

# Teacher Resources

## Walking with The Poor by Bryant L. Myers 2005

### Theological Summary

#### Who are we?

This seems a simple question. Sometimes we move too quickly past it, assuming everyone knows the answer. We need to pause a moment and be sure that the Western understanding of the autonomous, self-directed individual has not distorted our Christian understanding of who we really are.

We are human beings made in the image of God. We all know this. What we forget sometimes is that the God in whose image we are made is the three-in-one God, the God who is communion, the relational God. This means that our individual self can never be itself apart from our being-in-communion with God and with other human beings. The trinitarian nature of God means that we are self-in-community when we are fully human. Our human selves are embedded in relationships, finding their fullest meaning in just and harmonious relationships or losing meaning and worth when these relationships do not work. This view of the human being is radically contrary to that of modern times, at least in the West.

This trinitarian view of the self does not mean that the self is submerged in the group. As Leupp clarifies, “Egocentricity is different from ego awareness” (1996, 100). Every person is unique and should be aware of his or her uniqueness, just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are aware of their respective uniqueness. This uniqueness, however, does not lead to egocentricity but rather finds full expression in self-giving love. “The triune premise is that love is completed when it is invested in the other. Love that is given away does not impoverish, but enriches and perfects the giver” (ibid., 101). Thus the thrust for mission – for loving God and loving neighbor – is found first in God and then in us because we are made in his triune image.

This has practical implications. As Christians, we can no longer simply view the world as a collection of individuals. Instead, we need to view each individual as an encumbered self, embedded in families and communities as well as being participants in the whole gamut of social institutions – economic, political, cultural, and religious. All of this is what it means to be human, to be made in the image of God.

This view of the self is also helpful in terms of what the self is not. While no one can deny the importance of an assured and centered self, a trinitarian view of self will not validate metaphors like the lonesome, self-contained, “I don’t need help from nobody” cowboy; the entertainer who “does it my way”; or the entrepreneur who gambles with shareholder’s resources without regard for the people who work in his or her company and contribute to the value of the company. Self-actualization in any form will not create the full human self of the Bible.

Finally, just as we cannot understand who God is without reference to what God is doing, the same applies to human beings. We are made in the image of a God who is and who is acting. Thus, we must be who we are – bearers of the image of a relational God – and do what we were made by God to do – be fruitful and creative in self-giving relationships.

To be true to our identity as Christians, we must be in Christ and be doing mission, loving God, and loving our neighbor. We are not who we truly are unless we are doing both.

One final observation as to who we are. Human beings are located in a concrete place and at a particular point in time. We are material as well as spiritual. Our self-breathes, eats, laughs, and walks through the bush. We are located in God’s creation and are sustained by it. We are not disembodied ideas, thoughts, or spirits. We do not float above history or time. Our story and nature’s story are inseparable.