

The **New Urban World** *Journal*

EDITION FIVE NOVEMBER 2014

ISSN 2201-0203

In this issue:

**THE WHOLE CHURCH ON A
WHOLE MISSION TO THE
WHOLE WORLD**

– John Perkins

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WAR ON POVERTY BY
ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH**

– Robert C. Linthicum

**BLESSED ARE THE POOR
FOR THEIRS IS THE
KINGDOM**

– Bob Lupton

**THE LEGACY OF HARVIE
MAITLAND CONN**

**CITY FOCUS: BUENOS
AIRES, ARGENTINA**

– Manuel Sosa

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and Regular Columns.*

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The New Urban World *Journal*



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November 2014 Volume 3:2

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The journal is available to purchase through online book stores OR available for FREE download as PDF from <http://www.newurbanworld.org>

ISUM and NUW (ISSN 2201-0203) were established in 2012, in Klong Toey, Bangkok, Thailand, by the International Society for Urban Mission.

The Journal is published semi-annually.

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Print ISBN: 978-0-9923941-4-1

eBook ISBN: 978-0-9923941-5-8

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EDITORIAL

By Joel David Ickes

This November issue of *New Urban World* was highly experimental. We brought together another journal, *A Journal of Urban Mission*, to discern whether a merger would be in the best interests of the various parties and urban ministry itself. This current issue draws on multiple voices from around the world. These voices were brought together through the help of such a diverse team of editors. However, after discernment and practical consideration, we had to decide against the merger. As an editor and student, I grieve not, for this was a truly rewarding experience working with skilled scholar-practitioners of urban ministry. They have fueled my passion for urban mission and for the future direction of *New Urban World*.

Additionally, the previous editorial team shifted. Stephen Burris and Kendi Howells Douglas have both stepped down from their editing positions. We are grateful for the initiative and energy Mr. Burris provided for the journal. He has moved forward with new and exciting projects, and we wish him well. Dr. Howells Douglas, a good friend and mentor of mine, will continue her passion of teaching undergraduates about the mission of God in the city. Pastor and editor Darren Cronshaw will take over in Burris's place as Senior Editor at this time. I am pleased to continue as Managing Editor, just as Les Colston and Aaron R. Woods will continue in their positions as Graphic Designer and Media Review Editor (respectively). Ash Barker offers more detail on these updates in the ISUM update in the article

Though there are many changes, we trust that God is leading the International Society for Urban Mission and its journal in a direction that will help continue ushering the kingdom of God—and we trust that God will help us through this difficult transition. We look forward with anticipation as our team develops and as we plan future issues of *New Urban World*.

As for this particular issue, we gratefully received a poignant essay from Dr. Robert Lupton, a seasoned practitioner of urban mission in Atlanta, Georgia, and an author of standard texts addressing poverty and ministry, including *Theirs is the Kingdom: Celebrating the Gospel in Urban America*, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)*, and *Renewing the City: Reflections on Community Development and Urban Renewal*. It is an honor to have this special individual write for us.

Following a stunning presentation on discipleship at the ISUM Summit in Kuala Lumpur, we asked Dr. John Perkins for permission to publish his transcript as a feature article. Like Lupton, it is also a deep honor for us to print the words of Perkins on the pages of our journal. We have were gifted with an article by the reputable Robert Linthicum. Our guest editors included some of urban mission's finest, Manuel Ortiz and Susan Baker.



Joel David Ickes studies missiology at the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, IN) and urban ministry at the Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education (Chicago, IL). He serves as an editor for *New Urban World* and ISUM Publications. His interests include youth ministry, house churches, hospitality, and missional atonement.



AN ISUM UPDATE

Five Important Transitions and Announcements

The International Society for Urban Mission (ISUM) has moved into a season of important transitions. We value your prayers during this time. Formed by an international group of urban mission activists, thinkers and leaders in Klong Toey slum in January 2012, ISUM is moving from a pioneering phase into a growth and sustainability phase. Our journal *New Urban World*, Summits, book *Seeking Urban Shalom*, and web presence have so far helped to bring diverse urban Christian leaders together to better promote and seek shalom in the world's cities. Five important changes are happening as we seek to further God's impact through us.

1. In December 2014, ISUM will become an expression of Micah (the new exciting entity comprising of Micah Network and Micah Challenge) [micahnetwork.org] with a special focus on seeking shalom in cities with urban poverty. Micah Network is a global network for integral mission with 700 member organisations, churches and leaders in 88 countries. Micah Challenge is a global coalition of Christians holding governments to account for their pledge to halve extreme poverty by 2015. Our new collaboration will give ISUM a more stable organisational platform and greater reach with urban leaders in Majority World cities. ISUM is grateful for Urban Neighbours Of Hope's willingness to host ISUM in its first phase of our organisational life and looks forward to working as part of this global partnership. The next ISUM Summit will be imbedded as a track within the Micah Global Consultation in Lima, Peru, from September 14 to 18, 2015.

2. ISUM's New Urban World journal has been amplifying voices, views and insights for and from urban Christians leaders around the world for two years. We are grateful for the outstanding work of Stephen Burris as ISUM's Editor and Dr. Kendi Howells Douglas as Associate Editor in helping make this dream happen. It is therefore with sadness that ISUM has accepted Mr. Burris' and Dr. Howells Douglas's resignations. The November edition of New Urban World will be their last. Mr. Burris has fulfilled his commitment to lead four editions, as the November edition will be the fifth edition. Dr. Howells Douglas has a full workload at Great Lakes Christian College. On behalf of ISUM, we want to thank Stephen and Kendi for their hard work and are especially appreciative of their instrumental role in enabling urban voices to be heard through *New Urban World* journal.

3. We are pleased to announce that Associate Professor Darren Cronshaw has been appointed as the new Senior Editor of *New Urban World* journal and ISUM Publishing. Professor Cronshaw was the editor of ISUM's first book "Seeking Urban Shalom" [amazon.com/Seeking-Urban-Shalom-Integral-mission/dp/0992394104/ref=tmm_pap_title_0]. He is an urban missiologist, writer and pastor based in Melbourne, Australia, and previously was Editor-in-Chief of UNOH Publications. Joel David Ickes will continue as Managing Editor of the journal and there will be a number of regional Associate Editors from different parts of the world who will recruit contributors and promote the journal in their region. You can now download free past editions on PDFs of *New Urban World* and you can order both Kindle and print versions of *New Urban World* journal [newurbanworld.org/publications]. If you are interested in joining the ISUM Publications team or contributing to future editions of the journal, contact Darren [pastor@auburn.org.au] or Joel [jdickes@ambs.edu].

4. We are also pleased to announce that Dr. Graham Hill has taken on the role of Editor for the ISUM book *Signs of Hope in the City*. This book will include the keynote addresses and working group papers generated from the ISUM Summit 2014 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It will include chapters from Dr. Jayakumar Christian, Dr. John Perkins, Rene August, Wong Young Soon, and Seeta Gurung. You can view the

ISUM keynote talks here [youtube.com/channel/UCdWXJh5Jw4oNBcc0JRLRcZw]. The book is expected to release in March 2015.

5. As one of the founders of ISUM, my family and I are also personally in a transition season. We moved to Birmingham, United Kingdom, in November 2014. I lived in Klong Toey slum in Bangkok, Thailand for 12 years, where I also wrote my PhD on the rise of slums that became the book *Slum Life Rising*. This book was a catalyst for forming ISUM. My family and I have enjoyed the last six months on furlough in my native Melbourne where we started the community I led, Urban Neighbours Of Hope (UNOH), in 1993. Having left UNOH now, I will again be immersed in an urban poverty context, this time in Winson Green, Birmingham, joining the faculty at Springdale College where I will speak, write, teach, coach, and mobilise urban leaders more widely for ISUM and Micah. I look forward to continue leading ISUM as part of Micah to make an even deeper impact on our new urban world as our future unfolds.

We would appreciate all your prayers as these crucial changes take place.

If you would like to join the ISUM conversations, see our ISUM Facebook page or visit our website www.newurbanworld.org.

Dr. Ash Barker

ISUM Convener and Director

THE WHOLE CHURCH ON A WHOLE MISSION TO THE WHOLE WORLD

By John Perkins

Transcribed by Sarah Strip

I am really excited to be speaking here today. I have spent my last 57 years becoming a Christian. I grew up with a non-Christian background in Mississippi and dropped out of school somewhere between the third and fifth grade and never went back. I did not see much Christianity and knew little about it because my family did not participate often in church. I was 27 years old when I came to Christ. Then I began to understand Christianity more. The reality was that in my community Christianity had become a therapeutic religious system that had very little to do with the social and economic conditions of the people. African Americans adjusted themselves to the ever-present racial oppression and responded with a religion that focused on things like healing people so that they could function within the system.

So I came to faith in that context. I began to read the Bible and study it. I was trying to learn about Christianity and how it works through the New Testament and what the early church was like. I found that I had to learn all over what I had been taught about Christianity growing up. During this time of learning, I went back to Mississippi from California where I had moved. While I was trying to express to our people this newfound faith, all kinds of opportunities opened up for me to share the gospel. I had an area that circles about one hundred miles, and I got to go into the public schools. I ended up with 15 high schools and elementary schools and two junior colleges that I visited on a monthly basis. In that process, I became a teacher, teaching the Word of God. Then I worked to establish the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) and have become a big part of that movement in America and the rest of the world.

The CCDA has put together what we have come to call *holistic* Christian community development. We define that as the whole church taking on the whole gospel. We think in terms of the universality of the church to understand all of the vision within it. We are taking the whole church on a whole mission to the whole world. It seems to me that this mission fits what Jesus did when he was incarnated God here on earth. We believe that is what he did after his death and resurrection. Jesus sent the disciples out into the world by saying something very unique to them. He said, “Go into all the world and very carefully disciple the nations and teach them to observe the life of Christ and how he lived.”¹ As he was, so we are to be in the world. We see this in all four Gospels, and Luke continued to tell this story in Acts by looking at the church as it began to emerge.

While I’m excited about all the new church planting, particularly in my country, but also around the world, the big excitement is that these church plants are confronting the great evil, the evil of enslavement and oppression. Confronting the great evil is what I call justice. I see justice as a management and stewardship issue. It is really about us understanding who owns the earth. In the biblical account, the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof and all that dwells therein. You cannot understand justice apart from being a good steward. It seems like that is really what it is about. If you come at justice as just a social issue, you miss the full understanding. Another social issue is not radical enough in our society, so justice must include stewardship. If you follow Jesus’ teaching here on earth, he talked of God as the creator and that we have responsibility over that creation. The poor are those who do not have open access to the land and the management of it. Jesus challenges this system in his parables in terms of stewardship when he said, “I have come that you might have life, and life more abundantly.”²

We should not over-embrace the world’s political, social, and economic structures and deify them in life. In our society we have deified capitalism instead of using a prophetic voice within it or called it to be accountable. But the church is to be God’s prophetic people. They are to be the children of God and the continuation of the

1 Matthew 28:19.

2 John 10:10.

incarnated Christ on earth. The idea is that God, through the Spirit, is living out that life in us, and we are to be that prophetic people. We are to be a witness to society and a witness of peace within the church. We are to accept that suffering and pain that will come, but not stop our mission. Rather we are to go forth in it. Since the church was established on the rock so that the gates of hell cannot overcome it, the church is to be this witness and force in the world and follow Christ's teachings.

The Call to Discipleship

What I now see as the weakness of the church is the life of discipleship. We are making people Christians before we disciple them. The church at Ephesus is the exemplary church in terms of discipleship based on the teachings of Paul. I think we all accept that our teachings on discipleship come from Paul (and a little also from Peter and John), but what we have to worry about in the church is the apostasy and the turning away because of false teachers in the church. For example, I think we have a very serious problem in the church with personality cults. Instead of praising God for his redemptive work and what he can work out through us, we have twisted Christianity into a financial prosperity church, which is not being challenged. The issue is how do we put Jesus back into the center of the church as the real Shepherd of the flock and the sheep? Where Jesus is the leader and the pastors are the under-shepherds, who are careful not to make the church just their own? I see that as a real weakness, and I see that weakness spreading throughout the world.

As I get information from the field about these glowing churches in Africa and other parts of the world, it grieves me that we are not challenging the prosperity gospel with discipleship and teachings in the Word of God. We need to choose Paul's teachings in Ephesus, including his warning to the church when he was on his way to Jerusalem. This is a big warning, and it is applied to all the teachings of the church as they relate to false teachers and personality cults that would like to replace Christ and become heads of churches. I think this is very, very serious because we have a lot of churches not demonstrating the power of discipleship as they should be.

This is the reason why I am so committed to the multiracial church because racism, bigotry, and tribalism are really just economic exploitation at the heart of them. Now every time we turn around the church is exploiting the poor people, and they are not being taught. I am in some ways an example of that. I think it is great to know a lot about theology, I believe that. People all over are establishing centers at colleges and universities in my name and giving scholarships and things like that. But within the church I think that the Spirit of God can use the feeblest people, and I see that in life too. I go to jails and mental institutions and many times I can find people there who have a greater understanding of the biblical texts than the theologians in the schools. I believe that the Holy Spirit is the main teacher of the Word of God. Jesus taught that “when the Holy Spirit comes, he will lead us and guide us into church and will guide us to the things to come.”³ Therefore, churches have the responsibility to disciple people and teach them the Word of God. I believe that we are falling down on making that discipleship happen.

The principles that undergird this approach to discipleship have come out of our struggle as we have read the Word of God and tried to put together a philosophy of development that included a holistic approach to humanity’s problems. The Word of God is central because it is when people are obedient to the Word of God that the power of God is released in people’s lives. Somewhere between hearing God’s voice and believing it, faith is born. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God with the idea of obeying it. As we try to share in this holistic, social, economic work of the church, the principle is that we are actively doing social projects for the public good, such as providing healthcare and meeting the needs of the people and the church. We are at the very least reflecting the Kingdom of God that is coming.

We believe that the church has to be a community of alternative, that is, an alternative to the world’s systems that have fallen and an alternative people here on earth. Of course, the greatest miracle of all that we should be part of is breaking down the racial and cultural barriers in society instead of going around them. God’s radical love must

3 Acts 1:8.

fuel us, and we must find ways to express that love in action. I hear this call to love when Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God to bring salvation.”⁴ I think at times the church has minimized the power of the gospel and has accommodated heresy within the church. This destroys the power of the gospel. We need to nurture people in this holistic truth that Jesus Christ is absolutely our Shepherd. I am afraid of these personality cults because I am afraid they are not getting at the deep issues, but are looking at success based on materialism.

Today many Christians do not know how to read the Bible with enough depth. As a result, we have created a long history of disobeying the central truth of the Word of God, and we are not seeing its power as present in our society. As the church we are losing our first love. Yes, there was good fellowship last night, and I felt joy being a part of the Malaysian people. I know in most places people enjoy us Americans singing and our dancing, and those are wonderful things. But all cultures are fallen, and all cultures need to be redeemed. We too easily forget to depend on each other even as we bring people together. We leave them in their little cultural villages and behavior without challenging them, and if we are not careful, we start to deify a culture instead of challenging a fallen society. The key of love is that it is stronger than racism and bigotry, for the world will know we are Christians by our love.

Discipleship is a journey. In this holistic approach we find three roads of a well-disciplined life: the Damascus Road, the Emmaus Road, and the Jericho Road. These are images to show us what it would look like to be an effective, New Testament-like disciple. These three roads are a journey, the pilgrim’s progress. We are on our way somewhere, and all of the tribes are there, but we are keeping our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

The Damascus Road

The first road is the Damascus Road. It gives us a picture of an evil person made good. You all know the story of the apostle Paul. He was an intellectual, a genius. The Christians were witnessing in Jerusalem; they were living in community and turning

4 Romans 1:16.

the city upside down. At Pentecost there were people from every language under heaven. That is important for challenging our thinking when we accommodate racism or tribalism because at Pentecost we see a miracle that is the radical love that can burn through the racial and cultural barriers. Jesus demonstrated that in his own life and ministry in the villages. In a word, the church has become too easy because we have benefited from the exploitation of others. Life becomes very cheap.

But the first road is the road of conversion, of becoming a Christian, being born again. You can see this in the story where Esau and Jacob were fighting over the birthright. Eventually there came a time when Jacob was reborn from above. You can see this in Jesus' talk with Nicodemus. Nicodemus was the great leader of Israel and an educator and historian. But when he was confronted with Jesus, Jesus told him, "You must be born again."⁵ Nicodemus was confused, but Jesus told him that even though he was a great teacher, he did not recognize that Jacob had to become Israel and when he became Israel he was born again, born into the Kingdom of God. Jacob came to the end of his own trickery and at the end of his own trickery he was born again, and then out of that came that relationship with his brother.

Conversion is not a human effort. People are not born again because we make it happen for them. No one comes to God unless God himself draws that person. Salvation is absolutely by grace. Grace is all of the attributes of God towards humankind in redemption. All of those great principles are put together, and they are called grace. God uses grace to bring us to himself as people obey and teach the Word of God. The Word of God is God's creative power released in the world. The world is created by him, and by faith we understand the world is held together by the Word of God. So the ability to teach and disciple people is what we equip people with when we send them into the world. I can't overemphasize that.

We see this first road lived out in this mean apostle. He persecuted the church. He participated in killing Stephen, and it filled him with such anger (and joy really) because the message Stephen preached. Stephen's message was one of the most intelligent,

5 John 3:3.

historical messages in the New Testament. You see, Stephen's message confronted Paul's arrogance. Paul believed that he had learned from the best teachers, and so he killed Stephen. Then Paul went to the high priest and got letters to arrest even more followers of Christ. Paul knew about the Christians because he heard they were turning the world upside down with their love for each other and their teachings about Jesus Christ and the Word of God.

After the stoning of Stephen, Paul ended up on the Damascus Road where he met the Savior. God spoke to Paul. Paul heard the voice, yes; but more importantly, he believed and came to know with certainty that the voice was the voice of God. On the Damascus Road the apostle was handcuffed, or we could say, embraced by God's love. When he was struck down, he heard Jesus say, "Saul, Saul, why are you so mean? Why are you persecuting me?"⁶ In an angry outburst, Saul said, "Who are you?" The voice said, "I am Jesus." In this encounter the apostle was apprehended by God's love, and he wanted to be apprehended again and feel the squeeze of love that he first felt on the Damascus Road. Then he cried out and heard the voice and believed. He asked, "Lord, what is it you would have me do?"⁷ The voice spoke through Ananias, "I have called you to send you far away to the Gentiles to have you appear before kings, and judges, and governors of the world to turn people from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to the power of God."⁸ At the end of his ministry, Paul testified, "I was not disobedient to that heavenly vision."⁹

So the first road is conversion where you come to know Jesus Christ. You confess your sins, and turn from your sins. For three days after encountering God's voice, Paul confessed his sin. Ananias was involved in this process so that Paul would not be a cult leader. All disciples of Jesus Christ need others involved in their lives. You need people to disciple you so that you can live a life of discipleship. We really cannot do it alone; we

6 Acts 9:4.

7 Acts 9:6.

8 Acts 9:15.

9 Acts 26:19.

need the small groups in our churches; we need the personal relationships we have with each other. That helps us with some sense of humility. The church should be a place that together equips the saints for the work of the ministry.

When we deeply, radically love each other and care for each other, we can confess our sins to one another, which is a part of conversion. It is there we discover we are blind like Paul on the Damascus Road. When Paul met up with Ananias, his eyes were opened to a vision from God. It is important to follow that vision: God calls us, he gifts us, and he gives us skill. We need to seek that vision, learn our gift, and serve Christ in unity. The gifts ought to be used in ministry of the church. People say to me that they are discovering their gifts for their own personal ministry. But I teach them that their gifts are supposed to be used and exercised within the body of Christ. Gifts are for the nurturing of the saints first and foremost, so that we need each other. The body needs to commission us to go out and be an extension of God's grace and love as we ordain people. Then the church needs to send them forth, so that there is a sense of responsibility and you are not on your own.

The Emmaus Road

The second road is the Emmaus Road. The Emmaus Road is living the resurrected life. Christ is living his life through us. The Christian life is the out-living of the in-living Christ. Prayer is listening, so that Jesus the Good Shepherd can lead us and guide us. Oh yes, God tells us to talk to him and to call on him. God already knows everything we tell him, but we need to affirm that with our own lives and words. We have to confess with our mouth to make a promise to God, and make a promise to people around us. It is important to live in that promise and be faithful in light of that promise that God has made to us.

On the Emmaus Road are Christ and the resurrection. As the men were going back home, they discovered that Jesus was walking with them. That is an experience that I love. God needs to walk with us and talk with us, and the big thing is that he needs to tell us that we belong to him. Out of that we have the joy of the Christian life. It should

be joyful that God has enlisted us to be involved in his redemptive plan. That should be enough. That should be enough for our pride that this God of heaven, the God that said let there be light, has shined light into our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the love of God as we follow the Great Shepherd of the sheep. So the Emmaus Road is the road of discipleship.

The Jericho Road

The last road is the Jericho Road. These roads ought to be lived together at the same time. It is not that we perfect one and then the next. We are perfecting them all as we obey. As soon as we are converted we should be telling someone else the gospel. So the Jericho Road is the road of service. The road of rescuing the perishing, caring for the dying, snatching them from bondage to sin. It is the Jericho Road that goes across racial barriers. That is the great truth, the great miracle. I cannot get over it, and I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power to bring Jews and Gentiles together in one body for in Christ for there is no Jew or Gentile, slave or free, but we are one in Jesus Christ. That is the beauty and the miracle of miracles when God brings humanity into relationship with himself and in relationship with others.

There is great joy when we are able to experience the overcoming of these barriers. The Jericho Road is what happens when there is radical love that is turned into compassion. Our God had so much compassion that he put himself in the condition of human beings. In the story of the Good Samaritan, which took place on the Jericho Road, the religious teachers were in a hurry as they had some other things they thought were more important than compassion, more important than life. A man was dying and in pain, groaning, and they pretended that they did not hear him because they had other issues. So they left him in the ditch. But the Jericho Road, the holistic gospel, is caring for the whole need of broken people, as the Good Samaritan did. If you are compassionate, then you are compelled to reach out in love. Love is giving; it is the greatest gift we have.

A Warning and an Encouragement

I think that God has brought us together. I think we are now at a crucial place in the world. We face this discipleship challenge to be God's people and expect a miracle. We expect the sign, and, yes, the problem may be too big for us, but that is when God provides miracles; miracles that his gospel might go forth in the world and that people might know that he is alive. The gospel is that power if it is shared without compromising it in a way that makes it lose its power. We must not become the church of Laodicea, so compromised because the Christians thought they were rich and in need of nothing. They were doing religion, but they did not know their own misery and poverty. That is my warning and also my encouragement. I think we are at a unique time. I know in my country I am seeing a new generation of people who are beginning to see diversity and difference as a value, as enrichments to their lives. I felt the same about the Malaysian people last night in the experience we had together, and I will leave with that experience as a true enrichment to my life.

Let us pray:

Father thank you for this time. Thank you for what you are doing, Lord. Thank you for these church planters that are going into these countries and finding ways to express your love and finding ways to love the policemen and officials. They are finding ways to express that love, that radical love that burns through these racial and cultural barriers and that reconciles your people to each other. Oh Lord, bless us and guide us. We ask this in your name. Amen.



Dr. John Perkins is president of the John and Vera Mae Perkins Foundation of Jackson, Mississippi. He is one of the leading evangelical voices to come out of the United States Civil Rights Movement. He is also an internationally known author, speaker, and teacher on issues of racial reconciliation and Christian community development. He is the author of nine books, including *A Quiet Revolution*, *Let Justice Roll Down*, *With Justice For All*, *Beyond Charity*, *He's My Brother*, *Resurrecting Hope*, and *A Time to Heal*. He has written numerous chapters in other books.

Response to John Perkins

THE WHOLE CHURCH ON A WHOLE MISSION TO THE WHOLE WORLD

By Stephen Burris

John Perkins calls us back to the urgency of discipleship. As disciples of Jesus we must be concerned about what he was concerned about. This includes care for the poor, enslaved, oppressed, and exploited. It goes further in calling disciples to work for justice as a management and stewardship issue. Perkins hits the nail on the head when he says, “You cannot understand justice apart from being a good steward. As Christian disciples we have a stewardship obligation.” When John the Baptist wanted assurance that Jesus was the Messiah he sent his followers to Jesus to ask, “are you the Messiah or should we look for another?” Jesus replied in Matt 11, “Go back and tell John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor (Matt 11:4, 5, NRSV). This is a restatement of Jesus’ words at the beginning of his ministry: “The spirit of The Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18, 19, NRSV). This stream is consistent throughout the ministry of not only Jesus but of the early church, not least is Acts 2:42 and Acts 4:32-37 where the Jesus followers shared their possessions to meet the needs of fellow believers. When we do this we are working toward what Perkins is challenging us to do: “As we try to share in this holistic, social, economic work of the church, the principle is that we actively doing social projects for the public good, such as providing healthcare and meeting the needs of the people and the church. We are at the very least reflecting the Kingdom of God that is coming.”

Our urban ministry must also reflecting this holistic emphasis. The local context will guide us as to what needs must be addressed first, but our goal is to make disciples as the ultimate goal of all that we do. Drawing on the twenty-third Psalm, Perkins challenges us, “We need to nurture people in this holistic truth that Jesus Christ is absolutely our Shepherd.” The fundamental message of that Psalm is that The Lord is my Shepherd, I have everything I need. (Psalm 23:1, NCV). There appears to be at least two emphases here. First, the needs of God’s people are to be met, and, second, we are to be content with what we have as it is sufficient. As disciples of the Messiah, we should work toward both emphases. The needs of those we touch must be met and that is what Jesus emphasized in Luke 4 and restated in Matt 11. In a world, especially the Western world, that is concerned with getting more and more of the earth’s resources, often at the expense of those who are powerless and in need, the church must model Jesus’ priority. Perkins is correct: this is a management and stewardship issue. As Christians called to make disciples of all nations, we must work justice, peace, and mercy.



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THE LEAST OF THESE: THE WAR ON POVERTY BY ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

By Robert C. Linthicum

“As you have done it to one of the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you have done it to me” (Mt 25:40). To hear the phrase, “the least of these” is automatically to be drawn to this well-known statement by Jesus of Nazareth. But what was Jesus actually talking about? The “least of these” (Mt 25:31-46) or the “little ones” (Lk 17:2) were colloquial names for one of the three classes of Israelite society at the time of Jesus. Those three classes were the elite, the peasants, and the expendables.¹

How Roman Israel Was Organized

The “elephant” in every Jewish room at the time of Jesus was the Roman Empire. The reality of first century Israel was that it was under the political and economic dominance of Rome. But the Roman Empire was not a monolith. Rome essentially governed around the principle of subsidiary, that is, that decisions need to be made at the lowest possible level. Whenever possible, Rome governed through devolving authority to the local, even non-Roman leadership, whether it was a puppet king, priests, or locally selected leadership.

The Elite. The Jewish religious system was not solely a religious institution. It had been granted by Rome the responsibility to govern the nation. That religious community was to share that responsibility in Judea with the Roman procurator and in Galilee with the Herodian nobility. But their primary role was to be the on-the-ground political operatives of Israel, controlling the legislative and judicial systems of Israel, maintaining peace and administering justice. They were to exercise this control through the religious vehicles of synagogue, the Temple, and the Mosaic Law. These elite of religious leaders, Herodian nobility, and landowners made up only two percent

¹ Bruner, F. Dale, *The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 574-578; Green, Joel B., *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 266-267; Myers, Ched, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1988), 47-58.

of the population, but they owned around 60 to 70 percent of the wealth.

The Peasants. Between 83 and 93 percent of the people were peasants according to whether economic times were good or bad. The peasants were made up primarily of farmers like Peter and Andrew, who were “farmers of the sea” and artisans like Jesus, who worked as a carpenter. The peasants perennially lived on the edge of economic disaster. Farmers, for example, did not own the land they farmed but rented it from landowners. The farmers lived in nearby towns, not on the land, and typically 50 percent of their harvest would be paid to the landowner, 25 percent would be paid in taxes to the Herodian nobility and to Rome, 10 percent went to the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, and three percent would go to their village. Thus the typical Israelite farmer realized only about 12 percent of his harvest as both his family’s annual income *and* the monies to purchase next year’s seed.

The Expendables. Every peasant family lived in fear that one day they would slip over the edge into economic disaster and become one of the expendables or “the least of these.” The “least of these” of Israelite society included the beggars, the widows and orphans, grave-diggers, the unclean, and shepherds. The ranks of the “least of these” would be made up from five percent of the population (if times were good) to 15 percent (if times were bad). To have fallen into the expendable class meant that you were without predictable income, were dependent upon the generosity of the peasants (or, rarely, the elite), and were facing almost certain starvation and death.² Most of the

2 Some of the most seminal research of the historical context of Israel and other agrarian cultures at the time of Jesus are developed in the following books: Walter Bruggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); Thomas F. Carney, *The Shape of the Past: Models and Antiquity* (Lawrence, KS: Coronado, 1975); Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, *The Political Systems of Empires* (New York: Free Press, 1963); S.N. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); William R. II Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster John Know, 1994); John Kautsky, *The Politics of Aristocratic Empires* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1990); Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966); G.E. Lenski, and Jean Lenski, *Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982); Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981); Bruce Malina, and Richard Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke’s Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); Jacob Neusner et al., *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988); André Trocmé, *Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998); Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Doubleday, 1998).

people Jesus healed were the “least of these.”³

The continually harsh criticism that Jesus made of the elite eventually led to his alienation from them and to the crucifixion. The elite included the Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, and Herodians. They interpreted the Law in ways that would strengthen their economic and political power while avoiding the Law’s social expectations toward the peasants and the “least of these.” For example, the elite taught the importance of each Israelite keeping Jubilee. The Law presented four stipulations of Jubilee: 1) the land to lie fallow; 2) all debts cancelled; 3) all Hebrew slaves set free, and 4) all land returned to the ancestral owner’s family (Lev 25:8-55). But Israel’s religious leaders taught that maintaining Jubilee was solely to allow the land to lay fallow, which would hurt only the peasants and forcing many of them into “the least of these” class. No wonder Jesus called them “hypocrites,” “blind guides,” and “brood of vipers” (Mt 23)!

Of Sheep and Goats

Arguably, the most prominent use that Jesus made of the phrase “the least of these” was in his Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Mt 25:31-46). This is the final teaching that Jesus presents in the Gospel of Matthew regarding what he expects out of God’s people, wherever they may be in the world and however they might manifest themselves. Jesus taught about the Son of Man sitting upon his throne, ready to judge the nations which are gathered before him. The Son of Man separates the nations from one another, indicating that those on his right hand (the preferred side) are the “sheep” and those on his left the “goats.” The Son of Man (Jesus) commends the sheep for caring for him. They respond with incredulity, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” The Son of Man answers them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers or sisters, you did it to me” (Mt 25:34-40).

3 Taken from Robert Linthicum, *Building A People of Power: Equipping Churches to Transform Their Communities* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Press/World Vision Press, 2006), 33-35.

There are three primary ways of interpreting this parable. All of these interpretations are legitimate. Each interpretation nuances the parable in a way that, all considered together, creates a world-enveloping message. Each, and then all, considered together enables us to understand what Jesus expects out of God's people.

The first interpretation is an *internal insight*. That is, a particular community of God's people is ultimately judged by their actions toward those in their midst who are most hurting. The phrase from the parable that enables this interpretation is the key phrase, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these *who are my brothers and sisters*, you did it to me" (v. 40, and conversely, v. 45). This interpretation is centered on Jesus' words, "who are 'my brothers'" ('and sisters,' is implied). What Jesus was saying was that the way to understand whether a particular manifestation of the people of God is authentic is to ask how they treat the expendables in their village. This was Jesus' definition of authentic faith (see Mic 6:8).

The second interpretation concentrates upon the same statement, but it changes somewhat its focus. Rather than concentrating upon "the least of these *my brothers and sisters*," this interpretation places its emphasis upon "*the least of these*." This interpretation recognizes an inherent limitation in the first interpretation and seeks to correct it. The danger of the first interpretation is that, while true, it can lead to parochialism. One could read this parable in a way that would allow it to declare that the mark of the authentic congregation was whether it cared for the expendables in its own synagogue only.

But Jesus wasn't thinking in terms of simply the expendables who are faithful participants in the life of a given congregation. By definition the village synagogue was the synagogue for all the people in the community, not just those who were faithful in their attendance and participation. Therefore they should be concerned for all the expendables who might move through the life of that village, such as residents of the village who have fallen on hard times, itinerating beggars who might come from another village or area, and even Gentiles who might be hurting.

The final test of the authenticity of the people of God is their action toward all the

expendables in the world, both near and far. God's people exist for "the least of these." If a people are truly to be honoring to God, then they will not worship God by keeping all the minutia of the Law as did the Pharisees or observe all the proper liturgies and rituals of worship as did the priests and Sadducees. Rather, the authentic worship of God will be the service of humanity. The portion of humanity upon whom the authentic people of God should be centered are the expendables of that society: the poor, the powerless, the marginalized, the rejected, and the abandoned.

The third interpretation. This is the most powerful, and even mind-boggling, interpretation. This is the interpretation that most conforms and confirms the primary emphasis that moves throughout the entirety of the Gospel of Matthew. This interpretation centers upon the judgment given upon those identified as "sheep" and "goats." Our automatic assumption is that the sheep and goats are people. But take a careful look at the text. It begins, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. And all the *nations* will be gathered before him, and he will separate *them* one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (vv. 31-32).

All will be judged! All individuals, all churches, all mosques, all synagogues, all temples, all villages and cities, all economies, all nations: everything and everyone will ultimately be judged by God! This includes Christians as well as non-Christians, Jews as well as non-Jews. The Greek words used here, *panta ta ethne*, which means "all the nations" can be translated no other way. Absolutely everybody and everything will someday be judged by God.⁴

Every nation will be judged by God as to how it treats its poor! The military might of a nation means nothing to God. The economic prowess of a nation is given to it by God only to proactively seek the removal of its people's poverty and the poverty of the world. God does not bless the nation whose politicians most talk about God or their religious faith. God could care less whether that nation and its politicians conform to that nation's constitution! The only real question put to *every* nation is "What have you done with your poor?"

4 Bruner, Dale F., *The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 565-567.

What is true of nations is true of any group within that nation, whether Christian or not. Every unit of government, every city and village, every business and industry, every club, school or religious institution and, ultimately, every individual is measured by the same criteria. What have you done with “the least of these, your brothers and sisters?” That is the great judgment God brings upon all the peoples of the earth. This is the primary message of Jesus’ Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. This is Jesus’ call to us!

Now if it is true that the only sign of a nation’s faithfulness and obedience to God is how intentionally they have organized their life together to eliminate poverty, then the inevitable questions that must be asked are “How did Israel do? How does the church do? How did Israel organize its life together to eliminate poverty? How did the earliest church also organize its life to defend the expendable people of its society?”

The World As God Intended

The corporate life of any social unit, whether it is the family, a church, an institution, a city or nation, is to understand it as three intertwined and integrated systems. If we are to perceive the depth of the social analysis that in the Scripture as it describes the world as God intended it to be and the world as it actually is, we need to first understand clearly what systems are and how they act. Only as we do so can we appreciate the depth of the analysis that occurs in both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

The *political system* is that system by which society makes decisions about its common life. Politics is simply the agreed-upon means by which society orders its life through the making of public and private decisions. The essential question of the political system is “How do we as a people determine to live together?”

The *economic system* is that agreed upon means by which that society’s goods and services are generated and distributed. For all of its complexity at its heart, economics has to do with the way society agrees to generate and apportion wealth. The essential question of the economic system is, “How do we as a people choose to create and distribute our wealth?”

The *religious system* is a little more complex, not because the system is complex, but because of the predetermined meanings we bring to the word “religion.” The Latin root for the English word “religion” simply means “that which fences about.” In other words, what one believes sets the parameters around one’s life. Our “religion” therefore is that system which inculcates in a society the essential beliefs, values, and basic convictions of that society. The essential question of the religious system is, “What do we, as a people, ultimately value?”

Finally, what is a *system*? A system is an organized body of people gathered together around three components: *values* which are held in common, *structures* that institutionalize those values, and *individuals* that manage and operate those institutions. All three components must exist for a system to be a system. When we talk about *systemic change*, we recognize that significant change cannot occur in a society unless the justice values of that society are truly embraced and implemented. Such implementation cannot occur unless the structures function to carry out those values and individuals commit and work to run those structures for the interests of the people. Only when individuals *and* structures *and* values change, do you have systemic change.⁵

The truly unique reality about both the nation of Israel and of the earliest Christian churches is that both communities built into their respective systems a highly-intentional commitment toward “the least of these.” In fact, one could argue that they built the systems of their society, their values, structures and people around a commitment to “the least of these.” Three examples serve to illustrate these systems: 1) the Deuteronomic legislation to eliminate poverty; 2) the Festival of the First Fruits, and 3) the Sabbatical Year.

Deuteronomic Legislation to Eliminate Poverty

In Deuteronomy 6:6-25 the author presents an economics of stewardship. The Deuteronomist states that the wealth that the nation of Israel possesses is a free gift from God, a wealth that God has chosen to invest in them for the good of all the people,

5 For a more thorough treatment of the nature of systems, read Robert Linthicum, *Transforming Power: Biblical Strategies for Making A Difference in Your Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 23-26.

for Israelites and aliens alike. Their wealth is not a private wealth to be owned but is a common wealth that God has invested in them so that they can be good trustees or stewards of it. But toward what end is Israel to manage its wealth toward a specific end.

There will, however, be no one in need among you, because the Lord is sure to bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession to occupy, if only you will obey the Lord your God by diligently observing this entire commandment that I command you today. . . . Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land"' (Dt 15:4-5, 11).

There is only one reason why God gives wealth to a nation. God makes a nation wealthy for the purpose of eliminating its poverty. *The elimination of poverty is to be the primary agenda both of Israel and of each individual Israelite!*

In the Hebrew language, three distinct types of poverty are recognized. This is stated succinctly in Amos 2:6-7: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the needy (*ebyon*) for a pair of sandals, trample the head of the poor (*dallim*) into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted (*anawim*) out of the way." In this passage, three different types of poverty are identified by the prophet. The *ebyon* are people totally dependent on others, who are utterly destitute and must be beggars in order to survive. The *dallim* are people who are physically weak and materially poor and who have neither the capital nor the strength to make it financially in life. Finally, the *anawin* are people who know themselves to be of no account, who are so broken under their weight of poverty that they are entirely dependent on others for their survival. Today we would call the *ebyon* the "extremely impoverished" who have no hope (there are over one billion *ebyon* in the world today); the *dallim* the "deserving poor" who are trying their best but have too much against them; and the *anawin* are the "generational poor" who live in poverty passed down from generation to generation until it becomes a virtual lifestyle of "beating the system."

What is significant in this passage is not the analysis it contains about the Israelites' understanding of the nature of poverty. What is significant is that God condemns Israel for allowing some of its people to be exploited, impoverished, or oppressed. The

pointed message of Deuteronomy is that it is irrelevant whether one's poverty is the result of a reversal in a nation's economy, a family calamity or generational poverty, or an individual's bad choices, laziness, or unfortunate circumstances. However, the persons or families got into these circumstances, they are now poor and vulnerable, and it is the responsibility of each Israelite and the political and economic systems of Israel to resolve the situation both by requiring legislation that will enable these poor to help themselves out of their dilemma and by expecting acts of compassion on the part of the people!

This is perhaps no more graphically stated in the Scriptures than in Deuteronomy 15. This chapter states three things about poverty: 1) poverty is wrong and should be eliminated from God's nation (Dt 15:4); 2) no matter how hard a nation or community works to eliminate poverty, "there will never cease to be some in need on the earth" (15:11), and 3) God commands them to "open [their] hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land" (15:11).⁶

To help Israel fulfill this command, Deuteronomy is replete with instructions as to how the nation can guarantee that the economy is managed in such a way that poverty will be eliminated. One way is to celebrate three annual festivals: Passover, First Fruits, and Sukkoth. A second way was to observe the Sabbatical Year and Jubilee. A third way was through the observance of other laws designed to eliminate poverty through the redistribution of income. One of these third ways was the regulation that all loans were to be made without charging interest (Dt 23:19-20). Another regulation was a family's annual tithe to the poor (Dt 14:22-29; 16:1-17). Some of the most surprising and intriguing requirements were the responsibility of the rich and middle class toward the poor of the land. It is clear that in Deuteronomy's economic policies, Israel had a commitment to *compensatory economic justice*, designed to bring to reality the assertion that "there will . . . be no poor among you!"

6 Jesus used this verse from Deuteronomy when he said, "You always have the poor with you" (Mt 26:11; compare Deut 15:11). Those who wish to justify an increasing division of the impoverished and the wealthy or those who simply want to avoid their responsibility often use this statement. But to do so is to significantly misuse Scripture. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy within the context of the reality of his quickly approaching death. It is illegitimate eisegesis to use Jesus' quotation of Deuteronomy 15:11 as a means to justify poverty and a nation or church doing nothing to eliminate it.

The Festival of the First Fruits (Pentecost)

The second major festival of the Jewish Year was the Festival of the First Fruits. This celebration occurred 50 days after the weeklong celebration of Passover. It is also known as “Pentecost,” which is Greek for “the fiftieth day.” Yet another name for the celebration is “Festival of Weeks” because the fiftieth day is at the end of seven weeks. The Festival of the First Fruits is essentially a harvest festival, a celebration of the first harvest of the year. As Passover was meant to celebrate God as liberator, the Festival of First Fruits was meant to celebrate God as provider. As Passover remembered God’s mighty acts to rescue Israel from slavery, so the Festival of First Fruits would remind Israel that God was the source of their wealth and bounty (Jer 5:24). But First Fruits was celebrated with a unique justice twist.

Israelite Worship and Work

The most detailed and theologically rich description of the Festival of the First Fruits is given in Deuteronomy 26:1-15. Each Israelite was to “take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you” (v. 2a) and take it to the central shrine at the appointed time. There this symbolic offering is to be given to the priest (v. 3). When the offering was presented to the priest, each Israelite would recite God’s mighty acts that rescued Israel from slavery and testify of the benefits those acts have brought to this specific Israelite (vv. 5b-10a).

Following the recital, the basket brought by the given Israelite was placed before the altar. “Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house” (v. 11). With this annual recital, every single Israelite was reminded of and publicly gave testimony to the origins of his nation, how greatly Israel was dependent upon their intervening and liberating God, and the reason for their present abundance (“God’s gift”). With such a recital, each Israelite’s commitment to the covenant and to their people was reinforced. With these reinforcements, the potential for them to realize themselves as a community of *shalom* that practiced an economics of stewardship,

equitable distribution of wealth, a politics of justice, and a religion of personal and national relationship with God would be greatly enhanced.

After each Israelite had made his confession of faith and had remembered how God had delivered him and his nation, Deuteronomy 26 then instructs him what to do next. “You shall set [the basket of first fruits] down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house” (vv. 10b-11).

It was party time! The ceremony and act of devotion, confession and dedication were followed with a celebration! The family feasted, but not alone! Into that family’s celebration were brought the religious divested (Levites) and the most marginalized people (aliens) of that neighborhood. Each celebration brought around the table society’s most powerful and powerless. There they faced each other and related to each other; that is, those who would normally have nothing to do with the other gathered together around one of the central spiritual events of the year.

Deuteronomy 26:12-15 presents the concluding portion of the Festival of the First Fruits.⁷ In this section the Festival of the First Fruits progresses from being a single event to being a festival that is kept alive in the people’s hearts all year long. They achieve this through their responsible actions. The passage instructs each Israelite to return to his home after the completion of the Festival, and there continue to withdraw a tithe from his business or work. He then distributed this tithe to “the Levites, the aliens, the orphans and the widows, so that they may eat their fill within your towns” (v. 12b). It is significant that what is described in this chapter is the means God intended for Israel to use in order to provide economic security to all. It is, in other words, the social welfare program of Israel.

The objective of this strategy is to guarantee that “there are no poor among you” (Dt. 15:4). The strategy the nation will follow to make sure that there are no poor is for each

7 Some biblical scholars view 26:12-15 as a separate feast associated with the offering of a third-year offering for the support of Levites and the most impoverished of the community. I believe there is more evidence for seeing this section as an extension of the First Fruits regulations.

family to identify the most vulnerable people in their community. These would be “the Levites, the aliens, the orphans and the widows.” The Levites are mentioned because, as the priestly tribe, they are excluded from holding tribal land (see Dt 18:1-2). The aliens are mentioned because they are excluded from any due process of the Jewish Law that is provided solely for the Israelites and because they are marginalized by their very status as aliens. The orphans and widows are included because all ownership in the ancient Near East was in a husband’s estate and therefore, without a husband, a woman and her offspring would be particularly vulnerable.

Central to this strategy was the tithe. *Every* Israelite household was to commit 10 percent of their annual income to the support of the vulnerable, poor, and marginalized of their society. With such a significant redistribution of wealth (10 percent of the annual gross national product), along with the other stipulations of Deuteronomy regarding wealth and power, it would guarantee there would be no poverty within the country.

Further it was the task of each Israelite family not only to reserve 10 percent of its annual income for the nation’s poor, but it was their responsibility to distribute it! They were to directly give away this money themselves. This was done within the context of inviting the recipients into their homes to share dinner (Dt 26:11)! Thus this would place a human face on poverty! The issue would not be “the poor” but specific individuals, such as “Ruth, Jeremiah, Ahaz, or David,” who were the Levite, alien, widow, or orphan whom that Israelite family knew personally and cared about. This in turn would open the wellsprings of compassion of every family, so that all would be involved in eradicating poverty from the land.

Pentecost and the Church

Examination of the Hebrew celebration of the Festival of the First Fruits does not end with the Jewish people, however. The embracing of the social legislation of the Festival of the First Fruits and the birthing of the earliest Christian churches was also an integral part of the living out of this particular festival of the Hebrew people.

Acts 2:1-47 is the account of the anointing of the Holy Spirit falling upon the

followers of Jesus on the Day of Pentecost and thus signals the birth of the church. This great event was both climax and inauguration. It was particularly auspicious that this filling of the Spirit and consequent commissioning of the church occurred on the Feast of the First Fruits, now more commonly referred to as "Pentecost." Now, in essence, a new "First Fruits" was being celebrated by a "new Israel," as the Holy Spirit's anointing of Jesus' followers declared that they were now called to carry Jesus' "kingdom of God" not just to Israel, but to all humanity. That kingdom that they were to carry with them was one both of being chosen by God and of working to create a new world order where poverty would be eliminated and the powerless empowered.

This mission would be symbolized in the actions of that day, when the Spirit's anointing of the followers of Jesus would be followed by their proclamation of this liberating news in the languages of all the people gathered in Jerusalem (vv. 5-13), Peter's sermon that calls upon Israel to embrace Christ and his kingdom (vv. 14-36), the enthusiastic response of the people (vv. 37-41), and the creation of a Christian community (vv. 42-47).

Perhaps the most important actions of that particular Pentecost were the actions the followers of Jesus took to actualize the Jewish First Fruits vision in their creation of that new Christian community. Acts 2:42-47 tells us, "The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. *All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.* Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (vv. 43-47, italics mine).

Luke informs us that the life together of the earliest Christians was a shared life. That sharing, as it is described more thoroughly in verses 43-47, was not only social and spiritual sharing, but also an economic sharing of their individual wealth. By following

this economic policy, the earliest church was faithful to the mission of the ancient Israelite community. As the ancient Israelite community built itself around a covenant of relationship with God and responsibility toward each other, so the earliest Christians assumed the same economic responsibility when forming their new life together. Thus the best of Israel's living out its covenant with God is carried over into the shaping of the life together of the earliest Christian community, as they adopt and adapt for the church the principles of the Festival of the First Fruits.

The Sabbatical Year and Jubilee

Along with religious festivals throughout the year, the Hebrew people also celebrated a sabbatical year every seven years. The Law of Moses decreed, "Every seventh year you shall grant a remission of debts. And this is the manner of the remission" (Dt 15:1-2a). This is the beginning of the most remarkable economic national policy that the earth has likely seen. It is the Sabbatical Year and the Jubilee Year, which is the sabbatical of Sabbatical Years.

Deuteronomy 15:1-18, Exodus 23:10-11, and Leviticus 25:1-7, 12-18, and 35-38 command the observance of the Sabbatical Year. One year out of every seven years was to be declared the Sabbatical Year, and one out of every seven sabbatical years was proclaimed the Jubilee Year. Observance of a sabbatical year required the carrying out of three economic stipulations. Observance of the Jubilee Year required not only the obedience of these three stipulations, but the adding of a fourth. All of these stipulations were designed to require a redistribution of wealth every seven and 49 years, so that wealth and power could not accrue among a favored few at the expense of everyone else.

What both Israel and the early church recognized was that society cannot have political liberation unless it has economic liberation; that is, as long as there is an accumulation of wealth in the hands of the rich and the exclusion of the poor, all your political liberty is a charade. Liberation must be economic as well as political, and that requires a periodic redistribution of wealth. That is what both the Sabbatical Year and

the Jubilee Year were designed to accomplish!

The first stipulation of the Sabbatical Year was that once every seven years, the land was to lay fallow for one year (Exodus 23:10-11; Leviticus 25:11-12, 18-22). The reason for resting the land was to renew the land. At this time in human history, there was neither the development of chemical fertilizers nor the knowledge of soil restoration through the rotation of crops. Therefore, the only way that farmed land could be restored would be to let the land lay fallow for a year while putting animal dung on it to renew it. The command to let the land lay fallow was in the best interest of both the worker and the owner of that land. But since letting it lay fallow meant that the land would be taken out of production and therefore could not be turned into wealth, it would also result in a financial loss for that year. The likelihood would be that even though they would know that it would be in their own long-term best interest to let the land lay fallow one year out of every seven, people would not be willing to assume the short-term financial loss it would accrue. Consequently without legislation to the contrary, people would work and work their land until its productivity was depleted and it was good only “to be cast out and trodden under foot!”

The primary principle on which this legislation is based is the principle of mutual stewardship: Israel’s stewardship of the land and God’s stewardship of Israel. This mutual stewardship is built around the *liturgy of abundance*,⁸ that is, the reality that God is a fecund and prolific God, showering his people with abundance. By contrast, the question of sufficiency raised by Israel (vs. 20) is based upon the *myth of scarcity*; that is, fear that there may not be enough to go around. But what God wants for Israel is for them to embrace a liturgy of abundance (“the cup is half full”) rather than a myth of scarcity (“the cup is half empty”). God wants them to trust that if they obey the laws of God, including the very practical law of giving land a Sabbath rest so that it may renew itself, then they will always have abundance.

The second requirement of the Sabbatical Year and of the Jubilee Year was the

8 The phrase “the liturgy of abundance, the myth of scarcity” was first coined by the Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann in his article of the same name that appeared in the journal, *The Christian Century* 116, no. 10 (May 24, 1999).

forgiveness of debts (Dt 15:2-3; Lev 25:1-7). The Sabbatical Year and Jubilee Year process of the remission of debts had two elements to it. First, between the Sabbatical Years, no one who was owed a debt by another was to charge either advance interest or accrued interest on that debt (Lev 25:35-38). In fact, as one who had given a loan or who had otherwise advanced money or property or goods to another, one was forbidden to make any profit on that investment (25:36). The reason for the regulation was rooted in the welfare of the person in need. Needy or impoverished persons ask for a loan or for an advance. How dare one make a profit on the plight or the need of one's neighbor?

Second, if the principal of a loan or advancement has not been paid off by the Sabbatical Year or Jubilee Year, then one was to forgive the loan in its entirety at that time (Dt 15:2; Lev 25:40). One was to remit the debt, no questions asked. The author of Leviticus gives the rationale for such action: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God" (25:38).

The third stipulation of the Sabbatical Year and of the Jubilee Year is the freeing of slaves and bound laborers. On these years, slaves are to be set free from their bondage (Dt. 15:12-18, Lev. 25:44-53). If the person who is in servitude is a Hebrew, one was to view the Hebrew slave, not as a slave but as a "hired or bound laborer" (Dt. 15:12-18; Lev. 25:39-43). The difference between a hired laborer and bound laborer is that a hired laborer can quit while a bound laborer is contracted to the landowner for a designated period of time. In either case, one enters into such an estate by becoming impoverished and selling one's self to the Hebrew owner. These laborers can only sell themselves until the Sabbatical Year or the Jubilee Year. At that time, they must be set free and adequately compensated for their labor so that they can return to their family and ancestral property and start anew. The Hebrews were to free their slaves every seven years for this reason: "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God liberated you" (Dt 15:15)!

The fourth stipulation is reserved solely for the Jubilee Year and is the most radical legislation one could ever imagine: a legislated reversal of fortune! "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants.

Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land” (Lev 25:23-24). This legislated reversal of fortune decreed that, no matter what the circumstances, the land was to be returned to its original owners every 50 years. Since wealth was primarily in the land, such a regulation guaranteed that both wealth and the source of that wealth (the land) could not accrue in perpetuity in the hands of the rich, but would be intentionally and systematically redistributed to the people every 50 years by returning that land to its hereditary owners. Then, once restored, “in this year of jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to your property” (25:13).

This regulation originated with Joshua’s conquest of Canaan. After the conquest, every tribe was granted a selected portion of conquered Canaan. Each tribe divided the land among all its families (Josh 19:49-51; 24:13-21; e.g., Josh 13:8-19:48). That land became each family’s birthright. It was land promised in perpetuity so that the wealth of land was evenly distributed to all the families of Israel. Since it was impossible in later generations not to be a descendant of one of those families, the land in turn continued to be in the family. This was the economic foundation upon which the economy, politics, and culture of Israel was built.

Leviticus 25, therefore, does two things. First, it reasserted the basic principle of a redistribution of wealth to all the families of Israel every 50 years so that you begin every fifty-first year with an economically “level playing field.” Second, it laid out the regulations regarding the disposal of the land between the Jubilee Years. The assumption was that once one received one’s birthright land again, one would cultivate and farm it, using it as an economic base for the next 49 years. But Leviticus recognizes that this description was of an ideal Israelite society. In the real world, then and today, the fact is that some people have a stunning capacity to make money while others do not and are soon at the disadvantage with those who do. So Leviticus pronounced regulations that must be followed between the Jubilee Years regarding the fair use and distribution of one’s birthright land.⁹

9 It is debated whether the Sabbatical Year or Jubilee were ever observed by Israel. But there seems to be some biblical indicators that would support such observance, such as Ruth 2:1-23, Jeremiah 34:8-17, I Kings 21:1-27 and Nehemiah 10:28-31. But the most significant biblical passage supporting the observance of the Sabbatical Year and Jubilee is II Chron. 36:17-21. It notes that the Sabbatical Year had not been observed since 1077 BCE; this, in turn, indicates it was likely observed between the founding of Israel and 1077—a total of about 175 years or 24 Sabbatical Years and seven Jubilees. And it seems to have been reintroduced to Israel after the Babylonian Exile.

The Church and Jubilee

The Jubilee Year carries over into the New Testament as well. The author of the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles informs us that the earliest Christians were engaged in four activities in the building up of their life together: 1) learning, 2) building a community that shared wealth and faith, 3) celebrating Holy Communion, and 4) praying. Along with the building of their life together, they were also centered on action, such as preaching the good news about Jesus of Nazareth (e.g., 2:14-36), ministering to those in need (3:1-10), evangelism, and social action.

This is the description of the earliest church that Luke presents to us. But to truly understand what Luke is presenting, one must keep in mind the purpose not only of the book of Acts but of the Gospel of Luke as well. The Gospel of Luke was about presenting Jesus as the Jubilee Jesus, the Jesus who came to proclaim Jubilee to the people (Lk 4:18-19), to work for Jubilee especially for the peasants and expendables (Lk 9:10-17; 13:10-17), and to call the Jewish political, economic, and religious systems to accountability for refusing to practice the full Jubilee (Lk 20:1-47).¹⁰ To Jesus Jubilee meant an intentional and legislated reversal of fortune! It was Israel's most radical vehicle to redistribute its wealth so that society could be rebalanced and neither wealth nor political power could accumulate in the hands of a self-selected few. *That* was what Jesus was proclaiming when he read Isaiah 61 in the synagogue in Nazareth at the beginning of his ministry (Lk 4:16-21). *That* was what he was seeking to accomplish throughout his ministry, both through his compassionate acts toward the peasants and in his confrontation of the powers that be.

When Jesus came proclaiming Jubilee, it was extremely good news to the peasants and expendables of Israel. Likewise it was extremely alarming news to the elite, who viewed Jesus with a hostility that sprang from the very real threat that he posed to their concentrated power and wealth. It made Jesus' death an inevitable consequence to that conflict. But the Gospel of Luke does not end with a cross but with a resurrected Christ,

¹⁰ The Jewish religious establishment expected Israel to observe only one of the four requirements of Jubilee—letting the lands lie fallow for one year (which would hurt only farmers). Jesus insisted on all four requirements.

and the spirit of Jubilee living on through Jesus' followers.

The description of the earliest Christian community that makes up Acts 2-4 is presented by Luke in order to demonstrate that the earliest church was faithful to the Jubilee mission of Jesus. As Jesus had built a Jubilee community among his disciples, so the earliest Christians formed their fellowship into a Jubilee community, forgiving sin, freeing those oppressed by life, breaking bread with each other, and redistributing their wealth. As Jesus had been faithful to God by proclaiming and acting to bring about Jubilee for the poor and the powerful, so the earliest churches were seeking to live out Jubilee in their life together (also see Acts 4:32-5:16; 11:29-30; I Cor 16:1-4; II Cor 9:1-15; Gal 2:1-10) and to act out Jubilee in their working for social justice and in proclaiming the good news of the world's economic, political, social, and spiritual liberation through the Jubilee Jesus. But unlike their Hebrew ancestors who observed Jubilee every 50 years, these earliest Jewish Christians followed Jubilee every day of every year!

The Implications for the Church

This study has sought to demonstrate that Israel and the earliest churches built their values, structures and commitment to justice for "the least of these" into their respective political, economic, and religious systems. This thesis was explored by examining the Deuteronomic legislation to eliminate poverty, the Festival of the First Fruits, and the Jewish institution of the Sabbatical Year and Jubilee Year. Christian action was further explored through the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, the Pentecostal economic action of the Early Church, and its inheritance of Jubilee commitment given them by Jesus. Out of this exploration, the study showed conclusively that both Israel and the Early Church were deeply committed to the care, liberation, and self-determination of "the least of these" in their societies.

The Parable of the Sheep and Goats challenges the reader to be committed to the "least of these." This parable is found in the Gospel of Matthew. The entire theme of the book of Matthew is that Jesus is the Messiah, the "Son of David" of Ezekiel 34. But because of the commitment of Israel's leadership to greed, control, and the lust for power, Jesus

is presented by Matthew as the marginalized Messiah. In other words, *Jesus is one of “the least of these!”* In fact, Jesus is the archetype of “the least of these” of the world. As the one who is “The Least of These,” the one who has been marginalized by Israel’s and Rome’s political, economic, and religious elite, Jesus identifies with the poor, the marginalized, the vulnerable, and the desperate. Therefore Jesus calls his followers to the very same living out of the gospel. Jesus’ disciples are to live lives of working for justice, for empowerment of the people, and of service among the marginalized nobodies of the world. God’s people are called to work against the agenda of the “shepherds” (Ezek 34:1-7) and their systems and for the poor and powerless. That is what it means to be an authentic follower of Christ. That is the follower who will be rewarded in the final judgment. That is the kind of follower Jesus calls you and me to be today!



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Response to Robert Linthicum

THE LEAST OF THESE: THE WAR ON POVERTY BY ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

By Kyuboem Lee

The economic life of God's people has a calling—to be a witness to God's kingdom. This is the message that Dr. Linthicum highlights in his article. How God's people choose to structure their economic life together can demonstrate to the world that God's reign has broken into this world through God's Chosen One, Jesus. And, in the words that we find in Deuteronomy, the governing principle of his kingdom for our economic life is that there will be no needy person among us.

This visible demonstration of shalom community among God's people in their care for and welcome of the poor is a crucial facet of the church's witness and mission in the world, especially in our age of unprecedented economic inequality. An economic life of shalom under God's reign of justice and love speaks against this world's exploitative economic structures that have enriched the few with vast amounts of wealth on the backs of the destitute many. It exposes the idolatry of Mammon at the heart of our present global economy and calls for repentance. It also holds open the door to a new world of compassion and justice under Christ's reign as a hopeful alternative for those who dream of a different reality. The church, as Christ's chosen witness to God's kingdom, is called to practice prophetic economics before an old, broken world in need of new creation.

That many communities of faith either have been ignorant of, or have ignored, this call to shalom community and its economic practices has surely contributed to the brokenness of our world. Many economic decisions have been made among God's people wherein they have enriched and privileged themselves, their institutions, and their churches instead of giving relief to the exploited and to those struggling against the persistence of poverty (the true purpose of wealth, according to Linthicum). The

result is that shalom community is undermined not only by the world but also by the disobedience of its stewards. Thus this prophetic word confronts the world and also the church which is called to steward God's commands but which instead too often looks and acts just like the world in its economic practices.

Where do we begin? Many believers give up at the outset because they see the economic structures as beyond the scope of an individual's ability to affect change. But it is good to remember that the most basic economic decisions occur around family kitchen tables. Individuals and their families have a calling to care for the poor in their everyday stewardship decisions. Often, this means getting out of their privileged stations and making real connections with the poor—which is an invaluable component of discipleship in and of itself.

It is also good to remember that churches are economic actors and stewards of wealth, able to both model shalom economic practices and affect larger level changes in their local communities for the sake of the kingdom. The meaning of this has often been confined to financial support of larger institutions with a wide scope or individual missionaries serving far from their sources of support. But perhaps we need to look closer home. Our local congregations can model eschatological economic practices. No matter the amount of wealth in question, faithful stewardship of our wealth can yield faithful kingdom witness. Crucial questions for local church leadership then becomes: Are God's people being led into economic discipleship? Is the church more and more resembling God's shalom community where all are concerned for the good of the whole, especially the good of those most vulnerable? Is the church therefore now a community where the poor find Christ's welcome, care, and redemption?

Shalom communities that practice kingdom economics gain credibility in the eyes of the world to speak prophetically on Christ's behalf. May the Lord grant us grace to become such.



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BLESSED ARE THE POOR FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM

By Bob Lupton

It happens every year about this time, I can count on it. When Christmas day nears I can expect a half-restored muscle car to rumble into my drive, engine revving to announce its arrival, and if I don't come out immediately, a persistent knock will come to my back door. It's Eddie, my neighbor from down the street. He's on a mission. He will tell me about some poor widow woman who works 70 hours a week at a Waffle House just to keep bread on the table for her three little kids. Or it may be a man who has terminal cancer, no health insurance, and no way to support his family. Or a three year old whose father is in prison and whose mother has just died of a drug overdose. Eddie lives in a world where tragedy seems to be a daily norm: the world of the working poor. He often reaches into his own pocket to help, some would say to a fault, given his struggle just keeping his own utilities turned on. You don't make much income driving a quick-snatch flatbed truck repossessing cars.

But there is one time in the year when Eddie's heart badly overrides his reason. The thought of enjoying a Christmas meal with his own family in their own home, complete with adorned tree and adequate presents for his four kids, when another family not far away is despairing, well, the very thought is just too much for Eddie's tender heart to handle. He must do something; something significant. And so he figures out what a hurting family (or two) really needs, like a week's supply of groceries, special gifts for the children, or perhaps money to get the heat turned back on. Ignoring the bills that have stacked up in his own household, he takes a hefty chunk of his Christmas paycheck, comes to my door to see if I'll match it, then heads out to play Santa for those whose needs are more acute than his. I'm moved by the stories he tells me, but even more I'm touched by his caring heart. Eddie gives out of lack rather than abundance. Of course I'm willing to join him in his Christmas mission.

Eddie is poor, at least at first glance. He lives in a house built by volunteers. His wife suffers from a debilitating nerve ailment. He works long, sporadic hours driving a tow truck, a job that provides no health coverage. Unscrupulous people often take advantage of his good nature, sticking him with towing bills that he has to cover out of his own pocket. But he is not naïve. He has a nose for a deal, especially when it involves cars that need to be sold quickly. His wheeler-dealer instinct nets him tax-free windfalls from time to time, when he can lay hands on some ready cash to jump on an opportunity. He has developed to an art form the juggling act of bill paying, though not infrequently a creditor's threats will throw his system into chaos. But Eddie is a survivor. He somehow always gets by. In many ways he is actually quite rich. He knows about faith, the simple, practical, believe-God-to-get-me-out-of-a-jam type of faith. He practices almost instinctively (though he could not articulate them) some of the core values Christ taught: giving a second coat, turning a cheek, and lending without expectation of return. He is rich in spirit for he knows the fulfillment of sacrificial giving. Yet being rich in spirit is not the same as enjoying a peaceful existence. No, Eddie's life is far from being stress free.

I have tried in the past to help Eddie (and many other "Eddies") assert better control over his life, to help him get on a budget, get his bills under control, set some savings aside for the unexpected (though highly predictable) crisis. It never worked. Stacks of doctor-hospital-medication bills continually pile up, too high water-gas-electric bills, too many car repair-insurance-gasoline expenses, unending clothing-food-childrearing costs. And then there are the needs of the less fortunate others that are forever tugging at Eddie's heart. No, there is no way his chaotic life can be brought under manageable controls. Not for long. He has to live by faith!

I'm not sure I have helped Eddie much but I'm quite sure he has taught me a great deal. I'm finding that I ask myself a lot of questions before I go rushing in to rescue a poor person, hoping to save him from an impending crisis resulting from unwise decisions. I ask, "Who needs rescuing here? Does my comfortable, stable, orderly lifestyle afford me a safe and elevated platform from which to judge (or misjudge) lesser ones? Could

the financial security which I have worked so diligently to accumulate actually prevent me from experiencing a life of true faith? Does my 'good common sense' (or middle-class-achiever values) make me blind to the Kingdom; the Kingdom Christ said would be harder for a rich man to enter than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle?" I think I need Eddie in my life to remind me about the ways of the Kingdom.

It's one of the great surprises of my life that I need the poor at least as much as they need me. I had heard this spiritual-sounding rhetoric for years prior to my call to live and serve among the inner city poor, but quite honestly I believed it was little more than "spiritual rhetoric." When I embarked on my urban mission, I was fully convinced that I was to carry the light of the gospel into the darkness of the ghetto, never dreaming that God had already beat me to it. What I found there were people who seemed to know much more about relying on God than I did. Broken people like homeless Raymond who was one of the first neighbors I met when I moved into the city.

Raymond was a semi-regular at the Wednesday noon community lunch we had at our church. He was a hard worker, but alcohol interfered with his holding a steady job. He slept most nights in the park. Frequently I would ask him to help me do chores around the church, requests that seemed to please him. One day as we were taking a break from patching a leak on the church roof, he said something to me that rocked my theology. "Bob, I ain't no Christian but I love my Jesus." There was no doubt in his mind that he was a sinner, a pretty bad one. In spite of the fact that he felt utterly incapable of breaking free from his life-destroying patterns, somewhere down inside he clung to the awareness that Jesus did love him.

No one could have felt more unworthy of divine love or more helpless to do anything to deserve it. Yet Raymond clung to that belief like a drowning man to a piece of wood. This man was the polar opposite of my concept of a Christian, but I had to admit that I saw similarities with the man in Jesus' story who stood downcast at the back of the temple beating his chest and pleading "God be merciful to me a sinner" and then went away justified. Raymond forced me to ponder a perplexing question: can a broken, self-destructive derelict be a person of faith?

Raymond knew something about clinging to Jesus in a way I had never had to. When he was rousted by the police for vagrancy and thrown in jail with no one to post his bail, when he had not a friend left that he had not alienated, when he felt utterly alone, there was Jesus. Jesus, who promised never to leave him or forsake him. Raymond seemed to know a Jesus very different from the Jesus I knew, the One who offers me joy and peace; the One who promises me an abundant life. Raymond knew a Jesus who understood brokenness and aloneness and rejection. Raymond was showing me a Jesus I had never known.

Another unlikely teacher that challenged my understanding of God was a great grandmother named Mrs. Itson. She was the first person to join our church when we opened the doors for services in her community. She lived with three generations of her extended family in a one bedroom shotgun house that was in constant chaos. Perhaps that's why she arrived early at every church meeting; it must have provided a peaceful reprieve. She always wanted to sit next to me in church. I think I reminded her of her youngest son who had been shot and killed in a taxi cab the Christmas Eve before we moved in. I was touched by her hugs and affection.

Mrs. Itson struggled with many of the usual ailments that come with aging. One day she told me that her plumbing didn't work as well as it once did. But I knew that because an offensive odor accompanied her hugs. I got used to it. She began dropping hints about coming to our home for a meal, subtle at first, then a bit more direct. Finally she was asking me straight out when I would be inviting her over. It was obvious that I could not put her off indefinitely by oblique "maybe-sometime-soon" responses.

One Sunday after church following one of Mrs. Itson's direct inquiries, we had a family discussion about why we were so resistant to having her over for a meal. What would happen to our furniture? Covering it with plastic to keep her from soiling it would seem rather insensitive. My concern was my corduroy recliner. I knew if she sat in it that it would never be the same again. It was during this discussion that a shaft of heavenly light pierced a dark place in my theology, exposing what I was calling "good stewardship" for what it actually was: materialism. From childhood I had been taught

that taking good care of the things God entrusts to us is being a good steward. Mrs. Itson's persistent requests forced upon me see that I had taken full ownership of my possessions and wanted to preserve them for my own use. Finally it became clear that there was but one choice: we must walk in the light that is given. The following Sunday we invited Mrs. Itson to our home for dinner. She was delighted. She did just as I feared she would do and went straight for my corduroy recliner! To make things worse (or better), the following week she joined a Bible study in our home and every Tuesday evening she headed to her "favorite" chair. The group began to refer to my recliner as "Mrs. Itson's chair." It was true: the chair never was the same again! It was as though Jesus himself was saying to me, "Bob, I know you're a hopeless materialist, but can I just sit in your chair?"

In all my years of growing up in the church (in a pastor's home, no less), I had never heard a message on stewardship that was as powerful and convicting as the one delivered unknowingly by an unsuspecting messenger. Mrs. Itson changed my understanding of the Kingdom. It was a painful insight, one that I could easily ignore were I not forced by a "blessed one" to face the fallacy of my culture-shaped stewardship theology.

The statement, "Blessed are the poor for theirs is the Kingdom," does this mean that the affluent are blocked out? Oh, I hope not. Maybe it excludes the filthy rich, those who are greedy, selfish, hoarders. Surely this does not imply that we modest, middle-class Christians will have a problem getting in. Right? Go to www.globalrichlist.com and plug in your annual income. You will see where you place among the world's six and a half billion people. I was astounded to see that I am in the top one percent! I always thought that I lived a very modest lifestyle. I do, compared to the average American, but compared to the rest of the world I am richer than ninety-nine percent of my fellow earth-dwellers. I realize now that I deflected the warning in those troubling scriptures about how hard it is for a rich man to enter God's Kingdom. I assumed that it was meant for those much further up the food chain from me. Now I discover that I am in the very top one percent. By any measure, I am a rich man living comfortably among a people of unparalleled wealth. I find that very scary!

All my life I have wrongly assumed that I am not wealthy. I now wonder to what degree I have been unknowingly influenced by my wealth. How trustworthy is my spiritual insight? Raymond shows me that I do not know the Jesus who is present among the broken and destitute. Do I have wealth-formed blind spots filtering my perceptions, distorting the light of essential truths? Mrs. Itson shows me that I do.

“You fool!” What harsh words Jesus had for a hardworking man who built bigger barns to secure his retirement assets. You remember the story (Lk 12). The man made some legitimate windfall profits from his business that nicely secured his retirement years. He decided to bank his proceeds and take an early retirement to enjoy a life of leisure for a few years. But he died prematurely before he had a chance to reap the benefits of his good fortune. So why did Jesus call him a fool? Was he condemning the man for his retirement plans, the size of his portfolio, or how he invested it? Or maybe it’s all of the above? I have been told repeatedly by trusted spiritual leaders that wealth wasn’t the problem. Instead it was that “eat, drink and be merry” decision, the self-indulgent lifestyle that Jesus took issue with, they say. I liked their interpretation. It’s a comfortable fit for an affluent, success-driven, somewhat pietistic religious culture like mine.

But this is Jesus’ story. It’s his to interpret. Jesus says quite plainly, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth” (Mt 6:19). Take no thought for tomorrow, don’t worry about what you’ll eat or drink or wear, follow the example of the birds, give your assets away to those in need, trust in God to take care of you, pursue his Kingdom. How is a person living in the rarified air of the top one percent of this world’s wealth to make any sense of this? The only people I know that live this way are some of my poor neighbors like Eddie who don’t have many other options. Yet I criticize them for their lack of planning, for sharing their meager resources to a fault, for living from crisis to crisis, irresponsibly presuming that God will provide. But Jesus had another word for them: “blessed!”

How clouded is the spiritual discernment of one who has worked all his adult life to save enough to retire comfortably and deemed the accumulation responsible

stewardship? I have realized that it is a fearful thing to be found among the very wealthy, especially when those are the ones specifically singled out in Scripture as “highly unlikely” to get into the Kingdom. It is no mere rhetoric that “I need the poor more than they need me.”



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Response to Bob Lupton

BLESSED ARE THE POOR FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM

By Kimberlee Johnson

Bob Lupton is an accomplished Christian community developer who has served under-resourced Atlanta communities for decades. In his thoughtful article, Lupton expounds upon his insights about the blessed poor. He avoids the traditional method of exegeting the key gospel texts on the subject matter. Instead, he invites the reader to share his journey to understanding as he reflects on the lives of three friends: Eddie, the working-poor family man; Raymond, the homeless alcoholic, and Mrs. Itson, the elderly church member with an unfortunate odor problem. These are Lupton's esteemed teachers. Challenging Lupton's previously held conceptions, it is they who reveal the meaning of Jesus' saying, "Blessed are the poor for theirs is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20). Lupton grapples with how "wealth-formed blind spots" have influenced his perceptions of spiritual truths.

There are two notable strengths to Lupton's article. First, for the diehard exegete readers, Lupton absolutely gets what Jesus means by "poor" in the gospels. It is not just a state of economic deprivation, but it encompasses people who are socially excluded, people deemed religiously impure, and/or people of low status. We find many people in this category in the urban centers of our country—the unemployed, those involved in the informal economy doing odd jobs to make ends meet, the addicted, the sick, the elderly, the uneducated, prisoners, those without healthcare, minorities of all types, the brokenhearted, and the oppressed. These people are of great value in God's kingdom.

Second, as a man of financial means, Lupton was willing to learn challenging kingdom lessons with, among, and from the poor that he at times criticized for their poverty. The kind of poverty illustrated by the friends in the article produced in them a greater dependence on God. One can appreciate Lupton's honesty in this regard. "I

criticize them for their lack of planning, for sharing their meager resources to a fault, for living from crisis to crisis, irresponsibly presuming that God will provide. But Jesus had another word for them: “blessed!”

Having myself grown up in a poor family (i.e., economically disadvantaged; racial minorities) and now living a fairly comfortable middle class life, I found myself wrestling a bit with this as Lupton did. At first I found myself resonating with his (and ultimately Jesus’) teaching that it is indeed a kingdom privilege and joy to be reliant upon God for one’s daily bread, one’s wellbeing, and one’s security, for there are ways that we can only know God through the experience of lack. Conversely, there is a challenge that comes with the attainment of financial means. Having experienced both poverty and relative financial and social stability, I much prefer that stability. And I want it for others. But my (our) dependence on God, our king, really is not the same. And there is the tension. We may count on our insurance plans, our benefits, our jobs, our retirement packages, our education, and our social connections. The article confronts us with this and warns us of the dangers.

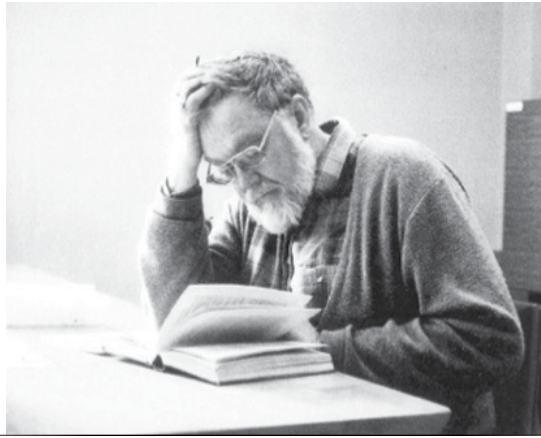
Lupton’s personal journey to understanding this beatitude is one that invites the reader to rethink what it looks like to be a part of God’s kingdom, to consider the blessedness that comes with poverty, and to grapple with the dangers of economic and social standing. What a great opportunity for contemplation on these things.

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LEGACY OF HARVIE MAITLAND CONN (1933 - 1999)

By Manuel Ortiz and Susan S. Baker

For every society and in every era God has always raised up a person who helped lead the church into a freshness of knowing Scripture and applying it to a changing world. Harvie Conn is such a person. He was a prophet of God who brought the Word to bear on the hearts and minds of people in North America. His calling was to introduce the Christian community to the cities of the world that God had ordained and that Christians had ignored. Harvie would say that the world is no longer that rural English village of the nineteenth century but rather the image of the New City of God described in Revelation.

Harvie, the student

From the first meeting I (Manny) had with Harvie in Chicago in 1978, he impressed me with his eagerness to learn. He was a good listener and wanted to be challenged in matters of theology and missions, especially from a two-thirds world point of view. He was finding his way through the maze of culture and globalization in an urban world. After many years of probing into the issues presented by theologians, anthropologists, and missiologists, he discovered that it was difficult for them to hear each other. He

noted in his preface *Eternal Word and Changing World*, “it seemed that frequently the theologians and the anthropologist were using the same words but speaking very different languages. We needed to hear each other better, to work harder at learning one another’s verbal symbols.”¹

From the time of his salvation in California and his entrance to Calvin College as a freshman student, his friends and colleagues recognized that Harvie had a photographic mind. He remembered almost everything he saw and read. Note taking from the board was a snap for him while other students wrestled with getting notes needed for grades and papers. In some ways he found formal education to be boring and at times irrelevant. What he preferred was dialogue from Scripture applied in a contemporary world, especially the interaction among students from a Majority World context. He always came across as an extrovert who loved the crowds, but in reality he was a profound introvert who loved his solitude and quiet times of study.

Completing his studies at Calvin in less than four years, he registered at Westminster Theological Seminary to begin theological studies with some of the most demanding and brilliant faculty of the early twentieth century. Faculty such as E.J. Young, Cornelius VanTil, John Murray, Edwin Clowney, and others were at his disposal. He was prepared to take in all that they offered him. Yet he was bothered by the lack of interaction. The classes were at times difficult for him to tolerate. In reading one of his notebooks for Dr. Young’s class, I noticed that his notes were precise and so exact that it seemed that he copied from Dr. Young’s notes. Alongside the margins he began to doodle and place notes like “only 40 minutes left,” “the next page,” and “10 minutes to go.” He was bored and ready for something else. He internally pleaded for dialogue and discussion.

Harvie, the missionary

From 1960 to 1972 Harvie was a missionary in Korea. While there he taught at the Presbyterian General Assembly Theological Seminary (Chongshin University Divinity Section). He also worked evangelistically with prostitutes in the red-light district where

1 Harvie M. Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Trialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 5.

he treated everyone with dignity and respect. He learned to speak Korean fluently, and was able to teach and preach without the aid of an interpreter, a real feat for an American.

As a professor in Korea, his students were at first intimidated. However, Harvie taught with passion, integrity, and dignity towards all. Many of his students had a limited educational background and would often ask questions that seemed irrelevant, but Harvie never put them down but encouraged them to keep asking questions.

Always the learner, Harvie allowed his experiences to teach him new truths. His work with the prostitutes taught him that he could not look at these women merely as sinners, but also as those who were sinned against. One time he was beaten up by a pimp, but he never stopped sharing the gospel. Dr. Hyung Yong Park related a story about Harvie.

One day, Dr. Conn went to preach the gospel at the prostitute village of Dongduchun. A couple women were sitting in a circle eating lunch with barley rice, bean stew (with a distinct smell), and kimchi. When they saw Dr. Conn approach, it aroused their curiosity, and they playfully, half-jokingly asked him to join them for lunch. Dr. Conn did not hesitate to accept this invitation, quickly took off his shoes as was the custom in Korea, and ate a lunch comprised with barley and kimchi with the women, relating the gospel to them in the process.²

He also began a Bible study with young beggar boys. He listened to them as to how they interpreted being poor in the Spirit. “After the Bible study, Conn recalled walking through the city wondering, what does ‘the poor’ mean in the Bible? Maybe this beggar boy has a better grasp of the Gospel than I do, he concluded.”³ Again, Harvie was open to learning from whomever he was engaging.

Harvie, the professor

When Harvie returned from Korea in 1972 he began teaching at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, PA, where he continued until his retirement in 1998. At first

2 Hyung Yong Park, “The Lasting Influence of Dr. Harvie M. Conn in Korea,” unpublished article, 2009, 2.

3 Mark Gornik, “The Legacy of Harvie Conn,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35, no. 4 (October 2011): 212.

he taught apologetics. He then began teaching the standard missions course in 1984 and eventually became the first professor of missions in the history of the seminary.⁴ “He was vehemently opposed to what he termed ‘academic apartheid’—separating the two disciplines [of theology and mission] into different academic departments.”⁵

His students soon learned that the classroom was only one component of the course, that the city of Philadelphia was used as a lab. Globalization was gaining momentum and was intricately tied to urbanization. Mark Gornik expressed it,

*Through the lens of the kingdom of God, Conn saw the city differently. Because cities were the future of the world, they were also the future of the church and missions. We no longer live in a “global village,” Conn would repeat, but a “global city.”*⁶

Dialogue and discussion became Harvie’s style of teaching. He engaged students with questions and ideas that needed a response. Once he read from the Koran and asked the students, “What part of Scripture did I just read?” Students shouted Psalms and New Testament passages but none were aware that the reading was from the Koran. The reason for this reading was to show how close some of the literature was in relationship to the Bible and the need for the students to be aware of this material. It was eventually revealed to the students who in turn laughed, and Harvie responded that he should repent for using this material with a final Harvie laugh. Harvie was more concerned with what the students did with the content than what was memorized. Another example was asking the students, “Will a theology formed out of culture and the situation of the Sawi look like a Korean theology?” He was not necessarily looking for the correct answer, but rather wanting the students to wrestle with issues of culture and theology.

Teaching along with writing was his love. Teaching always demanded further learning and probing. He was always teaching whether it was in or out of the classroom.

4 *Ibid.*, 213.

5 Manuel Ortiz with William S. Barker and Samuel T. Logan, Jr., “Introduction,” in *The Urban Face of Mission: Ministering the Gospel in a Diverse and Changing World*, ed. Manuel Ortiz and Susan S. Baker (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 5.

6 Op.Cit., Gornik, 213.

When Harvie came to Philadelphia, he found that Westminster was involved in providing training for primarily African American pastors in Philadelphia who did not have degrees. They were meeting on Saturdays for seminars, but Harvie did not believe that was enough, so he developed a three-year curriculum of evening, non-formal courses, and the program's name was changed to the Westminster Ministerial Institute. This eventually gravitated into a more formal approach to education called the Center for Urban Theological Studies (CUTS) with Geneva College accrediting the undergraduate program and Westminster accrediting a MA in Missiology. Over the years this has provided invaluable training for those to whom opportunities were not available as young people.

As a professor, and even after he was retired and was dealing with the burden of his own illness and that of his wife Dorothy, Harvie took the time to care for his students, to meet with them and counsel them spiritually as well as educationally.

Harvie was an avid reader and author. His insights on topics such as the poor, the oppressed, contextualization, and the urban church spread to thousands over the years.

Harvie found that the best way to confront injustices and instill compassion for the poor was to write books and articles on this subject, to lecture at the invitation of churches and educational institutions, and to live in community with his family. His many books and articles unreservedly promoted conviction, repentance, and transformation.⁷

Harvie, the person

Harvie was born in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, in 1933 but moved to the U.S. with his parents and became a U.S. citizen in 1957. His years in Canada taught him to love hockey, a love he maintained throughout the rest of his life. Another personal side of him that has been brought out in this legacy is that he loved humor, loved telling jokes and laughing at them himself, often louder than anyone else. Will Barker, dean of Westminster Theological Seminary during Harvie's last years there as professor, spoke of Harvie, "My memories of him and his unique manner of communicating go

7 Op.Cit., Ortiz et al., 2.

all the way back to when I was a university student and he was a seminarian assisting in an Orthodox Presbyterian church in New Jersey. Back then, in the 1950s, he was a lanky redhead whose smile and laugh were already unforgettable.”⁸ He also loved contemporary cinema and would use that genre to stimulate dialogue.

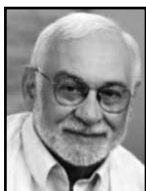
Throughout this legacy it is clear that Harvie had a deep concern for the poor. This was not just an academic concern; his life was consistent with his teaching and preaching. This concern led Harvie to a deep love for the city. He saw the city not just as a place where a lot of people lived but as a place that included the marginalized, oppressed, and disenfranchised, especially in U.S. cities. He believed the Lord’s heart broke when he saw so many being subjected to injustice and poverty, and Harvie taught that our hearts should be broken by the things that break the Lord’s heart. He wanted to see justice prevail in our cities. Urbanization was an important theme for him as was globalization, primarily because this dynamic brought more diverse poor into the cities thus creating a need for reconciliation along lines of ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Sam Logan, the dean and then the president of Westminster Theological Seminary during Harvie’s years as professor, summed up Harvie’s character by saying, “No one in my acquaintance ever embodied in life more fully than Harvie the things of which he spoke and wrote. Shining the light of the gospel on dark places of all sorts was Harvie’s specialty—in the classroom, on the written page, in the neighborhoods of Philadelphia, on the streets of Seoul.”⁹

Harvie didn’t like confrontation but his deep seated calling to proclaim justice and justification caused him to have to deal with confrontation. He did not like to be a party to church or administrative disagreements, but again he was drawn into this through his calling.

Harvie was a gentle and humble man who did not want honor or recognition. In fact, when he was laid to rest, he wore his well-known bib overalls and a Westminster sweatshirt. He loved the Word of God and what the Lord was teaching him about God’s love for the city. He was the epitome of an urban missiologist who is now at rest with the Lord for eternity.

8 *Ibid.*, 5.

9 *Ibid.*, 8.



Manuel Ortiz, a Puerto Rican born and raised in New York City, has devoted his Christian life to developing church leaders and planting churches. He taught urban missions courses for 24 years at Westminster Theological Seminary where he earned a Doctor of Ministry degree. At the same time “Manny” pastored a multi-ethnic inner city church in Philadelphia. While continuing his role as pastor, he now teaches in the urban program of Biblical Theological Seminary at the seminary’s Philadelphia extension site.



Susan Baker began her interest in urban mission work while a student at Wheaton College. After 21 years of ministry in the Puerto Rican barrio of Chicago (14 of which were with Manuel Ortiz and his wife, Blanca), Sue and her husband Randy moved with the Ortiz family to Philadelphia in 1987. Sue earned her Masters and PhD degrees from Temple University, taught with Manny at Westminster and Biblical Theological Seminaries, and partnered in the church planting ministry of their church.

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SEEK THE SHALOM OF THE (AFRICAN) CITY: A STUDY OF JEREMIAH 29:4-7

By I. W. (Naas) Ferreira

In Jeremiah 29, we find God's people living in exile in the midst of a heathen metropolis called Babylon. They were desperately longing for home and wanted to go back to Jerusalem as soon as possible. Their dreams were kept alive by false prophets who were telling them that it was just a matter of time before they would be taken back. But it was a lie. God had other plans for his people in exile.

God's Urban Mission Principle

The prophet Jeremiah presents the people in Babylon with a letter wherein God clearly reveals his will for his people in Babylon. The principle by which they were commanded to live in this space and time is also the principle whereby the Christian church today should be part of God's *missio Dei* in our own globalized and urbanized world. We should not live a life where we are focused on our own needs. God's people should seek to benefit the rest of the people: our neighbors, communities, and nations. Only when seeking to benefit *others*, will God's people also benefit. This is the life that prays for and lives as God intended life to be, called *shalom*. This is the way to be part of God's *urban mission* in 2014. The church of Jesus Christ should actively seek to be God's "Jerusalem" while we are still living as foreigners and refugees in a worldly Babylon.

Urbanization in Africa

While the rest of the world is desperately trying to cope with the challenges of the urbanizing world we live in, Africa is facing the same reality. But the situation differs in Africa. This difference in the context and the process of urbanization in Africa is only now being realized. In the past, organizations like the UN-Habitat and the World Bank were the most frequently cited sources of urban population statistics in Africa.

However, their data are often misleading and have exaggerated urbanization levels.¹ Many erroneous assumptions about African urbanization went unchallenged for decades.² Ideas and policies were indiscriminately transferred from the Global North with the result that many urbanization planning disasters in the Global South are the result of “best practice” transplants from the Global North.³

But there is good news. The fact of the establishment of the Association of Planning Schools in Africa⁴ has created an important new opportunity in Africa for getting the right information and using it correctly. According to a recent publication of the World Bank, urbanization is yet to happen in Africa and there is still time to get it right.⁵

The Formation of Global Christianity

Our world is experiencing the convergence of two mighty “streams.” The first stream is God’s *missio Dei*, flowing through world history and reaching out with the gospel of Jesus Christ to all the people at the ends of the world. This stream is today converging with the fast flowing stream of world urbanization. We have entered a post-Christendom⁶ time and are experiencing the formation of the so-called Third Church.⁷ The context of this dynamic church formation process is very closely linked to the urbanization processes that are currently impacting the cities of Africa. Those who study the urbanization in Africa should also focus intensely on the formation of the Third Church.

1 Debora Potts, “Whatever Happened to Africa’s Rapid Urbanisation?” *Africa Research Institute*, February 2012, <http://africaresearchinstitute.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Whatever-happened-to-Africas-rapid-urbanisation.pdf> (accessed May 28, 2014), 2.

2 Vanessa Watson and Babatunde Agbola, “Africa Research Institute,” *Counterpoints: Who Will Plan Africa’s Cities?* September 2013, <http://www.africaresearchinstitute.org/publications/counterpoints/who-will-plan-africas-cities/> (accessed May 29, 2014), 2.

3 See <http://www.aaps2014conference.org.za>.

4 Association of African Planning Schools, <http://www.aaps2014conference.org.za/conference-themes> (accessed May 28, 2014).

5 World Bank, “The World Bank,” *Harnessing Urbanization to End Poverty and Boost Prosperity in Africa: An Action Agenda for Transformation*, September 2013, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2013/09/18417628/harnessing-urbanization-end-poverty-boost-prosperity-africa-action-agenda-transformation> (accessed May 30, 2014), ix.

6 Christendom is the Christian church within the “boundaries” of Western culture. Christendom played a very important role in the formation of the Western urban world, but its time is now over.

7 Third Church is the growing Christian Church within the Majority World—also called the Southern Church. See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.

Urgent Action Needed

In a time where there is still an urban bias in Africa, where there is no consistent national policy for planning and managing the present and significant process of urbanization,⁸ where governments are unable and even unwilling to influence the agenda for the sustainable regulation of urbanization,⁹ something urgently needs to happen. Critically important change depends on planners who are innovative problem solvers and willing to collaborate with all parties involved in the development process, including local communities.¹⁰ UN-Habitat also pleads for the incorporation of community organizations in the planning and implementing phases of the urbanizing processes in Africa. They are talking about the need to “re-imagine the African city” by creating new paradigms for modern African urbanism.¹¹

Call the Third Church

While the challenges of African urbanization need to be defined correctly from the start, a crucial ingredient to the ultimate solution should also be incorporated. If Christendom played a major role in the formation of the Western city, the Third Church also needs to be involved in the formation of Africa urbanism. If you really want to impact the growing African city, call on the church. It is already sent by God.

8 Ivan Turok, “Desentralisation and Local Governance,” *Urbanisation and Development*, October 2012 http://www.delog.org/cms/upload/pdf-africa/Urbanisation_and_Development_in_South_Africa_-_Economic_Imperatives_Spatial_Distortions_and_Strategic_Responses.pdf (accessed May 29, 2014), 2.

9 Political leaders in Africa are very much dependent on their rural political support base.

10 Watson, 2.

11 UN-Habitat 2014, 37. *The State of African Cities* 2014, 2014. <http://unhabitat.org/the-state-of-african-cities-2014/> (accessed May 29, 2014).



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O.K., WHITE FOLKS: MY TOP FIVE WAYS YOU CAN REALLY HELP!

By Pastor Jonathan Brooks a.k.a. Pastah J

It was a brutally cold Saturday evening in January of this year when my wife and I had agreed earlier in the week that we would share our story with a group that was staying at an inner-city ministry where we work closely. Neither of us really wanted to brave the cold or dig ourselves out of the alley again! We tried to convince ourselves we could just cancel. We thought, “It’s just going to be another group of ignorant upper middle-class White folks coming to ask really uncomfortable questions and make very uninformed statements.” Did we really want to fight the brutal cold and shovel our way out of our garage in West Englewood (Illinois, USA) to hear that? Was it truly worth it to hear this group, although genuinely, ask us questions like, “If it is so bad here, why don’t these people just move away?”

Needless to say, we trudged through that snow and cold with our two children and headed over to the ministry. Just as we expected, it was a majority White, suburban, upper middle-class church group coming to “learn” from those working in the city and seeking a better understanding around issues of poverty. They were very open and honest about their misconceptions about our neighborhood and the image that was perpetuated by the media. They awkwardly asked us questions about poverty, inner-city education, food deserts, and violence in the city. Some of the questions were based on such extremely ignorant biases that they made me cringe in disbelief and aroused authentic anger. (I won’t go into these questions here, but let me just say that if you think I raise my children in a war zone where people are being brutally killed everyday and the value systems of the average resident are evil, I think you would be hard pressed to call me a responsible father.) My wife and I shared our story of returning back to Englewood after getting married and becoming the pastor of Canaan Church in 2006.

When I was done, I opened up the floor for questions; I was pleasantly surprised by how candidly the group was able to admit they had allowed biases to form without any tangible proof or personal connection to our inner-city communities.

What happened next was this extremely emotional moment where people feel the need to confess their feelings of shame, guilt, and helplessness. It led to the very question that I am writing this article about as well as my passion for giving an answer. It went something like this: “Now that we’ve been made aware of this situation, how can we help?” It was followed by statements like “there is so much to be done” and “if you could tell us one thing we could do when we leave here as a challenge, what would that be?” I often don’t have great responses to this question in the moment, but I decided after this last opportunity that I would sit down and really think through some answers to this question.

Is there anything I can do?

A young White man once approached the great African American evangelist Tom Skinner after one of his sermons; he said to him, *“I agree with your beliefs on racial reconciliation and want to know, as a White man, is there anything I can do to help with the cause.”* Tom’s response was probably shocking to this young, enthusiastic, hopeful, young man because he simply said, *“No, there is not.”* The young man, refusing to take no for an answer, replied, *“Surely there must be something I can do?”* and Tom said to him, *“Young man, we appreciate your support and energy, but really the best thing you can do for our movement is to go back to your churches, families, communities, and friends and share the truth you have heard today. It is the education of your own race, which will be the biggest catalyst for change in reconciling all races and bringing the kingdom value of racial unity and harmony into existence.”*

In the spirit of Tom Skinner, I share with you my top five things that a White person of privilege could do to help in the fight for racial unity and harmony in America. I would also like to add that I am aware that race is not the only issue in America around which reconciliation needs to take place. But if we act as if racial profiling and discrimination do not still exist, we are fooling ourselves. Not only do they still exist, they are fueled

by the same sociological lies, which are at the core of every discriminatory system in our world: class, mass incarceration, sexism, ablest issues, ageism, sexual orientation, etc. Here are a few ways that I propose the wealthy majority in our country can begin to get involved (Disclaimer: reconciliation is a long-term process and therefore I would encourage you to be prepared for a long-term commitment since there are no quick fixes!):

1. Get informed

It is extremely important that you do your research. Find authors, speakers, artists, politicians, and educators who are talking about these issues. Listen carefully to their thoughts, ideas, and expressions, and be open and honest about your reactions. Information is a great foundation; it does not have to be the first step, as sometimes you will be confronted with issues long before you are able to research them. However, you must not skip this step because experience without a sociological understanding of the systems that create injustice and prejudice can lead to even worse misconceptions.

2. Get inside

This step is also extremely important. Many people want to know how they can help but have no desire to truly understand the experience of the minority in this country. They would like to help the situation without being engaged in the process of transformation or entering into the pain or problems of the people. This approach will only lead to further disconnection and discontent; it is only until you have experienced the systemic struggles associated with living in under-resourced communities that you can really begin to understand how to help.

3. Get in relationship

Here is the key to the entire process and what I consider the missing link in the chain that will lead to the eradication of discrimination and racism. Relationship changes everything! The only reason racism can exist is because people look at one another as objects rather than people created in the image of God. This is all due in part to lack of relationship. God created everything to have relationship both with him and one another. However, these relationships were broken through our actions in the

Garden of Eden, but thankfully they were restored again through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. We not only have access to a repaired relationship with God, but we now have the opportunity to repair the other broken relationships around us. It is in these reconciled and repaired relationships that we truly understand the gifts and needs of one another. When we are in relationship with someone and learn to love them for who they are, we can no longer dismiss them as the unwanted other.

4. Get in people's faces

I believe relationship is the key and central piece to this process; however, for our White privileged brothers and sisters, this step is the probably the most challenging. This is a challenge for you to now take this information you have, these experiences you have from being on the inside, the new respect and love you have from these newly formed relationships and lovingly share them with your family, friends and colleagues. You will never be able to truly understand what it is like to live as a minority in America, but you will get a small microcosm of the feeling when you become the only person in the house challenging everyone's misconceptions about prejudice and discrimination. You become the strange one who always brings up race conversations whenever you're around. You become the weirdo who turns off the news when you see racist propaganda perpetuated about low-income communities. You become the one to introduce everyone to the literature, art, politics, and life lessons that informed you. Get in their face and don't let them ignore the truth!

5. Get involved

Also, I am asking that you get involved, but you might be surprised by what I mean by this statement. I have one rule to those I speak to or who come to our community, especially mission groups. Do not come here and do anything you do not do at home. Here is why: because coming to our community and wanting to help alleviate poverty insinuates that there is no poverty where you reside. Coming to our community to help single mothers makes us believe that there are no single mothers in your community. I would advise you to first look at the brokenness in your own community and engage

it before you look at the brokenness in ours. I also challenge you to be able to see the Glory of God in our community and thank God for it just as you see it in yours. It is important we realize that both the Glory of God and the brokenness of humanity exist everywhere and in everything and that it is our responsibility to identify them and seek direction from God on how to address them both.

Lastly, I am asking that you do not forsake the redistribution of resources. This includes the exchanging of money, for there is an economic wealth gap in our country that is ridiculous. As your views change, it should affect the way you spend your money and the things in which you decide to invest. It does not, however only mean money, for just as much as money, there needs to be access. Minorities need access to networks, relationships, and skills. Exposure is key to an even playing field and allowing open access for those who have been typically shut out of certain areas of society. Those doing inner city ministry need your support financially and through your networks. How many of us received our first job because of some relationship either we established or we were privy to because of someone else we knew? Along with financial gifts, these structures of power need to be redistributed throughout society, especially access-giving relationships.



Pastor Jonathan Brooks serves on the south side of Chicago at Canaan Community Church in West Englewood, Illinois, USA, where he is senior pastor. As a firm believer in investing in the community you grew up in, Jonathan has a deep desire to impress this virtue on the students and young people in his congregation, classroom, and community. Through various partnerships, his congregation provides youth development, holistic health options, college scholarships, music lessons, and continual support to families of incarcerated males living in Englewood and other Chicago communities. He has recorded four hip-hop albums and is currently working on his first solo project. Pastor Jay and his wife, Micheal, are contributing authors to *Making Neighborhoods Whole* by John Perkins and Wayne Gordon as well as the new book *Banned Questions for Christians* by Christian Piatt.

SERBIA'S URBAN CHALLENGE

By Ondrej Franka

Serbia does not have a long evangelical Christian tradition. The first evangelical churches were established in the latter half of the nineteenth century. With only a few urban exceptions, the churches that were planted in Serbia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were found in rural villages. The values of these settings characterized the picture of the evangelical church, especially as people treasured family values and lots of free time. Churches in the village setting were organized to fit this pattern of life. Their meetings and worship services were considered more of an event than a point of time. Thus nobody looked at the clock or felt pressure to be elsewhere. Everything was scheduled around the time for feeding the cattle. Church services were great events where whole families spent their time, often staying for three services per Sunday!

This way of “doing” the church certainly had a great impact on the spread of the gospel in Serbia, especially to its larger cities and metropolitan areas. As industrialization took place, migration into the cities started as well. Here people found jobs and many other things which were unheard of in the village. Of course, Christian folk also took part in this migration into the cities bringing the gospel with them. Migration resulted in a type of “urban church planting” that was not by choice or commission, but rather by transplantation from the village settings. This is the way most city churches were established in Serbia.

In this new urban setting, many former practices and services of the church had to be abandoned, though some survived. Cities presented a new socio-economic environment. The new forms of urban life started to mold the way the migrants lived, and the values of larger family size and owning cattle stayed in the old village setting. However, there were many people who never adjusted and thus failed miserably. Others, especially younger ones, quickly adapted to city life but sadly, they did so at the expense of their spirituality.

At the same time that the church needed to take root in this new setting, a new blow called communism was dealt to Christianity in Serbia. Communism as a godless system not only discouraged religion but also attacked the family and other social values. It put great emphasis on materialism and education. Instead of worshiping God, people found themselves worshiping their careers, their jobs, and the education of their children. Communism served as a convenient vehicle for people to advance in these areas.

What did actually happen to the church in the city? People from the village brought their faith to the city and started to worship God in this new and strange environment. Their theology was mainly that of survival in this hostile setting. Very little evangelism was done or promoted. In many ways the church became a replica of the old village church.

As we analyze present-day city churches in Serbia, we can conclude one thing: almost every member can trace his or her origin either directly to a village or to an ancestor who came from a village. Somehow the urban churches survived the great political changes going from monarchial to communism to present-day free democracy. Nevertheless, the fact is that the people are not being transformed to serve their urban environment effectively with the gospel.

One other factor to be mentioned is that in Serbia migration is continuing in the same direction as before, that is, from the village to the city. Thus the cities are growing rapidly such as the capital city of Belgrade that has grown to two and a half million people. But Belgrade only has a small community of evangelical believers made up of five or so small evangelical churches and a few house groups. This is far too few to meet the present need and opportunity. The Serbian urban church must heed the mandate for evangelization.

What is the evangelical church in Serbia going to do? One thing is sure: it needs to continue to build a strategy for reaching the cities of the country. Admittedly, this was never seriously done before. As said above, even today churches primarily consist of people whose origins reach back to the villages and serious, organized urban evangelism never took place. Yet now is also the time to build an urban strategy for

evangelizing the cities of Serbia. This strategy must include how to reach people in high-rise apartments, how to penetrate other social forms of city life with the gospel, how to do street evangelism, and how to reach a fellow student, co-worker in the factory, or neighbor, and so forth.

When evangelicals in Serbia understand the challenge and opportunity afforded in cities, an urban strategy will be a must, not just an option. Then the people of the cities of this country will hear the gospel, and its people will find out that God loves the great cities of Serbia. God's mandate applies to cities too, for theirs is the kingdom as well.



Rev. Dr. Ondrej Franka graduated from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with the Doctor of Ministry degree. Presently he serves as the President of the Union of Baptist Churches in Serbia. He also heads the Antioch Church Planting Ministry and the Baptist Theological School in Novi Sad, Serbia. Ondrej and his wife Milina are nationals who live and serve in Serbia.

THE HISPANIC CULTURAL TSUNAMI

By Pedro Aviles

The “browning of America” or to put it another way the “Hispanicization of America” is evident in the neighborhoods, market places, educational institutions, government, churches, multiethnic marriages, and in many other arenas throughout North America. Missionaries with their mission agencies no longer have to travel to the southern hemisphere to reach a Hispanic population. God himself has moved this new people groups into our North American neighborhoods.

How can the church become an effective witness to our new Hispanic neighbors? She must incarnate the gospel and her ministries in the garments of the culture without compromising biblical truth. In other words, contextualization. The Apostle Paul accommodated his ministry to cultural markers (1 Cor 9:22-23).

Therefore, communicating in the native language of Hispanic people is one important factor. Are there other cultural markers that ought to be considered and incorporated into our mission strategies among Hispanics? In this brief column I will present a few crucial markers that all church leaders must navigate in order to develop an effective ministry to Hispanics.

Family

You might have heard the expression “Mi casa es su casa.” Translated this is “my house is your house,” which means you are welcomed into the family. Family is not defined by the nuclear structure of mom, dad, and children. To Hispanics the family structure includes the aunts and uncles, grandparents, cousins, close friends, and more. A mission implication is the need for designing family-oriented ministries and creating places where whole families are welcomed. Second, understand that prayerfully witnessing to the key individual(s) in the family structure can result in the rest of the family members coming to Christ and to the church.

Personalism

Hispanics are very warmhearted people who greet one another with a kiss on the cheek. When conversing, they stand close to each other and touch another person's arm or hand. When you ask, "How are you doing?" the response will be in most cases a personal family story, leaving little unsaid. They share their feelings with deep expressions. Therefore, ministry must move from the abstract to the personal. When you are asked how you are doing, it is wise for you to respond personally and with emotion. It is wise not to move inches away in the middle of a conversation when Hispanics are talking, touching. If a person moves away, and does not respond in a personal manner, this can be interpreted as being closed, guarded, and indifferent.

Respect

Hispanics value respect given to the elderly and to people in positions of authority. While trust is earned, respect is automatic. Hispanics often will defer to the judgments and decisions of those in authority, many times seeking their blessing and approval. Children will ask a blessing from parents when leaving the home. Priests and others in power will be called by the title of their positions. In all initial contact there is a sense of formality. Therefore, in initial encounters, Hispanics maintain that formality. Give honor to the elderly, to fathers, to leaders of the community. Only after invited to relax should you respond informally and personally.

Harmony and Saving Face

Hispanics in general avoid conflict, confrontation, and negative situations so that relations can remain harmonious. They value family, personalism, and respect all at the same time. To balance these values, often what is required is communicating what is expected rather than what is the truth. Closely related to harmony is saving face. Hispanics come from a shame-based society, not a guilt-based one. Hispanics will interpret correction as a description of their identity and their personhood, and not as a correction of their action or a word they said. Witnessing to Hispanics and pointing out their sins will cause many Hispanics to interpret that as saying that they are evil

people. When correcting a Hispanic, perhaps do it in private so that they will not feel shamed in front of others. The Hispanic self-defense mechanism will shift blame away from self to others.

Mannerism and Passion

Finally, Hispanics value passion and display it by being loud and emotional when they speak. They will use many hand gestures and touch you as they speak. They may sound angry, but they are just expressing their thoughts with passion and conviction. If a church leader or member is communicating God's truth solely from an intellectual, rational, and logical form, the Hispanic may think this person is either lying or is not really convinced about the topic being discussed. Therefore, in preaching, teaching, and witnessing, passionate expression and demonstrative gestures will help convince the Hispanic audience about the truth that is being communicated.

Conclusion

These Hispanic cultural markers must become the garments by which to communicate the truth of the gospel of God's kingdom for effective witness and mission among Hispanics today. Missiologist Daniel Sánchez states, "The most effective Hispanic church planting approaches being utilized today are those that take into account the cultural characteristics of their target group. Among the factors that need to be considered are religious background, personal relationships, family ties, emotional traits, and assimilation stages."¹ The gospel must be incarnated in the Hispanic cultural garment. Then Hispanics will become more open to accepting the Gospel and feel welcomed in our churches.



Pedro Avilés holds a master's degree in Christian Leadership from North Park Theological Seminary and a PhD in Intercultural Studies from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. A church planter, professor, and pastor, Pedro is currently the pastor of Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church in Berwyn, Illinois, USA. His great passion is to make the fullness of Christ known and to raise the next generation of godly leaders. He and his wife Diana have three children: Elisabet, Mariana, and Pedro IV.

1 Daniel R. Sánchez, *Hispanic Realities Impacting America: Implications for Evangelism and Missions* (Ft. Worth, TX: Church Starting Network. 2006), 238.

ONCE THE POEM

By Joel McKerrow

There was once a little seed, planted
 once a little dream started,
 once a little fire burning
 once the yearning
 once the calling
 once the gathering
 once the falling in love with a new way of being.

Once this was easier than it is right now.

It was a Sunday morning soaring
it was the glory of presence
and the story of a saving grace
the race had just begun,
feet run to the new sound,
the bound of leaping free,
shackles loosed,
the blind to see,
It was all these things,
it was all these things
we were all these things...

Till life got in the way,
till the dark night of the clay,
till God no longer met my expectations.
The storms surround this small wooden ship,

the temptation is to bail, not the water, but my life,
my faith is old and tired,
it's required so much,

how many times God,
how many steps,
how many stumbles,
how many waves to pound against me
just want to be free...

but he, he looks at me.

stops me, straight in the eye he is staring,
I'm glaring into him, he looks at us,
stands before us, calls us forward,
asks us to trust, in the rush of life, the fight, when all has fallen,
faith only begins when we are tempted to throw it all in,
faith is only faith in the midst of doubt, he tells us to hold on,

to the little dream started,
to the little fire burning
to the yearning
to the calling
to the gathering
to the falling in love with a new way of being.

Where faith is not about a Sunday morning,
but about drawing a line in the sand
walking forth head high, feet stumbling though they may be,
we give ourselves to the lonely and the few,
to never walk past the suffering of humanity,
there was a man who suffered that we wouldn't have to be,
be we black or white, rich or poor, at home or seeking asylum,

our call is to never walk past them,
the Christ came to bring his new kingdom,
not the western dream and comfortability,
not pie in the sky, but flesh and blood and loaves of bread for the hungry
a cup of water to the beggar,
to visit the prisoner and the refugee,

You see, What we believe
is not seen in the things that we say,
nor even the way that we pray,
but in the way that we live, in the way that we give ourselves
to the lonely and the few, to those who have nothing.
I'm seeing that it all begins here,
not when I've got it all together,
but when where walking on no matter the weather,
the cost, the loss, we take up the cross, he's drawing us in,
to the little dream started,
to the little seed planted,
to the little fire burning
to the yearning
to the calling
to the gathering
to the falling in love with a new way of being.



Joel McKerrow is a performance poet, author, educator, and activist from Melbourne, Australia. He is the founder of The Centre for Poetics and Justice, a not-for-profit community arts organization focused on using poetics as a form of literary education, self-expression, and social engagement for marginalised teenagers.

CITY FOCUS: BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

By Manuel Sosa

Buenos Aires is, “one of the most important, largest and most populous of South American capitals, often referred to as the *Paris of South America* (“unidos por la historia 7- el domicilio del poder- 2,” YouTube). After living there for over four years, I am more prone to call it the *New York of South America*, due to its immensely diverse and rich ethnography. One can easily observe the diversity of peoples and cultures and come to the reality that, “...amazingly 85 percent of Argentina’s population [can be traced] back to European heritage ... what results is a very complex intermixing of races, sharing of traditions...” (www.expanish.com/blog/2013/04/ethnicity-in-buenos-aires). INDEC, the national census bureau, puts its best population estimate in their 2010 census at 14,819,137 for the combined 48 barrios in the greater Buenos Aires metropolis. The result of this agglomeration of so many cultures results in a rainbow of colors, cuisine, religions, and their respective houses of worship. The people of the city are passionate about their *futbol* (soccer), politics, tango, and their *asado* (their grilling of meat). One of their favorite sayings is that one can change religion, their wife, even their family, but never their allegiance to their favorite soccer team. The present Catholic pope comes from Buenos Aires. Here are some ways you can uplift this city in prayer:

- Pray that new works can be opened, especially in areas of the city where there is no evangelical presence.
- Pray for the church leaders as they encounter not only different religions of the world worshipping in their city, but especially as they are bombarded by false doctrines from different supposed Christian sects and cults.
- Pray for the economic status of the country as they see their peso devalued almost daily and experts are predicting a possible crash in the not so distant future.
- Pray for many struggling churches and small Christian groups so that they might remain encouraged.
- Pray for the thousands of international students flocking to Argentina for university education—which is free of charge to any person, regardless of where they are from.



Top: The iconic image of Maria Eva Duarte de Peron (Evita) can be found all over the country. The ruling political are from the Peronista party, named after General Juan Peron who was president of the country three different times. Evita was his second wife and much beloved by the people due to her many efforts to help the common people of the country.

Bottom: In Palermo, one of the most affluent barrios, the largest mosque in all of South America can be found. Some estimates place the number of Muslims in Argentina around 700,000, which are largely descendants of Syrian and Lebanese immigrants.



Top: Miguel Parisi has worked at the Senate chambers for over 20 years and had prayed that somehow the gospel could be accessible to the politicians. He has, over the years, prayed at every one the senate seats and for the Senators that make decisions that affect so many. He literally holds the keys to this building.

Bottom left: Luciano Bongarrá, started Parlamento y Fe in 2009 with the aim of reaching the politicians at all levels government. His group holds weekly Bible studies inside the national capitol where politicians and aids can attend. Their organization has also started groups in other Latin American cities.

Bottom right: This is the National Capitol and where the Senate meets and where Parlamento y Fe (Parliament and Faith), holds weekly Bible studies.



Top: This group of international students has grown a group of over 300 meeting in three different cities in Argentina and nine small groups in Buenos Aires. It started in 2009 with for Brazilian students, but is now reaching students from all over Latin America that come to study free in Argentina.

Bottom: A small group Bible study group with international students attending university in Buenos Aires.



Top: As a city that never sleeps, most of the citizens of Buenos Aires proper live in high-rise apartments. Census data gives us the figure of 34,800 inhabitants per square mile. To reach the city people will need to look up.

Bottom: The most recognizable landmark of the city is the Obelisk, which is in the middle of the widest avenue in the world, 9 de julio.



Top: Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner is in her second four-year term as president. Her husband Nestor Kirchner preceded her with a single term. He passed away unexpectedly in 2010.

Bottom: These less fortunate sleep in the shadows of extremely expensive high-rise apartments.



Top: The Catholic influence is seen even in public places like this train central. Many Argentines claim to be Catholic, but few actually practice it.

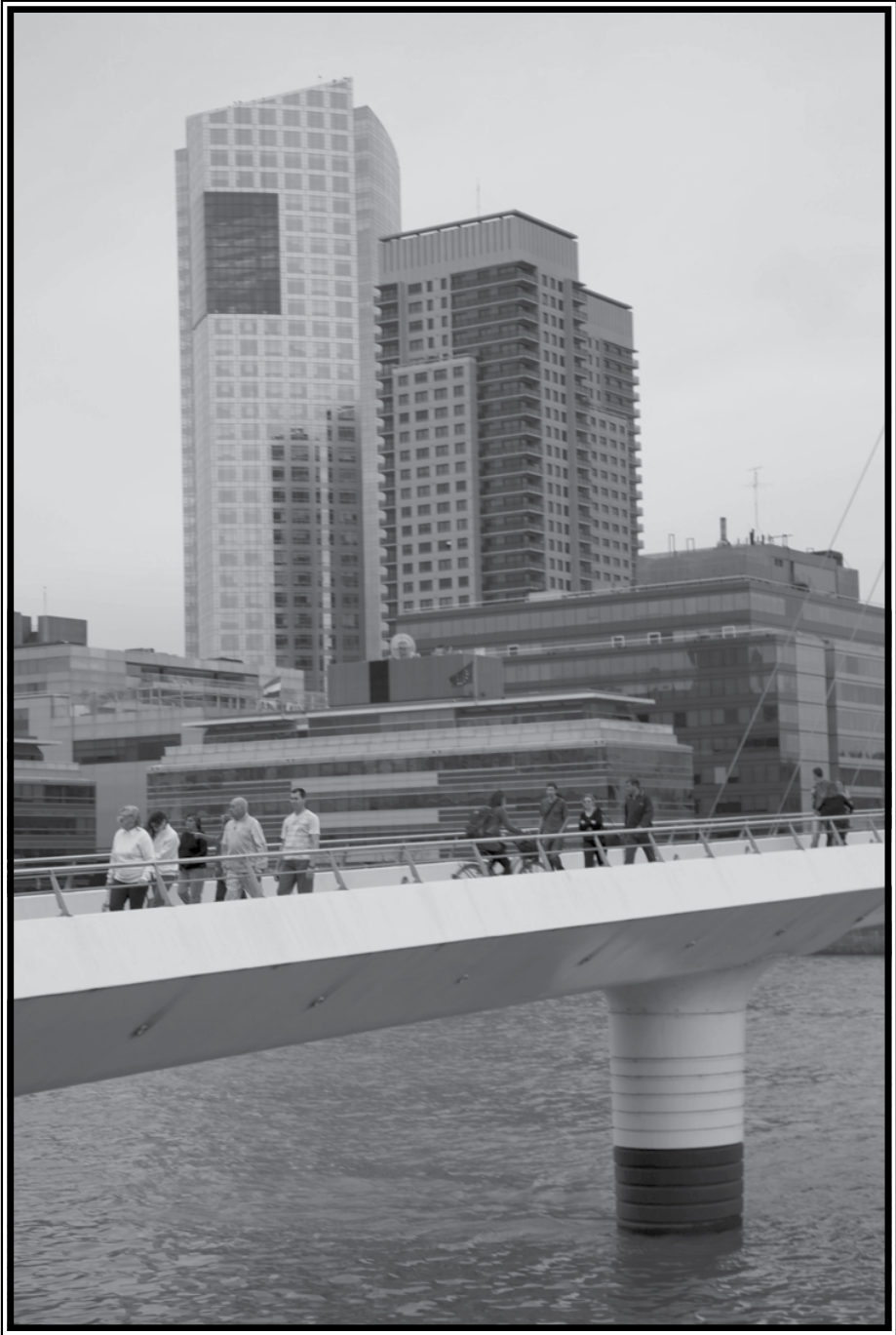
Bottom: Demonstrations are a daily reality in this government seat of the country. These protests are normally scheduled through the government and one starts out the day by seeing how to avoid them throughout the day, as they will close streets and even freeways with government permission.



Top: Apartment life is normal and finding a way to reach the people within these walls continues to stymie efforts to evangelize the city.

Bottom left: The European influence is still visible among the crowds. Many are amazed that Argentina is not your typical Latin American country.

Bottom right: Yerba mate is the national drink of Argentines. It is an herbal type of tea and many people carry a thermos of hot water all day to drink the tea. If it is shared, it is a sign of being accepted into the group.



Puerto Madero is a couple blocks from the downtown area and has been transformed in less than 20 years from the old docks and warehouse district to the highest priced property in the country. It is a barrio with an area of 0.8 square miles and about 10,000 people. There is no church of any kind in this sector of Buenos Aires.



Young and old have come from Paraguay to try and find a better life in this city, which attracts those from poorer countries like Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador.

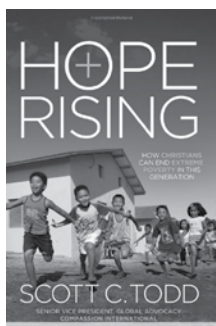


Manuel Sosa and his wife Berta are retired International Mission Board missionaries of the Southern Baptist Convention. They served for over 28 years in Ecuador, Chile, and Argentina. He was a seminary professor, pastor, and church planter in these countries and most recently started a Spanish speaking network in the DFW area.

HOPE RISING: HOW CHRISTIANS CAN END EXTREME POVERTY IN THIS GENERATION

Scott Todd

Review by Aaron Woods



In today's world of technology and advancement, the majority of our world is dominated by a more powerful, deadly force: poverty. A destructive force that takes millions of lives each year, but what is the church's response? Should we work to eliminate poverty? Is ending extreme poverty even an option?

Scott Todd, Senior Vice President for Global Advocacy at Compassion International, more than thinks so. In his book, *Hope Rising*, he shows the church and the world how extreme poverty can be eradicated in this generation—just 25 years.

With empirical research, tales of success and failure, Todd opens our eyes to see the church has been making significant improvements on erasing poverty, but is often held back by the tyranny of low expectations. Any rational person may see the impossibility of the task, but Todd sees a new logic. He addresses how Christians can create change in the public, business, and social sectors of society to end poverty.

Todd argues that verses like “the poor will always be with you” have been deeply misunderstood and are not universal declarations of God-ordained poverty. The church has been given an incredible task to steward the wealth and power given to us by God and yet, we are challenged to live and give according to the reckless generosity of God. Todd excellently sets the reader free from the tyranny of low expectations and shows how through simple generosity the church can create significant change in poverty. “Our timidity here has a lot to do with our low expectations of the future. If we think the poor will always be with us, then they probably will.”

In 1981, 52 percent of the world's population lived in extreme poverty. Today the number is down to 21 percent—half of what it was. Significant progress was made in just one generation and Todd says, we can do even better. We understand poverty now more than ever and have more medicinal, health, and human resources than ever before to end extreme poverty.

In his final chapter he offers one simple and impactful way to work to end poverty: Child sponsorship with Compassion International. Without denying the good work that Compassion does around the world, I would like to see more creative church-oriented options for working to end poverty. Throughout his book, Todd suggests other actions like supporting Christian, holistic ministry for the poor. Yet his vision for how the church responds to poverty always moves outside itself and does not offer the church itself as the set apart community where poverty does not exist. It seems the church is a means to an end and not an end in itself.

Todd builds up the power and achievement of the church, but leaves to be desired ways the church as a unique body with a unique mission can in their own communities end poverty and be that set apart community through which the reign of God is revealed. Todd desires to mobilize the church for change and recognizes that the church is the “one institution on earth with the capacity, the presence, the credibility, the endurance, and the passion to perform the ultimate act of caring for the poor.” Yet Todd as sees the eradication of poverty as part of the advancement of the kingdom on earth, he stops short of seeing the church as that community where poverty does not exist.

Overall, this book helps free us from low expectations, giving Christians new concrete, courageous hope to help end poverty in this generation, but lacks direction for the church community to be itself a set apart community as a response to poverty. This would be a great resource to anyone new to the conversation on church and poverty, but lacks serious insight for experienced persons already at work in the *Misero Dei*.

HIGHWAY TO HELL: THE ROAD WHERE CHILDHOODS ARE STOLEN

Matt Roper

Review by Jennifer Zuck, MA, LPC



British journalist Matt Roper and Canadian country singer Dean Brody set out to travel the BR-116, a motorway that runs through the country of Brazil, to investigate and document stories of young girls being sexually exploited. However, their journey quickly transformed into a life-altering event that became about more than just listening to these girls' stories, but to become a voice for sexually exploited girls across Brazil.

As a voice for the voiceless, *Highway to Hell* is powerful. The authors painstakingly portray the lives of extreme poverty, limited resources, and few opportunities for income that are so commonplace in many parts of Brazil. This culture of poverty perpetuates the exploitation of the young, including girls used as an income-producing property and not as the children who they truly are. The average age for entrance into the life of sexual exploitation is 13; however, girls as young as 10 and 11 are often forced to begin earning money. This is the reality Matt and Dean saw in each village, town, and city where they traveled. With each village, their goal became to give each faceless and voiceless girl they encountered a face and voice for a call to justice. Their stories are more than just words on a page. They are the lives of our most precious gift: our children.

You cannot read this book and put it back on the shelf an unchanged person. The girls' stories become a plea for justice. These are real girls feeling real pain and that pain jumps off the pages and into the reader's heart. This book calls us to carry on the work that was started in Brazil to reach around all parts of the

world by being educated, aware, and active.

Be Educated. We often look at the issue of child prostitution and think at some level there is still a choice; a choice to enter that life, a choice to get away, a choice to just say “no.” This book does an excellent job of breaking through all those misconceptions about children being sexually exploited. A true choice would entail an equal and viable option, a decision between many opportunities, and within a culture and justice system that fights for freedom of its most vulnerable. However, over and over again we meet girls in this book who have no opportunity to be free; they are sex slaves. This book calls us to educate ourselves with facts, not with opinions. We need to put aside our criticisms, judgments, and preconceived notions of what we think prostitution looks like, and to seek truth, justice, and freedom for all people.

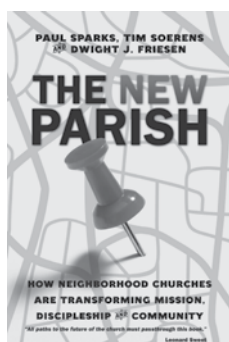
Be Aware. We like to believe that this kind of evil doesn’t happen, and if it does happen, it does not happen that often. This book asks us to take off our blinders and actually see the world around us accurately. I think the fear of most people is that when you do that, you can never put the blinders back on, and that means we must take action. You may be thinking that this does not happen in your community, in your town, in your backyard; it does. I challenge you to open your eyes and truly see. It will change your life forever, but that is what must happen if we are to change this global epidemic of child sexual exploitation.

Be Active. Matt and Dean did not stop at listening to the girls’ stories. Each girl they encountered was brought to life in the pages of this book, which reminds us that these are not just some fictional stories. This is reality. Children being sold for sex, forced to work in brothels, degraded and humiliated, violated, and often betrayed by family and friends. This book screams for us to do something, not just passively read a book, and move on to the next thing in our lives. Now, not everyone will start an outreach program like Matt and Dean did in Medina, Brazil. But there are plenty of organizations to partner with, volunteer for, and be a part of right in your own community. When you read this book, which I encourage you to do, be prepared to be challenged to be more than a reader of this book and to be a doer of justice and a voice for the voiceless.

THE NEW PARISH: HOW NEIGHBORHOOD CHURCHES ARE TRANSFORMING MISSION, DISCIPLESHIP AND COMMUNITY

Paul Sparks, Paul, Tim Soerens, and Dwight J. Friesen.

Review by Martin Navarro



The New Parish is a response to a postmodern church. The authors attempt to describe what it means to be a faithful church. The three authors share a common understanding of the church being called to serve neighborhoods. They arrive at this understanding from three distinctive traditions. Although the authors give indication of their traditions, they prefer to understand the missional church as a communal movement that

unites traditions. They agree that the church needs to be focused on the neighborhood and not on itself.

The authors share their insights about how to be creative with church community development (e.g., developing social enterprises and thinking both “global and local” when making decisions). Their ideas for church community development focus strongly on local missions. They advocate for churches to be connected with local decisions, but their understanding of church does not leave their western White concepts. The non-western White concepts that were mentioned were poorly articulated. For example, the term “other” was used without any clarity. The reader can assume the authors are referring to minorities; however, this term is also used to reference the impoverished and, in other places, to reference race or class.

Unfortunately, this book is aimed at a particularly North American White crowd. The authors fail to understand the church movement globally and what it means to experience incarnational ministry with the poor. The book has three areas of assumptions.

First, the book uses the language of the “Western North American” church. This language is misleading because it is not multicultural and ignores what is happening in diverse church settings across North America. For example, the authors discuss declining numbers in church attendance. This is not true for Latino/a and African American churches in North America. The authors are caught up in their own context and do not explore how other cultures have mobilized the church in their communities. For years, minority churches have understood and practiced what it meant to be missional community churches.

A second assumption is their understanding of the terms “local” and “global.” The authors do not understand that local is global in today’s world, especially in urban settings. Migration and globalization means that a person does not have to go far to experience other expressions of church. But when the authors talked “global,” they used it in reference to the subject of suffering. This is problematic because it characterizes churches outside of North America as places of suffering rather than as vital expressions of the church.

This leads to the third assumption. The authors suggest that North American Christians should visit other countries for their formation. They see the value in a person traveling to another country to be formed, but they seem unaware of the privilege of North American wealth that makes travel possible and the irony of leaving behind the poverty when they leave the countries they visit.

To understand a church embedded in their neighborhood, the authors need to begin with different cultures.

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