

What Better Future?

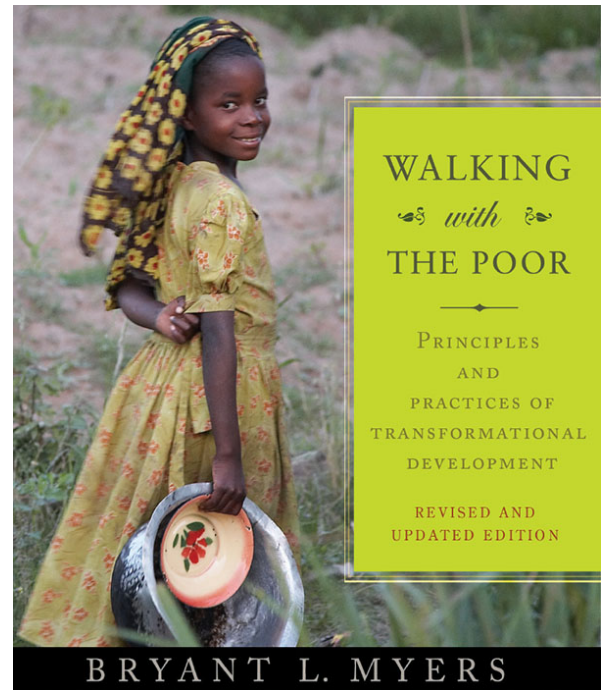
Excerpt abridged from *Walking with the Poor* by Dr. Bryant L. Myers (2011)
pp. 175-177

Articulating the Question

The quest for transformational development, therefore, begins with the need for a community to clarify for itself what really matters and why it matters. What is human well-being? What is abundant life? What is the community *for*? What vision will beckon community members toward becoming who they truly are? What claims does God make on us? What claims do members of the community need to make on one another? What will create joy at the end of the day?

In the Bible, the answer becomes clear: The unshakeable kingdom of God and the unchanging person of Jesus Christ are the best human future and the means to get there. This is God's best human future toward which everyone is invited to move. The kingdom of God is the future that has already invaded history and that is growing, like leaven, in the present.

What does this mean in concrete terms? The kingdom vision for the better human future is summarized by the idea of *shalom*: just, peaceful, harmonious, and enjoyable relationships with each other, ourselves, our environment, and God. This kingdom frame is inclusive of the physical, social, mental, and spiritual manifestations of poverty... Therefore, immunizing children, improving food security, and providing clean water can be part of a kingdom future... Working to make social systems, and those who manage and shape them, accountable to work for the well-being of all can also be part of moving toward the kingdom. Simply listening to and being with those whose troubles reside in a broken heart or a defeated spirit is kingdom business too. Whatever heals and restores body, mind, spirit, and community can all be part of the better, more just future toward which Christianity should point.

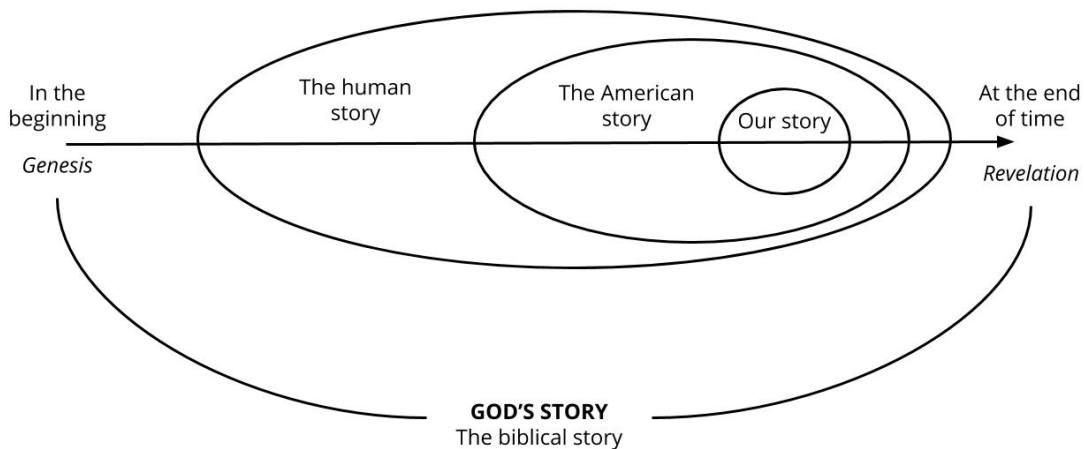


Abundant Life

Another way of saying this is that any better human future must be about life and life abundant... The Mexican poet and essayist Octavio Paz put it this way: “Progress has peopled history with the marvels and monsters of technology, but has depleted the life of man. It has given us more *things*, but not more *being*.” Life abundant is about living, not simply having.

Abundant life means no limits to love, no limits to justice, and no limits to peace. Anything that is for life, that enhances life, or that celebrates life is pointing toward the kingdom. Africans pray for “life, as well as the means to make life worth living” ...

The key to moving toward this better future of shalom and abundant life is the discovery that our community’s story, and our story, can in fact become part of this larger story, the story of God’s redemptive and restorative work in the world. Getting to a sustainable better future requires becoming part of the work that God is already doing. With God’s help we can



Credit: *Walking With the Poor* Figure 3-1

recompose our own stories so that we discover our true identity and true vocation, namely, being God’s children journeying toward God’s kingdom.

For example, World Vision in the Philippines, a Catholic country with a strong renewal movement emphasizing personal renewal and lay Bible reading, found that poor communities gravitated toward the biblical metaphor of Isaiah 65 as a way of visualizing the future that they believe God intends for them:

- A place of joy; there is no weeping.
- Children do not die. People live full lives.
- People build homes and live in them.
- People enjoy the product of their own labor.
- The community is restored and harmonious.
- The irreconcilable live in peace.
- God is in their midst, answering them before they call.

Both the poor and the non-poor need to respond to the only vision of justice that promises life in its fullness and relationships that work for justice and peace. This is a vision for transformation that is equally interesting in *being* as well as *having*. Knowing who we truly are and pursuing our true vocation is the key to having more life, not just more things or even more knowledge.

Envisioning a better human future is hard work for both the poor and the non-poor. The web of lies believed by the poor has convinced them that there is no better future, at least not in this world... This is also hard work for the non-poor, for they believe they are already on the way to or part of a better future. It is very hard for them to believe that there is anymore more, especially if it involves having less. It is even harder to get them to consider change - after all, it is fun playing god in the lives of other people.

There is encouragement here. This vision of the best human future is not modernity's story of inevitable human progress or the mind-dulling hope-destroying acceptance of the morally relativistic pluralism of post-modernity. The good news is that we do not have to create our own better future, nor do we have to accept that there is no better future. We do not have to accept a better future in which some have a lot and others are left at the side of the road, as if God didn't create enough to go around.

One final note. Any Christian vision of a better human future must include a vibrant, growing, living Christian community that is eagerly and joyfully serving God and its community. It is impossible to imagine a transforming community without a transforming church in its midst. Such a church is in love with God and with all its neighbors, celebrating everything that is for life and being a prophetic voice, telling the truth about everything that is against or that undermines life.