

WALKING WITH THE POOR:

Principles and Practices of Transformational Development

BRYANT MYERS. Orbis 2011

‘Transformational Development’: positive change in whole human life.

‘Christian Witness’: declaration of gospel by life, word and deed.

Separation of Spiritual and Material. Western world view argues for ‘combination’ of evangelism and development – the two were never divisible!

Words clarify meaning of deeds, Deeds verify meaning of words, Signs announce presence of power. Christians often act secularly, think spiritually. Separate Revelation & Observation too.

Catholic Social Teaching:

Rerum novarum (New Things) 1881: Pope Leo XIII. Addressed role of labour, reason, capital, private ownership, modern state. Socialism subordinated individual, Capitalism too unrestrained.

Populorum progerssio (Peoples’ Development) 1967 Paul VI. State & Church separate realms.

Gaudium et Spes Church has moral obligation to speak to world. Seven themes emerge: anthropology, justice, charity, dignity, common good, subsidiarity, solidarity, option for poor. Metanarratives? Science understands universe. Technology masters nature. Capitalism has hidden hand. History tells human story. Faith tells cosmic story. No ‘modern’ holistic storyline. Trinitarian relationality: contexts, structural sin, transformation, morality.

Creation account: we are co-creators. Diversity. Ecology. Joy. Stewardship not domination.

God owns all not individuals. Principalities and Pwrs shows humanists’ ‘progress’ false.

Christ’s Mission:

Christ died to save sinners and liberate the sinned-against.

Christ at periphery – even returns to Galilee after Resurrection: unmasking false wisdom of world. Collaborates in mission. Kenosis. Church as ambiguous Sign and Instrument.

Power Relations

Unequal distribution of gifts means human relations are inherently power relations.

Slain Lamb not American Eagle, Indian tiger or British Lion have power at denouement. God has no enemies which lie beyond God’s love – poor and non-poor alike.

Poverty and the Poor

Poverty is about people not ‘the poor’. Not nobodies upon whom we can play God. Reducing them to numbers increases their poverty.

Our own Prejudices: Conditioning, Like feeling superior, Gated so don’t know. Denial is safe.

Poor are lost souls, need saving. They are rebellious, don’t knuckle down. They are ignorant.

Households:

Friedmann sees poor people within dynamics, within political social structure and human relations. Poverty is about relationships that don't work.

Non-poor: poor don't just live with poor – others are around, even within household.

Theories of Poverty: no unified theory of poverty.

1. *Poverty as Deficit*. When the missing things are provided poverty ends. Deficit of things, of knowledge, deficit of access. Provider is then Fairy GodMother. It's thoroughly materialistic, Treats poor as inadequate. Providers feel messianic.

2. *Poverty as Estrangement*: (Robert Chambers, Sussex Uni) related areas of a poverty trap. Material Poverty, Vulnerability, Powerlessness, Spiritual poverty of broken relationships, Isolation, Physical weakness. They are therefore ripped off, over-extend and subject to disasters.

3. *Poverty as Lack of Access to Social Power*: (John Friedmann. Uni British Columbia, Canada Married to Leonie Sandercock) Households are subject to four domains – State, Civil Society, , political community and Corporate economy (in turn subject to global and corporations) So poor have a hard time in the vortex. Poor are disempowered. So work for power of: Social networks, self-development, time, social organisation, instruments of work, knowledge and skills, life space, financial resource.

4. *Poverty as Diminished personal and relational well-being* (Isaac Prilleltensky. Uni Miami) Talks of three domains: Collective (political and economic) Personal (access to health, rights, agency etc) and Relational (Shame, exclusion, humiliation etc - Psychology arrives!)

5. *Poverty as a Disempowering System* : Jayakumar Christian (World Vision India) again sees household embedded in Systems: Cultural (eg Karma 'we're born to rule - Brahmins, Tories) , Social(Poor become captive to the god-complexes of non-poor who create the narrative and structures.), Spiritual (lies of evil one), Personal (labelled, self-value, inherited from parents coping strategies), Biophysical (mind and body weakened). If accept this web of lies, then poor.

6. *Poverty as lack of Freedom to Grow*: Ravi Jaykaran (MAP International, now USA) Poor are wrapped in chains of Mental, Spiritual, Physical and Social. Asks Who is doing what to whom? So locating causes in people not concepts. Causal people also in bondage to others.

Within holistic understanding, Causes are: Physical, Social (narratives and stereotypes created by those who play god – reinforced by structures and finance, education (Friere) , Mental (marred identity after this bombardment take root), Spiritual

Poverty is absence of Shalom in all its meanings - relational. Sin distorts and is fundamental.

Delusions of non-poor:

Social chaos unless domination.

Some races, and men, are better at it.

Rulers entitled to extra privileges.

Property and wealth paramount.

Property sacred

Institution more important than people.

But don't demonise non-poor – having too much is as bad as having too little.

Transformational Development

A Better Future – Kingdom Shalom includes physical, social, mental spiritual.

Redirect the community's story towards Isaiah 65:

A place of joy, no weeping

Children don't die – full lives

Build homes and live in them

Enjoy product of own labour

Harmony in community

Peace

God in the midst

Restoring Identity, worth, poor and non-poor made in God's image (identity) and are valuable enough (dignity) to warrant Jesus' love on the cross. Non-poor to relinquish god complexes.

“The fulcrum for transformational change is no longer transferring resource or building capacity or increasing access, agency and choices, as important as these things are. These are all means after all. These things count only if they take place in a way that allows the poor to recover their true identity and discover the vocation God intends for them.” P179

But remember that identity and vocation still have to wrestle with Sin. Every programme is flawed and fallible. “Poverty is the world trying to tell the poor they are God-forsaken.”180

Relation with triune God is way to restoration. M Volf path to justice and peace is embrace of the other, in spite of all that the other has done. Volf is not romantic though and says: p183.

“The initial suspicion against the perspective of the powerful is necessary. Not because the powerless are innocent, but because the powerful have the means to impose their own

perspective by argument and propaganda.... The groans of the powerless must disturb the serenity of their comforting ideologies.” (1996, 219-20)

No such thing as an option for the poor but only an option for poor persons. Begin with people. Donors insist on effectiveness, meeting goals, outcomes and outputs and budget. Meaning matters more than efficiency – it all takes time! Moses was too long up the mountain so worshipped gold.

Truth will make you free against the web of the Master of Lies. Seek beauty therefore in art, music fun and celebration. A commitment to aesthetics where we lose ourselves and our attention goes to the other.

Our action must relate local to global – micro local individual transformation must ride hand in hand with macro development where institutions reformed for good governance
Sacramental beacons. Therefore the local action must be rooted in universal Church. But churches have been the non-poor playing god. So transformation here especially essential.

Sustainability.

Not maintenance but continuing transformation

Physical sustainability: enabling poor to create wealth. Health care ongoing. With Nature.

Mental sustainability: not repetition of victimhood narratives but learning how to learn rather than dependency.

Local social must be transformed into political power Insisting on rights to justice. Build social networks and social organisations to do this.

Church holding story and values:

Repentance and forgiveness are base of transformation and are the work of the CHURCH.

1. To love the community and serve it, not judge it.
2. source of holistic practitioners “The major role of the church in relationship to the great issues of justice and peace will not be in its formal pronouncement, but in its continually nourishing and sustaining men and women who will act responsibly as believers in the course of their secular duties as citizens.” Newbigin 1989, 139 [p199]
3. as a civil society organisation – sometimes the only one around on the estate
4. pastoral presence – poor need care in their pain. And tough love in their sin.
5. source of community & spirituality
6. prophetic voice addressing those who refuse to see and hear truth, especially when in powerful positions
7. reads the bible and applies the stories

“Church is to be community with Jesus (life) so that it can preach good news (word) heal the sick (deed) and cast out demons (sign).” P201

Chapter Seven begins the Practice:

Chapter 8: Designing programmes: emphasis on vision, values and monitoring rather than goals and milestones. Social Analysis rather than Needs Analysis.