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Section One

Section one explores the biblical call to incarnational mission within today's cities. The section provides a reflection on the nature of the city, the lives and culture of the people who live there, and Christian witness in contemporary urban culture.

Section Two

Section two provides case studies that model the presence of Christ in our cities. The first three clearly demonstrate relationality, the next four, service, and the final two community and worship through planting of new faith communities. Predictably, those essential characteristics are mingled and overlap. Spirituality is demonstrated in worship and the transformation of lives inspiring each narrative.

Section Three

Section three is a concluding call for the church to faithfully witness for Christ in the urban center. The section describes how the six essential characteristics are put into practice in the context of urban mission and ministry. The application forms the meaning of transformational evangelism in the city.

Foreword **F**

The weekend after the September 11 attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C., Graydon Carter was talking on the phone to Christopher Hitchens. Carter was then the celebrated editor of *Vanity Fair*. Hitchens, a contributing editor to the magazine, was a trenchant critic of religion, and a leader among the new atheists. Hitchens was stranded at the Denver airport, and Carter was at home near Seventh Avenue, Manhattan, not far from his office in Times Square.

While talking, they both heard the familiar strains of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Intrigued, Carter headed out into the street and saw a small marching band of African American teenagers. The marching band was a group of Christian students from Oakwood College (a Seventh-day Adventist institution, now Oakwood University). They'd driven to New York City from Huntsville, Alabama, and were sharing a bit of joy the best they knew how. Those teenagers touched the heart of the very secular editor of a very secular magazine in the heart of Manhattan. "Their noble posture and their music held the people around them like a pair of loving arms," wrote Carter. "At that moment, and in that place, it was a charm that soothed this savaged breast."[1]

Today Christians are called to embrace the cities with loving arms. Yet, too often, we have ignored them—extolling the virtues of rural living against the moral and physical dangers of the cities. Historically, both conservative Protestants and mainline churches in North America have struggled with the question of how to relate to the cities and the dominant discourse has been one of neglect rather than engagement. And yet, despite this historic unease and queasiness about cities, Protestants have played a crucial role in shaping them. Today many urban churches take a leading role in community organizing, helping the poor and homeless, providing youth programs and jobs training, offering an experience of community, and providing education.

There are encouraging signs of increasing urban engagement, but as it faces the huge and multiplying mission challenge of the city, the church is still a bit like a deer in the headlights. Cities are huge, fragmented, changing, expensive, competitive, confusing, and don't fit into well-defined boxes. They are now the church's biggest mission challenge. Like the Jewish exiles in Babylon we find ourselves crying out, "How do we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?" (Psalm

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1   *Vanity Fair,* November 2001.

137:4). We know the melodies and rhythms of the Lord's song in rural areas, but how do we sing that song among the strange and unfamiliar noises of the city?

Perhaps we need to start with repentance; confessing that in the use of our resources (time, money, people) we have continued to largely neglect the cities. We have worshiped at the altar of country living, and we are poorly equipped for urban mission. But then we can turn back to the experience of the Babylonian exiles for instruction on how to sing the Lord's song. God tells them not to keep themselves separate from the city of Babylon, but to work for and pray for its *shalom* (Jeremiah 29:7). As Skip Bell writes, "That message is still God's word for the church today."

This is the central theme of *Christ in the City.* In his six principles for transformational evangelism, Dr. Bell clearly outlines how the church is called to organically engage the city from within, not from outside, or from a distance. It is called to work for and pray for the shalom of the city—its welfare, prosperity, health, peace, salvation. And one of the many strengths of this book is how it explores the theology and theory of this engagement, but then moves out into city streets for concrete examples of how this is being put into practice.

Read and share this book. Be blessed and inspired to wrap the cities in loving arms.

— Gary Krause, Director
Office of Adventist Mission

Preface Ⓟ

People are moving to the city. Some are immigrants who seek security and employment among people who share their journey. Others are children displaced from agricultural communities where farms have evolved into large mechanized agribusinesses acquiring family-owned farms around them. The transition is especially evident among people finding employment in a technology driven economy. Young graduates of higher education eager to enter the workplace inevitably make the city their home. For these reasons and more, cities are growing while rural communities frequently struggle to maintain their neighborhoods and economy.

The human migration to the city is not merely a movement to the proximity of a major metropolitan area. Developed countries are experiencing a reversal of the decades old tendency to live in a suburban neighborhood and commute to work. More and more people of all ages are relocating to true city centers, those places we call downtown. They are looking for condominiums, apartments, townhouses, or brownstones within the range of public transportation or even within walking distance of their work. This trend is especially true for young professional adults, and they are changing the characteristics of urban neighborhoods.

One cannot examine the challenge of mission in the city without reflection on the changing cultural characteristics of the urban population. The Gospel has thrived among underserved populations in the city, especially those of African American heritage. Likewise, churches have grown rapidly in neighborhoods where immigrant populations from Central America, the Caribbean, or South America have settled. There are healthy Christian churches in Asian neighborhoods. However, Christianity is rapidly diminishing among Caucasian young adults of western European heritage, and they are considerably the largest and fastest growing segment of the urban population. The nature of that challenge to mission will be explored in chapter 3 of this book. This book recognizes that reality, examines mission in that context, and acknowledges that future shifts in diverse population groups will call for rethinking mission in similar ways.

The implications for faith and spirituality are evident. The urban culture in which the Gospel of Jesus is lived, judged, or shared is distinct. It is a different culture from the rural communities and country life familiar to many Christian faith traditions, especially those of the Protestant variety. And it is not going to change,

at least in our foreseeable future. Churches that do not understand the world of the city, who try to hold on to their small town or rural roots, will diminish. The urban shift must not be ignored.

I have undertaken the writing of this book because failure to acknowledge or to understand the distinct culture of the city center impairs Christian mission. True, we may reach immigrant populations who have brought their spirituality with them to the city. People who suffer in poverty in the city may open their hearts and minds to the Gospel. Or we may focus mission among suburban families, sometimes feeling we have reached the city by efforts to evangelize that sweep through suburban (or immigrant) neighborhoods. Metropolitan evangelism is wonderful: reaching people anywhere for Christ is reason for celebration. But we cannot be faithful while ignoring the distinctive culture of the true city center.

Related to why I have written this book is my relationship with urban life and ministry. My childhood years through early adolescence were experienced living in an urban context, and I continued to work in that environment until entering ministry after seminary. That is where my heart is. I have cherished a vision for service in the city my entire adult life, but, somewhat regretfully, the scarcity of churches in the city reflecting my heritage has shaped the direction of my service to the church. For much of the last decade, however, I have examined mission in the city, researched thriving congregations in the city, collaborated with people serving in diverse faith traditions, worked with urban ministries, and taught urban ministry in the professional doctoral program of our seminary. I have often felt I should have had the courage to pioneer distinctive ministry early in my adult life in the emptiness of a city neighborhood. My hope is that the work and research shared in this book will support and help others do just that.

This book is an opportunity to reflect on the challenge of Christian mission in the urban context. Mission in the city will require change. For many, the compelling need for change is unwelcome simply because it calls for resetting strategies for evangelism that have become tradition over decades of time. My conversations with colleagues in faith, especially students and leaders of church ministry, underscore the urgency.

There is a consensus that we need to rethink our ideas about mission. We need to reset the vision for urban ministry. We deny this need for change at the peril of our Christian faith. I invite you to prayerfully and carefully reflect with others on the challenge of urban life and ministry and respond positively to however God may call us to serve people in our cities.

Our challenge to engage with the culture of the city can be rewarding and fruitful. This book asserts six essential characteristics that help us understand transformational mission and evangelism in the city. They may be thought of as essential characteristics of our life and service as Christians living in a city and are woven through each chapter. Those essentials are relationships, service, community, spirituality, worship, and transformation. Though variable, these essential characteristics are in a sense chronological in our experience of mission in an urban setting.

Read these pages with an open mind. Seek to grow in your understanding; ask God to help you be open to change. Why? He has entrusted His mission to us. Respond for His sake, for the sake of the church, for those for whom He sacrificed His life.

Introduction ❶

She wept violently. I watched her standing on the weathered wooden front porch with her infant child, her shoulders shaking with despair. The auction company I worked for during the summer used a moving van to load households of furniture and other items for a weekly sale, often as directed by a loan company repossessing things unpaid for. That was the case on this day. We were pulling away from the curb with every piece of furniture that had filled the little house behind her.

It was not a safe neighborhood. Differing populations of the city merged in this place, and conflicts were frequent. This was not a secure life in the high-rise apartments downtown, or middleclass brownstones only a few blocks away, and it certainly was not life in the suburbs. Abandoned houses gave silent evidence to the poverty often seen in such places in the city.

She was alone. Her child's father had disappeared a few days before, and no family was available to rescue her. Her plain skirt, an obviously well-worn simple blouse, and long black hair falling carelessly over her face, hid her natural beauty. She was desperately alone. And she wept uncontrollably.

My job was to help load refrigerators, bedroom suites, laundry equipment, or kitchen tables for auction wherever in the city people had fallen into bad times. I was only the muscle, a student earning my way through college, riding in the truck to help load things. I had watched some fight for their belongings, one man had met us with a gun at his front door, one had assaulted the loan officer who accompanied us, and another just sat in depression in a corner as we emptied the house. But this memory is the most troubling.

We had been told to take everything and put it in the truck, everything that made living possible in the rundown rental house: the stove, refrigerator, and every stick of furniture. Ignoring instructions, we kept avoiding picking up one item, the baby's crib. When everything else was on the truck, John, the driver and a seasoned auction company employee, stood at one end of the crib while I stood at the other. Neither of us wanted to touch it. Instead we looked at the loan officer and suggested the crib should be left. With a reluctant wave of his arm he motioned us into the truck, leaving the crib behind.

That picture will never leave my mind. Though I was young, my faith reminded me that Jesus was incarnate within that young urban mother crying her heart

out on a summer afternoon. That is how Jesus is. He enters our experience. He does not observe from a distance or flee to safety. He was there in that mother's tears.

Christ is everywhere in the city. In a sense He is in a distraught young mother and her child, an anonymous immigrant hidden in the masses of people, a violent gang member, a young professional in a lakefront high-rise, and the elderly person locked in their store-top apartment. Christ lives in the city, takes His meals there, rides the buses and subways, works in the office, relaxes with a laptop and coffee at Starbucks, and walks the alleys.

This is a book about the city. More specifically, about the love Christ has for people in urban neighborhoods, and the call for His disciples to share His presence in the homes, apartments, streets, alleys, shops, parks and schools that form the city. The purpose of the book is to inspire and shape the lives of disciples who live and serve in those urban spaces. In this book, there is a distinction between the culture of the true city center and the suburban sprawl of a metropolitan area.

The book begins with insights regarding the nature of a city in section one. Issues of urban life, distribution of the world's population in cities, and urban growth characteristics will be investigated in the first chapter. Chapter two will provide a biblical theology of the city with focus on Christ and His view of urban life. A more expansive theology will also be provided, offering an overview of the church and its response to the city, including attitudes of the present-day church to urban issues. Chapter three provides an examination of the social demographics and faith characteristics of people in urban context. Chapter four defines the nature of missional discipleship. This chapter will confront the nature and practice of mission in the 21st century in urban areas of the world. Chapter five is a clear call to evangelize the city, not in the way we might think — holding public meetings and packing up our belongings when they are done — but to be a disciple of Christ living in the city. This sense of the mission to share Christ through our lives in the city is described as an expression of transformational evangelism.

Section two examines nine ministries that have transformed lives and grown the church in urban centers. These case studies generally offer four helpful perspectives: 1) a narrative of a person, or persons, whose life has been transformed by a specific ministry, 2) the historical narrative and nature of the particular city, 3) a description of the ministry and its leadership, and 4) reflection regarding what the ministry offers as a model and inspiration for Christian disciples in other urban areas. The case studies interpret essential characteristics that identify transformational evangelism in the city. Those essentials are relationships, service, community, spirituality, worship, and transformation.

While sharing personal narratives in the nine case studies, I have protected the identity of the person or persons. The stories reflect actual experience, but details have been masked to obscure the personal identity. The events are shared as one person's story and at the same time reflect the scope of the experience of others served in the particular ministry. Although the names of people experiencing a transformational journey are masked, the names of the organization, the ministry, and the ministry leaders are shared with their permission.

Another word regarding these case studies will be helpful. I would like the reader to reflect on three areas of commonality. First, the six essential characteristics of urban mission and ministry I describe above are present in each. Relationality, service, community, spirituality, worship, and transformation are common to all, though I have chosen to emphasize particular elements in each narrative. Second, though the ministries are not of the same denomination, each shares a Christian perspective, each shares a conservative view of the inspiration of Scripture, and each shares a passion for transformational evangelism. Though they have differing denominational traditions, there are distinct and important similarities in their biblical worldview. Third, each is dedicated to their ministry from a genuine love for people. They love and serve disinterestedly. They are less concerned for increasing their particular organization or religious institution than for helping other people. When you work with these people, you are inspired by their unconditional love.

The final section provides a chapter challenging the reader to form Christian community in urban life. More than a conclusion, it provides a call for reformation of how we go about sharing the Gospel in the true city center. In that process, it describes what constitutes transformational evangelism in the city.

Why this book? First, the providence of God may lead you or your family to a life within the heart of one of the world's major cities. Can you live a Christian life in the heart of the city? Should you accept God's calling to live in the city? Those questions are personal, and prayer accompanies such consideration. My hope is that when God does lead you to the city, you will recognize Christ in your neighbor, your colleague, or the person struggling with his or her own life situation. Christ can transform lives and grow His kingdom through your service. Second, faithfulness to God engages us in disciple-making. People are living in cities, and increasingly so. If we are to be faithful, we must accompany urban people in their journey of Christian discipleship. This book intends to thoughtfully challenge your suppositions regarding discipleship and what it means to evangelize the city.

Section One

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Section one provides insights regarding the nature of a city. Issues of urban life, distribution of the world's population in cities, and urban growth characteristics are investigated. An expansive theology of the city is provided, offering a biblical perspective of the church and its response to the city. An examination of the social demographics and faith characteristics of people living in an urban context is provided. The nature of missional discipleship is explored. A call to evangelize the city, to share Christ through our lives in the city, is offered as an expression of transformational evangelism.

1 Understanding the City

I sometimes think I crave cities just as much as large expanses of land or forests or beach. Each city has an energetic quality all its own — a way of speaking, an individual offering, and their own darkness and light... I want to know these places. I want to feel their hidden corners and history... And I want to find stories of struggle, and victory, and play, and hope. I want to meet locals and views and museums. I want stories not yet told. — **Victoria Erickson**

We like living in cities. Some will argue that humans prefer the gentle pastoral beauty and pace of life found in uncrowded rural settings, but the reality indicates otherwise. For whatever reason, we gather in cities. As long as human experience has been recorded, cities have been at the center of our culture and history. In more recent times, the city has increasingly become the economic heart that sustains life. Especially in the west, the scale of rural agriculture has grown so large that small farmers have been forced to abandon their homes. Their children move to cities for employment. Today the city is firmly established as the center of influence in trade, politics, and power.

Perhaps we live in cities because we must. Such a view reveals that our attitude toward urban life may be one of regret. Do we form urban centers because doing so offers our lives the only chance at abundance while we actually long for the more pastoral rural environments of decades past? Undoubtedly that is the case for many who live in today's cities. They must live where the work is, where housing is available close to their work, and where they can access conveniences because they have limited mobility. But many others who live in the city describe the social and cultural life as the attraction that draws them there. They simply prefer life in the city. They like to live in close proximity to others. They like the social style of a particular neighborhood. They like the art and dialogue they experience in the city. City life contributes meaning to their lives.

For whatever reason, we have to concede that humans form urban centers around the globe, choosing to live in them. That reality cannot be denied. How the church interprets that reality is foundational to how we envision and approach urban mission. Before the church can understand the worldview of those

who choose to live in urban centers, we must first examine the development and nature of the city.

The Development of Cities

Today when we think of a city we imagine a large population center. We define a city in terms of its size. That was not always the case.

Early city-states formed around shared religious practices, with powerful families multiplying and gathering a community to propagate or protect particular views, with the practice of commerce being secondary. These ancient cities were not defined by population size or economic power but by certain commonly held perspectives and practices, generally religious in nature. It was shared beliefs that bound them together.

From these early cities developed a few truly imperial cities that began to exert political and military power. These were places that extended their culture throughout broader regions and became the capitals of empires. The seat of the Pharaohs in Egypt, then Babylon, Alexandria, and finally Rome are examples of these early mega-cities. The formation of these cities in the history of the western world is reflected in the history of the eastern world as well.

Eventually, commerce and politics solidified their place alongside religion as the core-forming identity of a city. With this gradual transition came a new surge of urbanization in the 15th and 16th centuries after Christ. The rise of Protestantism flourished with the multiplication of urban centers other than Rome in Europe. These were cities that began to express independence and diversity of thought and culture and developed as centers of education and art. The freedom of thought and commerce promoted new structures in society that affected not only religious ideas, but, perhaps inevitably, ideas about government. Diversity became a characteristic of the city, and urban life provided the center of the transitions that led humans into modern history.

The industrial revolution further propelled the growth of urban centers and further formed their culture. In addition to being diverse centers of religion, thought, learning, and art, they developed a culture marked by new machinery, transportation, and ideas for productivity. Commerce claimed its place among the primary influences that formed and identified a city, arguably supplanting religion, shared worldviews, or common history of a people as the driving force in urban life. Throughout the world, cities became industrial giants, and a vast migration of people to the city from rural agricultural communities ensued. People came to the city from wherever in the world they had been endeavoring to survive

and sought a living through the labor promised in manufacturing. They came in search of economic security.

The value placed on the production of materials and emphasis on profits led to human abuses at worst and generally to conditions that were not sustainable. Immigrants to the cities sometimes arrived too late to receive the opportunities they sought, or in too great a number, or faced a retraction in manufacturing after some limited years of prosperity.

Still, the industrial period launched a time of opportunity in the city that survives in today's transition from manufacturing to a blended economy of service, technology, and manufacturing we describe as the new economy. Edward Glaeser writes: "The only reason why companies put up with the high labor and land costs of being in a city is that the city creates productivity advantages that offset those costs."[1] He continues, "There is a near-perfect correlation between urbanization and prosperity across nations. On average, as the share of a country's population that is urban rises by 10 percent, the country's per capita output increases by 30 percent."[2]

In our present history, human innovation and creativity through collaboration has replaced manufacturing as the primary promise of the city. While manufacturing centers like Detroit and Gary in the United States struggle with decay and poverty, centers like San Jose, Moscow, Bangalore, and Dallas thrive on innovation and creativity.

Today's cities are larger, more creative, diverse, and global than those of earlier epochs of human history. And the pace of migration to urban life has quickened. In the mid-19th century less than 10% percent of the world's population lived in a metropolis of 100,000 or more. In those times one could seek to sustain a family while living in a rural pastoral setting and at the same time easily move in and out of varied mid-size cities on short day trips. By 1900, as the 20th century began, the urban population in the world had increased to 14%. Today 60% of human population is in the city. In developed nations, like Canada and the U.S., it is an astounding 75%. The great majority of humans in developed countries live in urban centers and only venture out of them for long weekend retreats or a vacation.

Defining the City

The most commonly used definition in our time for the city is the United Nations definition based on cities by population. The United Nations defines the

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1   Glaeser, Edward. (2011) *The Triumph of the City*. London: Macmillan, p. 7.

2   Ibid, p. 8.

population of large cities by something termed a catchment area, in addition to the population of the particular city in its specific geographical limits. The definition is designed to describe the mobility and economic activity of citizens within the largest urban boundaries. In the western world classification of a city traditionally is called a metropolitan area rather than catchment area. The metropolitan area is generally defined by a combination of factors like electoral boundaries, geographical limits, and urban mobility systems. For any major city in America, the metropolitan area is rather arbitrarily defined by the United States census bureau using these factors. The metropolitan area is generally smaller than the catchment area specified by the United Nations.

How large a gathering of people in a geographical space is required to specify such places as a city rather than a town or village? Generally, in the western world, a metropolitan center is described as 100,000 people or more. So, we could assert a city is a place of 100,000 people or more. That definition, though it is admittedly arbitrary, will be used in this work.

This book is interested in life and culture in what is sometimes referred to as the city center area as opposed to the larger metropolitan area. The city center is a practical concept identified by easy public transport access and the primary municipal government. It is defined by the commercial and geographic center of a municipal area. Tourists typically visit the city center when visiting a city. In defining the city, this area includes the downtown area and the immediate adjoining neighborhoods identified with the downtown area rather than identified as suburbs. Museums and cultural life are centered here, financial institutions have their corporate offices here, and the downtown shopping district is located here.

These city spaces offer housing in large high-rise buildings, new townhouse developments in gentrified neighborhoods, and closely spaced single-family dwellings. In many city center neighborhoods housing, though dense, is very expensive while in other neighborhoods poverty has decimated the value of housing. Some think of impoverished neighborhoods in city centers as the inner city. In reality, city centers include widely different types of neighborhoods. Municipalities frequently approach the challenge of affordable housing for those in poverty in a city center through publicly owned housing projects. Increasingly, such housing areas are distributed throughout the city.

Why does this book focus on the urban center rather than the larger metropolitan area? The Gospel tends to find a welcome place in suburban neighborhoods characterized by family needs and the insulation distance has provided from the culture of a city. Churches have thrived, if it can be said that churches are thriving

anywhere in today's western culture, in these suburban neighborhoods. It is in the population of the city center that religion in general has had greater difficulty. There the influence of Christianity has diminished. Exceptions are notable among first generation immigrant populations and disadvantaged populations living in substandard conditions within a particular area of the city.

But especially where prosperity has accompanied life in the city, secularism has displayed its power to replace religiosity. That tendency is even more disquieting as the migration of young professionals from suburban areas to city centers increases alongside the influence of art, culture, and the economic strength of financial institutions and technology services in urban centers.

It is urgent for the church to address this challenge because urbanization will continue to increase. By mid-century our world population will be nearly 70% urban, and in developed countries that number is projected as 84%. Those numbers relate to the larger metropolitan area, but more and more of these people will live in the city center and rarely venture to the suburbs or rural locations. They may do so on occasional trips, but they will not absorb the culture of such places, nor engage with the church congregations located there.

Ours is a future in the city. And the city center is the core of the culture. The challenges faced by human life in the city will describe the focus of concern, research, and innovation in our global society in the coming years. These challenges are also the lens through which the Gospel will be experienced, if it will be experienced at all, in the increasingly challenging secular city.

Culture and the City

Cities form as people decide to live in close proximity to one another. However, the people groups in an urban setting remain distinctive to some varying degree, and often prefer to live in a particular space close to others of their distinguishing culture. They do so to further their own security, experience social fulfillment, find support in their pursuit of opportunity, and perhaps share a common spirituality. All cities have that in common, though the particular characteristics of the neighborhoods differ from one city to another.

Understanding the culture of a city requires reflection on this tendency of people groups to cluster together. As mentioned above one such factor is security. People from the earliest times have known that they can band together to achieve safety. It is paradoxical that refuge with others is needed to protect us from others. The formation of laws, community authority, security forces such as police, and the boundaries that define our political area, are more trusted in a social structure with others of like culture in the city. The tendency to congregate

in culturally defined neighborhoods is at least partially defined by this response to the human search for security.

This is not a new phenomenon in human history. In the following chapter the provision of safety and refuge in the city in ancient times will be noted. Biblical cities were intended to protect people, even as they committed wrong, were accused, or were wronged by others. Justice was a feature of the city. That inclination continues to the present day. People sense that justice is best distributed among people who understand a distinctive cultural group in the city.

First-generation immigrant populations in particular seek security when entering a new land by forming distinguishing neighborhoods. Such strangers in a new land rarely seek rural surroundings. The opportunity to earn and to own a home is envisioned within the security such a city neighborhood provides. They seem to find empowerment within a location marked by people of common heritage.

Security is of course not the only factor driving culture in a city. Humans are relational beings. Society is formed in the city, and it is in that place people find community. We develop our lives within the influence of a nuclear and extended family, and then seek acquaintance with people beyond our family. We play, work, and worship with an ever-expanding community of others as we mature. Cities outpace rural environments in satisfying this social need.

Work and education further shape culture. Work, when it achieves its creative potential, thrives in a community that brings diverse families together. People may have settled in a neighborhood within the city characterized by a distinct people group, but usually work in an environment that is far more diverse. The workplace provides an intersection of cultures. The public school sometimes offers a similar opportunity. Work and education, more than religion, provide an engine for producing a new urban culture by bringing diverse people together. Accompanying beliefs and worldview are reformed as a product of that interaction. Significantly, religion has less influence in shaping the worldview, and subsequent culture, of the dweller in the urban center than work and education.

"Society is formed in the city, and it is in that place people find community."

This reality hints at the challenge of urban culture to the church. Culture is shaped in the work place, the public schools, and the resulting exchanges they generate. The marks of our culture — art, smart phones, food, symphony, fashion, theater, music, and architecture — all emerge from the creative exchange of people living in the

city who work and learn with others. A new meaning emerges from the exchanges provided in city life, and the impact gathers strength as time moves forward. Thus, living in the city is not only living in the center where culture is generated, it means our culture is transformed. The church can find itself on the outside of this progression, and increasingly detached from the issues people in the city experience in their lives.

The marks of that culture move out from the city as people publish their creative activity or they reach out from the city. For instance, when art, empowered by the common media forms of the internet, film, and broadcasting, is received well in the urban center, we rush to publish the news and share the experience with others outside these centers.

Spirituality in the City

We may lament the decline of religious institutions as generators of culture, but the reality remains. No amount of lament will reverse the course. True, the earliest city dwellers viewed shared spiritual belief as the identity of their city; their city was inseparable from ideas about religion. We may wish for those days to return. But they are history. Religion is far more distanced from the nature of the city today. Christianity is simply not operating with very much power in such centers of creativity. This is especially true where secular thinking dominates the culture of a neighborhood, as among young adults whose ancestral heritage is rooted in Western Europe.

However, a new form of spirituality thrives, though in less institutional forms. Humans are spiritual beings. For better or worse, new ideas about spirituality are thriving in the creative milieu of an urban neighborhood. These ideas become patterns of belief compatible with the diversity, ideas, and culture emerging out of the shared experience of the city.

So, spirituality has not died in the city. Secularism has not replaced spirituality, and a post-Christian world, whatever that might be, is not a world devoid of spirituality. But what and how worship is expressed has clearly changed. Freedom, ideas, individualism, choices, power, wealth, human capacity itself — all are objects of worship in today's cities. Cities should still be recognized as immense worshipping communities, although the objects of worship bear little resemblance to the God of sacred texts or as conceived in Eastern traditions. This is a global phenomenon, not merely a western problem. Thus, the temple is a rather neglected place in the exploding cities of China. And so it is for a Christian; the gods of the city today have little spiritual connection or resemblance to the faith of our traditions.

It is not that traditional churches have totally disappeared in the heart of the city. Some thrive among first-generation immigrants, or among populations experiencing disadvantaged circumstances. There are some unique models of Christian churches in the city center that thrive, even attracting upwardly mobile and diverse young professionals from various neighborhoods. The common characteristics of such congregations, the case studies in this book will assert, is that they have a high degree of relationality and demonstrate Christianity by active social service to their city. They do so more than earlier generations of their particular faith tradition.

The changing nature of spirituality in the city may seem to be a risk. The development certainly poses a challenge to the Gospel, but it also presents an opportunity. People seek to worship; we are worshipping beings. Here exactly is the opportunity. The city is a vastly interdependent system. People seek to find meaning as their lives are transformed in the space of the city. The Gospel can speak in the midst of the need for security, longing for freedom, administration of justice, exploration of new and critical thought, expressions of art, or seeking new economic opportunity. Christ can speak as powerfully to these human concerns as He does to the doctrinal formations that shaped our faith traditions in earlier times. His witness becomes real as we seek Him in the context of these issues.

Understand that social action should not be seen as a substitute for Gospel truth in the city center. To be sure, social action on the part of religious institutions in the city is positive. Such ministry advances the Gospel. Churches should engage in social action, if for no other reason than love for others is at the heart of their faith. But in fact, institutional social action of churches is probably no more effective in speaking to the urban dweller than is the witness of personal involvement of disciples of Christ in the city within their vocations and the other aspects of their daily lives — art, pleasure, health, education, and expressed attitudes about urban society. It is the authentic life application of the Gospel that the city will hear. Such a life is evangelistic, though it redefines evangelism in a more transforming sense.

One other perspective bears repeating in this context. The city abounds with evil. As asserted repeatedly in this book, I hold a belief that human kind is naturally, in our post-fall condition, bent to evil. Where the Gospel is not embraced, where faith is not prevalent, a naturalistic worldview surfaces various forms of evil. And it is far more apparent in a crowded urban context. Such evil does exist in rural America, the country of my home. But it is more hidden. So, one cannot speak of the calling to evangelize the city, or speak with optimism in regard to the

city, without reasonably acknowledging the evil that exists in humanity and its prevalence in the city.

It is in the pressing circumstances of the city that the righteousness of Jesus may be most clearly demonstrated by a disciple. Those social circumstances are where people will search for hope. So, the city remains an incredible opportunity for the church. But the compelling truth is we must be there, living in the midst of their social circumstance.

Conclusion

Cities have been a human experience from the beginning of time. Today they are the center of power, culture, economy, and spirituality. Most of the world's wealth is produced and exchanged in the city. In a time when technology makes it possible to live and work wherever we like, people are choosing more and more to live in cities. Cities will continue to provide the narratives of our experience, and lead the way in development of technology, culture, and worship.

> **"People find belonging and identification with others in the city."**

People continue to migrate to the city. People have an optimism about the city, although there are large portions of today's cities marked by poverty. It is not that the city has made people poor. However, the city has not always resolved poverty, or always afforded the dreams of the poor who come to the city. The reality remains that the city is the center of power and wealth, and those who live in the city seek, even expect, to share in that economic opportunity.

People find belonging and identification with others in the city. Although populations cluster in certain neighborhoods, the vision for creativity, experimentation and alternatives drives the formation of new more diverse cultures in the city. Identification is shaped by new categories revolving around influences in the work place, education, vocational interests, or art.

The city is a place of paradox and dilemma. Though cities hold promise, they do not always satisfy human need. One can describe cities as broken, in trouble, even as places of despair. They have no capacity in themselves to cause worship to flourish. They drive cultural and ecological change, growth, and pollution at the same time. Cities enchant us with possibility, but for many the attraction of the city has been a deception, and the city has become a place of injustice.

The city needs the Gospel. The significance and challenge of the city for the Christian church is the question of how to go about sharing the Gospel there. It is easy to react to the changes happening in the city, to critique the influence it has

on human culture. But critical responses to change do not constitute a positive witness. We cannot simply sound an alarm. Warnings are of little help when humans are shaping and defining new horizons in technology and striving to solve vexing problems.

The city is an opportunity. It is an opportunity for the church to respond with love and care to the challenges facing urban populations. It is a challenge for anyone, Christian or non-Christian, to be in the midst of a new culture forming in the inner city every day. The focus of Christian service should be where people are: in the city. Christians should bring their influence into urban centers as they live, work, play, socialize, and worship in their neighborhood.