

Myers, BL. 2011. *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*. New York: Orbis Books. 386 pages. ISBN 978-1-57075-939-0.

A number of books have appeared over the past few years in which a Christian response to poverty is discussed. In 1977 Ronald Sider's groundbreaking book, *Rich Christians in an age of Hunger* was published with David Chilton's response which appeared four years later, *Productive Christians in an age of Guilt Manipulators*. Other titles which also grapple with the same topic include *When Charity destroys Dignity* (Glenn Schwartz), *To Give or not to Give* (John Rowell) and *When Helping Hurts* (Steve Corbett & Brian Fikkert) to name but a few. In his 2011 revised and expanded edition of *Walking with the Poor* (the first edition appeared in 1999), Bryant Myers focuses on, what he describes as transformational development.

Myers is of the opinion that most people have a restricted view on poverty, seeing it only as some form of need which exists, be it for food, a decent place to sleep, clean water, knowledge, skills and access to services such as health systems, markets or credit (p 113-114). Christians will usually add the need to understand the good news about Jesus Christ as another deficit. Although the author acknowledges the truth of this viewpoint, he identifies a number of problems with seeing poverty primarily as a deficit. The underlying assumption is that as soon as the deficit is corrected, people will no longer be poor. Furthermore, the response which is invited is to provide in that which is missing, where all good things (food, education, health systems, etc.) are brought in from the outside. This results in demeaning and devaluing the poor where those providing the help consider the poor as being defective and inadequate.

The solution Myers offers is to address the problem of poverty in a holistic way. Relieving poverty is not a matter of choosing what type of help needs to be given, but to properly analyze the cause of the problem and then

to produce sustainable solutions. Transformational development starts by articulating a better future for the community. This entails a process through which the community clarifies for itself what really matters and what not (p 175). The community needs to determine what human well-being is, how the community sees its own role, what its vision is for the community members, what claims God makes on the community and what claims the community members make on each other.

The author's solution is the Biblical concept of shalom which he describes as "just, peaceful, harmonious, and enjoyable relationships with each other, ourselves, our environment, and God" (p 175). Because poverty manifests itself in physical, social, mental and spiritual areas, addressing poverty should also take place within all of these areas. Therefore immunizing children, improving food security, reconciliation, simply listening to those whose poverty resides in a broken heart, are all part of the process of bringing shalom back into a community.

The goals of transformational development include changed people who have recovered their true identity and vocation as well as just and peaceful relationships with oneself, the community, with those outside the community and the environment. It is therefore clear that Myers's suggestion does not imply merely handing out gifts to impoverished people as many well-meaning people and organizations regularly do and which often creates greater problems than those which are solved. Myers wants to work towards sustainable solutions by thinking holistically about the causes of poverty and addressing these causes in a way which will lead to change throughout the community.

The book includes lists of helpful resources to further explain how these goals can be reached. People already involved in programs alleviating poverty as well as those planning on visiting impoverished areas would do themselves a favor by studying this book and by planning their work in accordance with Myers's suggestions.

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