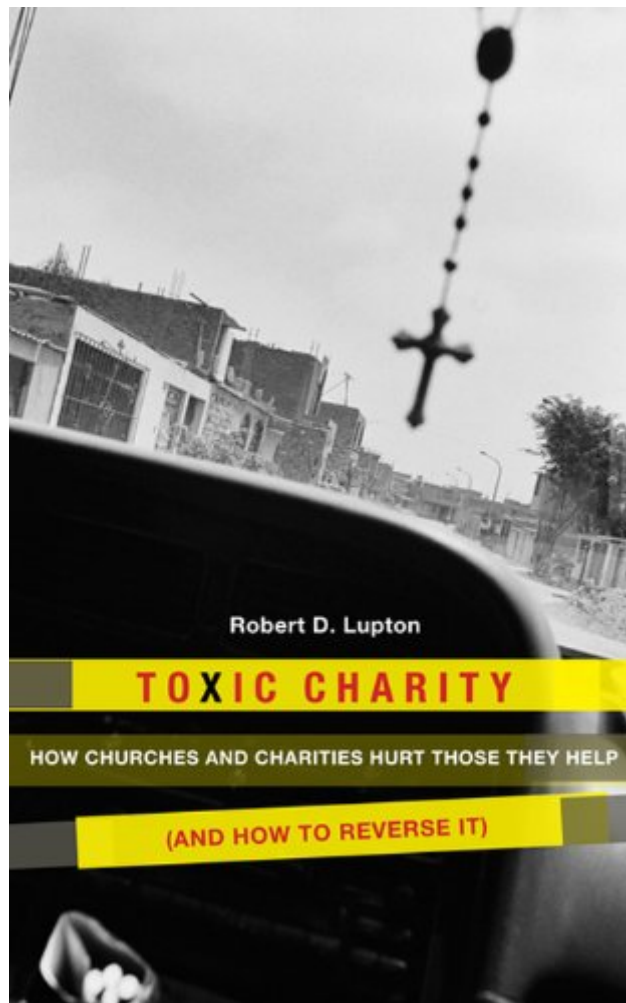


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Toxic Charity: How The Church Hurts Those They Help And How To Reverse It



Synopsis

Veteran urban activist Robert Lupton reveals the shockingly toxic effects that modern charity has upon the very people meant to benefit from it. Toxic Charity provides proven new models for charitable groups who want to help "not sabotage" those whom they desire to serve. Lupton, the founder of FCS Urban Ministries (Focused Community Strategies) in Atlanta, the voice of the Urban Perspectives newsletter, and the author of Compassion, Justice and the Christian Life, has been at the forefront of urban ministry activism for forty years. Now, in the vein of Jeffrey Sachs's The End of Poverty, Richard Stearns's The Hole in Our Gospel, and Gregory Boyle's Tattoos on the Heart, his groundbreaking Toxic Charity shows us how to start serving needy and impoverished members of our communities in a way that will lead to lasting, real-world change.

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Customer Reviews

Its title notwithstanding, this book is not a case for stinginess. Its author has four decades' experience of faith-based charitable work to his credit and draws on this experience as well as a host of anecdotes and research (which, however, he does not cite - the book does is one of

advocacy, not scholarship). His is also not an argument against voluntary or faith-based giving in favor of public welfare or rights-based claims on the state. Rather, with multiple and compelling examples, from weeklong 'missions' of church youth groups to poor countries through inner-city charitable initiatives to the enormous Kroc grant to the Salvation Army, Lupton argues that this work needs to be rethought and reoriented. As Brooks (Who Really Cares: The Surprising Truth About Compassionate Conservatism) has shown, giving by religious Americans, both to church-based charities and secular agencies like the Red Cross, is extraordinarily generous by any measure, in time, treasure, and talent, compared with that of secular Americans and citizens of other affluent countries. Lupton does not disparage these efforts or their (mostly) good intentions, but argues that most of this activity does more harm than good. Given the author's own commitment and credentials in the field, anyone engaged in this work will want to pay attention to his critique. In some ways, Lupton echoes those 19th-century critics of "sentimental charity," who sought to replace random handouts with organized charity based on a relationship between giver and recipient that offered "not alms, but a friend" (the motto of the Charity organization Societies).

In Toxic Charity, Robert Lupton embarks upon the much needed task of alerting the church to the pitfalls of poorly informed charitable giving, and showing how short many charitable efforts come in bringing real lasting positive change. He shares hard-won lessons and wisdom from years of work in inner-city service. The author does this with easy-to-follow and interesting stories that quickly show the reader how well-intentioned efforts have unintended results, and presents many great ideas for better ways forward. However, while important warnings are raised, unfortunately Toxic Charity seems to fall short on solid research, leaning heavily on anecdotal stories and intuitions. While rightly rejecting that all giving works great, the book frequently falls into an almost equally simplistic ideology, that can be summarized, "avoid dependencies". Citations of research on the topics discussed are rare, and range from hearsay to simply false data, such as citation of a World Bank study that quoted the wrong region, wrong intervention, and wrong data. Again, Lupton has some great suggestions, and certainly the focus on doing a better job of listening to recipients and seeking to understand and research what they truly need to be empowered is wise. But too much of the book fails to follow this advice, instead relying on following the intuitions of the anti-dependency ideology. Sometimes these intuitions are good, but often times they lead to poor conclusions. For example, anti-dependency mentality recommends always preferring microfinance over direct cash transfer.

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