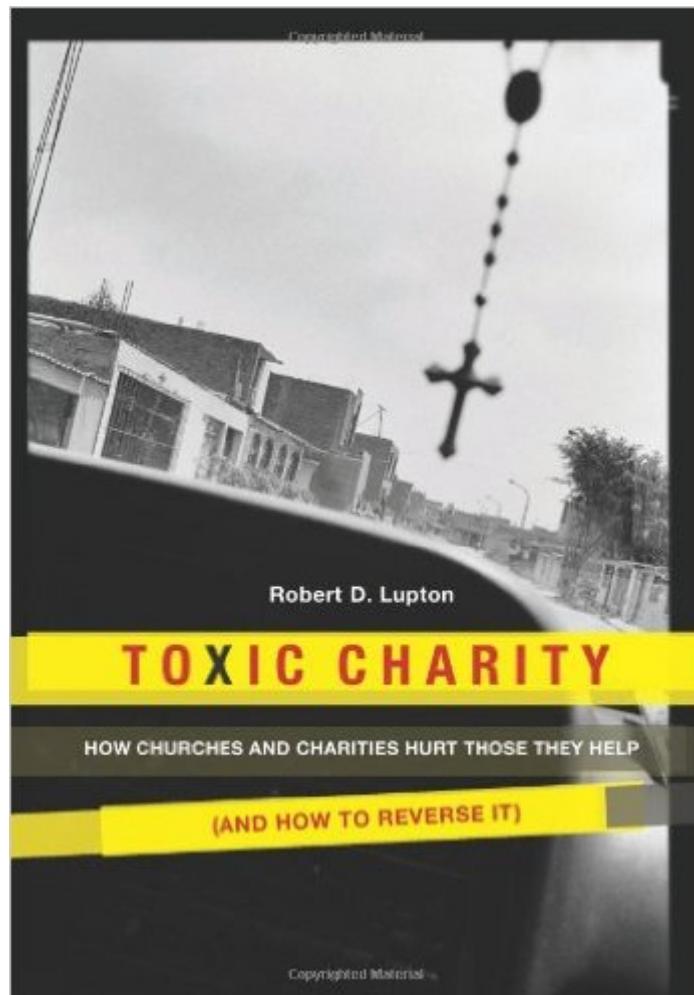


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# Toxic Charity



## **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' The End of Poverty, Richard Stearns' 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.

## **Book Information**

Hardcover: 208 pages

Publisher: HarperOne (November 5, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0062076205

ISBN-13: 978-0062076205

Product Dimensions: 8.3 x 5.8 x 0.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (491 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #294,298 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #143 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Philanthropy & Charity #386 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Ministry & Evangelism > Missions & Missionary Work #649 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living > Social Issues

## **Customer Reviews**

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 advise, 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.

I agree in theory with the author's premise that charity can wind up being an enabler to poverty. I think this is especially true of charity in the form of governmental programs. Where I disagreed with the author and the reason for the low rating is that I felt he was very one-sided. It felt to me like this was an attack on most of the charitable efforts commonly put forth by faith-based organizations like food shelves, clothing closets, meals and the like. The author goes on to say that we should never engage in one-directional giving unless it is an emergency. My question is: whose definition of emergency are we using? The author mentioned things like natural disasters, which certainly are emergencies on a large scale. But is it not a personal emergency when someone loses their job unexpectedly? A major illness or injury can be an emergency. How do we determine whether someone's circumstances constitute enough of an emergency? There is a degree of judgment in that statement that makes me very uncomfortable. And it seems to be contradictory to the theology of faith-based organizations, especially Christian ones, who believe in trying to be unconditional. I am not comfortable trying to decide if the family at the food shelf or clothing closet is in enough of an emergency to warrant my charity or if they are trying hard enough to change their circumstances. I am not comfortable assessing how much work they are putting into this or asking them to do more, like he suggests more than once. Does the single mother working a full-time minimum wage job have time to be working at the food shelf or volunteering at the church to "earn" her charity? I don't know the answer to those questions but I'm not even comfortable asking them.

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