these people’s calling to be stewards of their own time and talents. It might have been better if I had stayed home for spring break, rather than to have gone and done harm.

**Managerial Paternalism**

Managerial paternalism is perhaps the hardest nut to crack. We middle-to-upper-class North Americans love to see things get done as quickly and efficiently as possible. Relative to many other cultures, including many low-income communities in North America, we are prone to take charge, particularly when it appears that nobody else is moving fast enough. As a result, we often plan, manage, and direct initiatives in low-income communities when people in those communities could do these things quite well already. The structure and pace might be different if the low-income communities undertook the projects themselves, but they could do a good job nonetheless.

You might be asking, “Then why don’t they take charge and manage these projects if they are so gifted?” There are lots of reasons that the people, churches, and organizations in low-income communities might not take charge, but here
in a lower-class church, it is a problem that members praying for God's help. In contrast, in middle-class churches, prayers are often done for church life, it must be heeded. Pastors must be careful not to impose styles into settings in which the effective way to minister.

For people that they can do for an annual mission trip to Mississippi sick feeling I had as I stood on a marooned men living in the house so much harm that day. Yes, the stored these people's calling to it might have been better if I had have gone and done harm.

Destiny nut to crack. We middle-class things get done as quickly and efficiently, including many low-income people to take charge, particularly when enough. As a result, we often plan, ignore communities when people in it well already. The structure and communities undertook the project nonetheless. They take charge and manage these if reasons that the people, churches, and others might not take charge, but here are several common ones that should give us some pause before rushing into a low-income community and grabbing the reins in any project:

- They do not need to take charge because they know that we will take charge if they wait long enough.
- They lack the confidence to take charge, particularly when the "superior," middle-to-upper-class North Americans are involved.
- They, like we, have internalized the messages of centuries of colonialism, slavery, and racism: Caucasians run things and everyone else follows.
- They do not want the project to happen as much as we do. For example, they might know the project will accomplish little in their context but are afraid to tell us for fear of offending us.
- They know that by letting us run the show it is more likely that we will bring in money and other material resources to give to them.

There are situations in which a lack of local leadership and managerial ability may require the outsiders to perform these functions, but we should be very, very cognizant of our tendencies as middle-to-upper-class North Americans to take charge and run things. Remember, the goal is not to produce houses or other material goods but to pursue a process of walking with the materially poor so that they are better stewards of their lives and communities, including their own material needs.

Of course, there are exceptions to every rule! There are times when the Holy Spirit might move us to do something for the materially poor that they can do for themselves. But just remember that these situations are the exception, not the rule. Avoid paternalism.

FINDING YOUR NICHE

It is extremely difficult for the same person or organization to provide relief, rehabilitation, and development, for the relational dynamics in each of these types of ministry are quite different. For example, if your church is known as the place to go for free food (relief), it might have difficulty convincing people that they need to start working to earn their daily bread (development). In addition, each of these ministries is demanding. If a church tries to do all of them, it runs the risk of being spread too thin. Hence,