

The Biblical Story

WHY DO WE NEED TO DO THEOLOGY?

Why does a book on transformational development need a chapter on theology? First, some people think that development is an activity of the material world, something done in the real world of human life. They think that theology is different, assuming that theology is about God, about other-worldly and spiritual things. These very assumptions are part of the problem this book is addressing. To solve the problem the practitioner must take time to do some theology. By the end of this chapter I hope the reader will understand that because God is working even now in the concrete world of space and time, doing transformational development is a form of doing theology.

Second, I understand the Bible to say that God is the creator of this world. Furthermore, the Bible asserts that in Christ all things hold together through the work of the Holy Spirit. This suggests that God is actively at work in the world, working for God's purposes. If this is so, then God has a stake in what we are making in the world. God is very interested in our work of transformational development, since it either supports or works against what God is doing.

Finally, the development process is a convergence of stories. The story of the development practitioner is converging with the story of the community and together they will share a new story for a while. Because the development promoter is a Christian and because God has been active in the community since the beginning of time, the biblical story is the third story in this confluence of stories. This brings the development practitioner back to theology and the biblical account.

Every community needs a big story, a story that frames our lives and our understanding of the world. Everyone must have some kind of transcendent narrative that gives answers to questions of meaning and provides moral direction and social purpose. We need to know who we are (identity and

purpose), where we are (location in the world and the universe), what went wrong (making sense of the poverty, pain, and injustice we see), what we must do (what must change and how it can be changed), and what time it is (how our past, present, and future fit into this picture).

Development practitioners need a big story too. At its heart, transformational development is about seeking a better human future. Any vision of a better human future must have its roots in the story that makes sense of our lives. Sadly, there is more than one story competing for the allegiance of most development workers. First, we all live within the story of our culture. Second, all of us who have been educated in Western schools or schools using Western curriculum also carry the story of modernity. Finally, if we are Christian, we carry the Christian story as well. These three stories shape our view of the better future and how to get there. Therefore, before we set out to accompany the transformation of others, we need to be sure we are clear on the biblical story that has the final say on our individual stories.

COMPETING STORIES

The modern world has a number of competing stories. Some are age-old stories rooted in the great religions of the world. Others are the products of the Western Enlightenment. Communism is a comprehensive narrative about what the world is like, how it got that way, and a seductive promise of a better human future. It lasted almost a century and its idolatry claimed the lives of millions of people. Science, technology, and capitalism continue to demand our faith and allegiance, claiming to be the only remaining story. They are gods that we are often too quick to worship. Koyama tells us that these gods “are fascinating because they claim to give us our identity and security more directly and quickly than our crucified Lord. . . . The selling point of these gods is directness and security. . . . They give us instant service” (Koyama 1985, 259). Yet at the end of the twentieth century the authority of these modern stories is fraying in the face of broken promises.

Science claims to understand how the universe works and promises the power to master nature, but it does not provide the answers most of us require: How did the world begin? By accident. How will it end? By accident? Why are we here and what moral guidance do you offer? Science is silent. (Postman 1997, 31).

Technology speaks only of power, offering mastery of nature to all. Technology offers convenience, efficiency, and prosperity here and now with its benefits available to rich and poor, or so it claims. Technology is a jealous god; those who follow must “shape their needs and aspirations to the possibilities of technology” (ibid., 31). Worshiping any other god or good means slowing down or frustrating the benefit of technology. Yet the technological god is a false god: “It is a god that speaks to us of power, not limits;

speaks to us of ownership, not stewardship; speaks to us only of rights, not responsibilities; speaks to us of self-aggrandizement, not humility” (ibid., 31).

Capitalism asks for faith in a god called “the hidden hand” and seems to have forgotten the goal of the original story. Adam Smith, the original storyteller, “wrote that the ultimate goal of business is not to make a profit. Profit is just the means. The goal is general welfare” (Wink 1992, 68). Instead, capitalism reduces people to economic beings driven by utilitarian self-interest toward the goal of accumulating wealth. What is wealth for? What are we for if we do not have wealth? Who are we if we do not have wealth? No answer.

Finally, even the human story (history) is not a big enough story. The human story can explain the story of my people and even my personal story. The human story also contains the stories of science, technology, and capitalism. It fails, however, to provide the answers to the questions of identity and meaning for which we search. Only God’s story, the story that is outside human history but containing human history, can do this. Yet you can’t get there from here. Beginning from the human story only leads to the smaller stories, the story of my people, my story, and the story of my atoms and molecules. You cannot get from the smaller stories to God’s story. The only point of departure that works is to begin with God’s story.

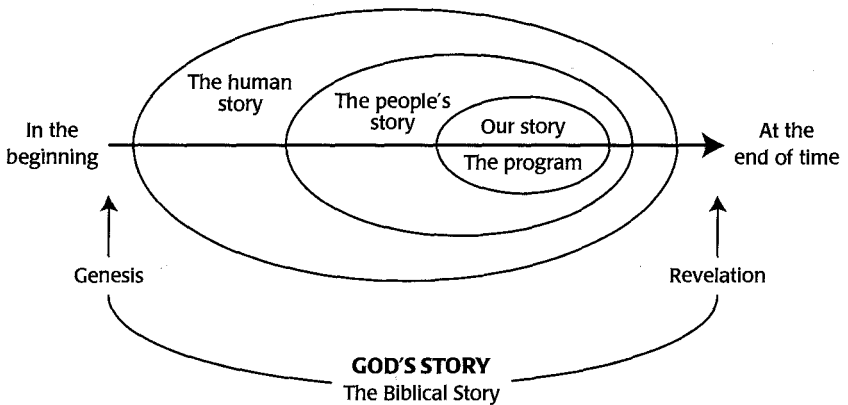


Figure 2-1: The constellation of stories.

In the latter years of the twentieth century, it is becoming clear that the modern world is discovering that it has lost its story. Part of the malaise in the West is the sense of loss and confusion that the absence of a true story brings. There is no widely shared story that makes sense of our lives, nor is there any promise of a better human future that compels belief. Modernity has failed to create a story line, and it has failed because it has no storyteller. “If God does not invent the world’s story, then it has none” (Jenson 1993, 21).

Christians do have a story, however. The Bible is the narrative of God’s creative and redemptive work in the world; thus it also contains the story of

the Christian community. It is God's story about what God is doing. This Christian story was received; we did not make it up. It is not our story about God. Nor is it the sum of our individual stories, even though God holds these stories in high regard.¹ It is this story of what God wants and is doing that compels us to care for the poor and to work for human transformation. God's story is the source of our motivation, our vision, and our values of mission.

The biblical story also puts our stories in their place. We learn that it is not my story, or your story, or our story, that is the main story, the story that gives meaning. Meaning only comes from God's story. To pursue human transformation as Christians means understanding where humanity is coming from, where it is going, and how it can get there. To do the work for transformation, we have to embrace the whole of the biblical story, the story that makes sense and gives direction to the stories of the communities where we work, as well as to our own stories.

God's story is at heart a simple one. In a nutshell, it is the story of creation and redemption by the God of Israel and Father of the risen Christ working through the Holy Spirit. God's story tells us how things started, lost their way, can be redirected, and how the human story comes out in the end.

But the biblical story is also a very unusual story. We are told the beginning, the middle, and the final chapter of the story. But the piece between Jesus and his work on the cross and the final chapter is still being written. God's story is not just about what God has done, but also about what God, through his church, is doing now. God is still writing the story, and incredibly, God has invited us to participate in that writing.

Because God is still doing things in our world, we must begin our theology with the storyteller. The storyteller of the biblical story is a unique storyteller, because the storyteller is also the main actor in the story. Before there was any story, there is God. And now, in the chapters just before the end of the story, this same God is working in this world through the church, doing what God has been doing since the fall: working for the redemption and transformation of human beings, their relationships, and the creation which God made and in which they live.

THE STORYTELLER

We have to begin with God because he is the storyteller and the author of the story as well. The question Who is God? must be the first question. This is the question "that frames and anticipates all other questions" (Leupp 1996, 89). We must know who God is before we can answer the question about who we are and what we are supposed to be doing.

The Christian response is that God is three in one, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While we affirm this in worship, we don't use this Trinitarian formulation very much in thinking about issues of daily life. In the last decade a lot of work has been done to help us recover and make use of the

Trinitarian understanding of God. Some of this thinking is important to developing a framework for human transformation.

Who is God? The question must be carefully put. One of the recent developments in philosophy is that being must not be separated from doing when addressing the question of identity. The better question is, Who is God and what is God doing? (LaCugna 1991, 1-3). If we focus solely on who God is, God's being and character, then we struggle when pressed with hard questions: Can we believe in a God who seems to allow the poor to be poor in an unjust world? Can we believe in a God in the face of the genocides in Cambodia in the 1970s and in Rwanda and Bosnia in the late 1990s? Does belief in God hinder human development? To answer that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-caring fails to provide a believable answer to these questions. If there isn't more to God, then there isn't enough.

To respond effectively, we have to go beyond who God is to talk about what God is doing. What God is doing is also expressed in a Trinitarian formulation: God is saving the world through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The question of who God is in an unjust and violent world can only be answered adequately by talking about what God is doing: saving a fallen and failed world in a particular way. Thus, God is not the God who permitted the Holocaust; rather, God is the God who is hard at work trying to prevent future ones.

Jesus provides another example of the importance of keeping who God is and what God is doing together in our thinking. Knowing that Jesus is God is not enough to know fully who Jesus is. We also need to know that Jesus emptied himself of his prerogatives as God and, in obedience to the Father, died for the sins of all humankind and provided for our forgiveness by his resurrection. Jesus is God (being) and Jesus became like us, died, and in so doing saved us (doing). This provides a more complete account as who Jesus is.

Why does this Trinitarian formulation of being and doing matter to the development worker?²² There are at least two reasons. First, it frames our mission response as Christians. We must both be Christians and do Christian work. Doing transformational development is acting out who we truly are. If there is no dichotomy between being and doing in God, then there can be none in us.

Second, this Trinitarian view leads to another helpful conclusion: we need to think of God as a loving, self-giving community; three, yet one. "Three persons in a single communion and a single trinitarian community: this is the best formula to represent the Christian God. Speaking of God must always mean the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the presence of one another, in total reciprocity, in immediacy of loving relationship, being one for another, by another, in another, and with another" (Boff 1988, 133). The Christian God is a relational God and this defines God's character: self-giving love. "Trinitarian theology could be described as *par excellence* a theology of relationship, which explores the mysteries of love, relationship, personhood

and communion within the framework of God's self-revelation in the person of Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit" (LaCugna 1991, 1).

A lot follows from this for the development worker. First, if human beings are made in the image of this triune community, then our understanding of the individual must be very different from the autonomous, self-determining individual of Western culture. Development cannot be reduced to simply empowering individuals with new choices. Second, if God is in God's very essence relational, then our understanding of the impact of sin must also be relational and this will shape how we understand poverty (more on this in the next chapter). Third, if this triune God is saving the world by inviting people to join the movement toward the best of human futures in God's kingdom, then our view of the better future of transformational development must be fundamentally relational too. Finally, as Leupp points out, "Christian ethics that hope to be triunely grounded must be an ethics of relationality" (1996, 159). Thinking in Trinitarian terms "is practical because it is *the* theological criterion to measure the fidelity of ethics, doctrine, spirituality and worship to the self-revelation of God and the action of God in the economy of salvation" (LaCugna 1991, 410).

THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY

Creation

In the beginning was God, the triune God. The story begins by God making something out of nothing. This relational God created the earth and everything in it. Genesis tells us that the triune God spoke the creation into being (Gn 1:1). God's first action was to create a material world that could be seen, heard, felt, and touched. John tells us that Christ was God's Word in the beginning (Jn 1:1-2) and that through Christ all things were made (Jn 1:3). The Holy Spirit hovered over the deep (Gn 1:2). Thomas Aquinas said, "God the Father wrought the creation through his Word, the Son, and through his love, the Holy Ghost" (quoted in Boff 1988, 222). The whole person of God, creating and active, from the beginning of time. The world was God's act, not God's thought or dream. And the result was very good, according to the one who created it.

God created male and female in God's own image and told them to "be fruitful and increase in number, to fill the earth and subdue it" (Gn 1:27). Human beings are more than simply alive (being). Our purpose as human beings is to tend the earth and make it productive (doing). In addition to establishing that we are to be and to do in a particular way, this story also establishes the requirement for a Christian ecology. We are to be stewards. Everything belongs to God—humankind, the creatures of the earth, and the earth itself. The call to and promise of productivity and fruitfulness find their ground in the intent of the God who created them.

The Trinitarian formulation helps us understand the doctrine of creation more fully. God is God and the world is the world, distinctly separate and yet personally related. Creator and creation are in continuing relationship, distinct yet inseparably linked together in a relationship of love. God transcends creation, yet through Christ is actively involved in sustaining it (Heb 1:2-3). The creation account is neither an example of the distant high God of traditional religion nor the blind clockmaker of the modern West.

There is an important two-part observation that needs to be made. Having been made in the image of the triune God, we are meant to be in loving, self-giving relationships with one another and to be caring stewards, participating in the continuing process of creation. So, first, we need to understand that human beings, as bearers of the image of God, are intentionally placed in a system of relationships: with God, with self, with community, with those perceived as “other,” and with our environment. This is our identity. Second, the calling or vocation of human beings (individually and in relationship) is to be fruitful, productive stewards of God’s creation. We are to make a contribution that adds value. The creation account gives every human being an identity and a vocation. Just as I have already explained that we better understand God when we acknowledge who God is and what God is doing, we understand ourselves more fully when we acknowledge who we are and what we were created to do.

The Trinitarian understanding of creation also allows us to understand that the rich diversity of creation and the human family is a gift of God, a reflection of who God is. “The plurality in unity of the triune revelation enables us to do justice to the diversity, richness and openness of the world without denying its unity in relativist versions of plurality. It is this vision that trinitarian theology has to offer to the fragmented modern world” (Gunton 1997, 103).

Going back to the story of creation, Gerhard Von Rad reminds us that the account of creation in Genesis ends with the creation of the nations in chapter 10. Human institutions are also part of creation. The story of creation does more than explain how and why humankind was created, it also “provides a common foundation for all human enterprises we call culture—not just theology, but science, politics, ethics and art as well” (Gunton 1997, 98). This raises an important idea that will keep coming back to us in this book. We cannot separate people from the social systems in which they live.

An interesting set of implications for the development worker can be derived from the creation account. Since God owns the earth but has entrusted it to humankind, the critical metaphor for us is that of the steward and the principle of stewardship. From this, Wright develops four ethical principles (Wright 1983, 69-70):

Sharing resources: The land and natural resources are gifts to all humankind, not to only a few. While this does not mean there can be no private ownership, Wright argues that “the right of all to *use* is prior to the right to *own*.”

Responsibility to work: Work is part of being fruitful. God is productive, and thus it is in our nature to be productive. Work then is a responsibility. It also follows that we have a responsibility to enable or allow others to work so that they can fulfill their purpose.

Expectation of growth: “Be fruitful and increase” applies to the number of human beings and to the means of supporting them. God has provided abundantly in creation so that this can be done, and God has given humankind the ingenuity and adaptability necessary to create this necessary increase.³

Shared produce: Being productive is also accompanied by the idea of being able to consume or enjoy the end-product of one’s work. This is part of the biblical image of the better human future (Is 65:21-22). “We are as responsible to God for what we do with what *we* produce as we are for what *he* has given us” (Wright 1983, 70).

The fall

Sadly, the big story did not end with the fruitful garden where human beings are obedient stewards and God walks in the afternoon. Yielding to temptation from an adversary working against God, humankind, man and woman together, decided to disobey God. They acted as if they knew better than God (Gn 3). Being like God was apparently more attractive than listening to God and doing as God asked. The effect of this disobedience ensured that human identity and all dimensions of human relationships would be marred. The scope of sin proved very broad—very holistic, if you will. It led to widespread deception, distortion, and domination in all forms of human relationships—with God, within one’s self (and family), within the community and between others, and with the environment.

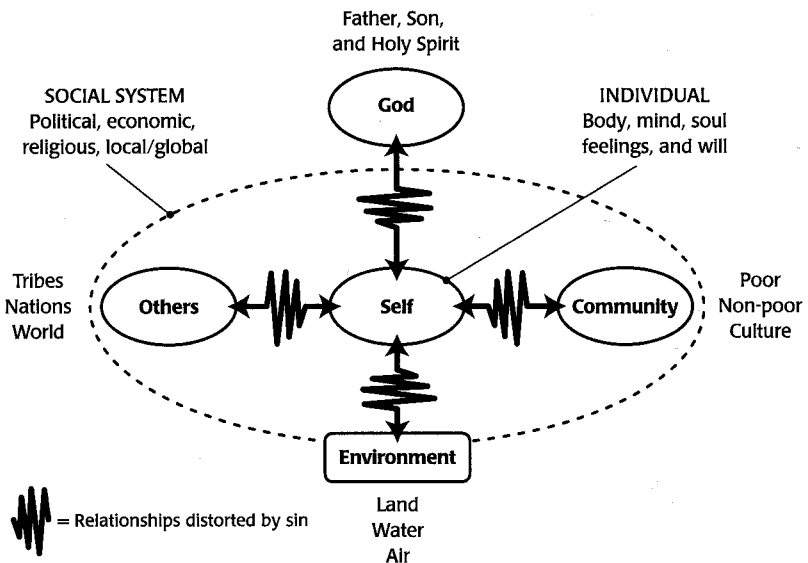


Figure 2-2: Impact of sin on all relationships.

I do not want to move past the issue of an adversary too quickly. Someone other than human beings created the temptation that resulted in the fall. Too often we dismiss the idea of a form of personal evil that actively works against God and God's intentions for human beings and creation. Yet, without Satan's role in the first part of the biblical story, there would be no need for the rest of the biblical story. We cannot read Satan out of the story and have it make any sense.

Each of Wright's ethical domains in creation was affected negatively by the fall. Instead of shared resources, land and natural resources have become a universal cause of strife and violence. They are hoarded by some and squandered and abused by others. Land and natural resources have become the counters in games of domination and oppression (Wright 1983, 71-74).

Instead of a way of using our gifts for ourselves and others, work has been corrupted. It can be toilsome and frustrating (Gn 3:17). Work has become a commodity, something we sell and buy with the temptation to reduce the human being to an economic asset, a living machine. Work has become a tool for greed, and even an idolatry whereby one makes a name for oneself. For the poor, this distorted work is often not available and the poor are vilified as "not productive."

Production and growth have become pathologically obsessive in many parts of the world. Covetousness has replaced contentment. "I saw that all labor and achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor" (Eccl 5:4). There is never enough. "The effect of the fall was that the desire for growth became excessive for some at the expense of others, and the means of growth became filled with greed, exploitation and injustice" (Wright 1983, 81). The result of this pathology is the systems of poverty that keep some people poor.

Finally, the product of work is seen as human property, no longer belonging to God. Claims of ownership are privatized and made an absolute, ignoring the claim of God on all things in creation or the transcendent responsibility each has for the well-being of the larger community. Worse, those who create wealth use that wealth to influence the laws and the economic, political, and cultural system to protect their advantage. "A poor man's field may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away" (Prv 12:23).

The bottom line of the fall is that the good creation of God became bent and no longer points at the purpose for which it was created. "The narrative of the Fall portrays the personal force of evil approaching man by means of the material creation and using the same material creation as a means of enticement to unbelief, disobedience and rebellion" (Wright 1983, 73).

Sometimes, evangelicals get so focused on the impact of the fall on the individual that they forget that the impact of the fall was on the whole of human society as well. Remember that the nations and their corresponding

social institutions were part of the creation narrative. Linthicum does an excellent job of outlining the impact of the fall on these institutions (1991, 106-7):

The *economic system* was created by God to steward responsibly and justly the natural and human resources of the nation and to encourage men and women to be productive, using the gifts God has given to create wealth. Distorted by the fall, people occupying positions of influence within the economic system now act more often as owners and less as stewards. They skew the system to enhance and protect their own self-interest and insulate themselves from the impact of these distortions on the less fortunate.

The *political system* was created by God to encourage kingdom ethics and to bring a creation order into the management of human affairs, an order based on justice and peace. Yet, as a result of the fall, the political system becomes captive to the economic order and begins to serve the powerful; its ministries of justice cease being either ministries or just.

Finally, the *religious system*, which was created by God to bring the nations and their institutions into relationship with God, too often colludes with the fallen political and economic systems. The prophets of accountability are gradually seduced by money, power, and prestige, gradually becoming silent (Ezek 22:28).

The net result of the fall on the economic, political and religious systems is that they become the places where people learn to play god in the lives of the poor and the marginalized. When fallen human beings play god in the lives of others, the results are patterns of domination and oppression that mar the image and potential productivity of the poor while alienating the non-poor from their true identity and vocation as well.

We need to return to our observation that human beings cannot be separated from the human institutions of which they are a part. As Linthicum points out, both the institutions and the person experience an interrelated weakening when we examine Ezekiel's account of Jerusalem's sins (1991, 106). The spiritual nature of the nation and its human institutions, business, church, family, and government, all created for good, become increasingly anti-life, anti-kingdom, and evil (Ezek 22:1-13). The people, embedded in these distorting, deceiving, and dominating systems, themselves become exploiters of each other (Ezek 22:29). Wink says, "Human misery is caused by institutions, but these institutions are maintained by human beings. We are made evil by our institutions, yes; but our institutions are also made evil by us" (1992, 75).⁴

Because economic, political, and religious systems are so important to our understanding of poverty and therefore to the work of transformation, we need to look a little more closely at the underlying spirituality of these institutions. Walter Wink (1992, 65-85) has a significant contribution to make in this regard. Wink proposes that Paul's "principalities and powers" are the "interiority of earthly institutions or structures or systems." Wink

points out that Paul says that the powers are said to be created in, through, and for Christ (Col 1:16-17), thus supporting the claim that social institutions are God's creations and not simply human artifacts. They were created by God because they are necessary to a full human life in community.

However, these powers—these social systems and structures—were profoundly distorted by the fall. They became idolatrous, along with the people who inhabit them. “An institution becomes demonic when it abandons its divine vocation—that of a ministry of justice or a ministry of social welfare—for the pursuit of its own idolatrous goals” (Wink 1992, 72), usually by serving the powerful in the name of self-preservation.

Wink goes on to argue that the doctrine of the fall is essential to understanding ourselves in relationship to these principalities and powers. The doctrine of the fall affirms the radical nature of evil and frees us from any illusion that we or our social institutions are perfectible apart from the redeeming work of Jesus Christ and the full coming of the kingdom of God. This should save us from any temptation toward optimistic belief in the ability of government or the free market or our own efforts at human transformation to change the reality of the poor in and of themselves. The relationship between this understanding of the fall and why people are poor will be developed in the next chapter.

The liberation story

To get from the fall to Jesus, God called a man, whom we know as Abraham, and made a promise to him: God would make through him a great nation that would be a blessing to all the nations (Gn 12:2-3). God kept his promise, and the Old Testament is the story of Abraham's nation, of its greatness and its flaws, of its loyalty and its betrayal of the God who called it into being. It is also the story of a promise-keeping God, who would not be diverted from completing the story God began at creation.

For the development professional, the Exodus story is instructive because it is the defining narrative for the people of Israel. It is a story of their liberation and of their formation. The liberation was from the oppression of Egypt and its pharaoh, and the formation was God transforming them from a group of slaves into a people. This was hard work. It took a day to get Israel out of Egypt and forty years in the wilderness to get Egypt out of Israel.

The Exodus narrative highlights the holistic and relational nature of God's redemptive work. Spiritually, Exodus is the story of the one God revealing himself and demonstrating his power so that Israel would believe and be faithful. Israel was freed from Egypt's gods and invited into a covenant with an ethical God who did not belong to any one place and who was too terrible to see face to face.

Sociopolitically, Exodus is the story of moving from slavery to freedom, from injustice toward a just society (at least that was the intent of God's instructions for pre-monarchy Israel [Wright 1983]) and from dependence to independence. Economically, the Exodus story is about moving from oppression in someone else's land to freedom in their own land, a land fairly distributed to all so that everyone could enjoy the fruit of his or her own labor. Psychologically, the Exodus story is about losing self-understanding as a slave people and discovering the inner understanding that, with God's help, they could be a people and become a nation.

What is sometimes overlooked is the other intention of God in the Exodus account. Throughout, there was a twofold agenda. The one we all know is the one just described—liberating Israel from its slavery and taking it to the Promised Land. The second was so that “the Egyptians might know that I am the Lord” (Ex 7:5). God was not being capricious in hardening Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh believed that he was God and thus fully justified in playing god in the lives of “his” people. This could not be ignored. “I have raised you up for this very purpose,” God said through Moses to Pharaoh, “that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth” (Ex 9:16). The non-poor are also the subjects of the good news, although I am sure it was very hard for Pharaoh to see liberation from his god-complex as such. The cost of discipleship is very high for those with wealth and power (see also Acts 16: 16-21). Jesus pointed out that the rich have a particularly hard time getting into the kingdom; this is part of the reason why.

The prophets

The history of Israel was not always consistent with the story God was attempting to create. Though they were God's chosen people and the instrument through which Jesus came into the world, Israel was also a source of pain for God. Hosea 11:8 reveals the “agitated mind” of God, whose emotions were always “jumbled up within him” (Koyama 1985, 220): loving Israel as a husband loves his wife and yet hating her idolatry and injustice.

Deuteronomy tells us that the prophet was “raised up” by God and set up over and against the priest and the king, taking on the character of God's own voice: “I will put my words in his mouth” (18:15, 17). The stories of the prophets tell us a great deal about how God views sin and its impact and serve to remind us of what God wants in creation as well as what God intends to do.

In the prophets we learn a great deal about how idolatry and injustice are related. When God, speaking through Isaiah, deplores “meaningless offerings” and “evil assemblies,” Jerusalem is told, not to improve its worship in

the temple, but to “stop doing wrong, learn to do right, to seek justice and encourage the oppressed, to defend the cause of the fatherless and plead the case of the widow” (Is 1:17). Loving God and loving neighbor are a seamless whole.

In Isaiah, we also see a strong message as to how God feels when the non-poor play God in the lives of the poor.

Woe to those who make unjust laws,
to those who issue oppressive decrees,
to deprive the poor of their rights
and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people,
Making widows their prey and robbing the father-
less (Is 10:1-2).

Echoing Mary’s Song (Lk 1:46-55), God will show the bankruptcy of power, privilege, and wealth (Is 5:8-10, 15-16). In front of a holy God it is made clear that there is no salvation in riches or power:

What will you do on the day of reckoning,
when disaster comes from afar?
To whom will you run for help? (Is 10:3).

The prophets also alert us to the fact that idolatry, personal sin, and social sin are a seamless package. We all associate Sodom with sins of sexual impurity. Ezekiel speaks of their “detestable practices,” when declaring Israel an “adulterous wife” who has become “more depraved than they” (Ezek 17:48). Then he surprises us when he describes Sodom’s sin: “She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy” (Ezek 17:49).

Ezekiel, interpreting the exile as God’s punishment, condemns Jerusalem for a political system that “has eaten the people” and seized their wealth (Ezek 22:23), for an economic system that “bribes for shedding blood” and “robs your neighbor by extortion” (Ezek 22:27) and a religious system that draws no distinction between the sacred and profane and does not “teach the people the difference between clean and unclean” (Ezek 22:26).

Finally, the prophets keep reminding us of what God’s story is all about, where God is going, what God is doing, and what God expects of us:

He has showed you, O Man, what is good
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God (Mic 6:8).

The wisdom of the people

The wisdom literature is the accumulated wisdom of the people who have lived under and within the Old Testament part of the biblical story. This literature summarizes the learnings of the community of faith concerning right and just relationships and testifies to people's experience that God's rule is the only rule at the end of the day. The rich are warned, as are the poor. God's concern for just social relationships surfaces throughout Psalms and Proverbs. This part of the biblical story illustrates God's interest in the everyday things of life—eating, drinking, playing, and laughing.

Our inability to see God active in and interested in daily life is a serious weakness.⁵ It is as if we believe that God is absent from or disinterested in this part of life. This view results in serious blind spots. Our practice and interpretation of development technology is an example of this. More on this later.

THE CENTER OF THE STORY

The center of the biblical story is the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a Jew who lived in Palestine almost two thousand years ago. This part of the story begins in Nazareth in Galilee, a place far from the center of political, economic, and religious power. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (Jn 1:46). It was understood by those in religious authority that neither the messiah nor a prophet could come from Galilee (Jn 7:41,52). A son of ordinary people, living in an unremarkable place, Jesus "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Lk 2:52).⁶

The Christ of the periphery

The Christ of God was very much the Christ of the powerless and despised geographical and social margins of Israel. The news that the Messiah finally had come came from a lonely prophet preaching in the desert of Judea. Jesus learned his true identity at his baptism in the Jordan River, far from Jerusalem and the Temple. Jesus then came to understand the fullness of his true vocation in the desert wilderness. By struggling with the temptations and deceptions of the Evil One, the one who is against life and against God, Christ determined that he was called to be the Son of God and the Suffering Servant, both at the same time.

Much of Christ's ministry took place in Galilee, on the edge of Israel. His work was done among the common people, those whom society labeled "publicans and sinners" or "unclean." Christ chose to do his work of preaching, healing, and casting out of demons in this backwater of the Ro-

man Empire, without any political or religious position. An itinerant preacher, Jesus was supported by some faithful women (Lk 8:3). In a sense, the political and economic power of Jerusalem had only one benefit to Jesus. By acting out its role as the center of power, it would put him to death.

This strange location for the work of the Messiah of the whole world has implications. Koyama reminds us that since Jesus is the true center of the kingdom of God, where he is becomes the center (1985, 251-52). This means that Galilee becomes the weak center, outside the powerful center of Jerusalem. The powerful go to the periphery to see this person, this one who teaches with authority and who does things only God can do (Lk 5:17), who takes the center with him wherever he goes. Development workers must search their heart to see where they believe the center is that can transform the poor, where they believe Jesus will be found, where the "foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength" (1 Cor 1:25). Perhaps the periphery is not God-forsaken at all.

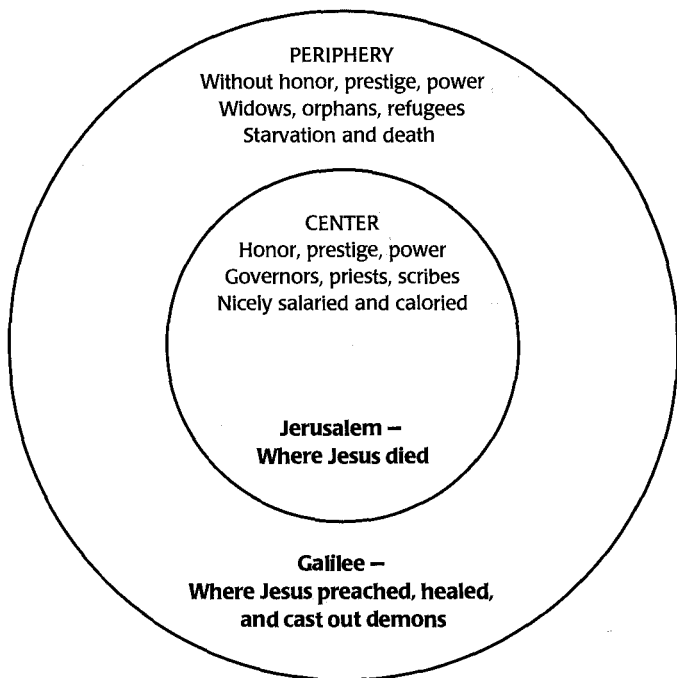


Figure 2-3: Center and periphery as the location of transformation.
(After Koyama 1985, 251-53)

This poses some interesting questions for the development practitioner, especially when involved in advocacy work. Where is the periphery today,

and what does it mean to say that Jesus can make it the center? What is the proper location for advocacy work? What result is likely if we go to the centers of power on behalf of the periphery? Are we willing to pay the price? Where are the real transformational frontiers? The ones that make foolishness into wisdom and weakness into power? Where are the places where the false wisdom of the world is unmasked and declared a lie?

The mission of Jesus

At the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit had anointed him “to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk 4:18-19). Jesus’ mission is a holistic mission to the poor.

Jesus preached the good news of the kingdom because this is what he was sent to do (Lk 4:43). While we can see no pattern of activity, no “model” for transformation, the gospel story is full of stories of preaching, teaching, healing, and casting out of demons—word, deed, and sign. Surely, Christian transformation should aspire to the same—word, deed, and sign. As for the kingdom, we will come back to this defining theme.

Jesus did not fulfill his mission alone

The triune God would not be expected to become an individual savior. He chose twelve fairly ordinary people “to be with him” in order that he could send them to do what he had been doing—preaching, casting out demons, and healing the sick (Mk 3:13-15, 6:12). A company of women helped support him “out of their own means” (Lk 8:3). Transformation is the work of a community; it is not served well by lonely “cowboys.” The gospel message is a way of living with Christ and each other that then enables the ministry of word, deed, and sign.

The greatest commandment

When asked what must be done to inherit eternal life, Jesus said that the greatest commandment was a twin affirmation: “Love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 23:36). This is a commandment about relationships, not law; about who we must love, not simply what we must believe or do. This commandment must frame our approach to transformational development. It is both our motive for helping the poor and a point of departure for what a biblical understanding of transformation means: right and just relationships.

Jesus died alone on a cross

Outside the city gates, in the company of criminals, Jesus died on a cross, abandoned by everyone, even God. The physical pain of death was insignificant compared to the pain of being wholly alone. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:33). There is no greater loss, no greater pain for the three-in-one God than abandonment. This must shape our view of poverty. Poverty is about relationships that don't work, that isolate, that abandon or devalue. Transformation must be about restoring relationships, just and right relationships with God, with self, with community, with the "other," and with the environment.

The cross, Leupp tells us, is a great clarifier. The cross is the vantage point of the triune God, God's point of view. From its perspective, Jesus revealed "not tarnished human possibility, but divine forgiveness" (Leupp 1996, 89). We are good, fallen, and redeemable all at once. The downward spiral of the fall meets the radical possibility of redirection toward the kingdom in the cross and resurrection of Christ.

The cross clarified something else. On the cross, in addition to canceling our sin, Paul tells us that Christ disarmed the powers and authorities, making a public spectacle of them (Col 2:20). In Christ, we no longer have to accept the rule of oppressive structures or of deceiving and dominating social systems. Their transformation is also included in Christ's finished work. Wink says, "The final subjugation of the Powers under Christ's feet will happen (1 Cor 15:24-25), but it is already, in anticipation, experienced now (Eph 1:19-23) in the new reality of resurrection experience" (Wink 1992, 70). Like us, the powers are good, fallen, and redeemable all at the same time. Transformational development that does not declare the good news of the possibility of both personal and corporate liberation and redirection toward God is a truncated gospel, unworthy of the biblical text.

Finally, there is an important paradox in the cross. From the epistles we learn that Christ has the power "that enables him to bring everything under his control" (Phil 3:21) and that "God has placed all things under his feet" (Eph 1:22). Yet, Wink points out that this Jesus who subjects all things to himself also "did not consider equality with God something to be grasped" (Phil 2:6). Jesus emptied himself of all desire to dominate, and taking the form of a human, identified himself with the poor and suffered a criminal's death. "Subjection to such a ruler means the end of all subjugation. The rulership (of Christ) thus constituted is not a domination hierarchy but an enabling and actualizing hierarchy. It is not pyramidal, but organic, not imposed but restorative" (Wink 1992, 83). This non-coercive, upside-down turning, healing, releasing Christ has implications in terms of who must own the development process and how we must run our development institutions.

Christ is risen

This is the transformation that begets all other transformations. Death to life. Something only God can do. Any work of human transformation that does not announce this incredibly good news is fatally impoverished. The cross and the resurrection are the very best news that we have. '

The Jesus story does not end with an empty tomb outside the gates of Jerusalem, the center of power. Jesus, risen in power and glory, returns to the periphery, to Galilee. The center has nothing more to offer him. Also, Jesus is concrete again: "Touch me and see" (Lk 24:39). He eats in the presence of his disciples. He appears to them for forty days, speaking about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). His last reported instructions were to go, to make disciples, to baptize in the name of the triune God, and to "teach them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:20). Teaching about the kingdom of God seems to be something important to the risen Jesus, and so it must be to those of us who follow him.

THE CONTINUING STORY

One of the many peculiar elements of the biblical story is that, after his resurrection, Jesus did not stay on earth to see his mission through, at least not in the way that anyone would have expected. After forty days of speaking about the kingdom of God, Jesus announced that the disciples would be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, once they received the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit reversed the story of Babel and those present heard them "declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues" (Acts 2:11). The biblical story was now a story for every language, for every person to hear in their mother tongue.

The church

From that point until now, you and I are the ongoing work of Christ in the world, his body here on earth. Surely this is hard to understand: handing over the work of saving the world to people who, while redeemed, are yet flawed and struggling with sin. Yet, this is what Jesus chose to do. The church, the community of faith, is the bearer of the biblical story, the "cracked pot" that is to continue announcing the good news of the unchanging person and the unshakable person until Christ comes again.

E. Stanley Jones helps us a great deal by describing the church in relationship to the triune God. Jones says that the kingdom is the Father's, while Jesus is the embodiment of the kingdom. The Holy Spirit is the first fruit of the kingdom, the assurance that there is more to come, and the one who helps us discover the truth and fullness of the kingdom. When it is at

its best, the church is the sign, a witness, to the kingdom of God breaking into the world.

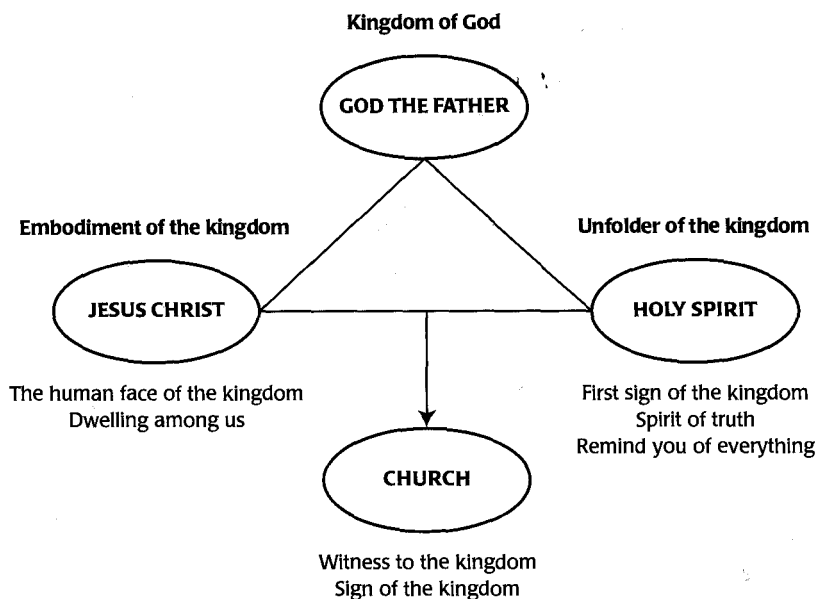


Figure 2-4: The triune God and the church.
(After Jones 1972, 26-29)

This has two important things to say to development workers. First, God brings the kingdom; it is neither our task nor that of our transformational development. We must not put the weight of building the kingdom on our shoulders; we cannot carry it, nor are we expected to. Second, the sign of the kingdom is the church, the community of faith, not the development worker or the development agency. Somehow development workers must become a part of the church. As Christians, their local community of faith is the local church. Their work needs to be seen as the sign of that church and not as some personal beacon.

The body of Christ is a community. This seems obvious enough, but sometimes we forget it. If our life with Christ is our first call (Mk 3:14), then our church is our family in which this life is nurtured. Our worship and our experience of the sacraments are the sole sources of the drive to take the whole message of Jesus and the kingdom of God into the world. The church is also our hermeneutical community, a community of and around the word of God. Believers are to study and interpret the Scriptures, doing so within a community as a correction against error. Every Christian community has the responsibility to read the biblical story in light

of its own story for the purpose of shaping its vision of mission and repenting of its errors. Where else does the vision of human transformation come from?

Most of us in the development business have deeply ambiguous feelings about this church of which we are a part. David Bosch reminds us that “the church is both a theological and a sociological entity, an inseparable union of the divine and the dusty” (1991, 389). Bosch continues with an eloquent description of our contradictory feelings about the church:

We can be utterly disgusted, at times, with the earthliness of the church, yet we can also be transformed, at times, with the awareness of the divine in the church. It is *this* church, ambiguous in the extreme, which is “missionary by its very nature,” the pilgrim people of God, “in the nature of” a sacrament, sign, and instrument, and “a most sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race” (Bosch 1991, 389).

We must remember that the church, while it is to be sign of the kingdom, is not the kingdom itself. The kingdom judges and redeems the church. The church is successful in being a sign to the extent that the Spirit makes it so. The church is a true sign only to the degree that it lives up to the spirit and life of the kingdom. “The church is not the end of mission, the kingdom is the end” (Jones 1972, 35).

This has two implications for the development worker. First, it is a counter-balance to the earlier claim I made that the church is to be the sign of the kingdom, not the development worker. While true, the church is as fallible as we are and sometimes fails to be this sign. Our greatest pain comes when we wish our work to be part of the sign of the kingdom, expressed through the local church, and yet find ourselves with a church that is unwilling or unable to be this sign with us. Such is the ambiguity of being in development work, especially if one works for a so-called parachurch organization.

Second, this means that church planting cannot be the final objective of mission, only the beginning. A church full of life and love, working for the good of the community in which God has placed it, is the proper end of mission. Transformational development that does not work toward such a church is neither sustainable nor Christian.

The church represents a special challenge to many involved in Christian development, since much of the work in the last quarter-century has been done by the so-called parachurch agencies. Made up of Christians, these agencies go directly to Christians in the pew to solicit funds and then directly to poor communities to help the poor. The local church on both ends is too frequently ignored, or worse, seen as part of the problem. This is a

seriously flawed view. I will address the role of the local church in the chapter on transformational development.

To summarize, the church is the bearer of the biblical story because it is Christ's body in the world. As Christians, we are part of this body, and that's the way it is. With all our warts and pimples, witnessing about Christ and doing his work within the context of the church is our mission. Fortunately, to carry out our role as the body of Christ in the world, the church has some additional help. We have been given a person and a book.

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the experience of God that accompanies the church on its fallible journey of witnessing to Christ and the kingdom. God's Spirit of truth reminds us of everything Jesus taught us (Jn 14:16,26) and unfolds the meaning of the kingdom to us (Jones 1972, 38).⁷ The Holy Spirit is the actor of mission who convicts the world, including the prince of this world, of its sin (Jn 16:8-10).

The Holy Spirit is the source of power (Lk 24:49) that transformed a fairly ordinary group of disciples, who had abandoned their Lord, into a fearless group of witnesses who would not surrender their mission even under threat of death (Acts 4:19). This Spirit is the source of our mission: "The same Spirit in whose power Jesus went to Galilee also thrusts the disciples into mission" (Bosch 1991, 113). The Holy Spirit initiates mission (Acts 13:2), guides mission (Acts 8:28, 16:9), and creates the response to mission (Acts 16:14). The signs and wonders of the Holy Spirit demonstrate the power of God in a way that demands an explanation so that credit is given to whom credit is due (Acts 14:8-18). Any transformational development that is not guided, empowered, and made effective by the Holy Spirit will not prove sustainable. Furthermore, expecting and praying for supernatural interventions by the Spirit must be part of the spirituality of Christian development workers.

The Bible

We were also given a book, the Bible. This book is the received story of what the author of the story has done, is doing, and plans to do. In this living word we have the whole story that makes sense of our stories. This book tells the only story that answers the questions that really matter: Who am I? Where am I? What's wrong? How can it be changed? What time is it?

We are to be the living illustrations of the truth of this story. Newbigin says, "We live in the biblical story as part of the community whose story it is, find in the story the clues to knowing God as his character becomes

manifest in the story, and from within that indwelling try to understand and cope with the events of our time and the world about us and so carry the story forward" (1989, 99).

We also received the story in another way. The story of the church is the story of how the biblical story has been lived out in the two thousand years since Christ created his church and set it on its mission. The history of the church—its thinking and its actions in the world—is the lived-out story that we inherit. The flaws and failings we see in this history should remind us how fallible we are, create in us a deep-seated suspicion of our own righteousness, and lead us to humility. At the same time, this story of Christ's body also reveals many who have tried to live out God's story by caring for the poor and working to transform society. We need to know that, with all its imperfections, the church has been in the transformational development business since its beginning.

We must also take note of the fact that the Bible is more than a book. It is the living word of God, "sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, . . . judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight" (Heb 4:12-13). The Bible is unique among books, it is "the only book that reads me" (Weber 1995, ix). Because it is the living word of the living God, it always has something to say to every situation, and it always has more to say than we can ever know.

For too long evangelicals have treated the Bible as a book for the spiritual world⁸ and have failed to give it the freedom to inform the material world of everyday life and everyday "non-spiritual" decisions. One of the challenges of Christian holism in development will be to release the Bible and the biblical narrative to speak to all phases of the process of human transformation. One of the best gifts that we have for the poor and the non-poor is the living word of God. We need to share it with them and let the living word speak for itself. More about this in the chapter on Christian witness.

THE END OF THE STORY

The end of the biblical story is the end of history. John tells us that Jesus will come again in power and glory. This leads to the judgment of judgments, the one and true judgment, the one that ends in the eternal destruction of the Evil One and of those whose names are not written in the book of life (Rv 20:15). Then the first earth and first heaven pass away and a new earth and new heaven, in the form of the new Jerusalem, descend from heaven. The story that began in a garden ends in a city.

Once again the dwelling place of God is with men and women (Rv 21:3). There are no more tears, or death, or crying, or pain, nor is there famine or drought (Rv 7:16, 21:4). Everything is made new—the people and their

city. There is no church in this new Jerusalem because it is no longer needed; God and the Lamb live among the people (Rv 21:22). The mission of the church as a "history-making force" (Newbigin 1989, 129) is completed. The kingdom of God stands alone at the end of time. It is the final reality; all other kingdoms have passed away.

The nations now walk by the light of the glory of God shone forth by the Son. The honor and glory of the nations, all their "artistic, cultural, political, scientific and spiritual contributions" (Wink 1992, 83), transformed and no longer a seduction away from the worship of God, are brought into the city (Rv 21:24,26). The gates never shut.

The measures of value are turned upside down. Gold, the most valuable commodity in this world, the commodity of greed and violence, is so common that it is used to pave the streets. The foundations of the city are made with precious stones (Rv 21:20-21), because we have a new understanding of what is valuable. These gemstones are simply beautiful, no longer objects of greed in the eyes of humankind.

Finally and most important, this new Jerusalem is a city of life (Rv 22:1-3). The earth itself is redeemed and once again produces the fruit and the healing that humans and their nations need. Our true vocation is once more within our grasp as "his servants will serve him" (Rv 22:3).

It is important for those concerned for human transformation to keep the end of the story in mind. This is where the triune God is going. This is the best human future. While this triumphant vision should guide us, it should also instill a sense of awe and humility in us. This end comes only at great cost. Christ died and the saints suffered. There is a cross on the way to this triumphal end.

THE POINT OF THE STORY

By now, the point of the story should be clear. From the day our first parents walked out of the garden, estranged from God, each other, and the earth itself, God has been at work redeeming the fallen creation, its people, and its social systems. God's goal is to restore us to our original identity, as children reflecting God's image, and to our original vocation as productive stewards, living together in just and peaceful relationships.

This restoration project has required hard work, very costly work; work that could only have been motivated by the most profound, self-giving love. "The center of the New Testament lies in the narrative of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ understood as an act of obedience toward God and an expression of self-giving love for his followers as well as a model for his followers to imitate" (Volf 1996, 30).

The goal of the biblical story, then, is the reconciliation of all things, on earth and in heaven (Col 1:19) with Christ as the head (Eph 1:10). Rela-

tionships are restored in all the dimensions distorted by sin. “The gospel is the news that distorted patterns of power have been broken; the reception of the gospel is the embrace of radically transformed patterns of social relationships” (Brueggemann 1993a, 34). This is the story into which every human being has been invited by God to be a participant. This goal must inform our understanding of transformational development.

REFLECTIONS

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 corporations without regard for the people who work in them and contribute to their true value. 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 in self-giving relationships.⁹ 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.

What are we to be and do?

We are first of all to be with Christ. Being is the beginning. We cannot do what we are not. Furthermore, life in Christ means life in his Body; we are with Christ when we are in his church. As Christians, the church is our community because our being is being-in-community. There is no transformational development apart from people who themselves are being transformed and who live in the community that is the home of their transformation.

We are then to live the life that God gave us through Christ. We are to live the biblical story. We are to live from and for God, from and for others; we are to live a life of being and doing. We do transformational development because this is what the biblical story tells us that God is doing.

Living the trinitarian faith means living as Jesus Christ lived: preaching the gospel; relying totally on God; offering healing and reconciliation; rejecting laws, customs and conventions that place persons beneath rules; resisting temptation; praying constantly; eating with modern day lepers and other outcasts; embracing the enemy and the sinner; dying for the sake of the gospel if it is God’s will (LaCugna 1991, 401).

We are to do transformation in the Spirit since the mission is God’s. The Holy Spirit empowers us for mission, leads us into mission, and is responsible for the results of mission. If there is to be any human transfor-

mation that is sustainable, it will be because of the action of the Holy Spirit, not the effectiveness of our development technology or the cleverness of our participatory processes (see Chapter 6). Because our role is to be faithful and obedient, in contrast to being successful, we must modify our ambitions and redirect our praise.

The chief actor in the historic mission of the Christian church is the Holy Spirit. He is the director of the whole enterprise. The mission consists of the things that he is doing in the world (Taylor 1972, 3).

We are to embrace the "other," and this must include the non-poor as well as the poor. This is the heart of the gospel and the beginning of transformation. The open arms of the father embracing the son who had made himself wholly other and the healing embrace of the Jew by the Samaritan are the images that must shape our mission of transformation to the poor and non-poor alike. God has no enemies whom he does not love, and hence neither can we. The embrace is the necessary first step toward reconciliation and justice (Volf 1996, 29).

We must fulfill our mission by accepting the paradoxical location of every Christian (Walls 1996, 53). The gospel is infinitely translatable, available to everyone in every language. Therefore, as bearers of the gospel story, the Christian agent of transformation can and should be thoroughly local, at home everywhere, just as the gospel is. At the same time, however, the kingdom is not yet fully here and will not be until the second coming of Christ. Thus, we are also pilgrims, at home nowhere, because our real home is the transcendent Christian community moving toward a kingdom not yet here. This means we are in the world and not of it. This also means that we accept people where they are without judgment, while also knowing that the Spirit of God celebrates the good, unmasking the evil, and calls for the most fundamental change in everyone.

We are to see the world as created, fallen, and being redeemed, all at the same time. We must not separate creation and fall from redemption. As a story, the parts are inseparable, each giving meaning to the other. Wink reminds us,

God at one and the same time *upholds* a given political or economic system, since some such system is required to support human life; *condemns* that system insofar as it is destructive to full human actualization; and *presses for its transformation* into a more human order. Conservatives stress the first, revolutionaries the second, reformers the third. The Christian is expected to hold together all three (1992, 67).

Our practice of transformational development must be informed by these three lenses for making sense of the human story. Understanding creation helps us understand what was meant to be. Understanding the fall helps us recognize what is working against life in poor communities and why. Un-

derstanding the redemption story helps us know what can be and who and what can help us get there.

Three important theological ideas

There are three theological ideas that seem useful for Christians working for transformational development.

Incarnation

One of the most incredible parts of this biblical account is the idea that the triune God would stoop to becoming flesh and make his dwelling place among us (Jn 1:14). For many inside and outside the faith, this is a stumbling block of major proportions. The Incarnation is a powerful theological metaphor for those who practice transformational development for several reasons.

First, the Incarnation is the best evidence we have for how seriously God takes the material world. The Incarnation smashes any argument that God is only concerned for the spiritual realm and that the material is somehow evil or unworthy of the church's attention. God embodied himself. God became concrete and real. It was possible to touch God's wounds and hear God's voice. Real people were healed; a dead man lived again.

This suggests that doing transformational development is what God does. We are only following after God. This is the bottom line of the biblical story. This is why "Christians cannot, indeed they must not, simply believe the gospel; they must practice it so that by God's grace they might embody its reality—what the Christian scripture calls the down payment of God's future glory" (Dyrness 1997, 3). To declare that the mission of the church is solely about spiritual things ignores the Incarnation.

Second, the Incarnation provides a highly instructive model for how we must be willing to practice transformational development. God emptied himself of his prerogatives. Are we willing to empty ourselves of ours? Jesus did not come as a conquering, problem-solving Christ. Jesus is not the quick-answer god Koyama warned us against (1985, 241). Jesus was the God who was not able to save himself, and so he was able to save others. There are lessons here for development professionals, full of technical skill and confident of their "good news" for the poor. Any practice of transformational development must be framed by the cross and the broken Christ.

Finally, we must always remember that Jesus chose freely to empty himself of his prerogatives as God, making himself nothing (Phil 2:7), so that every tongue might confess that "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil 2:11). The entire purpose of the exercise was to invite people to redirect their lives and to provide the means by which they could do so. Transformational development must have the same end in mind.

Redemption

The point of the biblical story is to redeem and thus redirect the trajectory of the human story after the fall. This was made possible by the finished work of Jesus Christ. We need to remember, however, that this act took place in the concrete world of Israel, at a particular point in real human history with the real death of a real man. Redemption is material as well as spiritual. Both our bodies and our souls are redeemed. The new heaven comes down to earth. The glory of all nations will enter the city at the end of the day, our cultures, our science, our poetry, our art, even our transformational development—all are redeemed and part of the end of the story.

For this reason we must remind ourselves constantly that the work of transformational development is part of God's redemptive work (Bradshaw 1993, 43). Don't misunderstand me. Transformational development, by itself, will not save. The charitable and transforming acts of Christians will never mediate salvation. But, having said this, it is also wrong to act as if God's redemptive work takes place only inside one's spirit or in heaven in the sweet by-and-by. This disembodied, wholly spiritualized view of redemption is not biblical. God is working to redeem and restore the whole of creation, human beings, all living things, and the creation itself. "For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8:20-21). It is in this sense that transformational development is part of God's redemptive work in the world.

Finally, because God is working out God's redemptive purposes in spiritual, physical, and social realms, this also means that we are God's agents of redemption, however flawed and unsatisfactory we may be in this incredible role. When we work for transformational development, we are working as God's hands and feet.

The kingdom of God

Finally, a word about Jesus and the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is something Jesus talked about a great deal. It has been recovered as an important biblical concept, beginning with the social gospel movement in the United States early in the twentieth century. The kingdom of God was the subject of Christ's first sermon (Mk 1:14), was the only thing he called the gospel (Mt 4:23), and was the topic on which he focused his teaching to the disciples during his last forty days on earth (Acts 1:3). Jesus said that the kingdom is the key to understanding his teaching (Lk 8:10). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that the kingdom of God was the first thing we should seek and that everything else will follow (Mt 6:33). The coming of the kingdom is the first petition in the prayer Jesus

taught us to pray (Mt 6:10). Luke closes the book of Acts by telling us that Paul “boldly and without hindrance preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31). Jesus even said that “the gospel of the kingdom will be preached to the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Mt 24:14). The idea of the kingdom of God is an important idea for those who work for human transformation.

Recalling the importance of the interrelationship of people and the social systems within which they live, E. Stanley Jones, long-time missionary to India, makes an important contribution to kingdom theology when he presents the biblical metaphors of the “unshakable kingdom” and the “unchanging person” (Jones 1972). The kingdom of God is unshakable (Heb 12:28) because it is the true reality, the way things really are. Christ is the unchanging person (Heb 13:8), the reality of the kingdom in human form, the only way to enter God’s kingdom.

The kingdom of God, Jones says, is both radical and conservative at the same time. It is radical in that no one or anything is beyond the claim of God’s kingdom. It is conservative in the sense that it “gathers up everything that is good [God’s good creation peeking through the results of the fall] and fulfills the good, cleanses the evil and goes beyond anything ever thought of or dreamed anywhere. This is the desire of the ages—if men only knew it” (1972, 27). Jones continues, the kingdom of God simply “is and you must come to terms with it” (*ibid.*, 46).

Jones also rejects the reduction that limits the gospel to the individual alone. People and social systems are interrelated. While people create the political, religious, and economic institutions of their society, at the same time these institutions shape (create) the people who live in them. The impact of sin, and hence the scope of the gospel, includes both the personal and the social.

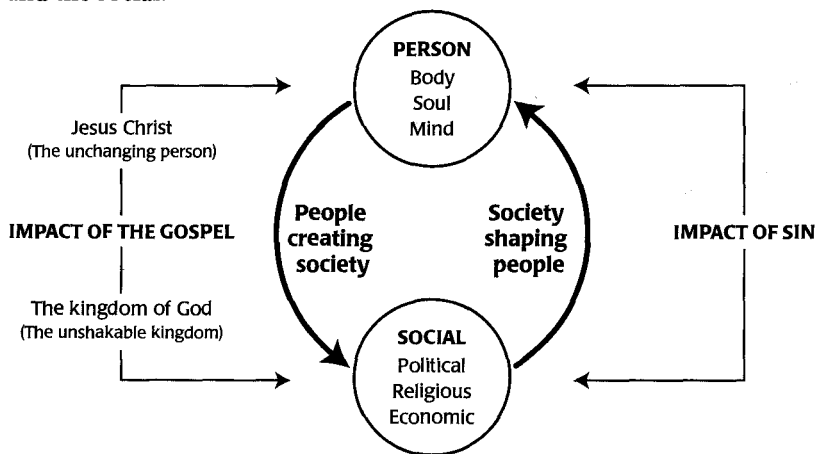


Figure 2-5: The inseparability of the person and the social order.
(After Jones 1972, 32-35)

If we reduce the gospel solely to naming the name of Christ, persons are saved but the social order is ignored. This is a “crippled Christianity with a crippled result” (Jones 1972, 30). If we act as if individuals are saved now and the kingdom is only in heaven when Jesus comes, then we in effect leave the social order to the devil. “Vast areas of human life are left out, unredeemed—the economic, the social and the political” (*ibid.*, 31). Into this vacuum other ideologies and kingdoms move with their seductive and deceptive claims of a new humanity and a better tomorrow—socialism, capitalism, nationalism, ethnic identity, and denominationalism—shakable kingdoms all.

Therefore, the scope of the gospel of the unshakable kingdom and the unchanging person is the individual, the social systems in which we live, and the earth on which we depend for life. Jones’s argument anticipates Wink’s analysis to a remarkable degree. The impact of the fall is on both the individual and the social system, and so the impact of the gospel of the kingdom must be on both. Wink makes this provocative claim, “The gospel is not a message of personal salvation *from* the world, but a message of *a world transfigured, right down to its basic structures*” (Wink 1992, 83). Even the creation itself has “been groaning as in the pains of childbirth” waiting “in eager expectations for the sons of God to be revealed” (Rom 8:22, 19). To work for human transformation as a Christian means working for the redemption of people, their social systems, and the environment that sustains their life—a whole gospel for all of life. This is the kingdom of God.

We must never separate the person and the kingdom, Jones warns us (1972, 37). Jesus, the unchanging person, is the embodiment of God’s kingdom. The best news is that God’s kingdom is not a theological phrase, but “is now a name with a human face” (Newbigin 1981, 32-33). Better yet, this person came and dwelt among us, “tempted in every way just as we are” (Heb 4:15). The kingdom of God has indeed drawn near in the form of the unchanging person. “Jesus is the kingdom of God taking sandals and walking” (Jones 1972, 34). Any Christian understanding of transformational development must keep the person of Jesus and the claims and promise of the kingdom central to the defining of what better future we are working for and for choosing the means of getting there.

Like the cross, there is something paradoxical about the kingdom that is worth noting. Jayakumar Christian, a development practitioner and colleague in India, has explored the reversal of power in Revelation (1994, 11-12). The lamb of God that was slain is the one worthy to open the scroll. The lamb, convicted by Pilate and sentenced to death as a criminal, sits on the only throne that matters at the end of time. The slain lamb, not the British lion, the Indian tiger, or the American eagle, is the symbol of power when history ends. In the kingdom of God, what we believe to be the natural order of things is reversed (Kraybill 1978). Further, because Jesus promised it, this kingdom is peopled by those we think of today as powerless: the poor (Lk 6:20), the meek and the persecuted (Mt 5:5,10). Finally, all expres-

sions of human power, every tribe and language and people and nation, will stand in front of the lamb and acknowledge who he is and what he has done (Rv 7:9-10). The kingdom of the broken and humiliated Christ is the only kingdom standing at the end of time.

This creates some challenging questions for development practitioners. Where do we believe the power is that can help the poor? In whom or in what do we trust? What does the image of the slain lamb say to the development practitioner? Or, even more provocatively, to the development agency?

The biblical story and transformational development

Evangelistic intent

This biblical story, of which the Jesus story is the center, is a transformative story. The story of Jesus can heal our story and can heal the story of any community or society by giving it hope and life, if we will accept God's offer of redemption. Failure to share this story is to withhold the only story that Christians believe brings real hope. No other story leads to life. This is the only story that has good news, transformative news, for human sin and for dominating human systems. There can be no better human future apart from this story. For this reason, transformational development done by Christians must include sharing the biblical story in a way that people can understand and that calls for a response.

Restoring relationships

The point of the biblical story is ultimately about relationships, restored relationships. "Living as persons in communion, in right relationship, is the meaning of salvation and the ideal of Christian faith" (LaCugna 1991, 292). Relationships must be restored in all their dimensions. First and foremost, in an intimate and serving relationship with God, through Jesus Christ. Second, in healthy, righteous, and just relationships with ourselves and our communities. Third, in loving, respectful, "neighboring" relationships with all who are "other" to us. Finally, in an earth-keeping, making-fruitful relationship with the earth.¹⁰

The integrating and focusing importance of relationships in the kingdom is a consistent biblical theme. The creation account, including the fall, is a relational account. The Ten Commandments are about relationships with God and each other, with a bias in favor of the well-being of the community. The covenant with Israel was about a relationship between God and God's people. Melba Maggay, a Filipina theologian and practitioner, reminds us that "Israel was sent into exile because of idolatry and oppression, prophetic themes resulting from the laws of love of God and love of neighbor" (Maggay 1994, 69). Loving God and loving neighbor must be

the foundational theme for a Christian understanding of transformational development.

Jesus made a radical extension to loving neighbor when he told us to love our enemies (Mt 5:44). This is not like us, but it is like God. God has no enemies who lie beyond the love of God, even the most vicious, grasping, greedy landlord. Therefore, we must love the poor and non-poor alike. This is not, however, a call to a smarmy, uncritical, "I'm OK you're OK" kind of love. God's love is often a very tough love. Egypt suffered greatly so that Pharaoh might know "that I am God" (Ex 7:5, 14:4). God sent his beloved Israel into exile, even to Babylon, and then did not speak to her for almost six hundred years. God's love of us and our neighbor can be a tough, truth-telling, there-are-consequences, your-soul-is-in-danger kind of love. But, there is never hate; the enemy is never demonized or declared hopeless. The offer of grace is always there.

We need to spend a moment exploring the nature of these relationships. What do we mean? How should such relationships be assessed? The biblical image of *shalom* is particularly helpful here. Nicholas Wolterstorff points out that *shalom* is usually translated by the word "peace," but that it means more than the absence of strife. First, *shalom* is a relational concept, "dwelling at peace with God, with self, with fellows, with nature." Then, Wolterstorff suggests, we must add the ideas of justice, harmony, and enjoyment to capture the full biblical meaning of the word. *Shalom* means just relationship (living justly and experiencing justice), harmonious relationships and enjoyable relationships. *Shalom* means belonging to an authentic and nurturing community in which one can be one's true self and give one's self away without becoming poor. Justice, harmony, and enjoyment of God, self, others, and nature; this is the *shalom* that Jesus brings, the peace that passes all understanding (Wolterstorff 1983, 69-72).

The idea of *shalom* is related to one of the interesting ways Jesus described his mission: "I have come that they may have life, and have it in the full" (Jn 10:10). Life in its fullness is the purpose; this is what we are for and what Christ has come to make possible. To live fully in the present in relationships that are just, harmonious, and enjoyable, that allow everyone to contribute. And to live fully for all time. A life of joy in being that goes beyond having. While *shalom* and abundant life are ideals that we will not see this side of the second coming, the vision of a *shalom* that leads to life in its fullness is a powerful image that must inform and shape our understanding of any better human future.

A holistic story

Holism is an important word for Christian thinking about development. There are a variety of ways in which we must think holistically.

First, we need to remember the whole story from beginning to end. Sometimes we are tempted to shorten the biblical story and limit it to the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. While this is the center of the story, it is not the whole story. To think properly about human transformation, we must see the world of the poor and the non-poor in light of the whole story. We must be clear on what was intended, how things got as they are, what God is offering to do to change them, and what we can and cannot do as participants in the story. We must have a holistic view of time, of biblical time.

The whole story is also important because it helps those who have not heard the story to understand the gospel. It is hard to make sense out of any story if the storyteller insists on starting in the middle. For example, telling people that Christ died to forgive their sins can be hard to understand if people do not know which God you are talking about or understand the idea of sin. We need a holistic view of the narrative to create a complete framework of meaning for all the gospels have for us.

Second, we need a holistic view of persons. This brings us back to an earlier theme: God's redeeming work does not separate individuals from social systems of which they are a part. People come first, of course. Changed people, transformed by the gospel and reconciled to God, are the beginning of any transformation. Transforming social systems cannot accomplish this: "No arrangement of social cooperation, in which power controls power and anarchy is tamed, will produce human beings free from the lust for power" (Wink 1992, 77). Therefore, transformational development that is Christian cannot avoid giving the invitation to say Yes to the person of Jesus and the invitation to enter the kingdom. At the same time, however, this individual response does not fully express the scope of God's redemptive work.

Social systems are made up of persons, but they are also more than the sum of the persons involved in them. Corporations, government ministries, and even church structures have a character or ethos that is greater than the sum of the individuals who work in them. Wink explains this ethos or spirit in terms of the biblical concepts of principalities and powers: "The principalities and powers of the Bible refer to the inner and outer manifestations of the political, economic, religious and cultural institutions" (Wink 1992, 78). As I have said, this social dimension of human life is also fallen and is thus a target of God's redemptive work.

The Great Commission calls for making the nations into disciples, not just people. This commission of the living Christ instructs us to baptize the nations in the name of the triune God, "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:20). What did Jesus command? To love God and your neighbor as yourself. Kwame Bediako, the Ghanaian theologian, articulates the full meaning of the Great Commission nicely:

The Great Commission, therefore, is about the discipline of the nations, the conversion of the things that make people into nations—the shared and common processes of thinking; attitudes; world views; perspectives; languages; and the cultural, social and economic habits of thought, behavior and practice. These things and the lives of the people in whom such things find expression—all of this is meant to be within the call of discipleship (Bediako 1996b, 184).

Recalling Hiebert's three-tiered worldview scheme in Figure 1-2 in Chapter 1, God's redemptive work addresses all three levels. God is the only true God, the God of power and the God who loves and works in the real world of sight, sound, and touch. His redemptive agenda works in truth (upper level), in power (the excluded middle of the West) and in love (the concrete world of science and the earth). A whole gospel for all levels of our worldview.

Finally, one other aspect of holism needs mentioning. The gospel of Jesus and his kingdom is a message of life, deed, word, and sign, an inseparable whole, all expressions of a single gospel message. Mark's account of the calling of the disciples says that Christ "appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons" (Mk 3:14-15). When the apostles are sent on their first solo ministry outing, Mark reports that "they went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them" (Mk 6:12-13).

Activists are quick to pick up on the preaching, the healing, and the casting out stuff. They too often overlook that Christ's call was first and foremost "to be with" Christ. Being must precede doing.

I find it helpful to picture the gospel message in the form of a pyramid. The top of the pyramid is being with Jesus, life in and with the living Lord. This relationship frames all that lies below it. Each of the corners of the pyramid are one aspect or dimension of the gospel: preaching—the gospel-as-word; healing—the gospel-as-deed; casting out—the gospel-as-sign.

Each of these can be developed in turn. Gospel-as-word includes teaching, preaching, and the doing of theology. Gospel-as-deed means working for the physical, social, and psychological well-being of the world that belongs to God. This is the sole location of transformation for too many Christians. Gospel-as-sign means signs and wonders, those things that only God can do, as well as the things the church does as a living sign of a kingdom that is and has not yet fully come.

The metaphor of a pyramid is helpful because one cannot break off a corner and still claim to have a pyramid. This reminds us that for the gospel to be the gospel all four aspects—life, deed, word, and sign—have to be present. They are inseparable, and so is the holism of the Christian gospel.

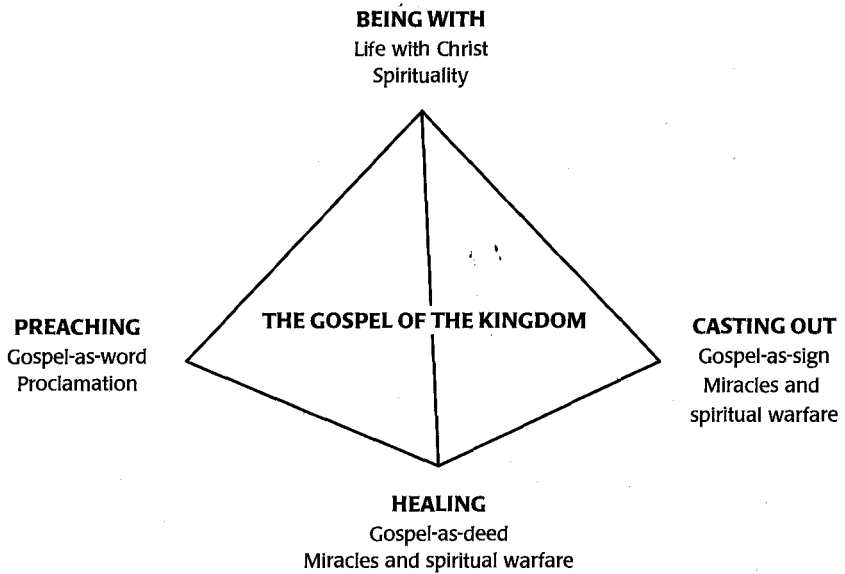


Figure 2-6: The gospel of the kingdom: Being, preaching, healing, and casting out.

Technology and science have a place in the story

One of the increasingly clear features of the modern era is that science has lost its story (Postman 1997, 29-32). Science and technology do not, indeed cannot, provide the answers we need. Science helps us figure out how things work, but not why they work or what they are for.

Science cannot create. Because science is assumed to be value free, it did not operate within a vision of what ought to be. It could relentlessly and efficiently disassemble; it could not construct an alternative whole (Shenk 1993, 67).

It was not always this way; science was once part of a larger story. Postman reminds us that the “first science storytellers, Descartes, Bacon, Galileo, Kepler and Newton for example—did not think of their story as a replacement for the great Judeo-Christian narrative, but as an extension of it” (1997, 31). Yet in the intervening centuries science and technology increasingly seemed to be able to explain themselves without need to include God as part of the explanation. God became increasingly marginal to their story and was ultimately dismissed as no longer needed. Today science and technology explain themselves: “We work, don’t we? Nothing else matters.” Relationships, ethics, and justice are pushed to the sidelines.

Yet technology and science are an inseparable part of working for human transformation. Immunizations, water drilling, improved agricultural practices, indigenous or folk science make positive impact in the lives of the poor. Any Christian understanding of transformational development must have space for the good that science and technology offer. Yet, to be Christian, this science and technology cannot be its own story, cannot stand apart from the biblical story that is the real story. We need a modern account of divine action in the natural order (Murphy 1995, 325). If we fail to recover a fully Christian narrative for science and technology, one that recognizes God at work through science in the natural order, and one that places science at the service of life and enhancing relationships, we will bring the poor the same story-less science that is impoverishing the West. This would not be good news. I will develop this more fully in the chapter on Christian witness.

The biblical story is for everyone

In our eagerness to be with and for the poor, we must not forget the biblical story is everyone's story, poor and non-poor alike. Both are made in the image of God, both experienced the consequences of the fall, and both are the focus of God's redemptive work. The hope of the gospel and the transformative promise of the kingdom are for both. The only difference is social location. The poor are on the periphery of the social system while the non-poor, even when living in poor communities, occupy places of preference, prestige, and power.

While God's story is for everyone, there are two ways in which human response to the story creates a bias that favors the poor. First, it is apparently very hard for the non-poor to accept the biblical story as their story (Lk 18:18-30). Wealth and power seem to make people hard of hearing and poor at understanding (Lk 8:14). Even Christians who are not poor have a problem living out the story. There is a strong temptation to domesticate the story in a way that uses it to validate their wealth or position. For the Christian non-poor, there is a need to appropriate the whole biblical story as stewards, not owners. The church has lost its way in this regard from time to time.

Second, it is the poor who most consistently seem to recognize God's story as their story. The church has a long history of growing on its margins and declining at its center (Walls 1987). Furthermore, God has always insisted that caring for the widow, orphan, and alien is a measure of the fidelity with which we live out our faith. No story in which the poor are forgotten, ignored, or left to their own devices is consistent with the biblical story. If the poor are forgotten, God will be forgotten too. Loving God and loving neighbor are twin injunctions of a single command.

If the biblical story is for both poor and non-poor, then we must work to understand the poverties of both as seen from God's perspective. Furthermore, we must see how the poverty of both interact, reinforcing each other. Any theory or practice of transformational development must be predicated on an understanding of the whole of the social systems and those—both poor and non-poor—who inhabit them.

This leads us to explore the meaning and expression of poverty. We need to understand who the poor are and why they are poor, as well as who the non-poor are and how their poverty contributes to the poverty of the poor.