
Arturo Cuba's Ministry among the Pokomchi in Guatemala

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The Pokomchi Indians are among the poorest people in the poorest state of Guatemala. Many years ago, missionaries came to evangelize and start churches in Pokomchi communities. At that time, many accepted Christ as their savior, yet they remained desperately poor. The young Christian converts gained hope for the future, but no hope for today. In fact, they were literally waiting to die, so they could leave their miserable existence on earth and go to be with Jesus in heaven. Several years later, some “community development” organizations came to work with the Pokomchi, interested in helping them improve their impoverished living conditions. They brought in money and resources from “wealthy” countries, and completed many projects, labeling them successful. Now, there were latrines, but they were largely unused. There were school buildings, but very few children attended or graduated. Many of the projects that were to improve the physical condition of the Pokomchi were completed, but there was no transformation in the lives and communities of the Pokomchi. The people remained dreadfully poor.

Then, in the early 1990s, a young Peruvian pastor named Arturo Cuba began his ministry to the Pokomchi. Unlike the earlier missionaries and community development professionals, Arturo understood the importance of the biblical worldview for individual and community transformation. Likewise, he understood that authentic Christian ministry is to be wholistic—seeking to bring healing and restoration to every area of brokenness in the community. He began to work with illiterate Pokomchi pastors. He lovingly and prayerfully took them through a comprehensive study of the Bible, in hopes of challenging their fatalistic mindsets. Arturo believed that true repentance involves more than merely trusting in Christ as savior to gain access to heaven. It also requires a transformed mindset leading to a transformed life.

As Arturo taught them from the Bible, he used everyday illustrations to teach concepts such as God's intention that mankind exercise dominion and stewardship over creation. One of the primary causes of malnutrition in the Pokomchi communities is the lack of proper storage facilities for harvested crops. Often, local farmers harvested a good crop, only to have rats eat it before their children could be fed. Arturo asked the farmers,

“Who is smarter, you or the rats?” The farmers nervously laughed as they concluded, “The rats.” Arturo asked, “Do you have dominion over the rats, or do the rats have dominion over your lives?” The farmers reluctantly acknowledged that, at least as far as crop storage was concerned, the rats had dominion over them. Then, Arturo pointed out the biblical truth that men and women are image-bearers of God, and have been given dominion over creation. Just as God created the heavens and the earth, they too, possessed creativity. With their God-given creativity and a proper understanding of their role to subdue and care for creation, they could overcome their food storage problem.

Gradually, the fatalistic mindset of the Pokomchi pastors was transformed into one of trust and hope. As a result, their churches were impacted. Through these churches, their communities began to dramatically change. Children started to attend school because the people began to value education, particularly education in God’s Word. Women learned to read because they understood that God cares equally for men and women. Men began to try new farming techniques because they wanted to be good stewards of what God provided. Women built stoves in their homes so their children would not fall into open cooking fires and get burned. Women also began to create small pantries to keep insects and vermin out of their food supplies because they understood their responsibility to exercise stewardship and provide for their communities.

When a seminary professor from the United States visited Arturo on one occasion, he was stunned and overjoyed to see the transformation that had occurred—transformation that was the result of wholistic ministry, based on the power of biblical truth applied to all areas of life. Tears welled up in his eyes and he said, “Surely the Kingdom of God has come to the Pokomchi!”

ARTURO CUBA is on staff with Food for the Hungry in Bolivia where he trains local pastors in Biblical worldview and wholistic ministry

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