## Theme: Urban Mission

# The Church and Her Mission to the Cities:
## A Theological Rubric to Evaluate Urban Mission Methods

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**The New Testament church** was birthed in a city. In its earliest days, this fledgling movement, ignited by the work of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, spread throughout the Greco-Roman world, and it did so in cities. As Rodney Stark notes, "The original meaning of the word pagan (*paganus*) was 'rural person,' or more colloquially 'country hick.'"[1] Christianity was first an urban movement. The church's urban roots are perhaps hard to imagine for the evangelical Christian in America today. Far from an urban movement, twentieth century Christianity in North America appears more at home surrounded by a picket fence than a skyline. A fact that leads some to classify evangelicals as a suburban species.[2] Such accusations raise questions about the evangelical relationship to the city. This article will briefly survey the biblical foundation of mission, develop a theological view of the city, and set out four characteristics of a theological vision for urban mission. The purpose of this work is not to provide one specific missiological method for urban mission. Instead, the goal of this article is to provide a theological rubric against which various methods of urban mission can be evaluated as being both biblical and contextual.

Over the last century, the United States as a whole has demonstrated a tangled relationship with the urban setting. Rapid urbanization at the turn of the twentieth century gave way to decentralization and suburbanization. These shifts were undergirded by more than pragmatics.

Ideology and even theology gave rise in certain decades to

## Word from the Editor

This issue of the *Occasional Bulletin* of EMS has two parts:

- A collection of four papers on the topic of "urban missions." I am glad to present to the readership of *OB* this issue on "urban mission" with three papers previously presented at the national EMS conference in October, 2016; except the feature article by Jared Looney. For these three contributors, it is their first time publishing and it is the distinctive outcome of the efforts of EMS leadership team to develop a new generation of missiologist. It took time to work with these three contributors and that would explain the delay of this issue of *OB*.

- Sharing from outgoing members of the leadership team of EMS—an occasion for them to "speak" to the EMS membership before they leave their posts with legacy of powerful and effective leadership.

— Enoch Wan

a distinct anti-urbanism. During the height of suburbanism, everyone knew the good life was found down the interstate, just outside the clutches of congestion. Today, the pendulum swings toward the urban setting again. The search for utopia outside the beltway led to the empty reality of isolation and long commutes. Just as evangelicals followed the tide out to the suburbs in years past, the new wave of urban renewal brings with it a fresh evangelical interest in the city. In the North American context, evangelicals on the whole lack clear direction concerning their place in the city. Evangelical interest in the city must be rooted in a theological vision as opposed to cues from the broader culture. Churches should love the city, not because the United States likes them again, but because the Bible provides a robust vision of the city and its role in global mission. A proper theological vision for urban mission exhibits right presence, a prophetic voice, and a focus on gospel proclamation through word and deed across the spectrum of cultures present in a city. The Bible showcases the priority of urban mission and outlines the essential nature of residential churches that cooperate together in their mission of multiplying witness throughout a city for the glory of God.

To attempt an urban analogy, like a skyscraper good missiological method must be firmly fixed to a deep, immovable foundation. David Hesselgrave asserts, "Biblical theology is logically and practically prior to mission vision and missiological exploration."[3] As God's authoritative revelation, the Scriptures are the lens to see all of life accurately. One does not understand her real purpose apart from Scripture's claims on life. One also does not see the city clearly without viewing it through the Bible. This immovable foundation sets in place truths and parameters in order to see the city as God sees it and to understand the church's mission to cities.

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## Biblical Foundation for Mission

The Bible has much to say about cities, and it sets the course for urban mission. However, what it says is set into a much larger story of cosmic significance. Concerning this grand narrative, cities play an important role in its telling, but they must not be viewed in isolation from the whole.

Doing so creates myopic theology at best and misguided missiology at worst. Instead, a cursory discussion of the general mission of God and his people sets the stage for a clear understanding of urban missions as a significant facet of an encompassing task.

## What is the Mission?

It is not that the church has a mission, rather that the mission of God has a church.[4] This common mantra sets in perspective the role of the church in the overarching metanarrative of Scripture.

The church must view her mission as a component of the Triune God's cosmic mission of restoration for his ultimate glory. Despite the diversity that exists across the canon, a clear storyline emerges, and God serves as the acting agent who initiates both creation and a subsequent mission to redeem his creation after its fall. As noted by Roy Ciampa, "[The Fall] is the 'occasioning incident' in our own narrative. The rest of the biblical story revolves around the question of the restoration of God's originally intended relationship with his vice-regents and the restoration of their role in reflecting the glory of his reign through his realm."[5] After the Fall, God issues curses on man, woman, the serpent, and creation, but he also makes a promise that he will right the wrongs committed in the Fall (Gen. 3:15). The promised seed will crush the head of evil. The rest of the narrative details God's actions in history, accomplished particularly through a people and ultimately through his sent Son, and the end result is the restoration and amplification of creation.

Christ's advent, crucifixion, and resurrection serve as the focal point of this narrative, and he serves as the key to God's mission. As Paul details in his letter to the Colossians,

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (Col 1:16-20).

As Keith Whitfield rightly claims, "God's two great actions outside the triune life, creation and redemption, are both accomplished through the son."[6] The announcement of this redemption accomplished and applied serves as the kernel of God's good news. In the gospels, this message takes the form of an announcement of the kingdom of God. Matthew records that Jesus began preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 4:17).

In this regard, Jesus both inaugurated the kingdom and served as its first herald. It is this latter aspect of his mission that Jesus hands on to his newly established church. The gospel of John establishes a clear connection between the mission of Jesus and the subsequent mission of the church quoting Jesus saying, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (Jn 20:21). The task is made explicit in the book of Acts as Jesus, prior to his ascension, tells his followers, "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The mission of the church is to bear witness to the gospel of the kingdom of God just as Jesus before them. It is a continuation and amplification of Jesus' proclamation mission, as they will take the message to the very ends of the earth.

Witness-bearing is the unique mission of the church between the times of the first and second advent. In Ephesians 3 Paul points to the primacy of the church, noting that it is the primary vehicle for displaying God's plan. He writes,

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"that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (Eph 3:10). Imagine a divine stage on which the drama of God's manifold wisdom is displayed and at its center is the church bearing witness to this good news of cosmic significance. On these verses Klyne Snodgrass comments, "The church's very existence and conduct are making known how great God's plan of salvation is— both to people and to the powers. This gives an unparalleled importance to the church."[7]

This witness-bearing role must be understood as both encompassing and limited. It is a holistic endeavor with a specific scope. Often, the church's mission is chopped up into incomplete pictures which claim to be the whole. In some quarters, the mission of the church is the verbal proclamation of the gospel and that alone. In other quarters, the mission of the church is extending mercy and charity or seeking social renewal. Both views taken by themselves are inadequate. Bearing witness to the gospel requires proclamation and authentication of its message; it is word and deed ministry. The result is a church that acts out the same things it proclaims. As

Bryan Stone rightly asserts, "Insofar as evangelism is the heart of this mission, this very people constitutes both the public invitation and that to which the invitation points."[8]

Authentic witness-bearing has a deep ethical component. Michael Goheen writes, "Our evangelistic words will be heard only if they are authenticated by the lives of the Christian community. The gospel gains its power from a community that embodies something of the life that the gospel promises (cf. Acts 4:32-35)."[9] The ultimate congruity of the spoken message requires lives that work its meaning into every facet of life. The new-creational language of the gospel demands a distinctly different ethic, informed by the values of the kingdom to which the gospel's recipients now belong. As the church lives out this new ethic in all facets of life, both public and private, the world gets a preview of the kingdom, already present in the existence of the church but yet to be fully consummated at the return of Christ. In this sense, the mission of the church as witnesses is an all-encompassing mission, but it also remains one limited in scope.

The New Testament is replete with references to Christian conduct before an unbelieving world, and with practically unanimous voice declares that the reason is witness. Jesus declares, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may

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see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16b). Peter gives the same advice to readers of his first epistle. Providing extensive ethical parameters about conduct in the world, Peter summarizes, "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (1 Pet 2:12). Our conduct in all areas of life must be above reproach, resembling the ethic of the kingdom, because it serves as testimony to the truth of the claims made in the gospel.

Highlighting the testimonial nature of our ethic is necessary in order to avoid overreach in purpose and mission. As noted above, Christ has called us to be witnesses to the restoration that he brings, both now in its inaugurated sense in the church and later in the total restoration of all things when he returns. Transformation is the work of Christ, not the work of the church. Robert Webber writes,

The mission of the church is not to accomplish God's eschatological reign. The church does not bring in the kingdom. It does not establish God's reign over society. God has already accomplished his goals for humanity and for the cosmos in Jesus Christ. The church in this period of history between the cross and the return of Christ witnesses to an accomplished fact. It witnesses to the reign of Jesus Christ over all creation and lives in the hope of its final realization in the second coming of Jesus Christ.[10]

While the ethic of the kingdom works its way into every facet of life, the purpose of the church's participation in society is not to "fix it." Rightly understanding the aim of social engagement aligns the church's purpose with their given mission. A misunderstanding at this foundational level will inevitably direct one's course in mission practice. Goheen rightly claims, "such endeavors for peace and justice will always be proximate and penultimate… Ultimately, a faithful witness to Christ and sharing in his love for the world remain the mission of the church."[11]

Perhaps the best description of this full-orbed witness-bearing is found in the Great Commission passages. In fact, one finds the essential components of a missional vision in Matthew 28:18-20, "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age'" (Matt 28:18-20). As the concluding paragraph of Matthew's account, R.T. France notes the central significance of this statement both to the gospel and Christian theology. Comparing it to a graduation speech, France writes, "For the disciples, and Matthew's readers, this conclusion is in fact a beginning, a commencement."[12]

The Great Commission plots a course for the mission of the church. In it the careful reader finds both the impetus to go and the manner in which to go. The scope of this mission is encompassing, the word "all" occurring four different times in the short commission.[13] The church has *all* authority to go to *all* nations and teach *all* that has been commanded with the presence of Christ *all* the time. However, the task has specific directives. They are to make disciples, baptizing them. Baptism, rightly understood, implies the central role of the church both as the agent of mission and by establishing more local assemblies among the nations. Finally, these disciples are taught to obey all that Jesus has commanded. This final statement speaks to the life-changing ethic of the kingdom affecting all areas of life, the church serving as preview of the kingdom in this present age.

In summary, the grand story of the Bible is the story of Triune God crushing evil, restoring his good creation and redeeming a people for his glory. The climactic event of history was the Father sending his Son as the Christ to accomplish and apply that redemption as well as inaugurate the new kingdom. The church stands in continuation of Jesus' mission of proclaiming the kingdom by being witnesses in

word and deed to all he accomplished through his death and resurrection, pointing forward to his imminent return and the restoration of all things. The church is central to this mission as its agent and as its product. The mission is encompassing, making disciples of all nations and teaching all that has been commanded. However, it is specific in scope, being testimonial in nature and engaging culture and society for the purpose of witness.

With this foundational understanding of mission in place, one must turn to the question of context.

## A Theology of the City: Is the Bible for or Against?

Americans have a spotted past with cities, and American evangelicals are no exception. Several significant shifts occurred during the course of the twentieth century that shaped the American view of cities. Unfortunately, evangelicals were often more influenced by the greater culture than the testimony of Scripture. During the turn of the last century, rapid urbanization was in full swing, and cities were on the rise. However, a pivotal shift occurred in 1920; for the first time in United States history, the areas around the perimeter saw more growth than the cities themselves.[14] A period of decentralization began that would last for the rest of the century and gave birth to a largely suburban nation. Today, almost 3 out of 4 Americans live within reach of a major urban center, but the majority do not live inside the city itself, residing in the surrounding smaller communities instead.[15]

Decentralization was the result of a perfect storm of factors. First, the urban boom that had occurred a generation ago was not ultimately sustainable. It created unlivable congestion, issues with sanitation, and crime. Second, technological advances, such as prefabricated housing and the automobile, made living a distance from the city possible. Finally, emotional reasons such as a broiling racial tension gave rise to a desire to move.[16] Soon, the ideal life was found outside the beltway. Steve Conn writes of a latent anti-urban bias realized because of these developments during the twentieth century. He claims, "For Americans, utopia has always been a few acres in the country, a home on the range."[17]

In the decades that followed, the suburbs and evangelicalism thrived together. As the suburbs continued to increase, so did the perceived influence of evangelicalism. By the 1980s, evangelicals eclipsed mainline denominations and church went "mega."[18] Regional church was the new idea, and it fit squarely in the context of suburbia. Evangelicalism and suburbanism were increasingly mentioned in the same breath. However, Mark Mulder and James K.A. Smith rightly point out that evangelicalism is perhaps more influenced by the suburbs than the suburbs are by evangelicalism.[19] "White evangelicals in the last half-century have, for the most part, viewed the city with suspicion, distrust, and criticism... as they fled on the newly constructed superhighways to the relative comfort, security, and homogeneity of the suburbs," writes Alan McMahan, "In time, theology complied with this shift, and the white, evangelical worldview either erected justifications for demonizing urban living or simply neglected the city altogether."[20]

Many evangelicals accepted the cultural narrative and constructed a theology that accorded with their views instead of finding their vision for the city in the pages of Scripture. Such anti-urban theology was manifest in multiple forms, some subtle and others overt. Conn notes the impact of dispensationalism on urban theology. Cities were an easy target for a futurist eschatology that saw the world becoming increasingly evil, a view that allowed for a detached dismissal of the city.[21] More explicit forms of anti-urban theology developed as well. Jacques Ellul is perhaps the most prominent example of such theology. Ellul was a Parisian, but his theology expressed the sentiment of many in the US. In his view, the city was the chief of humanity's accomplishments, but that was precisely its problem. Since it was a human endeavor, it was mechanical and inherently sinful, standing in contrast to the natural

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order that God made. Ellul writes, "The city is dead, made of dead things for dead people. She can herself neither produce nor maintain anything whatever. Anything living must come from outside… the city is an enormous man-eater. She does not renew herself from within, but by constant supply of fresh blood from outside."[22]

Despite anti-urban sentiment, the Bible provides a different picture of cities, one that is best described as realistically positive. Cities play a prominent role throughout the canon, serving both as the backdrop against which the narrative is told and as theological symbols themselves.

The overall portrait demonstrates that the city is far from a sinful aberration and that God loves cities. However, one must be careful not to overcompensate for previous slights against the city in theology. The city is also a place of deep wickedness in Scripture. There are cities set for destruction and ultimately a city that serves as the eternal abode of both God and humanity.

In Genesis 1:28 God delivers what is frequently called the Cultural Mandate. Adam and Eve are told to "be fruitful and multiply" and to "fill the earth and subdue it." In this state-

ment, God gifts humanity with the privilege and potential of work and culture. Humanity is set to the task of filling the world both with more worshippers as they multiply but also with the labors of their hands. The Cultural Mandate opens the doors for human creativity, and certainly this serves as the grounding for humanity's urban endeavors. In an effort to show the development of cities as a theological theme, some have interpreted the cultural mandate as an essentially urban mandate.[23] In addition, Craig Bartholomew postulates that Eden itself was an urban environment, an urban garden that may have included buildings.[24] While it may be premature to place an explicit urban emphasis this early in the narrative, the Cultural Mandate and Eden both set the stage for the development of cities and the reader need only wait a few chapters to discover the first.

In the primeval history of the Genesis narrative, cities begin to show up as soon as chapter 4 alongside the development of culture (Gen 4:17-22).[25] Concerning this early history Keller writes, "We learn that city life is not

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to be seen as simply a punishment for humanity after the banishment from the garden. Rather the city has inherent capacities for bringing human beings together in such a way that enhances both security and culture making."[26] Contrary to the idea that the Bible displays a disdain for cities as human inventions that intrude the divinely created landscape, cities appear in the earliest portion of the grand narrative as the natural outworking of humanity's initial instructions to multiply and subdue.

The Bible provides no warrant for considering cities an irredeemable human mistake. In fact, it demonstrates just the reverse, with a whole book dedicated to the narrative of one city's redemption.[27] Cities are, nevertheless, human inventions and display both ability and depravity. Cities are tainted with the same curse of sin that mars all creation after the fall, and since they are concentrated humanity, they are necessarily concentrated fallenness. To be human is not to be fallen, but until that day when all is restored, the two are inseparable.[28] Thus, the Bible portrays a positive

but realistic understanding of cities. Al Wolters refers to this as the difference between structure and direction. A created thing is structurally, or ontologically good; however, since the fall all things are directed toward evil.[29] Cities are essentially good, as with the rest of creation; they are naturally intended, since God instructed humanity to multiply and subdue; but they are directed toward sin, due to the fall. Keller refers to this as the tension of the biblical view of city. He writes, "This tension takes time to come into focus, as the city plays a definite role at every stage in the history of salvation… the Bible moves from a largely negative view of the city (emphasizing the city's rebellion) to a more positive one (emphasizing the city's strengths, power, and strategic importance)."[30]

The city's potential as a center for evil comes into clear view in Genesis 11 with the city-builders in the land of Shinar. The motives behind the construction of this city are laid bare when the people say, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth" (Gen 11:4). The narrative demonstrates the theological tension that exists, as it is evident the potential benefits and strengths of the city in God's response; however, the motivation usurps God's authority and position in the cosmos, just as occurred in the garden during the fall. The city of Babel is one that shows up again as the story progresses. Shinar is the sight of the great city of Babylon. Babylon becomes an urban symbol of wickedness, figuring throughout the canon as the enemy of God's people and at times their captor. Babylon's final appearance comes as John pens this epitaph, "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations" (Rev 17:5).

Since cities are humanity collected, they are in many ways evil magnified. Robert Linthicum wisely notes, "a city's evil is far greater than the sum of the sin of its individuals. The very systems of a city could become corrupt, grasping, oppressive, and exploitative."[31] One example is found in Genesis 18-19, where God condemns and destroys the two cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for their extensive wickedness. God says, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me" (Gen 18:20). God destroys the city after witnessing the wickedness and the abominable acts committed against Lot's family.

Some use the events that surround Lot's choosing of Sodom (Gen 13:12) instead of Canaan to suggest it is sinful for God's people to choose urban life, but it is more appropriate to focus on his rejection of Canaan as a residence. Kenneth Matthews rightly argues, "Lot ignored Canaan for the deceptively attractive 'cities of the plain'... Lot's action is reminiscent of the folly of Esau, who treated lightly the promises (25:34) and eventually lost the inheritance."[32] Just as stew is not inherently bad but Esau chose against the promises of God, Genesis is not indicating that cities

are ontologically evil. Additionally, Abraham's choice of the pasture lands of Canaan must not be interpreted as a sign that rural living should be preferred over an urban life. Abraham was not avoiding a city but looking for the right one. The writer of Hebrews tells the reader Abraham "was was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God" (Heb 11:10).

Cities serve as the backdrop for much of Scripture, and they are often painted in a positive light. As the grand narrative turns to Israel settling the promised land, the view of cities brightens. The Israelites are told to build cities, and they are described as places of refuge (Num 35:11-12). One city, however, stands out above the rest. Jerusalem's capture and establishment as the capital of the kingdom serves as a milestone along the road of redemptive history. Keller writes, "Unlike Babel, established 'to make a name for ourselves' (Gen 11:4), Jerusalem becomes the city that is the dwelling place for God's name (1 Kgs 14:21)."[33] Throughout Scripture, Jerusalem becomes an urban symbol of God's presence. It is his city, his mountain, his throne. The Psalms speak in idealized language of this city; it is "the holy habitation of the Most High" and "the joy of all the earth" (Ps 46:4, 48:2).

Cities are perhaps the highest expression of humanity's creative and culture-making faculties. Cities were part of God's intended trajectory for humanity, and both the built and social structures display the imago Dei in a unique way. Cities are also progenitors of evil. The intensity with which cities can produce culture is also true of their ability to magnify sin. Great systemic sin can exist when people are gathered into the urban environment. Perhaps this is why these twin ideals are represented throughout the canon by two cities, Babylon and Jerusalem. Keller summarizes this well,

The great spiritual conflict of history is not between city dwellers and country dwellers but is truly "a tale of two cities." It is a struggle between Babylon, representing the city of man, and Jerusalem, representing the city of God. The earthly city is a metaphor for human life structured without God… But God's city is a society based on his glory and on sacrificial service to God and neighbor.[34]

One must not mistake this conflict as one of equals. John's apocalypse details the fate of these two cities. Babylon is ultimately ruined, and in the final pages of the story, creation is ultimately restored. However, as Bartholomew aptly notes, "lest we think that the goal of history is a return to Eden, this paradise is a holy city ([Rev] 21:2; 9-27)."[35] The new Jerusalem stands as the last scene of the Biblical narrative, where man finally dwells with God once again in fullness, and it is a city. In fact, it is a massive city according to the description that is unmistakably urban. Bartholomew continues, "The trajectory in Scripture from the 'garden' of Eden to a city reflects the role of the city as a symbol of God's intent and humankind's desire to develop the creation and to build places of culture and community."[36]

## A Theological Rubric to Evaluate Urban Mission Methods

By now it is evident the church's relationship with the city is not one of avoidance but engagement. The methods of this engagement will naturally vary based on context, but an appropriate theological vision for urban mission is essential to healthy method. Twin ditches must be avoided when crafting theology for urban mission. Simply neglecting the context produces an under-contextualized, primarily propositional list of "things to do" that likely do not fit. The reverse error allows the context to dictate the theological conversation, an error that results in pragmatism. Conn develops a helpful distinction between a theology of mission in the city and a theology of mission for the city. The first simply considers the city one place of many where mission occurs. The second, a theology of mission for the city, goes a step further to allow study of the context as a dialogue partner in the theology itself.[37] The following components, while not exhaustive, provide a broad theological basis for urban missiological method. A biblical, urban mission will understand the priority of cities in missions. It will also possess a right presence in the city, a prophetic voice toward the culture, and gospel proclamation as a focus. Taken together, these four values serve as a rubric against which any urban missiological may be evaluated.

## Value One: The Priority of Cities

"All ambitious missionary movements are, or soon become, urban," states Rodney Stark in reference to the rise of Christianity as a global religion.[38] It does not take a sociologist, however, to understand the significance of cities on a global scale. Cities serve as global population, cultural, and financial centers. More people live in cities, more things are made in cities, and more ideas are propagated in cities. As Keller famously states, "Cities, quite literally, have more of the image of God per square inch than any other place on earth."[39]

Concerning mission, the Bible also puts great emphasis on cities. The book of Acts is largely the story of the urban spread of the church over roughly 30 years. At the beginning, Jesus instructs his followers not to leave the city and wait on the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4). The birth of the New Testament church occurs there in the city during Pentecost (Acts 2). The church continues to grow in Jerusalem until persecution spreads believers out into the surrounding regions (Acts 8:1), most notably the cities. In fact, Philip's incident with the eunuch stands out because it was located in the wilderness instead of a city (Acts 8:26). By Acts 13, the church of Antioch, as a major city, is compelled by the Spirit to send out Barnabas and Paul. The rest of Acts details the missionary journeys of Paul, until he makes it to the largest city in the world at that time.

Over the course of the book, it becomes evident that Paul's

strategy is directed toward cities. Goheen writes, "Paul plants churches in urban areas that are then called to be a witness to the gospel in life, word and deed in the place where they have been set."[40] Paul's missionary method was dependent upon local churches being established in influential cities. Only as an exception did Paul feel the need to visit the countryside, and yet the gospel spread throughout the provinces (Acts 19:10). Roland Allen claims, "St. Paul's theory of evangelizing a province was not to preach in every place in it himself, but to establish centres of Christian life in two or three important places from which the knowledge might spread into the country round."[41] One must not overread Acts as a prescription to slavishly reproduce the steps of Paul, but the narrative makes clear the priority of cities as key places of influence in spreading the gospel.

## Value Two: A Right Presence in Cities

If cities are strategic for the spread of the gospel, then a theology of urban mission must include a robust understanding of presence. A proper theological vision for urban mission involves local churches in the city made up of residents of the city. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for an urban strategy

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to be missing one of those components. Since the 1980s, a renewed interest in urban ministry has infiltrated evangelical ranks, however, this often translated into parachurch organizations and special interest ministries that focused on aspects of city mission.[42] The specialized work of a parachurch organization can be valuable, but it will always be insufficient. For only the church serves as a true preview and foretaste of the kingdom.[43] To the other extreme are "parachute" approaches to ministry, where ministry is attempted by a local church, but the church is not actually located in the city. By necessity, such ministry is programmed, periodic, or outsourced. As Manuel Ortiz writes, "There is, in my opinion, a swing today toward the development of programs for community transformation that are moving Christians away from developing personal relationships… More and more we are becoming servants from a distance."[44] Neither parachurch nor

parachute ministries can provide the kind of presence that a proper theological vision for urban missions demands. Cities need more than Christians; they need churches.

With the necessity of church-based, residential mission established, one can turn to the manner in which presence is lived out. Jeremiah 29:7 commands the Israelites to "seek the welfare of the city" in reference to Babylon. At the time, the people of Israel were in exile in Babylon, and Jeremiah calls them to a certain lifestyle. Perhaps because of its plain wording, this verse is often used as biblical warrant for many different approaches to the city. Some popular works on urban mission focus on the word "welfare", or *shalom*, and take that as a theological cue for ushering in supernatural peace.[45] Unfortunately, that kind of interpretation runs the risk of illegitimate totality transfer. The context of this passage makes fairly clear that *shalom* references something more temporal and limited. The preceding verses speak of daily-life activities instead of a program of social reform. In fact, the verse explains that they are seeking the well-being of Babylon because their well-being depends on it. Finally, by the end of his book, Jeremiah writes of the ultimate downfall of Babylon with longing and expectation.

Jeremiah may be flimsy support for a city transformation movement, but it provides much help to Christians who desire a faithful presence in the city. James Davison Hunter rightly claims, "The people of Israel were being called to enter the culture in which they were placed as God's people—reflecting in daily practices their distinct identity as those chosen by God. He was calling them to maintain their distinctiveness as a community but in ways that served the common good."[46] Peter picks up on this exilic theme in his first epistle, admonishing the scattered churches to live in the same manner, keeping their conduct excellent (1 Pet 2:11-17). Rightly understood, this places guardrails on Christian demeanor in cities. Culture wars and brandishing threats are out of place and so is capitulation to the broader culture. Instead, it calls the local church residing in the city to a properly prophetic voice toward the culture.

## Value Three: A Prophetic Voice Toward Culture

A prophetic voice is one that is nuanced by the truth of the gospel and balances between cultural isolation and cultural acquiescence. As noted above, creation is structurally good, but fallen in direction, and that reality applies to culture and other human systems. Since cities are humanity's most complex human systems, prophetic engagement with the culture is essential to urban mission. In his popular-level work *Onward*, Russell Moore winsomely explains the essence of a prophetic stance toward culture. He claims, ""If we see ourselves as only a minority, we will be tempted to isolation. If we see ourselves only as a kingdom, we will be tempted toward triumphalism. We are, instead, a church. We are a minority with a message and a mission."[47] In the midst of radical cultural diversity, city churches have a unique chal-

lenge to find such a voice; however, the church has no better example than Jesus.

Jesus' ministry exemplifies prophetic engagement with the surrounding culture. Jesus could not be called pro-Pharisee or anti-Pharisee. On one instance, he referred to a group of them as a brood of vipers (Matt 23:33), on another he meets with a Pharisee by night to graciously speak the gospel (John 2). Jesus prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt 24-25) and weeps over her fate (Luke 19:41-44). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes this prophetic relationship with the surrounding culture. He says,

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matt 5:13-16).

The result is a tension between cultural isolation and capitulation. The church must remain salty in the city, but it must do so in a winsome way. This requires Spirit-led analysis of the diverse mix of cultures present in a city and thoughtful discernment concerning engagement. Moore writes, "This means we will live in the tension between prophetic distance and prophetic engagement."[48] The church must speak up against injustice and point toward the gospel, but it must do so in a way that communicates love of neighbor.

## Value Four: A Focus on Gospel Proclamation

Finally, the church must bear witness to the gospel of the kingdom through its proclamation in the city. A healthy theological vision for urban mission involves local churches serving as gospel-proclaiming communities whose chief aim in mission is multiplying the witness to the kingdom. This gospel proclamation is public and private, it is individual and communal, it is macro and micro. A church testifies to the gospel in the totality of its actions and structure. It assembles to worship and serves as a public display corporately. It publicly and verbally proclaims the gospels in sermons, but it is also a community of individuals who are quick to share these truths with those in their circles of influence. This is done with the aim of multiplying the witness to the gospel of the kingdom in that city.

Paul's city ministry was marked by the verbal proclamation of the gospel. A brief glance at his first missionary journey leaves little doubt to its centrality. In Acts, Paul spoke the gospel in Salamis (13:5), Perga, (13:16), Iconium, (14:1), and Lystra and Derbe (14:6), and this pattern follows throughout the rest of the book. This practice was not unique to Paul, but expected of every believer. Luke informs his readers that the gospel spread out to rural regions of Asia as Paul was teaching in Ephesus (19:10). For this to occur, the message was being carried on the backs of lay people into their own neighborhoods and cities. That verbal proclamation is an every-member ministry becomes explicit as Paul later corresponds with these churches throughout the empire, telling their members to walk in a manner worthy of their calling (Eph 4:1).

However, this call to "walk" is more than a call to speak. He repeats this refrain in multiple letters, exhorting the churches throughout the cities where he ministered to live a life congruent with the gospel they received. Paul calls these congregations to the word and deed witness-bearing mentioned above that serves as the central mission of the church. The other New Testament writers are no less emphatic on the nature of this witness. James tells his readers that the profession of faith without the authentication of deed is merely empty words (Jas 2:17). This includes the mundane and everyday activities of life. Paul writes, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain

> **PAUL'S MINISTRY WAS marked by the verbal** proclamation of the gospel. A brief glance at his firs missionary journey leaves little doubt to its centrality.

or labor in vain" (Phil 2:14). In this passage, Paul notes the connectedness of their continued ministry of witness-bearing to his own. The mission of the early church was a cooperative effort of local churches bearing this kind of witness and seeking to multiply it.

Multiplying the witness of the church in a city is, nevertheless, a considerable challenge due to its complexity. As Keller notes, "The great missionary task is to express the gospel message to a new culture in a way that avoids making the message unnecessarily alien to that culture, yet without removing or obscuring the scandal and offense of biblical truth."[49] Contextualization is necessary for mission, but this challenge is uniquely multiplied in cities. The density and diversity of the urban context means that city churches do not merely contextualize to a different cultural context but to dozens or hundreds. While this has always been true of cities, the contemporary state of urban centers is unlike any time in history regarding their radical diversity. A recent news article in the *Charlotte Observer* notes, "In just 20 years, from

1990 to 2010, the percentage of Charlotte's population that is foreign-born quintupled from about 3 percent to about 15 percent. Close to 114,000 immigrants, legal or not, call the city home."[50] It is easier than ever to get across the globe, and that means cities are more diverse than ever.

Leslie Newbigin rightly asserts, "Human beings only exist as members of communities which share a common language, customs, ways of ordering economic and social life, ways of understanding and coping with their world. If the gospel is to be understood...it has to be communicated in the language of those to whom it is addressed and has to be clothed in symbols which are meaningful to them."[51]

> **" PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL in cities today requires** cultural acquisition. For churches to speak and display the gospel to an array of varied cultures, they must discover the cultures that exist around them. **"**

Proclaiming the gospel in cities today requires cultural acquisition. For churches to speak and display the gospel to an array of varied cultures, they must first discover the cultures that exist around them. It is not enough for one to assume the culture of her neighbors. Such urban mission requires a posture of humility and the heart of a learner.

Furthermore, it is only accomplished through dialogue.

## Conclusion

The above tenets of urban mission are by no means exhaustive. In fact, much more should be said concerning the church's role in preparing its members for vocation, engagement in the civil life of a city, the desperate need for prayer, and the biblical emphasis placed on hospitality as demonstrating the gospel and its role in shaping cultural dialogue for contextualization.

Nevertheless, essential to any theological vision for urban mission are right presence, a prophetic voice, and a focus on gospel proclamation through word and deed across the spectrum of cultures present in a city. By considering these four elements, any urban missiological method can be evaluated for their biblical consistency. The Bible showcases the priority of urban mission and outlines the essential nature of residential churches that cooperate together in their mission of multiplying witness throughout a city and its surrounding region for the ultimate glory of God.

## Endnotes

1. Rodney Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006), 2.

2. Mark Mulder and James Smith, "Subdivided By Faith? An Historical Account of Evangelicals and the City," *CSR* 38 (2009): 428.

3. David Hesselgrave, "Conclusion: A Scientific Postscript—Grist for the Missiological Mills of the Future," in *MissionShift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium* (ed. David Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer; Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic, 2010), 279.

4. This statement has been used by enough people it is hard to attribute. It perhaps stems back to Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, (1 ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 10, where he claims, "What we have to learn from them is not that the church 'has' a mission, but the very reverse: that the mission of Christ creates its own church." Much of its usage today would not line up with Moltmann's original claims concerning the mission of the church.

5. Roy Ciampa, "The History of Redemption," in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity* (ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul House; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007), 258.

6. Keith Whitfield, "The Triune God: The God of Mission," in *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations* (ed. Bruce Ashford; Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic, 2011), 32.

7. Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 164.

8. Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2007), 15.

9. Michael W. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History, and Issues* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2014), 246.

10. Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith-Forming Community* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2003), 154.

11. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, 253.

12. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 1110.

13. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2007), 1109.

14. Harvie M. Conn, *The American City and the Evangelical Church: A Historical Overview* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1994), 76.

15. Steve Conn, *Americans Against the City: Anti-Urbanism in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 277.

16. See Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), for a thorough treatment of white flight. He uses Atlanta to demonstrate a movement that swept through many US urban centers.

17. Conn, *Americans Against the City*, 11.

18. Conn, *The American City and the Evangelical Church*, 141.

19. Mark Mulder and James Smith, "Subdivided By Faith? An Historical Account of Evangelicals and the City," *CSR* 38 (2009): 428.

20. Alan McMahan, "The Strategic Nature of Urban Ministry," in *Reaching the City: Reflections on Urban Mission for the Twenty-First Century* (ed. Gary Fujino, Timothy R. Sisk, and Tereso C. Casiño; Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2012), 1.

21. Conn, *The American City and the Evangelical Church*, 61-62.

22. Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, (trans. Dennis Pardee; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970), 150.

23. See Manuel Ortiz and Harvie M. Conn, *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City & the People of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2001) and Stephen T. Um, Justin Buzzard, and Timothy

J. Keller, *Why Cities Matter: To God, the Culture, and the Church* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2013), whose work relies heavily on Conn and Ortiz.

24. Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011), 27.

25. In the same pericope that discusses the first city, there is explicit mention of the development of cultural artifacts such as music, metallurgy, and cultivation.

26. Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2012), 138.

27. The book of Jonah serves as a perfect counter-example to the idea that cities must be dismissed or that God's people should avoid them. While not the only theme, or perhaps even the main theme, the story of Nineveh's redemption is a main thread of the narrative.

28. Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament: Promises Made* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2006), 76.

29. Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 88.

30. Keller, *Center Church*, 138.

31. Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God, City of Satan* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), 46.

32 Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 1- 11:26* (NAC; Nashville: Holman, 1996), 130.

33. Keller, *Center Church*, 140.

34. Keller, *Center Church*, 140.

35. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 161.

36. Ibid., 161.

37. Harvie Conn, foreword to *God So Loves the City: Seeking a Theology for Urban Mission*, ed. Charles Van Engen and Jude Tiersma (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 1994), vii-viii.

38. Stark, *Cities of God*, 25.

39. Keller, *Center Church*, 141.

40. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, 388.

41. Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours; A Study of The Church In The Four Provinces* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011), 43.

42. Conn, *The American City and the Evangelical Church*, 153-154.

43. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, 383.

44. Manuel Ortiz, "Being Disciples: Incarnational Christians in the City," in *Discipling the City: A Comprehensive Approach to Urban Mission* (ed. Roger Greenway; Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 90.

45. While the "third way" approach of Stephen T. Um, Justin Buzzard, *Why Cities Matter: To God, the Culture, and the Church* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2013), 88, rightly handles the intent of the passage, they are guilty of totality transfer concerning the meaning of shalom. See also Eric Swanson and Sam Williams, *To Transform a City: Whole Church, Whole Gospel, Whole City* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2015), who base much of their book's methodology around this one phrase with little regard to its context.

46. James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 278.

47. Russell D. Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Books, 2015), 35.

48. Moore, *Onward*, 47.

49. Keller, *Center Church*, 89.

50. "A new era needs a new approach: City would get boost from investment in immigrants," *Charlotte Observer*, Retrieved from http://www.charlotteobserver.com/opinion/article16121978.html#storylink=cpy.

51. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 141.

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# Polar Views of the City:
## Jacques Ellul vs. Timothy Keller

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**H**AVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED whether you have a more positive or negative view of the city? How you view the city will influence how you minister to the city. According to T.J. Gorringe, "There is certainly a deep ambivalence towards the city in the Christian tradition which is recognised and shared today by many secular theorists" (Gorringe 2002, 140). This ambivalence is demarcated by two polarized views: the "doom laden" view expounded by John Chrysostom and Augustine; and the "endorsement view" articulated by Isidore of Seville, Abelard, and Thomas Aquinas (Gorringe 2002, 140-142).

> **SOME THEOLOGIANS have posed a dialectical** view of the city: 'The city is both Babylon, the place of alienation, exile, estrangement and violence, and Jerusalem, the place where God dwells, sets God's signs, and invites humankind to peace.'

In recent decades Western theologians have renewed this debate. French philosopher Jacques Ellul reanimated the doom view in *The Meaning of the City*, which is "widely recognized as one of the most important twentieth century theological reflections on the city" (Toly 2012, 231). Alternately, prominent pastor Timothy Keller has revived the positive view[1] through his sermons and books, including Center Church, which has received high accolades among practitioners.[2]

Some theologians have posed a dialectical view of the city: "The city is both Babylon, the place of alienation, exile, estrangement and violence, and Jerusalem, the place where God dwells, sets God's sign, and invites humankind to peace. The twofold imaging of the city calls for a dialectic" (Gorringe 2002, 140). Interestingly Gorringe and Toly argue that Ellul articulated a dialectical view of the city (Gorringe 2002, 143; Toly 2012, 233-238). Nevertheless, practically speaking, "The danger with dialectical perceptions is that they tend to fall apart…Most theologies tend to fall on one side or the other of this dialectic" (Gorringe 2002, 140, 143). In reality, a robust tension is hard to maintain so I join many in interpreting Ellul as leaning toward a negative view (Ward 2000, 48-50; Pickett 2013, 105; Sunquist 2013, 347-348).

My purpose here is to sketch out the poles of this debate, particularly how Ellul and Keller diverge on the origins of the city and vantage toward the city. We will conclude by considering possible implications for those serving in urban contexts.

## The Origins of the City according to Ellul

According to Ellul, Cain created the city. After Cain killed Abel, he was cursed by God; fled to Nod; impregnated his wife, who gave birth to Enoch; built a city; and named it after his son (Genesis 4:1-17). Ellul concludes, "The entire history of the city has its beginning in Cain's act. All the builders were sons of Cain and act with his purpose" (Ellul 1970, 10). Cain's motivation is twofold: "He will satisfy his desire for eternity by producing children, and he will satisfy his desire for security by creating a place belonging to him, a city" (Ellul 1970, 5).

Therefore, at its inception, the city becomes both a symbol of Cain's rebellion and the anti-Eden. Ellul asserts, "For God's Eden he [Cain] substitutes his own, for the goal given to his life by God, he substitutes a goal chosen by himself—just as he substituted his own security for God's. Such is the act by which Cain takes his destiny on his own shoulders, refusing the hand of God in his life" (Ellul 1970, 5). In the final analysis, Cain's building of the first city is a watershed moment because he seeks to supplant God's authority: "before him, there was only God. But by Cain's act God became the one no longer adequate for the life, the will, the thought of man" (Ellul 1970, 6).

## The Origins of the City according to Keller

Keller sees the inception of the city embedded within the creation narrative and the commission of humankind to "rule over," "work," and "take care of" the Garden of

Eden (Genesis 1:28; 2:15). On the basis of Meredith Kline's interpretation of Genesis 2, he states: "God designed the city with the power to draw out the resources of creation… and thus to build civilisation" (Keller 2012a, 1). Further he asserts, "The City is the fulfilment of the purposes of the Eden of God" (Keller 2012b, 150).

Regarding Cain, Keller rejects Ellul's emphasis on Cain's rebellion. Instead Keller interprets Cain sympathetically: "the founding of the city comes as the result of Cain's search for security in the world and of God's granting his request (Gen 4:14-15). In other words, the city is seen as a refuge, even from the very beginning" (Keller 2012b, 138).

## Differing Hermeneutical Frameworks

Clearly Ellul and Keller demonstrate divergent hermeneutical approaches to the city. In constructing his theology of the city, Ellul approaches the Bible sequentially and expansively: from Genesis to Revelation, starting with Cain and Nimrod then progressing to Sodom, Nineveh, Jerusalem, and Jesus. *The Meaning of the City* feels broad yet cohesive.

In contrast, Keller takes a narrower approach, placing most of his attention on the Old Testament prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Jonah along with Revelation 21-22 (Keller 2012b, 135-151; Keller 2014, 8-9). Revelation 21-22 acts as his primary interpretive lens through which he looks backward over the Bible: "Since the Bible reveals to us that a city is the final result of the work of the second Adam on our behalf, it seems fair to assume this was what God intended when he gave the cultural mandate to the first Adam" (Keller 2012b, 151). For Keller, the biblical view of cities must be predominantly understood in light of the New Jerusalem as described at the end of Revelation.

A second hermeneutical consideration is personal context.[3] Ellul taught history and sociology at the University of Bordeaux. Other than a brief stint as a city administrator and political candidate, he spent the majority of his life in academia. This suggests Ellul was a theoretician disconnected from his urban environment. Moreover, his pessimism may have been born of his experience of living through World War II and European reconstruction. The devastation of war may have influenced his work.[4]

Keller has served as a church planter, pastor, and movement leader for most of his career, although he spent five years teaching preaching and pastoral ministry at Westminster Theological Seminary. Since its near bankruptcy in 1975, New York City has ascended as an economic and cultural power (Florida 2015) and has been labeled the top Global City in the world according to the A.T. Kearney Global Cities Index (Hales et al. 2015). Clearly, there is a difference between being a sociology professor and a pastor, between living in postwar France and twenty-first-century New York City. One's milieu will influence one's hermeneutic.

## Ellul's View of the City

When discussing the city, Ellul uses forceful language and striking imagery that carries dour overtones. He declares:

We have referred to the *judgment* and *condemnation* of the city in several of its aspects. But we must not forget the curse…The curse was pronounced from the beginning. It is part of the city's very being, it is woven into the fabric of her history. The city is a cursed place—by its origin, its structure, its selfish withdrawal, and its search for other gods. (Ellul 1970, 60)

It's important to note he saw this curse as pertaining to the "city itself" and "not to the inhabitants of the city" (Ellul 1970, 44-45).

Consequently, the city is a tragically deformed place: it "has within her every disorder because she is the great means of separation between man and God…She is the very center of the world's disorder, and it is therefore useless to speak to her of order" (Ellul 1970, 119). This disordered state makes the city a predatory creature:

> **" THE CITY IS NOT A LIFE-generating** or culture-developing refuge, Rather because it is dead, it forcefully sucks resources, energy, and vitality from the humans that flow into it and inhabit it. **"**

Like a vampire, it preys on the true living creation, alive in its connection with the Creator. The city is dead, made of dead things for dead people… The city is an enormous man-eater. She does not renew herself from within, but by a constant supply of fresh blood from outside… The city devours men… [it] cannot function except as a parasite; it needs constant contributions from the outside. (Ellul 1970, 150-151)

The city is not a life-generating or culture-developing refuge. Rather because it is dead, it forcefully sucks resources, energy, and vitality from the humans that flow into it and inhabit it.

Accordingly, no human agency can reform the city: "Man is not to be counted on to transform the problem of the city" (Ellul 1970, 170). Only divine initiative brings change: "Only the death of the very Son of God is sufficient to change the facts of history… God, by his act in Jesus Christ, made the city into a neutral world where man can be free again, a world where man finds possibilities for action" (Ellul 1970, 170).

Ellul concludes his work in a decidedly apocalyptic vein, seeing the work of Christ as instrumental in forming "the new city" or "Yahweh-Shammah" (Ellul 1970, 188-196). He states, "God prepares a new world for man in the resurrection" (Ellul 1970, 189). Since this is an "open city" (Ellul 1970, 193), it is the "antithesis" of the "earthly city" and "follows and takes the place of the church…[It is] an extraordinary synthesis of man's work adopted by God and the work of the Spirit brought to perfection" (Ellul 1970, 195).

Therefore Ellul tends toward articulating a pessimistic vantage of the city: it is dead, condemned, parasitic, and hence unable to be reformed by humans in the present age. The best hope for the city lies in the future Jerusalem.

## Keller's View of the City

Keller's understanding of the city is far more optimistic than Ellul's. He observes an existing dialectic: There is a "tension between the city's God-exalting promise and its man-exalting shadow. We will find this dual nature played out in the pages of Scripture" (Keller 2012b, 135). Furthermore, the Bible paints a more accurate portrait than given by the popular media: "…what the Bible teaches about the city is far more optimistic and far more pessimistic than anything you'll read in the newspapers…It's both more hopeful and yet more realistic than either the defenders or

> **IF GOD IS A BUILDER,** **architect, urban planner,** and inventor, Christians have a responsibility to engage in the redemption of the world's cities.

detractors of the modern city" (Keller 2014, 4).

However, Keller repeatedly leans toward expressing a pro-city bias. For example, he asserts: "The city is an intrinsically positive social form with a checkered past and a beautiful future" (Keller 2012b, 151). He grounds his position in his understanding of the nature of God:

God is also building a city. He is a city architect, an urban planner, and we are citizens of that city…We as Christians are called to redeem and rebuild the city… God invented the city, so we don't abandon it—we build it… Not everybody is called to live in the city… But no matter where you live, you should be seeking to help restore and rebuild cities. That's biblical. Are you a city builder, as God is? God invented the city, so we should be for the city. (Keller 2014, 6)

If God is a builder, architect, urban planner, and inventor,

Christians have a responsibility to engage in the redemption of the world's cities.

Lastly, both secular and Christian publications such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *New York Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *Christianity Today*, and *Leadership Journal* have noted Keller's advocacy for the city.

## Implications of These Polar Views for Those Serving in Urban Contexts

**First, urban ministry practitioners would do well to be sensitive to urban dynamics, both nationwide and in their local milieus.** Generally speaking, evangelicals have leaned toward Ellul's negativity, expressing an anti-urban posture. This was my experience growing up in rural and suburban areas outside Portland, Maine, where I developed dour stereotypes of cities as crowded, noisy, dirty and crime-ridden. I thus affirm Harvie Conn's claim that "The history of the evangelical church in the American city has been liberally sprinkled with a cultural pessimism toward things urban" (Conn 1994, 194). Further Mulder and Smith's research led to them to assert, "Evangelicalism does seem to have a suburban 'center of gravity'.… White evangelicals tend to exhibit an anti-urban bias that contributes to a negative view of urban life and contributes to the growth of suburban and exurban social arrangements" (Mulder and Smith 2012, 103). The urban playing field is tilted.

**Second, those in urban ministry would do well to identify their personal biases.** One suggestion is to write out your urban origin/conversion narrative. How did you come to care for the city? Did you move into a city and grow to love it? Did you leave a city and miss it? Or through a catalytic experience, did you learn to view your city differently? Another recommendation is to do free association: stand in front of a whiteboard and rapidly write down all the words that flash into your mind when you focus on the word "city." After five minutes, step back and evaluate: do the words skew negative or positive? An additional way to gauge your leanings would be to read reflectively both Ellul and Keller and assess which author you resonate more with. Ask: "Is the city more parasitic or life giving? More Babylon or New Jerusalem?" Then, upon pinpointing your prejudice, you could venture more deeply into the opposing position. Ask, "Why is this lens valid?" By reading and reflecting on the other side, the Holy Spirit may bring correction, leading back toward a healthy tension. In so doing we start to become reflective practitioners.

**Third, the urban (reflective) practitioner will feel free to identify and embrace her ministry strategy and style.** Again, Ellul and Keller appear to present two distinct approaches to urban ministry: presence and activism, respectively.

Although Ellul conveyed a negative view, he did express the importance of Christian presence: "Our task is therefore to represent him [God] in the heart of the city… as faithful

witnesses to God's work" (Ellul 1970, 181-182). Unfortunately, Ellul fails to flesh out the practical implications of this admonition. Yet we may find suggestions in James Davison Hunter's work *To Change the World*, which delineates a "faithful presence" model from within a late-modern, Western culture. For example, Hunter contends Christians are not only to "be fully present" to those outside the Christian faith, but also to "pursue others, identify with others, and labor toward the fullness of others through sacrificial love" (Hunter 2010, 244).[5] We find an ecclesial application via urban pastor David Fitch who helpfully delineates "seven disciplines" that contribute to the formation of faithful urban mission such as "The Lord's Table, Reconciliation, Proclaiming the Gospel, Being with children, Kingdom Prayer" and so on (Fitch 2016).

Ultimately, a close reading of Ellul could encourage the urban worker to adopt a hopeful, endurance mind-set. Urban ministry is difficult because the city is difficult. While the urban situation is not impossible, it will be endlessly challenging. And yet if Christians can persist in the city, they will highlight the unique hope they possess in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The hope of the resurrection acts as a buffer against the parasitic nature of the city: the city cannot nullify the resurrection from the dead, the consummation of all things, or the promised arrival of the New Heaven and Earth.

On the other hand is Keller's activism, which, contextually speaking, springs from a recent wave of literature touting cities as central to God's redemptive work in our world (Toly 2014, 1). This enthusiasm, however, may lead to a potential danger: "If the flood of books about the city tells us anything, it is that cities don't just have stories that draw us into idolatry, but are *becoming the story* that draws us into idolatry. Cities themselves are becoming the things in which we trust for deliverance" (Toly 2014, 1). It is easy to fall into the idolatrous trap of imbuing the city with too much power and hope.

With this in mind, Keller calls for Christians to engage in missional living and to plant missional churches (Keller 2012b, 264-290). Activism leading to transformation is key:

Only if we produce thousands of new church communities that regularly win secular people to Christ, seek the common good of the whole city (especially the poor), and disciple thousands of Christians to write plays, advance science, do creative journalism, begin effective and productive new businesses, use their money for others, and produce cutting-edge scholarship and literature will we actually be doing all the things the Bible tells us that Christians should be doing! This is how we will begin to see our cities comprehensively influenced for Christ. (Keller 2012b, 292)

Additionally, Keller advocates for "city-wide gospel movements," placing a strong emphasis on church planting to reach "a city tipping point, when 10 to 20 percent of the population goes to those [gospel-centered] churches, and

you begin to realize that the whole city, the whole culture is going to change because of the impact of Christians in a place like New York" (Keller 2011, 75). Hence Keller would say presence is important insofar as it is coupled with an aggressive effort to plant new churches. Of course it should be noted Keller is one of many voices emphasizing church multiplication.[6]

Regarding urban ministry strategy, which prospect excites you more: faithful presence expressed through spiritual formation/disciplines or church planting and citywide transformation movements?

Or perhaps you want to explore the works of urban missiologists and practitioners who occupy a middle space between Ellul and Keller. This list includes Mark Gornik

> **" AS THERE IS MUCH AT** stake, those who minister in urban settings can benefit greatly from reading both writers in order to assess their own biases so as to temper and realign their positions for more effective ministry. **"**

(Gornik 2002), Michael Goheen (Goheen 2014), Howard Snyder (Snyder 2016) and Harvie Conn and Manuel Ortiz (Conn and Ortiz 2001). Having done so, it is prudent to then corporately pray, process and pursue the vision God lays on your hearts.

## Conclusion

Beginning in 1970, and continuing to the present day, theologians have reanimated a long-standing debate regarding how Christians view the city. Jacques Ellul rearticulated the doom view, while Timothy Keller helped resurrect the endorsement view.

These lenses prove crucial because the United States is a cosmopolitan nation: its now estimated "Nearly two-thirds of Americans" live in cities (Cohen 2015) with "71.2 percent and 76.4 percent" of the population residing in metropolitan areas in the Midwest and West, respectively (US Census Bureau 2015). More widely the exponential growth of cities is continuing unabated across the globe.[7]

Crucially, it appears urbanization may influence the size and resourcing of congregations. The majority of so called "megachurches"— defined as those exceeding 2,000 people in attendance each Sunday—are located in or near

# Memphis' Christ Community House Church Network:
## Robust Mission to Urban Underserved and Global Unreached

*B. Mark Morris, PhD*

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## Oil and Water

Urban strategists such as Viv Grigg[1] and John Perkins[2] can point to some impressive examples of church-based ministry among the urban poor. Likewise, international mission agencies celebrate their favorite exemplary sending churches that consistently deploy impressive numbers of missionaries and employ creative strategies to plant multiplying churches among unreached people groups. The numbers grow scant when searching for North American churches that dramatically impact both their own urban

> **THE FOUR DOCTORS moved into the most** medically underserved areas of Memphis, starting a clinic with a sliding fee scale for low-income uninsured patients,

poor as well as unreached peoples in difficult to access nations. Admittedly, a few megachurches can raise their hands and declare, "We do it all well." No matter how hard one tries, oil and water don't seem to mix. Effectively blending the oil of urban work with the water of international missions among unreached peoples has proven improbable, especially for a small to medium sized church.

The research question for this study: How does a small to average-sized, urban church simultaneously impact both the urban poor and international unreached peoples? Can

it be done with more than a token effort? When one such example emerged in my own city, I determined to learn everything possible. As a church planter, mobilizer, mission strategist and educator, I skeptically observed the seminal efforts. I listened to the founders who described their commitment to practice international church planting strategies in Memphis with a view to sending out experienced church planters to do the same among unreached peoples. Inner city, church-based ministries rarely even attempt a dual focus with a simultaneous passion both for the unreached and the underserved of North American cities. After more than a dozen years of observation of Christ Community House Church, I become convinced. My wife and I joined one of the house churches and soon planted a new inner city parish ourselves, training young leaders to do the same.

A case study research methodology was employed, based on interviews with founders, elders, pastors, church members and health care providers. I examined primary church documents and pieced together the unwritten historical narrative. Included in the study is an exploration of the cumulative impact of Christ Community House Church, Christ Community Health and the latest initiative, Resurrection Health. The desired outcome of the research is to identify traits and practices that set this model apart, perhaps offering transferable lessons.

## The Dream

Since the mid 1990s a discreet church-based mentoring and sending prototype has been germinating in Memphis, Tennessee. The *Memphis model* has resulted in a blend of inner city incarnation, health care for the underserved and gospel witness among unreached peoples from Afghanistan, North Africa, India and North Africa. In 1986, during their first year of medical school at LSU-New Orleans a vision was birthed in the hearts and minds of four medical students. Rick Donlon and Stephen Besh poured over God's Word, praying for and reaching out to their community and sharing the gospel and their vision with medical students. During the first year of medical school David Pepperman and Karen Miller turned to Jesus and joined the discipleship group. As the four medical students grew together in Christ, God captured their hearts for His mission. Donlon

attended Urbana '87; they participated in The Perspectives Course, memorized the Navigators Topical Memory verses, prayed for and reached other students for Jesus. By May of 1990 the four doctors made a vow together before the Lord to be doctors for Jesus, shirking their own ambitions and rejecting the American dream of wealth and material success. Rick Donlon pursued his residency in Memphis in Internal Medicine and Pediatrics, while the other three pursued residencies in Family Medicine (Pepperman), Internal Medicine (Besh), Obstetrics-Gynecology (Miller). Their residencies were of different lengths and in various locations but they all eventually reunited in Memphis.

The four doctors moved into the most medically underserved areas of Memphis, starting a clinic with a sliding fee scale for low-income uninsured patients. The clinics accepted Medicaid, Medicare, and commercial insurance for the underserved. These are not the first doctors in history to pursue an inner city medical ministry. What sets this story apart from other urban North American ministries is the dual focus on training doctors and young professionals for work among the urban underserved while simultaneously sending them out globally to the unreached in dangerous locations, such as Afghanistan, North Africa and the Middle East. Many of those trained through this dual process are serving today among the unreached, as well as in North American urban populations.

## The History

When asked about early influences shaping his world view, Donlon mentions the life and music of Keith Green, the Urbana student movement, the ministry of Campus Crusade, Navigators Topical Memory System, Ron Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*[3] and the emphasis advocated by people such as John Perkins and Wayne L. Gordon to move into the city and incarnate the gospel.[4] Seeking to live out their commitment together, the four doctors met recruiters from Methodist Hospital in Memphis who sought to hire them. Once again, team Donlon, Pepperman, Besh and Miller rejected a traditional career path, choosing a risky startup. Demonstrating more faith than good sense, Donlon, Pepperman, Besh and Miller registered Christ Community Health Care[5] in 1994 as a clinic for the underserved in Memphis, Tennessee. For eighteen months, the doctors worked days as well as *graveyard shifts* in Memphis' emergency rooms to save money and prepare for a September 1995 launch of their first clinic on South Third Street at Winchester Boulevard. That initial opening was bolstered by a $400,000 credit line and a grant for $200,000 from Baptist Memorial Hospital. Donlon refers to this challenging season as the group's "wandering in the wilderness" years.

Having read about the unreached and God's jealousy for His glory among all nations, the four doctors explored ways to practically live out their faith among the urban poor and the unreached. Admittedly they fumbled around a bit. They attempted to do global missions as they understood it—participating in medical mission trips to Central America. They made mistakes attempting to incarnate the gospel among inner city Memphians. In 2000 God shook up their world. A missionary among unreached peoples, Charles Fielding met Rick Donlon through their wives' friendship; both had worked together in Memphis Young Life. Donlon and his team asked Fielding[6] to teach them how missionaries conduct church among unreached peoples.

"We do house church," was Fielding's answer. Fielding passed on books by Ralph Neighbor,[7] Neil Cole[8] and Wolfgang Simson.[9] Fielding began meeting regularly with the four doctors for practical training. Fielding challenged the fledgling Christ Community Health Care Ministries and the seminal church start in more ways than ecclesiology. He explained that there are three areas to completely rethink. First, he encouraged them to reconsider the significance of incarnation. He asked, "How will you incarnate the gospel

> "
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> "

among the urban underserved if you don't live among them? Second, "You need to completely rethink what you mean by 'missions' and how you practice it locally and globally." Finally, Fielding challenged the doctors to redefine "church" —specifically, how church is lived out in the neighborhood.

The pivotal event that upended the initial philosophy of Christ Community was a trip to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan in early 2001. At the invitation of Fielding, Donlon joined him on a medical ministry opportunity in northern Afghanistan. The result? His view of missions would never be the same.

Shortly after the journey to Afghanistan, Nathan Cook joined the four doctors. By 2002 Joe and Sima Weaver, young doctors were recruited to Christ Community from Chicago. The Weavers moved into Binghampton, an underserved area of Memphis. In the same year, Christ Community Health developed a new partnership with Southern Baptists to engage in a unique tuberculosis-focused medical mission in Central Asia. For several years Dr. Brent and Jodie Freyling, another Christ Community doctor and his wife, raised support through the Christ Community network and

were seconded into an already-existing IMB team in Central Asia. Also during that year, Donlon and the team shifted their thinking from a cell-church model to a house church approach. They made the necessary preparations to move more people into "the hood." Incarnation and house church became a reality for Christ Community.

As the ministry expanded, additional clinics were added in the most challenging neighborhoods of Memphis. By 2005 Christ Community Health Ministries grew to become the largest health care provider in Memphis. More and more doctors and physician assistants were drawn to the vision of reaching the underserved and unreached; young suburban *millennials* moved into similar underserved communities across Memphis. These young professionals were equipped by Christ Community Church Network to start churches in their homes – reaching their neighbors. In 2012 Donlon and his team organized an accredited international family health residency, requiring young doctors to spend part of their residency among unreached peoples, following a steady diet

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of equipping in cross cultural skills. Fielding and Nathan Cook inevitably indoctrinate these young people with their contagious vision for the unreached and the underserved.

Ironically, in 2014 the volunteer board of directors, concerned about the ministry's long-term financial health and believing that a closer relationship with one of the large local hospital systems was necessary, removed Donlon and Pepperman from leadership. They replaced Donlon, who was serving as CEO, with the Methodist Hospital's board of directors' chairman, a wealthy retired tobacco executive and a partisan fund-raiser. The original global mission vision would be compromised. Donlon and Pepperman regrouped and created Resurrection Health[10] with an even more robust Evangelical missionary vision. Remarkably, after the transfer of leadership of the original Christ Community Health Ministry, the International Family Medicine residency program and most of the health care providers shifted to work at Resurrection Health. Momentum rekindled, proving again the worth of combining urban health care ministry with the Christ Community House Church Network. Both Resurrection Health and the house church network continue as a potent force in missions equipping and mobilization.

## Distinguishing Marks

As of today, the Christ Community House Church Network of sixteen multiplying churches and roughly 200 people has deployed more IMB workers to North Africa and the Middle East than has any other church in the Southern Baptist Convention. A similar result would be rare even in a mega church, especially since most of those sent globally, serve a narrowly focused, dangerous and challenging region of the world. The obvious question—what is unique about the *Memphis model*?

Several distinguishing characteristics mark the urban/unreached methodology employed by the elders of Christ Community House Church and the directors of Resurrection Health. Upon close investigation, it becomes apparent that there is an organic collaboration of leadership and vision, but without formal connections or legal ties. The house churches and the medical ministry share DNA and two leaders; namely, Nathan Cook and Rick Donlon. Interestingly, the two entities stand completely autonomous, one from the other. The 12 parishes are overseen by 6 biblically qualified elders. Resurrection Health is led by a registered board of trustees. A tangible but unwritten connection unites the two organizations. Unlike the rapid reproduction approach espoused in *T4T*[11] or other church planting movement models, the house churches in Memphis have reproduced steadily, but not rapidly. Some of the dozen house churches have multiplied; of those, some have grown and a few have disbanded. Last year the network sent out nearly an entire parish overseas to reach unreached people groups. Four characteristics mark the *Memphis model*.

**Incarnational living.** As Donlon, Fielding and Cook describe the approach, they insist that moving into the neighborhood is a priority. "The result is that when our people get to Frontier's training or the International Mission Board's Learning Center, Christ Community missionaries are already seasoned in cross-cultural, incarnational living," says Donlon. He explains that there is little regarding crossing cultures that could be learned from a text book or from a training session, that his church members have not already caught by living in "the hood." Binghampton, Orange Mound, Whitehaven, Nut Bush, Sycamore View and Frayser communities in Memphis may not be Darfur or Mazar-i-Sharif, but the total immersion experience in urban Memphis is profound.

**House church.** After a short experiment with *cell church* Donlon and Cook rejected it for the *house church* model. The leaders had already moved away from traditional church structure and explored a connected semi-autonomous house church network guided by elders. Today Nathan Cook serves as first among the six church elders. One house church led to yet another, resulting in sixteen churches. The evolution of the early DNA was more organic than most North American models. Initially the only constitution and bylaws was the Bible. The doctrine and culture was transmit-

ted orally through teaching and modeling. The earliest Christ Community House Church missionaries screened by mission agencies ran into difficulties because they weren't even certain as to when they officially became "members." Eventually, formal constitution and bylaws facilitated membership in the Southern Baptist Convention, Tennessee Baptist Convention and the Mid-South Baptist Association.

**Prioritization of unreached peoples.** Since 2000 Charles Fielding has pressed Rick Donlon to dramatically reorient the church and the health care ministry with a bias toward unreached peoples. Fielding describes other effective inner city ministries as unable to transition to a dual focus and simultaneous passion for unreached and underserved cities in the US. Fielding insists, unless both are built into the original DNA of the ministry, a dual focus never happens.

Christ Community's initial IMB partnership was a focus on the Aimaq people of northern Afghanistan. Later several unreached people groups in North Africa were added. Today the vision of Resurrection Health has expanded to *Priority 15*, as an unreached people group emphasis. Medical students in the International Family Practice Residency pray for and are oriented toward fifteen of the most resistant peoples in the world, including the following: Mauritanian desert people, Algerian inland peoples, the Tuareg of Niger, Chad, the Nuba mountain peoples, the Somali peoples of the Dollo refugee camp in Ethiopia, a Yemeni Arab people known as the Tihami, the Zaza of Turkey, the Dagestani people, Mazar-i-Sharif peoples of Afghanistan, the Aimaq of Afghanistan, Western Punjabi peoples of northern Pakistan, peoples of the Terai in northern Bihar, and the minority peoples of southern China. The goal of *Priority 15* is to equip and send Resurrection Health medical residents to these fifteen challenging people groups. In addition, several other cities are being mentored in and practicing the *Memphis model*.

**Justice and Evangelism.** The leaders of Christ Community House Church have postured themselves toward an inflexible dual commitment to actively pursue justice/holistic ministry, as well as traditional evangelical convictions. The elders hold the church to the highest possible view of Scripture, conversion by grace through salvific faith in Jesus Christ and to a confidence in Jesus' imminent return in glory. There are no zany doctrinal positions. Elders maintain a healthy tension between organic systems and flexible methodologies while guarding traditional biblical values. Christ Community Church elders find as much comfort with John Perkins' Community Development conference as with IMB or Frontiers training in evangelism and church planting.

All four of the above characteristics exist in harmony one with the other. Fielding views the prioritization of unreached peoples as the inimitable feature. Unique to Christ Community is her demonstration that prioritization of unreached peoples can occur while equally embracing urban ministry in North America.

## Health Care Results

The four young doctors who founded Christ Community Health in the late 1990s chose Memphis to address the devastating racial and economic health care disparity, citing 2009 Tennessee Health Statistics revealing a 41% difference between black and white death rates; an 84% disparity in black and white male cardiovascular death rates and a 37% disparity between black and white mortality rates from cancer. Donlon attributes the problem to a lack of access to health care and to a culture of health care providers competing for middle to higher income customers. Donlon and his team worked to quantitatively and qualitatively change the health care scene for the underserved in Memphis, building affordable clinics in the least served areas.

Christ Community also played a prophetic role in the city. In November of 2011 Christ Community Health was awarded Shelby County's women's health and family planning contract, controversially stripping those funds from Planned Parenthood. Donlon competed for and accepted the local government contract.[12] Planned Parenthood ad-

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vocates complained about Christ Community, "a religious organization that refuses to provide abortions or refer women to others who would provide them."[13] Donlon mobilized churches throughout Memphis in this historic move, exemplifying Christ Community's commitment to justice, despite opposition.

By 2013 Christ Community Health had expanded to seven locations, growing to become the largest health care group in Memphis with $30 million in revenues. During that year175,000 patients were seen. One thousand babies were delivered. Fifteen hundred HIV patients were treated.

After the administration of Christ Community Health was transferred, Donlon and Pepperman created Resurrection Health. In its first eighteen months Resurrection Health saw 65,000 patients, accruing close to $7 million in revenues. The new organization opened three clinics in underserved areas of Memphis, offering health care for adults and children, general surgery and urgent care.

## Intangible Results

The International Mission Board's Affinity Group Leader for North Africa and the Middle East reports that compared to all other SBC churches, Christ Community House Church has sent the greatest number of missionaries to serve in that region of the world. Donlon comments, "God has brought a remarkable number of gifted younger leaders to us, as well as several seasoned practitioners to help along the way. It's been a 'body' thing, with Jesus as the Head and all of us as the supportive parts.

Our commitment to knowing, loving, and obeying the Bible has been absolutely foundational." He explains, "Because we've committed time and money to hosting students and residents, and because we participate in national conferences and meetings, the *Memphis model* has gained wider exposure and is beginning to be replicated, at least in part, in multiple other American cities (Augusta, GA; Tulsa, OK; Wichita, KS and Kansas City, MO)."

Church members serving among unreached peoples includes five families and three singles currently serving

> " **SMALL, LOW MAINTENANCE** house churches enable increased leadership development of future teachers, evangelists, deacons, and shepherds. "

in two locations in North Africa. Two singles are currently serving in highly restricted countries in Central Asia. Another single is serving among Muslims in East Asia. Another family is serving in Jordan, and a single is in the Far East. In addition, another family is living and working in South Asia. In the process of being sent is a family moving to a highly-restricted country in Central Asia, another returning to the Middle East and two other families moving to North Africa. A dozen others are in the process of deploying among unreached peoples. The above mentioned "sent ones" are long term missionaries. In addition to these, numerous short term mission trips have been engaged to these same areas.

The only property owned by Christ Community Church is a recently constructed missionary house, located strategically in "the hood." The missionary residence was funded after one of the sixteen parishes took responsibility to lead the other parishes in researching, raising funds, building, and coordinating its use by missionaries. One announcement and a month of fund raising resulted in the $200,000 cash needed

to build the home without debt. Since the house's opening a year ago, the *Antioch House* has remained booked by Christ Community missionaries returning to their sending base.

## Observations

Through interviews with founders and leaders in the relevant organizations, several observations emerge. Perhaps a few lessons are pertinent for those seeking to explore similar ministries.

**Abiding faith.** This movement was birthed organically by a few young medical students who were moved by God's Word to live out their faith locally and globally. These four disciples daily abided in Christ, memorized Scripture, studied the Bible and practiced personal evangelism; all of which fueled and led these students to commit their lives, specifically their careers, to a gospel vision greater than themselves. God directed these four families to embark on a sacrificial and extraordinary career and lifestyle trajectory.

Vision and Leadership. Rick Donlon and Nathan Cook, with a constellation of other younger leaders, have served as leaders and caretakers of the two-pronged vision of health care alongside of local and global house church multiplication. Skilled and Christ-centered team members have worked together to create a contagious gospel-centered missionary culture. Like many other similar examples of innovation in ministry, clear vision and selfless leadership are central to the *Memphis model.*

**Risk and Sacrifice.** The missional culture that has been fostered in Memphis incorporates risk taking and sacrifice in obedience to Jesus. Moving into "dangerous" areas of the city is central to the cross-cultural learning that occurs through Christ Community. Working tirelessly on Emergency Room shifts to pay for the ministry required a selfless dedication. Even today local doctors and other professionals are accepting below market salaries and challenging living conditions for the cause of Christ.

Prioritization of Unreached Peoples. Charles Fielding constantly reminds everyone that the prioritization of mission toward the unreached is critical. Donlon admits that he traveled reluctantly to Afghanistan that first time, and that the trip eternally reoriented his view of God's mission. His bias is for those unreached peoples who live in the most dangerous and challenging locations.

**Marketplace ministry.** Christ Community has mobilized and empowered the medical community for local and global ministry. There are numerous categories of marketplace professions that could be mobilized and employed in a Christ Community type model.

**House church.** The house church model allows for building-less, debt free and generous giving to local and global missions. Small, low maintenance house churches enable increased leadership development of future teachers, evangelists, deacons and shepherds. Sixteen or more shepherds will be mentored this year. Severally of them

will be sent overseas and they will be replaced those they have personally trained. Missionaries can be sustained and supported internationally due to the freeing up of budgets for nearly 100% mission spending.

## Transferable Lessons

**A dual focus of inner city and unreached peoples is feasible.** The Memphis model demonstrates the compatibility of pairing North American urban ministry with preparation to serve as missionaries among unreached peoples globally. Both inner city and unreached foci can coexist and thrive effectively together as a more biblical approach, rather than a compartmentalized, single-cause oriented ministry-project approach.

**Cross cultural preparation is tenable through inner city incarnation.** Cross cultural learning is enhanced when incarnation occurs by an intentional move into a neighborhood dominated by cultures other than one's own. Urban ministries that emphasize "moving into the hood" offer opportunity to develop meaningful cross cultural skills for future global workers.

**Doing house church effectively trains global church planters.** For many Westerners, house church may seem culturally and personally unappealing. A crowded home with children scampering about is incomparable to programmatic churches with excellent children's ministry, professional-style musical bands, comfortable chairs and well-rehearsed preaching. Yet house church, if well-organized and biblically designed and led, serves as a natural preparation for indigenous church planting among unreached peoples almost anywhere.

**Broader marketplace deployment is needed.** Teachers, social workers, engineers, artisans, entrepreneurs and other professionals can be more strategically equipped and deployed through a model like Christ Community. In this Memphis model, health care professionals are well mobilized and equipped for global missions. Couldn't the same approach be adapted for other marketplace professionals?

**Inherent barriers make the model challenging for some churches.** Initially, Donlon and his team toyed with house church. They attended Sunday morning services at their existing churches, while experimenting with house church on Sunday evenings. Charles Fielding insists that the model was "stillborn" until the participants began meeting as a house church on Sunday mornings, organized biblically as an autonomous church and functioned as the body of Christ. Programmatic (not intended as a negative term) churches may struggle with sponsoring this type of model, unless they are willing to view it as an autonomous church planting model that is launched outside of its own walls. According to Fielding, house church simply does not occur in an institutional church building. This is not a church revitalization tool. It cannot exist as a ministry arm of an existing church.

## Conclusions

Lessons from the *Memphis model* challenge the assumption that ministry to urban North Americans runs counter to globally-focused work among the unreached. Why can't the principles of this model be replicated geographically, as well as through other marketplace arenas? According to Donlon, "Opposition and even persecution have been part and parcel of what we have done. At times, supernatural means . . . have been important in sustaining us. God has demonstrated His authority and steadfast love over and over and over."

Donlon expresses his desire for the multiplication of the model, "We hope to infect other cities (New Orleans, L.A., Detroit, etc.) with ministries that share the same distinctives of incarnational living, risk-taking, justice-pursuing, house-church planting, leader-developing, and unreached and unengaged people group sending." With a similar tenacity and resolute motivation, others could develop similar approaches that serve inner cities while mobilizing and sending well-equipped teams to the most difficult global

> **" THE MEMPHIS MODEL IS a financially frugal but** missionaly extravagant church multiplication model that effectively equips and sends missionaries to work among North American, urban underserved and global unreached. "

locales to make disciples among the least reached. Christ Community House Church Network, along with Resurrection Health have built a workable and transferable health care-based model. The *Memphis model* is a financially frugal but missionaly extravagant church multiplication model that effectively equips and sends missionaries to work among North American, urban underserved and global unreached. The question remains, will similar urban approaches be employed to equip and send teachers, engineers, students, entrepreneurs and merchants to the global unreached?

### Endnotes

1. Grigg, Viv. *Cry of the Urban Poor: Reaching the Slums of Today's Mega-cities.* Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media. 2004.
2. John Perkins is an author and advocate for urban community development. He is founder of John Perkins Center for Reconcilia-

# Transnationalism:
# New Pathways for Mission

*Jared Looney*

**Dr. Looney** *is the executive director of Global City Mission Initiative http://globalcitymission.org. Serving in NYC for 15 years, he has worked in evangelism, church planting, and teaching in multicultural communities, and has spent several years training new missionaries in NYC sent from multiple mission agencies. Jared is the author of* Crossroads of the Nations: Diaspora, Globalization, and Evangelism *(Urban Loft, 2015) and co-author (with Seth Bouchelle) of* Mosaic: A Ministry Handbook for a Globalizing World *(Urban Loft, 2017). He currently lives with his wife and daughter in Tampa, Florida.*

SOME YEARS AGO, I was listening to a colleague in New York City tell his story. He had originally moved to Africa as a missionary to a Muslim people group—one of the least reached in West Africa. Now he was in New York working among Muslim immigrants from West Africa. Reflecting on the two contexts, he felt like he was more of a pioneer to unreached groups working in New York City than when he was the only Christian in a Muslim community in Africa. While living as a missionary in an African city, he explained, he found that he did not have relational access to any of the leaders of the community, nor did he ever receive a welcome into the homes of any of the homeowners in his neighborhood.

After extreme illness nearly took his life and he was forced to find a new ministry context, a series of circumstances led him to New York City, where he began reaching out to West African Muslims. He quickly discovered that many of the homeowners and community leaders from his African town actually lived and worked in New York. Because they labored in a well-known city and provided financial capital for their extended families, they gained valuable social capital among their families in their homeland. As a result, his new African friends opened doors for him as an evangelist in the same communities that were originally closed to him when he had lived there as a missionary. His African neighbors in New York City now gave him access to declare the gospel to their home country. He has since spoken on national television of a Muslim nation, stayed in the homes of community leaders during short-term trips to West Africa, and shared the gospel message repeatedly with extended family members. After many months of evangelistic labor, he began to see people come to faith in Jesus Christ among this unreached people in West Africa. By moving to a global city, he had increased

his access and built bridges to this community. Essentially, he had to move to New York in order to start churches among an African people group.

Several months ago, I sat with a friend, Sung-ho, in Koreatown in Midtown Manhattan. As a seeker, he was exploring Christian discipleship, so I introduced him to one of our missionaries working with Global City Mission Initiative

> **WE WERE EXCITED TO watch as Sung-ho grew** in his confidence to pray, to embrace an emerging faith in Christ, and to facilitate group discussions around the Bible in the Korean language.

(GCMI) in the city. The two of them exchanged numbers and began meeting together for a Discovery Bible Study. We were excited to watch as Sung-ho grew in his confidence to pray, to embrace an emerging faith in Christ, and to facilitate group discussions around the Bible in the Korean language. His personal transformation bloomed as his tiny Bible study group gathered each week and participants were challenged to apply what they were learning from God's word. Four months later, Sung-ho returned to Seoul. We knew he would only be there for three months before returning to the United States to continue his education in California. However, we encouraged him to gather friends and start a new Discovery Bible Study there in Seoul as well, which he did. His friend in New York—a Mission Catalyst with GCMI—continued to coach him through Skype. Three months passed, he relocated to California to enroll in college, and once again, he began to share his faith with both Japanese and Korean friends, forming another new community.

## Ministry in a Mobile World

During my first years as a church planter in New York—the United States' largest and most international city—I would regularly chat with other church planters, and we together would lament the highly transient nature of the city. We were

each attempting to build a stable base for establishing a located church. However, it was challenging to begin developing a leader in a new church plant only to see him follow the outbound migration to South Florida a few months later. It was disheartening to finally begin integrating a new member into our faith community after months of reaching out only to bid her farewell as she moved back to her home in Nigeria. It was difficult to see progress with a new leader interrupted while he was away for six months to a year in the Dominican Republic addressing a family emergency. By the middle of our second year into what we intended as a neighborhood church plant, our modest membership roll was spread across four counties and had involved plenty of farewells.

Over time, I reflected on the transient nature of life described in the Mediterranean world of the New Testament in contrast to the frustrations my colleagues and I felt. We know that the trade routes of the Roman Empire were heavily traveled, and during the early decades of the church Jewish Christians faced persecution or exile resulting in further spread of the gospel. Although a much more ancient backdrop, it, too, was a world on the move. I thought about how the mobility during the time of early Christianity in the Roman Empire contributed to the exponential spread of Christianity. How different from today when we, church planters, were feeling the stress and anxiety of such mobility because it inhibited the constancy of our church projects. I began to realize that what I had seen as an obstacle was, in fact, a pathway for mission. Eventually, I stopped mourning the challenges caused by doing ministry in this highly mobile society and instead began thinking about the opportunities presented by a world that is highly mobile and increasingly connected. I shifted my mindset to celebrating the many populations of urban dwellers who represented relational pathways for mission and pursued strategies that led to a viral spread of the gospel. I slowly realized that we were operating in the mission field of the near future.

## Transnationalism: A New Context of Global Mission

Today, the twin forces of urbanization and globalization are reshaping the context of global mission. Globally, the mission field today is a different place than it was only twenty years ago. Diaspora communities (i.e., various types of immigrant communities) in cities represent a new arena for mission where local and global overlap. Such communities represent pathways for evangelism that are multidirectional—within the city, to the migrant's homeland, and to new destinations throughout the host country as new residents resettle in various regions in their new country. In the words of Jehu Hanciles, globalization is leading us to see "the world as a single place" with greater and greater connectedness between once-distant locations. Borders between nation-states are becoming less and less of a barrier to religious, cultural, and commercial exchanges. Time and space are

being compressed through information, communication, and travel technologies.[1] This global compression means that international migrants can maintain relationships in more than one place. People are now connected like never before, and local churches increasingly find themselves confronted by global realities just down the street.

In the past, immigrants came to a new country and began to find ways to identify with their new nation. International migrants would make the occasional long-distance phone call, mail letters home, and, if they were fortunate, find a way to visit their homeland every few years. However, in today's world, one of our missionaries working with GCMI meets with his Hindu friend just a short bus ride away in New York City, and they speak in real time with his friend's Muslim family members, who join the discussion through online video from their home in Bangladesh.

"The global village we've grown used to inhabiting is a new reality for humans. The ancestors of most Americans

> **THE BARRIERS TO MAIN-**taining cultural connections are far more surmountable than they once were, and contemporary migration often means living between both worlds, or in both at the same time, rather than leaving one in the past.

lost contact with those they left behind in the old country. … Today, immigrants to America can choose to maintain their links to the people they leave behind. We can and do keep in touch."[2] The barriers to maintaining cultural connections are far more surmountable than they once were, and contemporary migration often means living between worlds, or in both at the same time, rather than leaving one in the past. Indeed, many migrants today share what social scientists refer to as transnational identities. Once upon a time, immigration meant leaving everything behind. One's old home faded into the background as one moved toward assimilation into the new culture. That unidirectional pattern of migration is no longer a singular choice for international migrants. Today, international migrants live in multiple worlds. They do not quite break with their homeland even as they build a new life in a new country. They essentially live "in between Home and home."[3]

This has significant implications both for missions around the world and for the local church in the ever-increasing

international diversity of North America. "Transnational families, networks, and communities . . . strike at the heart of traditional missiological reflections on home, power, identity, and subjectivity." Historic mission strategies that focused on traditional societies are facing new social patterns. Transnational communities in cities create space to embody "home" in the midst of fluid relationships and movements.[4] The context of global mission is experiencing a profound transformation. This strange new world certainly presents challenges to the mission of the church, but I would insist that the opportunities far outweigh the challenges. The realities of transnationalism provide strategic opportunities for the spread of the gospel through the natural relational flows of connected peoples beyond borders.

## Strategic Opportunities

As the leader of GCMI, I am sometimes asked about the value of investing in evangelism in the diaspora neighborhoods of global cities versus conventional missionary platforms. For Americans supporting mission work, it's a question that grows out of a desire for responsible stewardship. The essential question being asked is: What's the bang for the

> **THE REALITIES OF transnationalism provide** strategic opportunities for the spread of the gospel through the natural relational flows of connected peoples beyond borders.

buck? For me, living at the global intersections, the answer is fairly obvious. For instance, you could send a missionary to the Dominican Republic, another one to Colombia, and yet a third family to Ecuador, and these would all be valuable endeavors. Or you could send one Mission Catalyst to Roosevelt Avenue in Queens (NYC) to seek open doors connected to every single nation in Latin America. If the missionary methods utilized are replicable, working at global intersections may lead to a far-reaching impact beyond borders. Another church may desire to send a mission team to a least reached people group in one of the world's more challenging regions, such as Yemen, where missionaries must navigate civil war, American military intervention, anti-Western outcries, and laws against proselytism, all while wading through visa issues and building a creative-access platform in order to operate within the country. Or they might sponsor a catalyst to the tens of thousands of Yemeni in New York City who are

sending remittances to friends, family, and associations while building social capital back in their home nation. Many unreached peoples are forming new communities in globalized cities and simultaneously maintaining connections to their homeland. Oftentimes they are building retirement homes in their countries of origin and increasing their clout in their cultural community or network. These relational connections are natural pathways for the gospel. These unreached diaspora communities may or may not represent receptivity, but they do represent the potential for greater access.

In our network, we often talk about mouth-to-ear evangelism. In other words, we want it to be possible for someone to reproduce any of our evangelism efforts with someone else in their social world just an hour later. When members of our team study the Bible with international students and visiting scholars at Columbia University in Manhattan, we gently encourage them to share what they are learning with others in their life. Quite often they are calling or "skyping" home to Shanghai, Beijing, Taipei, or other urban centers in Asia to share the new stories they are learning. It is not uncommon for us to hear that they shared testimonies with their family back home on the other side of the planet, explaining how Jesus is transforming their hearts. While starting a Discovery Bible Study, a new believer from China once said, "We see these stories [in the Bible] as nice fairy tales that make a good point, but we do not believe them." However, a year later the same new believer declared, "I visited my family in China, and I told my parents: 'The stories in the Bible are not fairy tales. They are true, and Jesus has changed my life.'"

When I began conversations with Kevin King, director of International Project in New York City, that led to our ministries partnering together, he shared his story of reaching international students in New York City. He explained that over a decade ago his team realized that they had to help internationals experience forms of church that would be reproducible in nations that are legally closed to the spread of the gospel, so they formed a network of house churches. They recognized that no matter how many times they verbally encouraged new believers to reproduce ministry within their culture, they actually needed to provide experiences of church and Christian life that could be reproduced across borders. They eventually incorporated Discovery Bible Studies and have seen new churches begin in countries in Asia—following bathtub baptisms in Harlem. Through weekly conversations on Skype, King mentors new leaders who have returned to their homes in Asia and started new house churches.

## Mission at Global Crossroads

Urban missiologists have argued for the strategic importance of serving the city for years. Now, in the context of globalization, international migration, and transnationalism, planting the seeds of the gospel in cities representing global intersections is more important than ever. Today, cities are hubs of global activity and influence in a highly connected

world.[5] By working at the global intersections of increasingly diverse cities, there is a multidirectional potential for the gospel to impact a mosaic of cultures and nations. A couple of years ago, I was lecturing in a mission course at a large church in Harlem. During the class I invited anyone interested in getting involved in training on evangelism and church multiplication strategies in the city to meet with one of our Mission Catalysts. An African-American woman signed up to be coached for evangelism in her community. Right away, we discovered that one of her new Bible studies was with a group of Fulani Muslim women. It was a natural connection because they shared life together in their workplace. By working with urban Christians in a globally connected city, we are constantly in close contact with some of the least reached peoples in our world. Cities, as nodes in the global network, are the new context of global mission. Cities represent the space for transnational interactions and relational flows throughout the global network. As nodes in a global network, urban centers provide the geographical connection points for the flows of production and information between once-distant cultures.[6]

Of course, engaging urban settings has not often been the primary focus of the church in North America despite the distinctly urban history of the early church. However, we now live on a planet where the majority of occupants live and work in metropolitan areas. Despite our rural history, we are now faced with the task of navigating urban networks that increasingly close the gap between once-distant places. One of the significant challenges facing American Christians within the emerging context of global missions is a renewed focus on urban settings. Many of the opportunities for pursuing evangelism through transnational connections will lie at the global intersections of urban space. Evangelists desiring to make a global impact through their international neighbors not only must learn to ride the wave of transnational relationships but also must be able to navigate urban dynamics on a daily basis.

## The Church and Transnationalism

New ways of thinking about missiology and practicing evangelism will need to come into play for the church to embrace emerging opportunities for the advance of God's mission. Existing paradigms are being confronted by a world constantly on the move. However, this is an amazing opportunity for launching viral movements of the gospel beyond traditional boundaries. Ministry leaders will need to incorporate strategies that extend the reach of the gospel through relational pathways both locally and globally.

Transnational citizens linking cities in a global network provide new avenues for Christian witness. Contemporary strategies for church multiplication have led to making disciples and planting new churches in the homelands of transnational migrants, but to see these sorts of stories increase, conventional church growth paradigms must face the new global realities of mobility and fluidity. The as-

sumption that local communities can remain monolithic is short sighted in light of current global realities. Furthermore, individual believers are more mobile than we have ever encountered in history. The gap between distant places is not as great as it once was, even as the cultural gap in local settings seems larger than ever. Church models and structures will need to take such mobility and fluidity into account while grasping opportunities for a more expansive global witness. Change is a constant, and urban contexts are regularly being reconstructed. The rate of change now confronting urban missionaries is truly dizzying; however, opportunities for global evangelism shaped by transnationalism are unprecedented. Engaging contemporary contexts for mission will require the church to flourish in a networked society.

The opportunities facing the church in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere are beyond precedent. This means embracing new challenges, as well. The church will need to

> ❝ **THE OPPORTUNITIES FACING** the church in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere are beyond precedent. This means embracing new challenges, as well The church will need to rediscover her identity as missionary people. ❞

rediscover her identity as a missionary people. Leaders of this missionary community will need to seek the resources for equipping members to be ambassadors of Christ across cultures. Education and training once reserved for professional missionaries will become increasingly practical for those in the pew, as the basic skills of cross-cultural ministry are relevant in city and suburb alike. Furthermore, in an interconnected world, organizational structures that dichotomize domestic and foreign mission will need to reevaluate their approach to the contemporary mission field.

The opportunities of transnational evangelism emphasize both the importance of geographic context as cities form the connection points in global networks and the ability to transcend historical geographic barriers through ever increasing connectivity in a global world. Everything is changing, and there is certainly much to consider for leaders and evangelists who desire to be increasingly effective participants in God's mission. Transnational networks present emerging

# Upcoming Changes in EMS Leadership

*EMS President: Robert J. Priest*

**The EMS serves as a scholarly society** with the goal of helping our members contribute wisdom and understanding to all those who are deeply committed to God and his missionary purposes in the world. We pursue this goal through conferences where our members can network, present the fruit of our research and reflection, interact with each other over work in progress, and gain greater clarity in how to orient our missional efforts and education of others. We also pursue this goal through fostering publications that will be of strategic value towards the same ends.

The EMS achieves its success through the energy and support of EMS members, conference presenters, regional vice-presidents, and other board members who monitor finances, track membership, support our website presence,

> **OUR GOAL IS TO HAVE A board that includes** members with long-term presence and institutional memory but also, on a reglular basis, brings new people into leadership.

coordinate publications, organize conference logistics, and so on. Our goal is to have a board that includes members with long-term presence and institutional memory (such as Scott Moreau or Enoch Wan, for example) but that also, on a regular basis, brings new people into leadership. We wish for a board that is responsive to what God would have for us in the contemporary moment.

Thus, we are letting you know in this *Occasional Bulletin* of board members that are completing terms of office. In each case, with input from our EMS board, we are nominating a replacement as mentioned below. These individuals will be brought before EMS membership for final vote of approval this September.

I am one of the board members whose three-year term of service is completed this September. My view has long been that there is value to this particular position not being held for too long by any one person. You probably know that the ASM presidency rotates every year. I think our EMS three-year term of office has value in creating continuity. However, for a variety of reasons I believe this coming September will be the appropriate time for another person to transition into presidential leadership. We seem to be in a strong position with our stand-alone national conference, with membership, participation, and finances; our bank account is strong. So, from the standpoint of my replacement, this is a good time.

I discussed this with some of EMS's long-term board members, and we identified the ideal profile of my replacement being someone:

I discussed this with some of EMS's long-term board members, and we identified the ideal profile of my replacement being someone 1.) with a track record of support for and leadership in the EMS, 2.) with experience and success organizing and leading conferences, 3.) young enough to help us connect missiology to the next generation, 4.) strategically positioned in the world of missions leadership or missions education, and 5.) with sufficient scholarly success and maturity to provide respected leadership for what is intended as a scholarly organization.

With these criteria, **Ed Smither**'s name came to the fore. He has an excellent track record of EMS leadership, with the Southeast regional meetings flourishing under his direction. As Dean of Intercultural Studies at CIU, and with an impressive publication record, he brings scholarly success and recognized leadership to this position. He shares at the deepest levels EMS theological and missionary commitments. His strengths in relationship to Islam, strengths that I lack, are valuable in a time where many of the most difficult missiological challenges are related to Islam. I've also been impressed by Ed's vision of helping the EMS become a more demographically diverse society—with women, youth, and representatives of various ethnic communities finding the EMS to be a place for them to flourish as missiologists. I have personally observed Ed's energy, grace, diplomacy, social connections, courage, and wisdom in my time serving with him on the EMS board. With the support of the EMS board, his name is being put forward as my replacement, to be confirmed by vote of EMS members at the national meetings in September.

# Parting Words of Outgoing Members of the EMS Leadership Team

**I am grateful for the opportunity** to lead the Southeast region the last seven years, carrying on the work of J.D. Payne, Mike Barnett, and others who went before. I'm thankful for the missiologists in the Southeast who regularly presented their research in our gatherings. What has excited me the most is to see emerging missiologists (graduate students, mission leaders) present papers for the first time at a regional meeting and many of them have continued to pursue missiological scholarship. While I am stepping out of the Southeast role, I will by faith move into the role of EMS president and strive to carry on the legacy of Bob Priest, Enoch Wan, and others. Beginning in September, the Southeast region will be in the capable hands of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary mission professor, Greg Mathias.

*Edward Smither*
Southeast Vice President

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**I am very grateful** for the opportunity to serve as northeast regional VP in the past 6 years. Dwight Baker has been a great mentor to me. Although our region does not have many PhD programs in missiology, many professors of Bible colleges and seminaries offered their support to our regional activities. I have also received support from OMSC and many missions scholars in the region.

Our development of Spanish and Chinese tracks was inspired by an experience I had several years ago in the northcentral regional conference. Recently Alliance Theological Seminary has been actively involved in our conference activities by sending many students and presenters. I'm also very thankful to the support of First Baptist Church of Flushing. They have offered their facilities in New York City for our conferences.

After 6 years of service of a local church pastor, I'm pleased to hand the responsibility to a "professor," Dr. Marcus Dean of Houghton College who has been very supportive throughout these years. I am confident that under his leadership we will continue to grow offering a platform for the scholars and practitioners of the missiological community in the northeast region.

*Tom Sappington*
Dissertation Series Editor

**It has been my joy** to work with all of you over the past few years. I've especially enjoyed working with Enoch Wan both in his role as President and in his role as National Vice President Publications. I've especially appreciated his hard work in figuring out a way to publish the EMS Dissertation Series once William Carey was no longer able to participate in this effort. I know Enoch gave sacrificially of his time and energy in the midst of his many responsibilities so that the Series could continue to provide an opportunity to help scholars become established in their ministry of publishing articles and books related to the field of missiology. Also, special words of thanks are due to Blake Kidney for the significant amount of time he devoted both to developing the new format for the Series and to working through all the technical details of publishing the Series under the EMS name in a print-on-demand format.

I've also appreciated Bob Priest's leadership in recent years. It's been encouraging and exciting to see the growth both in terms of numbers and in the variety of presentations that have been offered at the EMS Annual Conference. I know Bob has given sacrificially of his time and energy to provide this kind of effective leadership.

*Rochelle Scheuermann*
North Central vice President

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**What a joy it has been** over the last few years to work with all of you at the executive level for EMS! I am indebted especially to Steve Strauss (who served before me), Mike Pocock, Mark Young and Enoch Wan as they helped me so much with the continued development of the South Central region. Many others in our region helped in the recruitment, meetings and presentations which made the experience especially rewarding. It was my joy last fall to pass the baton to Robin Harris as she now directs the region as I had to step aside due to family and professional constraints. However, I will continue to serve with joy those who now lead—both at the regional and national levels.

*Alan Mezger*
South Central Vice President

*I*t has been a joy to work with the Rocky Mountain Region, especially when it came to seeing new folks from a broad range of ministries joining our meetings. It has been encouraging to see the Lord helping our EMS chapter develop new contacts from both the academic and practioner worlds. Over the past six years I have seen our meetings go from 18-30 in the beginning to the last three years from 45 to 95 attending. EMS serves in our region to engage both those who would research and write on the scholarly topics but also those that come from missional organizations and individuals who have a heart for serving in various capacities. Thank you for allowing me to serve with such a great team of EMS leaders at the national level. I have learned much and appreciate the high integrity, passion, and vision that has been expressed in our team. I will miss those discussions. Truly "may the Lord's last command, be our first priority!" Thank you Enoch for your friendship and encouragements.

*Dale Wolyniak*
Rocky Mountain Vice President

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*T*he North Central Region really came to be what it is today because of the work of Robert Priest. It was both intimidating and humbling to follow in his steps and serve the region for the last five years. Each year we are blessed with professors and life-long scholars, graduate students, and practitioners attending and participating. We pack our day full, but the level of scholarship, networking, and friendship-building is what makes the day so worth it. It has been an honor to serve this region and do so with the tremendous support of EMS regulars and especially the Intercultural Studies PhD program at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School who regularly partner with us by co-sponsoring the event. While I step away due to increased professional and personal responsibilities, I leave the region in the capable hands of Esther Theonugraha (who has run our college-level Pecha Kucha competition for the last five years). It will be a pleasure to continue participating in and supporting the endeavors of both the North Central Region and the national EMS.

*John Wang*
Northeast Vice President

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*O*ne of the key lessons I have learned in my role as EMS VP of the Canada region since 2011 is the importance of networking and cooperation. I took over from Dr. Allan Effa who was responsible for reviving EMS in Canada and with Dr. Tim Stabell as treasurer gave critical leadership to the initiative. However, we were all frustrated with the lack of continuity and inability to gain momentum because of the need to change venues across our vast land each year.

It wasn't until Dr. Bill Peed at Kingswood University in Sussex, NB offered to host a centre via internet that we had a breakthrough. We now have four centres across Canada holding the annual meeting simultaneously, connected via live streaming. This requires dedicated people in each centre who occasionally meet online to coordinate our efforts. I am very pleased to hand this responsibility on to Dr. Narry Santos in Toronto just after the most successful meeting in Canada so far. Dr. Santos is already showing the kind of initiative, commitment and sensitivity to networking that will ensure growing interest and impact.

*Mark Naylor*
Canada Vice President

# Ministering Cross-Culturally:
## A Model for Effective Personal Relationships

*By Lingenfelter, Sherwood G. and Marvin K. Mayers*
*3rd ed., Baker Academic, 2016*

**Reviewed by Fred Lewis.** *Fred trains missionaries for cross-cultural service at WorldView in Portland, OR.*

I read **Ministering Cross-Culturally** (First Ed.) nearly 30 years ago while serving as a missionary in Africa. Lingenfelter's characterization of cross-cultural ministry as incarnational helped crystalize my thinking, and was formative in my life and ministry. Over the years I've recommended *Ministering Cross-Culturally* many times. Thus I eagerly anticipated reading the Third Edition when I learned a new one was forthcoming. I wound up reading all three editions side-by-side in preparation for this review.

One of the best features of the book remains all the fantastic stories! New in the latest edition are stories of a few STMs (Short Term Missions) that illustrate the experience of
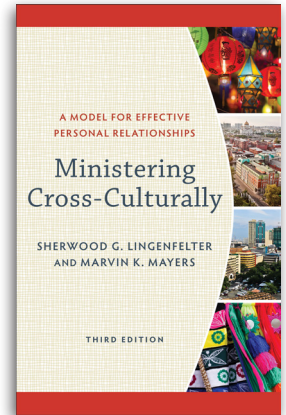
> **ANYONE OF ANY AGE considering cross-cultural** service for the first time, for any length of time would do well to read this book.

coming into contact with cultural differences. When you're not insulated from the life of local people either by choice or circumstances, cultural differences among peoples show up very quickly. Ministering in another culture for Kingdom purposes requires you to pay attention and adapt to those differences. This foundational and far-reaching point is well-illustrated in the Third Edition. Anyone of any age considering cross-cultural service for the first time, for any length of time would do well to read this book.

Pages xii-xiii of the Preface caught me unawares. Lingenfelter backs away from using incarnational as a model for cross-cultural service, citing his interaction with J. Todd Billings as the reason. Soon I read chapter 5 of his Union with Christ and had to conclude he was right: ". . . the incarnation is not an 'on-going process' to be repeated or a 'model' to be copied in Christian ministry" (Billings, 124).

I grew uncomfortable reading about the Model of Basic Values developed by Mayers, because there are better descriptions of cultural values now available. Knowing there are 7 other lists of cultural values, I've backed away from embracing completely any one list or author, feeling that the differences in the lists may reflect the relatively immature state of our knowledge. Yet if the reader pays attention to the sources of the tensions described in chapters 3-8, s/he will be rewarded with valuable insights.

My next point may to some seem trivial. Lingenfelter suggests taking the Values Survey before entering cross-cultural service. I suppose if you're going on a STM, that's all you can do. But based on my own experience, listening to other missionaries, and from readings, I'm convinced no one knows in advance of entering a cross-cultural situation what precisely in another culture will rub you the wrong way. While you're having a negative reaction to a cultural practice, value or belief, reading one or more of chapters 3-8 will give you insight into why you're reacting as you are. It's much easier to identify accurately the real tension points between your home culture and another culture when you're already living in it. This point is quite significant, for not identifying what you're feeling in a cross-cultural setting and why you're feeling that way will drive you and the people around you nuts!

Lastly, Lingenfelter is to be commended for integrating cultural differences and the Bible into one book, and that in only 114 pages! The fact that his integration succeeds is remarkable. *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, Third Ed., remains a very helpful and useful short introduction to cross-cultural living and service.

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cities, particularly in California, Texas, Florida and Georgia (Hartford Institute 2012). Conversely, a fair number of smaller churches, understood as "less than 75" people in average worship attendance, "are found in more rural settings" (Kaylor 2015). Due to these demographic trends, some denominations are pouring "more resources on bigger, urban congregations" (Kaylor 2015).

Consequently, as there is much at stake, those who minister in urban settings can benefit greatly by reading both writers in order to assess their own biases so as to temper and realign their positions for more effective ministry. Deep introspection can lead to robust mission.

Here's the crux of the matter: do we care enough to do the hard work of personal, contextual, theological and missiological reflection?

I freely confess I struggle to keep a Christ-like posture toward my current city of Newport, Rhode Island. Every day I must decide whether I will buy into the glamorous veneer of its gilded-age mansions, celebrity sightings and fine dining, or dig deeper in order to see, understand and minister to the poverty, discord and brokenness afflicting our many inhabitants. My view of my adopted city will undoubtedly determine my steps.

### Endnotes

1. Keller confesses his urban missiology was shaped by his mentor Harvie Conn: "I would never, ever have been open to the idea of church planting in New York City if it were not for the books and example of Harvie Conn." See Gornik 2011, 215.

2. See "The 2012 Leadership Book Awards" 2013, 72-73; and Pickett 2013, 64, 98.

3. I am indebted to Dr. John Wang for steering me in this direction.

4. Ellul was certainly skeptical of our modern infatuation with technology and technique, as we see in his highly regarded The Technological Society. The machines of war wreaked tremendous havoc.

5. Hunter provides concrete "vignettes" on pages 266-269. He serves as the Executive Director, Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, which oversees The Thriving Cities Project (www.iasc-culture.org/research_thriving_cities.php).

6. I am thinking here of Sunquist (2013, 364) and Cook (2015).

7. According to Stephen T. Um and Justin Buzzard, masses are flooding into the world's cities, by some estimates, "nearly 5.5 million people a month, or a new San Francisco Bay Area being created every 30 days."

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opportunities for the seed of the gospel to bring transformation and hope beyond the boundaries of nation-states. More than anything else, ordinary Christians must rediscover what it is to love our culturally different neighbors as ourselves and liberally sow the seed of the gospel, knowing that the winds of globalization could carry this precious seed even to the ends of the earth.

## Endnotes

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