

## Introduction

During the wilderness wandering, the spies returned to Moses with their mixed report. The land truly was flowing with milk and honey. "But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large" (Num 13:28). The providence and promises of God took a back seat in a majority report that measured urban challenge only in terms of size, density and population.

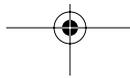
Have things changed, or are God's people still afraid of what cities hold? This book aims to address today's urban reality in all its complex and interrelated facets.

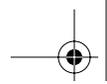
### How to Use This Text

The content of this book was carefully structured for students to work through sequentially in order to get a full-orbed understanding of urban ministry. Yet the work can also be used as a reference book; any section can be read by itself.

The first three sections provide a foundation for what follows. Part one is a historical section, attempting to lay out a global view of urban history and demographics. We wanted our treatment to be as comprehensive as possible. This historical analysis provides perspective and renewed vision for what the sovereign Lord is doing in his world. It identifies some missiological concerns that have not yet been addressed fully by present-day mission strategies.

The second section takes a biblical-historical look at God's concern for cities. Drawing on both Old and New Testaments, this material helps the reader put together the present contemporary world with the world of biblical times. Actually very little has changed regarding either issues or solutions. Biblical strategies must be operative in contemporary society if there is to be kingdom reign.





The third section—"Understanding the City"—presents ways to interpret and define the city. It is strong on sociological information. How do we do theology in the midst of the historical reality of where and how people live? The city's complexity can be overwhelming; this section assists the student and practitioner in wrestling with the various aspects of the city as a Christian.

Now that the foundation has been laid, section four looks at practical skills and highlights the importance of the social sciences. In the early 1970s Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner from the School of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary introduced social-scientific perspectives and methods into church planting and church growth. Their work was helpful but was often dismissed as too secular and not Christian enough. Again and again, both in classes and other forums, we have insisted on the utilization of the social sciences as an applied science for mission. This section leads the reader to grasp the need for doing serious field work before embarking on any mission endeavor. Bible translation work since the beginning of the twentieth century exemplifies how insights from anthropology and sociology help us understand cultures and societies for the purpose of bringing the gospel to unreached peoples.

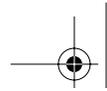
Section five addresses Christian community development among the poor. The church has to reckon with its inescapable responsibility to the poor. The Lord Jesus has summoned his body to be what he is in the world. Mercy ministry is not optional but is demanded of all Christians, reflecting God's concern for the value of life and his image bearers (Rom 5:21-26).

Much will depend on the development of leaders, which is the subject of our final section. This section may be one of the most important, because all the ministry described in preceding sections is vitally dependent on biblical leadership. The city will not see effective kingdom ministry if leaders are not preaching and living the whole counsel of God. Reductionism will not do. Sociology without biblical theology misses the mark. Justification without justice will not be divine salt that penetrates and preserves our God's world.

All across the world urbanization is proceeding apace, not waiting for us to decide whether the city is a legitimate place for mission. The Lord of history is calling us to be servants of his gospel in the cities of his world.

Lima, Peru, one of the major cities of South America, can serve as a specific example of contemporary urban challenges. This will lead us to formulate a contemporary agenda for reflection which lays out the many questions this book seeks to address.





### **Lima, Peru: Looking for Clues**

Indigenous peoples have inhabited the area we now call metropolitan Lima for nearly seven thousand years. But 1535 was a crucial turning point. Conqueror Francisco Pizarro saw Lima's safe harbor advantages and began its transformation into his "City of Kings." City-minded Spanish colonialists shaped Lima into one of the two most important urban centers of what became Latin America (the other is Mexico City). "As both the political-administrative capital for the viceroyalty and its principal economic center, Lima also took on the role of the social capital of Spanish South America" (Kent 1994:459).

**Population patterns.** For a little over four hundred years, Lima grew slowly. By 1796 its population accounted for a little over 6 percent of Peru's total. By 1940 the city had grown to 645,000 people, about 8.6 percent of the nation's population.

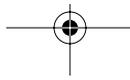
Then came the last half of the twentieth century. And Lima, like the world's major urban centers, underwent a demographic explosion. By the early 1990s well over six million people, nearly one-third of Peru's population, were calling themselves Limeños.

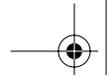
The city is now a center of political and economic power. By 1988 Lima was thirteen times larger than the country's second city. Its metropolitan boundaries enclose more than 50 percent of Peru's entire urban population (León 1992:201). And paralleling this demographic growth have come significant urban challenges.

**Religious directions.** Over 90 percent of Lima's residents are formally attached to the Roman Catholic Church. Some of the church's 136 parishes are home to tens of thousands of constituents. But, reflecting a long history, there is a divorce between church and religion. Few fulfill Catholicism's minimal requirements of participation in Sunday Mass. Faith expresses itself in a more individualistic way, often disconnected from the official church. It is to the confraternities and brotherhoods, in what is termed "popular religion" that one looks for manifestations of serious commitment (Klaiber 1992:16).

"Popular religiosity" is a genuine expression of Catholic piety fitted to native traditions and the painful marginalization of the poor. It is "a people's way of crying and remembering and aspiring" (Cox 1973:117) the faith of those who have been least integrated into the mainstream of urban society.

Processions and feast days, the multiplicity of saints, the prominence and popularity of religious relics bespeak rural backgrounds of devotion and veneration. Those less linked to the agricultural cycle turn to more secularized forms of faith, to horoscopes and astrology (Candelaria 1990:9-14).





“Without doubt the most important popular religious manifestation in Peru is the great procession of Our Lord of Miracles, which takes place three times during the month of October in Lima” (Klaiber 1992:91). Clothed in purple penitential robes, the faithful accompany the image of the crucified Christ, the “Purple Lord,” carried on a heavy platform through the streets of Lima. The Brotherhood of the Bearers of the Lord of Miracles had three hundred members in the 1920s; by the 1980s the membership had reached some four thousand.

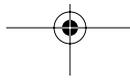
But such expressions of “popular religiosity” are often less (or more) than the church expects or wants. The distance between private faith and ecclesiastical practice is a concern.

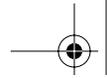
Some in the 1990s looked to the papal push of the Lumen 2000 movement, the “new evangelization” of Latin America, to narrow the gap. Others, like Gustavo Gutiérrez, Lima’s “father” of liberation theology, struggle with the connection between popular religion and the poor. In his earlier writing Gutiérrez expressed fear of its opiate impact on the poor. Conversion, he noted, demands society’s transformation, not just a personal change of heart. Can these expressions of popular religion deaden the poor, those very agents of change, to their identity as the church of the poor, for the poor? In more recent years Gutiérrez appears to be looking for more positive connections.

**Poverty’s expansion.** The recent expansion of migration has underlined the challenge of poverty in Lima. Since 1950 the people of the Peruvian countryside have been slipping through the city’s back door. Pushed by poverty and fear of the violent activities of the *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path), they are pulled by an optimistic urban hope. Most settle in the *pueblos jóvenes* (“young towns”), an aristocratic euphemism for the 598 squatter areas that ring the metropolitan area.

Between 9 and 10 percent of the city’s population lived in these “slums of hope” in 1955; by 1985 that figure had reached 50 percent. There are also hundreds of thousands in old, overcrowded inner-city tenements called *tugurios* (Grigg 1992a:24, 103). Marginalized by poverty and a government simply unable to keep up with the flow, these urban migrants form cities within the city.

Relatively untouched by large-scale industrialization, the new Limeños join the 49 percent of Latin America’s work force who find their livelihood in the informal sector. By 1984 nearly 70 percent of Lima’s working population was linked to this nonformal sector, which the government does not regulate. “Many join the 200,000 to 300,000 army of street vendors, who sell everything from brooms to artichokes” (Maust 1984:10). Cars are repaired in backyards, and furniture gets repaired and clothing is manu-





factured in people's homes. "This trade does not get registered in the country's economic statistics. It pays no taxes to governments strapped for cash. And millions of citizens in the informal sector are outside government health programs and have no provision for their old age" (Berg and Pretiz 1992:91).

**Poverty's youth.** Old age is not always a problem in Lima; youth is. Typical of Latin America's cities is the youthful age of Lima's population. One-third of the country's population aged fifteen to twenty-four—1.2 million—are Lima residents.

Typical also is the marginalization of the young. By the mid-1980s officials estimated there were ten thousand abandoned children in the city. They shine shoes, change tires, wash cars or go begging during the day. At night they sleep in parks or on sidewalks. A major in the Salvation Army comments, "I know of children who live on a cup of tea and a couple of bread rolls a day."

### Contemporary Urban Challenges

The story of Lima is reproduced with variations in many cities. By looking at these cities we become aware of the challenges facing the church today. But just what are these challenges, and how is the church responding?

**Population explosion.** Whatever else we see, we see the city as *more of everything*—more people, more buildings and expanding neighborhoods.

Isolated voices speak of a "decline in the growth rates of cities nearly everywhere. The era of rapid urban growth is about to finish" (Prud'Homme 1989:45). But usually these predictions are limited to so-called developed countries, suggesting more slowdown than decline.

Many continue to affirm the 1985 predictions of Rashmi Mayur, then president of the Global Futures Network. "Ninety percent of the earth's population," he suggested, "will likely be urbanized by the end of the next century. Much of this urbanization will take place in 'supercities' in Third World countries" (Mayur 1985:28).

Urban populations will continue to grow at almost twice the rate of national growth, and large cities at a rate three to four times as high. Does the church show any indication of interest in these expanding urban centers? Vital signs are beginning to appear in the Southern Hemisphere. In Latin America, Protestants "have now reached a critical mass of about 15% (with wide variations from country to country). Although the vast majority of Latin Americans when polled still identify themselves as Catholics, relatively few attend mass regularly. The upshot is that the number



of active Protestant churchgoers is comparable to that of practicing Catholics" (Berryman 1994:7).

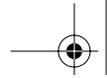
How much of that Protestant presence is urban? Full figures are not yet available. And hints are sometimes not consistent. Between 1990 and 1992, 710 new churches—five a week—were established in greater Rio de Janeiro. Typical of elsewhere, 90 percent of these were Pentecostal. During the same period one new Catholic parish was established. El Salvador claims 390,000 evangelicals in its capital, 26.4 percent of the city's population. On the other hand, in Venezuela 4 percent of the total population is Protestant, but in Caracas the figure is just 1.16 percent. Lima now boasts an evangelical community of 212,000, 3.2 percent of its total (Pretiz 1995:8-9).

A full recognition by the church of the potential of the world's cities seems yet to appear. Commenting on Africa, a Catholic observer remarks that "about 80% of missionary personnel in Africa are engaged in rural parish work, while there are very few actually involved in ministering to the slum dwellers of the towns and cities" (Zanotelli 1988:283). An evangelical addressing the same context adds, "Churches . . . have failed to recognize fully the tremendous needs of the multitudes who left their homes and went to the cities" (Falk 1979:426).

**Socioeconomic gap.** Everywhere the global city is becoming identified with the poor. In the United States past practices of housing discrimination have locked blacks and Hispanics into isolated urban neighborhoods. In the meantime, the work base of the American city has shifted from industry to service orientation. Factories spring up in industrial parks in the suburbs far from these urban communities, while new office buildings transform the urban skyline. Entry-level and low-education-requirement jobs become scarcer in the city. Blue-collar employment opportunities shrink as white-collar openings expand.

Economically marginal communities are finding more doors of occupational opportunity closed to them. Federal aid resources for the city are greatly reduced, and a crumbling urban infrastructure must look to a diminishing tax base among the growing poor. Help is not there to give. The white middle class, now joined by a rapidly emerging black middle class, continues its movement to the suburbs with its tax dollars, while central-city expenses skyrocket.

In England's urban priority areas (UPAs) the patterns are similar. The gap between rich and poor becomes a gulf. The poor, both unemployed and working, bear both the brunt of recession and the blame as "social security scroungers." By 1981, just over 2.6 million unemployed people and members of their families were living in poverty or at its margin—



three out of every ten people under pension age.

And what lies at the heart of the problem? "The national decline in the number of manual jobs, and the concentration of manual workers in the UPAs" (*Faith in the City* 1985:202). As in the United States, the major source of new British jobs (with some shifting between the 1970s and 1980s) is the service sector.

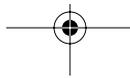
But outside the historically industrialized world, poverty speaks even louder. "Nowhere else is the economic, political, and social distance between the few rich and the masses of the poor greater than in towns of the Third World" (Gutkind 1974:35). And nowhere is poverty more visible than in the slums and shantytowns that spread out from the edges of Lima or Bangkok. In San Francisco and Philadelphia, Houston and Boston, the word *suburb* denotes home for the middle and upper classes. But in the Matheri valley of Nairobi and high on the hills above Caracas, the suburbs are where we find the poor and marginalized. It is estimated that half the urban populations of Africa, Asia and Latin America live in slums. Africa's cities have become what one author has called "centers of despair." An estimated 79 percent of Addis Ababa residents live in squatter settlements, as do 70 percent of Casablanca's residents and 65 percent of Kinshasa's. "More than one-third of the populations of Nairobi and Dakar are slum dwellers. In Nairobi, the population of the lowest squatter settlements has been growing more than twice as fast as that of the city as a whole" (Rondinelli 1988:304).

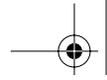
The overall pattern is staggering:

By the year 2000, 2,116 million, or 33.6 percent of the world population, will be in Third World cities, and 40 percent of these (a low figure) will be squatters (846 million people). This would indicate a world that is about 13.6 percent squatters by the year 2000—a bloc nearly the size of the Muslim or Hindu populations, doubling each decade. Squatters thus constitute an immense people group—a distinct entity deserving specific strategies for evangelization. (Grigg 1992a:25)

The picture becomes even more compelling if we include the decaying inner-city areas as well as the street people living in cities. That brings our estimate of the urban poor up to one billion by the year 2000, a figure totaling 30 percent of these cities, or 16.9 percent of the world's population.

Where is the church in all this? The picture is not uniform. In Latin America the majority of the churches are among the poor. In ranges varying from 60 to 90 percent, Mexico City's 1,200 churches, Sao Paulo's 5,294 congregations, Lima's 610 fellowships reach out to the marginalized (Grigg 1992a:102-7).





Leading the way in church planting in this social class have been Pentecostal churches. While mainliners and evangelicals have moved up the social ladder, Pentecostal churches have concentrated their evangelistic efforts on the lower classes in mushrooming cities:

Millions of rural-to-urban immigrants, their village life left behind forever, were ripe for new ideas, including religious teaching. The Pentecostals provided them the opportunity to hear the gospel free of intimidation from relatives or neighbors, to experience warm Christian fellowship in the impersonal city, and be treated with dignity as children of God. (Greenway 1994:190)

By contrast, “nowhere in Asia, with the exception of Korea, does the church in the slums make up more than four percent of the existing church in the city” (Grigg 1992a:95). In 1986 over 19 percent of Bangkok’s population lived in its 1,024 slum areas. Only three churches and two house groups were located there at the time. In Calcutta, between 48,000 (officially) and 200,000 (the generally accepted figure) live on the streets. No figures exist for residents of squatter areas, but some estimate that a million may be living there in tents and mud or thatched huts. Of the 132 churches in Calcutta, only one has targeted this population.

Also missing from the Asian church is the blue-collar factory worker. In patterns similar to the past in England and the United States, Christianity in Hong Kong and Taipei is perceived as a middle-class institution.

In Taiwan that perception is not far off. By 1984 almost 23 percent of Taiwanese church members had a college-level education (compared with 5.1 percent of the general population). It is easy to understand why the working class see most church programs as geared toward the needs of the intellectual or the middle class.

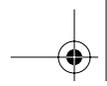
Three million strong by 1984 and increasing at the rate of ten thousand a month, working-class Asians tend to hang on to their folk religions. Living in company-built dormitories, their weekly work hours are long—fifty-two in Korea, forty-eight in Singapore (1979), fifty in Taiwan (1983). And their expectations are low. A high percentage are women, who enter the factories “as a means of liberation or as a new and exciting experience” (Tsai 1985:125). That optimism quickly turns to cynicism and passivity; women workers soon see themselves as mere assemblers who count for very little.

There are signs that the church\* may be awakening to the needs of this

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\*Throughout this book when the word *church* is used with no referant to Roman Catholic, Protestant or universal church, it should be construed to mean both the Protestant Church and the Roman Catholic Church.





forgotten group. But the signs are still geographically isolated. In Hong Kong, visionaries like Agnes Liu of the China Graduate School of Theology saw the need years ago. And that awareness has spawned over one hundred lay-led factory fellowships. A dozen churches have started. In Taiwan the Fellowship of Covenant Churches initiated a church-planting project in the central part of the island among the more settled factory workers—those married or planning to stay in the area after marriage. Making initial contact through the factories, particularly those with Christian management, the Fellowship planned to create home meetings to meet the need (Fredericksen 1993:16-18).

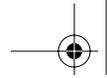
**The public arena.** There is still another dimension to the urban world that the gospel cannot ignore: public life and the policies shaped by it.

Politics and economics, real estate matters and city planning, history and socioeconomic policies shape the directions of population demographics and cultural systems. Here global movements mold local responses to issues of poverty and development; powerlessness listens as power speaks. Political and military colonialism fades into the urban past, to be replaced by what many call economic neocolonialism. The global reach of the world-class city marginalizes rural and small-town interests—and now it is shifting even national concerns to the periphery.

Across the globe, urban realities require that Christianity develop an agenda that addresses more than church planting or evangelism. South Africa's explosive urbanization led to population shifts that helped topple the oppressive pass laws and the structures of apartheid. Human rights abuses, government corruption, sexism and racism have become urban questions in Kampala and Recife, Seoul and Chicago. Pressures mount on society and the family. New urban financial struggles strain human relationships. Roles shift as Korean immigrant wives in the United States find themselves transformed from rural homemakers to second-income earners. Families in Zaire and Thailand wrestle with splitting their time between the city and their country roots. New questions arise: kin obligations on narrowed incomes; conflicts between parents and children as rural value systems are challenged by urban values adopted by the children; newly emerging patterns of sociability, based now not only on family but on vocation. Children and youth encapsulate these challenges of rapid urbanization on more than simply a private level. As the poor become visible, they become younger. A Roman Catholic study notes that in Africa "youth are the most affected by the rural exodus and the consequent urbanisation" (Meeting on African Collaboration 1983:3).

City dwellers in the United States have a median age of about thirty. In





Mexico City the average age is 14.2. Sixty-eight percent of the urban populations of Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Costa Rica are made up of young people between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four. In Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela it is 75 percent. By the year 2010 more than 10 percent of the world's population will be children living in the urban slums and squatter settlements of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

How exploited are the children? Forty million abandoned children live on the streets of the poorest cities. In São Paulo, Brazil, for example, 700,000 live by their wits in that city's streets. Abandoned by their parents, they survive by begging, stealing or selling their bodies.

City children who work in order to stay alive number, worldwide, between 100 million and 200 million. Sixty percent of all children in Asian cities are full-time wage earners. Child prostitution is one of the principal means of making money. Forty thousand of the estimated 100,000 prostitutes in Bangkok are 14 or younger. In Manila, 15,000 children are in prostitution, most purchased from their parents to be sex slaves. (Linthicum 1994:21)

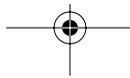
The West is not exempt from this victimization of children. In the United States "every day 15 children are killed by firearms; 2,660 babies are born into poverty; 8,493 children are reported abused or neglected and 3 die from it; 2,756 teens become pregnant; 2,833 students drop out of school; and 100,000 children are homeless" (*Rachel's Tears* 1996:4).

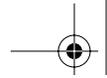
The Christian community faces a new urban generation. They are less idealistic and considerably more pessimistic. Jaded and old before their time, without hope and marginalized by broken promises, they become easy prey to the temptations of cynicism and meaningless violence. How do we respond to their needs?

In the recent past the church often found itself sharply divided in seeking solutions. The Anglo-Saxon church world expressed that division more quickly and sharply than the minority churches within its cities or the more holistically oriented congregations of the developing world. Mainline and Catholic voices have turned more easily to face the public side of these issues. Their agenda concerns incorporate with relative ease topics of homelessness, political power brokering, rapid social change. They call readily for a partnership of theology, politics and urban policy.

Evangelical bodies find themselves more comfortable with responses that reflect the private dimensions to these questions. Evangelism, church planting and traditional expressions of charity toward the poor, they argue, will ultimately effect "redemption and lift." Beyond this limit they are extremely reticent to speak.

Reinforcing these proposals is their legitimate concern for past capitulation to theological liberalism. Will a both/and mixture of the public and





the private lead once more to the theological reductionism that previously minimized the gospel and maximized the social? And further, is entrance into the urban public sector a legitimate role for the church in its institutional form? What, after all, is the calling of the church? Where does the limited competence of the church end?

These concerns and warnings have affected the daughter churches of the mission fields in a similar way. And reinforcing an inherited theological reluctance have been other contextual factors. How will the church speak to public issues in countries where it is often socially and politically restricted to a closet existence? In Muslim-majority countries where the church can exist only as a ghetto, forbidden growth by Qur'anic legislation? In the People's Republic of China and North Korea, where even its private life is subject to constant scrutiny and intrusive suspicion? How will a marginalized church of the poor in Latin America shift the weight of global power forces that shape local economies and larger development programs? How can African church leaders trained and experienced in rural settings carry rural-shaped worldviews of social connection into urban settings and styles of ministry (P. Fritz 1995:33-34)?

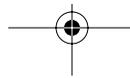
There are encouraging signs of change. Asia's evangelicals "recognize that our ministry demands a clear and intelligent understanding of the complexities of our economic, environmental, social and cultural context. . . . Our gospel must reach the poor, down-trodden and marginalized as well as the rich, powerful, and comfortable sections of urban population" (Ro 1989:1).

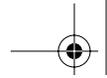
In Latin America many evangelicals support a holistic approach to the city. A 1988 consultation of the Latin American Theological Fraternity calls for the churches to be agents of transformation in the city. Five areas are targeted for that process: (1) better understanding by the church of the city's social and economic structures, (2) the incarnation of the church in those social and cultural realities, (3) sensitivity to all social levels in the city, and particularly affirmative action on behalf of the poor, (4) a clearer definition of the prophetic role of the church in the city and (5) a reemphasis on the church as a community of compassion by way of a Christ-centered message of hope and incarnation ("Seeking the Peace" 1989:22-24).

### **Agenda for Reflection**

The challenges we have summarized are large and complicated. What kinds of questions flow out of all this for our mission reflection? What are some of the issues we must engage?

1. *What is the basis of urban mission?* What place does the city occupy within the total framework of Scripture's commands and promises?





The history of urbanization points to many motivations in the church's interaction with the city. Frequently that motivation was a Western desire to connect "Christianizing" with "civilizing." The city has been seen as the venue for spreading what was seen as a superior white culture. In more recent times the urban interests of the church often became tied to the colonial interests of the sending church's home base. Concerned over those very connections, some mission agencies have turned to rural areas for church planting, fearful of the watchful eye of government on urban activities.

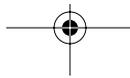
Also affecting the mission of the church to the city has been a growing antiurbanism in the mentality of Europe and North America. Overwhelmed by the impact of the industrial revolution, these traditional centers of evangelistic activity have turned with approval to a nostalgic rural ideology of mission. Remembering the recent rural successes of the gospel, an increasingly middle-class church is paying less attention to the sudden growth of the developing world's cities. The growing visibility of the poor in those cities reinforces middle-class suspicions of poverty and makes antiurbanism an obstacle to mission. God's providential opening of the cities becomes a secularized history of mixed motives and ideas.

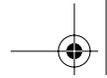
a. *How does Scripture view the city?* Is the Bible a rural book, promoting a rural understanding of mission? Where do we find the proper patterns to read that revelation? In sample models and case studies drawing principles from cities like Ur and Sodom, Jerusalem and Antioch, Athens and Rome? Or from the larger hermeneutical structures of the history of special revelation?

b. *How do we fashion a full-orbed urban mission from the Bible?* Is the work of urban mission to be restricted exclusively to the work of evangelism and church growth? What is the connection between urban mission and the kingdom of God? Is that kingdom emphasis fully exhausted by the preaching of Christ? Or is it more comprehensive? Does it also include urban social transformation? If so, does that transformation spread out to the life of the non-Christian? In what way?

2. *How do we understand the city as a process and urbanism as a way of life?* The city, we are learning, is a holistic system of networks. Those networks are geographical, social, institutional, political, cultural and religious. Through them social community takes on new forms.

a. *How are ties of ethnicity and kinship affected by the city?* What new challenges face them in secondary relationships such as friendships and work partnerships? How are human norms and values reexamined? How is the concept of neighborhood changed by the city? How do these new perceptions affect the congruity, the link, between neigh-





borhood and local church? How far does the impact of the city extend? How do new urban influences reinforce or question traditional patterns of religion and faith?

b. *Wrestling with these questions draws us deeply into definition of the term urban—and that definition will have a crucial effect on our perception of urban mission. We can make it an adjectival addendum. But this will add little to a radical, basic understanding of a theology of mission. A second possibility makes the term urban into a “definitive category, part of a new core that will create a new sub-discipline, urban missiology” (Conn 1994b:viii). The first choice can leave Christian discipleship as a calling to witness, church attendance, Bible study and prayer. The second choice can add to that list the practice of justice and love in every sphere of urban life.*

Will our vision for urban ministry be holistic enough to meet these new perceptions of the city? Will the theology of mission we develop be merely a theology of mission *in* the city or a theology of mission *for* the city? Will the first choice treat the city only as a place in which mission operates? Will the second choice go further and treat the city as a fundamental variable in the design of urban mission?

3. *What tools does God provide to help us see the city and urban church growth more clearly? How do we develop urban church growth eyes?*

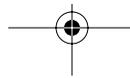
Urban mission studies in recent decades have followed earlier academic interests in focusing on demographics. The reasons may be different, but the bottom line has been the same. Built into the nature of the church, after all, is its deep yearning that men and women everywhere come to Christ in repentance and faith. It is a missiological concern that does not stop at any geographical or political boundary of the world.

Those boundaries expanded particularly in the world’s urban centers during the last half of the twentieth century. Massive urbanization has brought explosion of the cities of the so-called Third World.

a. *Demographics has taken a prominent place in mission research, given these population shifts. Discussions of unreached peoples and their size, number and location in this world has accelerated. Through its institutions, the church continues to expand its efforts to collect more reliable statistical information on these groups.*

More recently still, that search began to zero in on the least evangelized cities. Preliminary strategy plans are emerging, built around the transformation not merely of people groups but of cities (Grigg 1995). The term “gateway cities” is applied to the most significant entry points for evangelizing unreached people groups.

b. *But demographics alone is not enough. Other tools must be used also.*





What use can be made of the social sciences as we analyze class systems in city and church? How can urban ethnographies aid us in looking past statistical surveys to the cultural settings in which a church might grow?

*c. How do we link all this research with God's plan for the evangelization of the cities?* All truth, no matter where we find it, comes from God. But how do we prevent this search for truth from losing its Christian edge and becoming research exuberance instead of spiritual discernment? Recent Christian literature, wrestling with this temptation, calls for "spiritual mapping" as a key to the process of research and planning and praying. How should we evaluate this new appeal?

*4. Where should our research and planning be directed?* Where do we look to see signs of the kingdom of God in the city?

*a. We must begin with a drive for new churches and their growth.* Writing in 1970, Donald McGavran noted that "after a hundred and fifty years of modern missions, the plain fact is that churches have not done well in most cities" of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (McGavran 1970:280). Reinforcing that judgment is the decline of Christianity in the cities of North America and Europe.

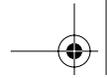
In the twenty-first century the need for urban church planting is growing. "We will live in a world of seventy-nine supercities (fifty-nine of them in developing countries), each with over four million inhabitants. Our globe will have 433 mega-cities with over one million people in each. Our urban population will increase by 1.6 million people per week. Poverty in our urban areas will continue to expand, producing a 'planet of slums' " (D. Barrett 1987:84).

*b. Where should we look to accomplish this task?* How will the concept of reachable people groups aid us? What potential for church planting will we find among the world's poor, among the global movement of border-crossing migrants and immigrants? What of neglected industrial factory workers, or government employees who make up a large percentage of the world's primary cities, or new ethnic and tribal groups settling in urban areas?

*c. What unmined treasures can we still find in the Scriptures to help us shape new contextual forms of worship and message for these peoples?* How can Spirit-directed promptings stirred by these new cultural encounters with the gospel help us look at the Bible in a fresh way? What new theological light still waits to break forth with evangelistic force from the cities of Brazil and Japan, from the slums of Philadelphia and Cairo?

*d. The theological paradigms that have shaped the church's self-under-*





*standing in its dialogue with the city can create a measure of distortion.* Hidden behind stone and mortar are the philosophies of ministry that have shaped the urban church. And basic to these are unseen assumptions that dictate those church statements of purpose. Our image of the city and of urban ministry is affected by the paradigms, the presuppositions, out of which we create our models for mission.

Can we construct a historical typology of paradigms fashioned by the church's perception of the city? What are the paradigms available to us in the dialogue of church and city? How do the paradigms shape the models that shape self-understanding? How many of these paradigms are shaped by an antiurban bias? Where are the boundaries we cannot cross and remain the people of God in urban mission? What are the boundaries we must break down to be the people of God?

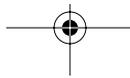
5. *Most of the boundaries of our paradigms are structured to define church Sunday morning. Where are those boundaries Monday morning?* Can we look for signs of the kingdom in the public sector of the city?

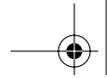
Across the globe, cities have become concentration points for problems not exclusively urban. Massive poverty, human exploitation, government corruption and the abuse of human rights cry out for answers. Racism and ethnic cleansing devastate East Los Angeles and Lusaka. Sydney wrestles with a massive influx of non-European immigration. Prostitution becomes a major tourist industry for Bangkok. Trade imbalances create joblessness in Houston, put people to work in Shanghai, and accelerate shouting matches between Tokyo and Washington, D.C. Industrialization in Seoul marginalizes rural and small-town interests.

a. *What is the responsibility of the people of God in this public sector?* Will the pursuit of some sort of social calling leave evangelism in the dust? Does biblical shalom incorporate social justice activities in the task of urban mission? Is mercy, not justice, our part in social transformation? Should the church be only a servant of righteousness? Can it also be an advocate for righteousness? Prison Fellowship, set up by Charles Colson, carries on Bible studies for inmates and helps the families of prisoners. Should it also press, as it does, for changes in social legislation to bring prison reform?

b. *Where do the agenda boundaries end for the church as an institution?* Should Christians alone or in community take action in the public square? How does our holistic understanding of the kingdom of God affect the boundary lines of the church's work? Can we shape a legitimate public theology?

c. *How do we determine where we can establish incarnational ministries?* Many churches are incarnating their social conscience in Christian com-





munity development. Free medical clinics for the poor, reconstruction of deteriorating housing in the inner cities, legal services for the “underclass” and food distribution programs are appearing in the world’s cities. Base Ecclesial Communities are reshaping perceptions of the nature of the church and its relation to the poor and to the community.

How do we determine what we can and cannot do? How are Christian community development projects related to the shalom of the kingdom of God?

6. *How do we prepare Christian leaders for these tasks? What shape should discipleship training for the city take?*

Experts warn us that “when training Christian leaders for ministry in the city, the church is going to have to abandon assembly-line, denomination-oriented, systems-associated ministries” (Elliston and Kauffman 1993:135). People and task orientation, rather than institution orientation, they tell us, will have to carry the day.

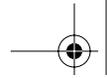
Spiritual formation and technical skills must be shaped to meet new demands and confront new needs—worldview adjustments, increasing ethnic diversity, more easily discernible differences between the classes, moral demands that cannot always be addressed by traditional patterns of behavior, the growing visibility of the poor, urban openness to change and the accumulated effect of new ideas.

Past models of decision making will face adjustments. Hierarchical patterns of African group thinking will cope in the city with the pressure of a more individualistic style of choosing. First- and second-generation Koreans in the United States will struggle to cross a gulf of alternate leadership models as wide as that between Japanese and Anglos.

a. *In the cultural and social diversity of the world’s cities, how will we discern leadership gifts? Where do we look to find gifts that are appropriate to the cultural context and faithful to biblical demands? How will those gifts be tested in ministry?*

b. *How will the training of leaders be carried on? The formal schooling model of learning has severe drawbacks in cultural settings where education moves on nonformal lines. Can mentoring avoid the one-way concept of learning, where instruction is deposited in student receptacles as money is deposited in a bank? How can we develop mentoring models in which content is not detached from the real world of the learner, where every mentor/teacher is also a learner?*

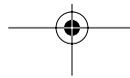
c. *How do we develop a model for mentoring laity that equips unpaid as well as paid leaders of the church? That instructs every Christian in equipping skills? That leaves out no generation in the church—youth or adult? How do we create a holistic program of discipleship that*

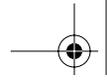


Introduction

encourages the people of God to take their ministry outside the church into the urban public world?

The agenda just outlined is the focus of this book. It is what might be termed a calling to spiritual warfare and ultimately to the urban mission of God himself. We cannot improvise; we may only ask at each step what it is that God demands (Bavinck 1960:5). How does God see the mission of his people in this world of cities?





## 8

# Place, Process & Misperception

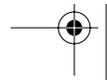
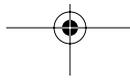


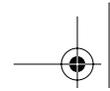
WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED "CITY" around which God's mission and ours revolves? That is harder to answer than one might suppose. Scholarship devoted to the city has yet to find a commonly accepted definition of either *a* city or *the* city (Gulick 1989:1-21).

The diversity of cities makes such a question extremely difficult. In some ways it is easier to focus on cities in the plural than on the city as a monolith. Are we speaking of precolonial West African settlements built of grass houses? Or Aztec holy cities like Tenochtitlán, with its boulevards carefully laid out in geometric patterns to mirror its view of the four-quartered universe? Or the clay houses of Mesopotamia's ancient cities, built on the remains of earlier centers?

Where is the point of comparison between Beijing in the fifteenth century and Los Angeles in the twentieth? Beijing was reconstructed then to reflect the order and harmony of the universe. At its walled center was the Hall of Divine Harmony, the sacred core of the world, and the Temple of Heaven. Here earth and sky met, the four seasons merged, and yin and yang were in harmony. Its architectural design symbolized the role of China as the Middle Kingdom. It united the will of heaven to the will of earth, power and cosmic harmony merged.

By contrast, modern Los Angeles exists virtually without a downtown center. It is fragmented by freeways and distance into a complex of clus-





tered suburbs in search of a city. Some say that in the twenty-first century it will spread 150 miles from San Diego to Santa Barbara, from ocean to desert Palm Springs. If Los Angeles has a walled center, it is probably Disneyland, an amusement park of fantasy and order, the Magic Kingdom of la-la land. Its unity is not readily apparent. It is the second largest Mexican city in the world, the second largest Guatemalan city, the second largest Cambodian city.

Of crucial importance: If we cannot find common connections between cities past and present, how shall we link the biblical perceptions of the city and urban mission discussed in previous chapters with the city today? Is the link we think we see between the remote, preindustrial cities of the Bible and cities like Copenhagen and Colorado Springs an artificial, imposed one? Is religion a part of it? Is the gulf so large that it isolates radically the walled city of Jericho from the double-beltway-circled Washington, D.C., or the island-mainland harbors of Tyre from those of Kowloon-Hong Kong?

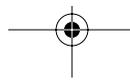
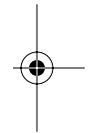
In the face of such great differences, can we reach any conclusions about this thing called city? Where do we look for commonality?

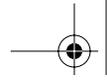
### The City as Place

Pioneering European studies of the city in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries largely set the direction in the search for commonality. Following the lead of Ferdinand Tonnies (1855-1936), a sharp contrast was drawn between two types of human social life. The one was *Gemeinschaft* or community, the quality said to be characteristic of the small country village. Here people worked for the common good, linked by ties of family and neighborhood, common interests, common purposes. The lifestyle of this "living organism" was "intimate, private, and exclusive living together," its members bound by a sense of "ourness," of "us" (Tonnies 1957).

In sharp contrast was *Gesellschaft*, the urban society. A "mechanical aggregate and artifact," the urban lifestyle of association was said to be characterized by disunity and hostility, rampant individualism and selfishness. There was no belief in common good. Ties of family and neighborhood tended to be of little significance.

Other interests and developments also emerged in this early stage of reflection. Georg Simmel (1858-1918), for example, moved in Tonnies's direction but focused on the social psychology of the city. In the midst of overwhelming stimulation and the call for rational response, the urbanite, he argued, finds relief in the development of social reserve and a blasé mindset. Out of that more calculating and rational mindset, he feared,





might come indifference and even aversion.

Out of these early emphases was emerging a strong antiurban pattern, oriented to the city as a place in contrast to the rural setting (Karp, Stone and Yoels 1991:12-44). What became known as the Chicago school of sociology amplified and modified these directions. In the period between about 1913 and 1940 it formulated the problems and provided the research that would virtually define the whole field of study (Bulmer 1984). How do we understand the ecology of the city as a place? How do we see the human community shaped by and shaping the city as place?

Sociologist Louis Wirth, a prominent member of the Chicago School, produced a classic definition in 1938 that scholars still debate, deny, correct or modify. "A city," he argued, is "a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals" (Wirth 1980:35).

Wirth's focus was fixed on definite physical boundaries, on population size and density. Contrasted sharply with the homogeneity of the rural setting, the city was perceived as heterogeneous, a place of specialization and diversity. And, asked Wirth and his supporters, what was the effect of this on our way of life in the city, on what he called urbanism?

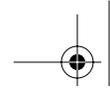
Kinship ties are eroded by social contacts. Individualism grows, competition dominates. Community is replaced by noncommunity, simplicity by sophistication. In the city the sacred becomes secular, the integrated life moves toward anomie, toward life without norm. The warmth of personal relationships is exchanged for rational, impersonal anonymity.

Scholarship has continued to modify or challenge Wirth's thesis with a variety of emphases over the years. Studies have pointed out, for example, Wirth's heavy dependence on the industrial city for his urban model. Chicago, after all, cannot be a paradigm for the whole urban world. Researchers have asked in response, what about the preindustrial city (Sjoberg 1960)? Was Wirth's model really universal enough?

What of modern cities like Cairo where over one-third of the inhabitants were born outside the city? How many of these newcomers are urban in residence but, by Wirth's definition, are still rural in outlook and behavior? In extensive research, Janet Abu-Lughod found thirteen communities or subcities of Cairo in that city's last hundred years. Scattered through the thirteen subcities, past and present, was a spectrum of four lifestyles from rural to urban, traditional to modern (Abu-Lughod 1971).

Other contrasts suggested by Wirth and refined by his supporters have been attacked or modified severely. Is it true, to cite one significant debate example, that migration from a peasant village to a large urban center





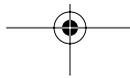
leaves the newcomer disorganized and marginalized? Can one really find in the village, as Robert Redfield contended from his neo-Romantic bias, all the moral virtues and communal solidarity and homogeneity missing from the city (Redfield 1941)? Isn't it actually true, responded Oscar Lewis, that life in a Mexican village like Tepotzlan shows much of the fragmentation and dislocation imagined in the city? Isn't Redfield's evolutionary model of cultural development from the simple to the complex, from tribal to rural to urban, an oversimplification? And conversely, in the urban environment of Mexico City cannot one find the continued maintenance of kinship lines and the healthy support of religious systems thought to have been eroded (Lewis 1963:31-41)?

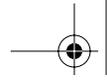
**Liabilities and modifications.** We will return throughout this book to the heavy baggage that comes with this paradigm of the city as a place. But at least two major flaws must be uncovered before we move on now. They both can play a strong role in an understanding of urban mission—and in damaging it.

One of those flaws is the strong antiurban direction taken by the paradigm. The eulogy it pronounced over the city has been bane, not blessing (Conn 1987:20-22). The city was observed through a bipolar moralistic model of rural versus urban. Everything rural was good, everything urban was bad. Urbanism as a way of life was ultimately an acid that would eat away traditional rural values and undermine meaningful relationships and institutions.

Linked to this was a second major flaw: static determinism. In this ethical stereotyping of rural versus urban, all the destructive patterns of life were peculiarly, essentially or exclusively urban. As urbanism increases, the thesis argues, neighbors become less important, social norms are enfeebled. We are left with "peculiarly urban phenomena—stress, estrangement, individualism, and, especially, social disorganization" (Fischer 1984:31-32).

Abstracted from these flaws, there is still some wisdom in using population size, density and social heterogeneity in the beginnings of a sketch of urbanism and the city (Gulick 1989:18). After all, the demographic criterion is common to virtually all definitions of urban or city. Other dimensions—institutional, social, cultural or behavioral—must also be added. Yet these demographic qualities are relative: "they are not all-or-nothing characteristics" (Fischer 1984:25). Ultimately, regardless of where we put our emphasis, "definitions largely consist of threshold criteria that describe minimal levels of demographic, institutional, or structural complexity beneath which city or urban levels cannot be applied" (Press and Smith 1980:12).





In keeping with this reminder, even size of area and density of population provide no uniform measure for definition. A feudal city like Damascus could be crossed in a morning's leisurely walk. To cross modern Tokyo or Mexico City would take an automobile. "The populations of all but a few of the greatest medieval cities could be dropped into our modern urban centers and make scarcely a ripple. The Los Angeles metropolis was in 1980 over 150 times greater in area and about 14 times greater in population than Cairo at its most glorious around 1500" (Fischer 1984:8).

Scholarship still stumbles over relative questions of size, population and their measurement. How, for example, do we deal with history's early urban settlements? Archaeological evidence is fragmentary. And research struggles with finding uniform standards for measuring those early settlements (Shiloh 1980:25-35).

Even in our contemporary world, government census takers continue to find little agreement when it comes to statistical definitions. In Denmark and Sweden it takes only two hundred inhabitants for a place to be defined a city. In the United States there needs to be at least twenty-five hundred, in Greece and Senegal ten thousand. Sensitive to the diversities particularly between developed and less developed countries, the United Nations has set up its own classification system. Urban characteristics on an international scale, UN thinkers argue, are most readily found in population areas exceeding twenty thousand people.

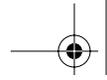
All this underlines that the value of demographics in defining city is only relative. There are other more significant pieces to add to the urban mix.

**The church's early response.** During the first stage of emerging great cities Christians joined in the antiurban bias toward the city as a place. As early as the 1830s and 1840s church sentiment in Europe was turning against the cities as strongholds of irreligion, as religious deserts. That view quickly took on traditional status: urbanization leads to the decline of faith.

By 1880 Horatius Bonar (1808-1889), an evangelical pastor in Edinburgh, was writing a series of missionary tracts to Parisian working men and speaking of cities as "great centers of human evil." Pleading that his readers not forget "the warnings of Noah's days and the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah," he asked, "Does God care for our Great Cities or has he given them up?" (Bonar 1880:83-84, 90-92). Others were asking the same question but with less compassion.

For Pietists Berlin was a "Babel . . . where all ties were broken and nothing was sacred." A London clergyman in an 1844 sermon spoke of





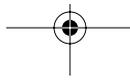
the life of cities as “essentially a worldly life,” in contrast to “the country with its pure serenity” (McLeod 1995:8). Catholic clergy supported the negative judgments of Francois Courtade, who, writing in 1871, saw cities like Paris as “without faith and without God” (Kselman 1995:165). Cities had become a threat to faith.

In the rapidly urbanizing United States a similar pessimism was growing. Protestant churches were feeling overwhelmed by urban growth and change. Dwight L. Moody’s early enthusiasm over the church’s role in the city was dying. Urged to resume his urban revival campaigns, he was becoming reluctant. By 1896 he was writing, “The city is no place for me” (quoted in Conn 1994a:60). “The city as a menace to be resisted and redirected into familiar Protestant patterns—this was the predominant understanding among Protestants at the turn of the century” (Handy 1969:94).

To a greater degree in America than anywhere else, Protestant clergy took the lead during the latter half of the nineteenth century in publicizing what they perceived as “the urban peril”—pauperism and chronic poverty, crime and political disorder, alcoholism, the new immigrants from southern Europe and the concomitant growth of Roman Catholicism. Fear replaced hope as the city became “a serious menace,” “the fever sores of the land,” the ultimate challenge to religious commitment and faith (Lees 1985:165-68). Frequently accented was the demographic disproportion between the growth of the city and the availability of clergy and churches to respond to the needs.

American Catholics voiced similar pessimism regarding the city. By the 1920s the church’s membership was largely urban. But there were those like Father John Ryan who concluded somberly, “The future will be with the Church that ministers to the rural population” (quoted in Cross 1962:41). Critics saw the weakening of the territorial parish and the rapid multiplication of national ethnic parishes as telltale signs of the present disunity of the city and warnings of further demoralization. “Imbued with respect for the past, nostalgic for a life close to nature, and bemused . . . by an urban sociology that clothed similar sentiments in a majestic scientific terminology, they yielded too readily to impulses of dismay” (Cross 1962:51).

Industrializing Europe and long industrialized Britain underlined similar concerns. Many of England’s Protestant clergy “saw the city as at worst a den of iniquity and at best a serious challenge that could be effectively countered only through constant vigilance” (Lees 1985:153). In the 1870s an Anglican bishop remarked to Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli that “the Church would probably lose the city.” Replied Disraeli, “Don’t be mistaken, my Lord, the church has nothing to lose, for she has never had the city.”





Around 1850, life in Germany was still predominantly agrarian. Two generations later it had become the leading industrial power on the European continent. Already its Protestant clergy were joining England's voices of despair, denouncing the urban way of life for its destructive "impact on the religious and ethical standards of the previously faithful. Traditionally allied with the conservative forces in state and society to an even greater extent than their British counterparts, they perceived the big city as a milieu in which all their efforts to retain and guide their parishioners continually faced attack by the forces of secular individualism" (Lees 1985:158). The cities were "shapeless giants . . . comparable to powerful vacuum cleaners," "a wildly fluctuating chaos of human beings" in which the forces of Christianity would be placed inevitably on the defensive.

**History revisited.** Revisionist looks at these early prophecies of urban downfall question the full historical accuracy of these judgments. Did the rural-urban polarization and the migration to the city produce a real decay in faith? The clergy's verbal "for example" is apparently no proof. The polarization is too simplistic, too ideological, to explain the full picture. The late anthropologist Margaret Mead, noted for her wit as well as her scholarship, provides another evaluation of such migration: " 'At least 50 percent of the human race doesn't want their mother-in-law within walking distance.' Mead's remark may tell us as much about life in the countryside as the typologies do" (Phillips and LeGates 1981:129).

Further, where should the final judgment be placed—on the city as an unresponsive place? Even when we restrict gospel impact to the demographics of church attendance, there are enough historical examples from this early history of industrialization to indicate that urban unresponsiveness is too easy an answer.

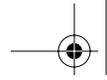
In 1851 the city of Glasgow had a church attendance rate higher than a quarter of Scotland's rural counties. And in nearly all cases major Scottish towns had higher rates than their immediate hinterlands (Brown 1995:251). After a complex evaluation of England's industrializing cities,

**An Indictment of the Urban Context**

"All dangers of the town may be summed up in this: that here, withdrawn from the blessed influence of Nature, and set face to face against humanity, man loses his own nature and becomes a new and artificial creature—an inhuman cog in a social machinery that works like a fate, and cheats him of his true culture as a soul. The most unnatural fashions and habits, the strangest eccentricities of intellect, the wildest and most pernicious theories in social morals, and the most appalling and incurable barbarism, are the legitimate growths of city life."

REV. AMORY D. MAYO, SYMBOLS OF THE CAPITAL: OR, CIVILIZATION IN NEW YORK, 1859.





Callum Brown concludes that “taking mainland Britain as a whole, the degree to which industry contributed to a city’s economy is probably a poor predictor of church participation” (Brown 1995:253).

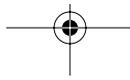
Also ignored in early judgments against the city were the immigrants who brought their own faith to the cities from their rural heritage. The ghettos built by Catholic and Protestant newcomers to European and North American cities were more than forced retreats in the face of Anglo-Saxon racism. They were that, to be sure. But they were also efforts by the newcomers to deal with the city’s pluralism. In these enclaves their people would be safe from over-close contact with commitments alien to their faith.

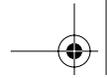
Subsequent history underlined this impact of the new migrants. In England the initial period of rapid immigration was a time of religious growth. But as immigration declined from 1870 to 1914, religious stagnation and decline accelerated. Another explanation for the decline of faith was also being offered during this time. It laid the blame not on the unresponsive city but on the church’s neglect of urban need. The city was a God-given opportunity as much as a diabolical threat.

For evangelicals like General William Booth (1829-1912), founder of the Salvation Army, the decaying state of the city was a call to Christian action. Beyond the city as a place, he was alert to the processes that made up the city. “As there is a darkest Africa,” he asked, “is there not also a darkest England? Civilisation, which can breed its own barbarians, does it not also breed its own pygmies? May we not find a parallel at our own doors, and discover within a stone’s throw of our cathedrals and palaces similar horrors to those which Stanley has found existing in the great Equatorial forest?” (Booth 1890:11-12).

Booth’s pleas, along with those of others in the United States (Conn 1994a:62-70), drew attention to the church’s isolation from the working classes. To be sure, class patterns of church involvement showed considerable variations from country to country (McLeod 1995:27). Even so, were class distinctions that had long divided churched from unchurched more to blame than the city as a place? Was revulsion at the irreligiosity of the urban lower classes in the cities of England, Germany and the United States as much revulsion at lower classes as at irreligiosity?

**Responses from contemporary Christian scholarship.** One hundred years later, Christian reflection has still not caught up completely with these revisionist discoveries—or, for that matter, with modifications of the early flaws. The defect of static determinism in the rural-urban polarization can be quickly acknowledged. After all, such determinism





strikes at the very heart of the Christian notion of conversion, of radical change. With it hope for change will quickly vanish.

There still appear to be traces of a defeatism regarding city life. This shows in a tendency to resist the city's impact on the church instead of developing the church's impact on the city.

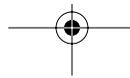
The stereotypical negativism spawned by antiurbanism still surfaces, from various directions. For some the reality of God's common-grace blessings in the city is still minimized as the city is primarily perceived as a place of Satanic power. Its inhabitants are still described as powerless, alone, vulnerable, lost, rejected, bewildered, insecure, used, void of meaning. Others, in a proper assault on the Enlightenment background of modernity and modernization, speak of urbanization as one of the main realities that drives the process.

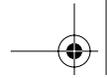
Happily, the earlier version of the rural-urban contrast has undergone revision or readjustment among some Christian theorists. Some speak of a rural-urban continuum rather than of polarization; they underline the damage caused by the negative and simplistic stereotype of the past. "The city does not exist in opposition to the countryside" (Hiebert and Meneses 1995:262). Others speak of it as an "idealized contrast" (DuBose 1978:34-35) or a heuristic typology to provoke analysis and discussion of society and social change (Filbeck 1985). The proposed continuum is seen as a meaningful channel, not a barrier, for spreading the gospel (DuBose 1983:515-16). Whether these revisions are adequate to offer a new path for healthy urban mission is a question awaiting more in-depth Christian research.

### **The City as Process**

The interests of cultural anthropology and sociology in urbanism as a way of life have moved in many directions in the last few decades. Some of those interests are still tied to past discussions. What social relations have been generated by these areas of relatively heavy population, density and heterogeneity we call cities? Will we find these relationships exclusively in the city? Can we find them also in places other than cities? Cities are mosaics of institutions, family and kinship groups, ethnic enclaves, and associations. How do we understand the complex interactions that go on between them, and the interactions with areas beyond the city?

**Burgeoning study agenda.** In the 1960s and 1970s, a heyday of urban anthropology and sociology, interest in urban processes created a wide but limited agenda. How do we understand urban poverty? What happens in the process we call rural-urban migration? How do we





describe life in a residential neighborhood? What goes on in the structures and functions of associations not built on kinship? How can we best explain the persistence of extended kinship relationships? How do role relationships work in an urban setting? What is this thing called “ethnicity” (Sanjek 1990:152)?

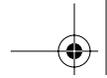
In the 1980s the scope of these studies expanded. The liabilities of earlier studies were recognized and modified as new directions were pursued. In the process, less formal attention has been devoted to issues of definition (Sanjek 1990:153). But a consensus has been growing on the significance of the socializing process for understanding urbanism.

In the development of this consensus Marxist-oriented scholars have pressed the hardest in the most radical terms. Some, like Anthony Leeds and Leonard Plotnicov, have decided that the city under capitalism cannot be distinguished from complex society as such. Words like *city* and *town*, *village* and *rural*, become relative in any society, ancient or modern, integrated as they are by class differences in the area of production (Plotnicov 1985:50-51). In such a world, “No Towne is an Islande of Itselfe” (Leeds 1994:71-79). Cities and towns, villages and metropolises, goes the argument, are simply nodal points within societal systems. They are only distinct specialties of an urban society linked (under any technology known) to specific geographical spaces.

The impact of this radical emphasis, we argue, has played some part in further confusing significant areas of study. Urban anthropology now struggles more than ever with defining its area of research. What really is urban? Has the virtual equation of urban with civilization and human culture not left us with something too diffuse and too large to be studied with anthropology’s traditional method of participant observation and intense fieldwork? If everything is urban, then nothing is urban.

The Chicago School saw the development of cities as a natural process. However, others take a different stance. Neo-Marxist political economists take into consideration the manipulative capacities of those in power. Primarily viewing the development of cities through the economic maneuvering of government and big business, they focus on such phenomena as exploitation and discrimination. The question we must ask is, does the neo-Marxist orientation to economics restrict our understanding of urbanism to the point of imbalance and one-sidedness? When economics are absolutized at the center of urban studies, what happens to the significance of history and the arts, politics and religion, for understanding the city and urbanism? Are they really useful—or only when they are redefined within a Marxist framework?

At the same time, out of this ferment of discussion, Marxist and other-



wise, have come new issues for study that add to an interdisciplinary picture of urbanism. Political and class questions begin to explore work relations, enrich urban migration studies, and expand interests beyond the urban poor to gender and public culture issues. Even the study of urban religion, long neglected in contemporary sociology and anthropology, seems to be making an appearance (Kemper 1991:383-84; Sanjek 1990:154-55).

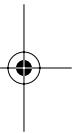
Above all else, scholarship, even outside the Marxist orbit, now finds itself wrestling with the social connections between the city and the world outside the city. Urban history does touch, and is touched by, widening circles beyond its own. "Paris sneezes and France blows its nose." Urban and rural are not simply bipolar, isolated opposites but distinct entities integrated by mutual action and reaction. How will we understand that interaction? In the process how does the city act? And how is it acted upon? How is power exercised, and who benefits from it?

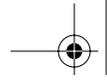
The restrictive demographic definitions of the past are breaking down. Scholarship appears to be recognizing more and more that cities are places but also participants in, and respondents to, social process (Palen 1992:339-56).

**Christian research reflections.** Urban mission studies in recent decades have not moved as quickly as larger scholarship concerns into considering the city as process. Among evangelicals the worldwide growth of cities, coupled with pragmatic interests in personal evangelism and church planting, has led to a narrow study agenda dominated by demographics. The gathering of reliable statistical information on urban growth—particularly on world-class cities—and on unreached people groups has been a central focus of concern (Conn 1997:26-28). Urbanization, in this light, has been understood more as a demographic process than as a process of sociocultural shifting.

Also restricting progress has been a lack of interfacing between Christian mission and the social sciences most useful in analyzing the city. Linguistics, cultural anthropology and communication theory are becoming more comfortable, though still debated, instruments in research. But little serious attention is being paid to sociology, economics or political science.

Studies also remain disproportionate geographically, ecclesiastically and topically. A growing body of studies from America's mainline churches focuses on North American urban history and mission (Hartley 1996:308-63). Deeply sensitive to social and institutional context, these studies add a much-needed dimension missing from more explicitly evangelical research. But their ties to biblical and evangelistic concerns





can sometimes be weak, and their connections with the American geographical scene and to theological pluralism can hamper wider usefulness.

Outside the Anglo-Saxon world both macro-level and micro-level research on urban mission is much more limited. The churches of Asia and Latin America, for example, "recognise that our ministry demands a clear and intelligent understanding of the complexities of our economic, environmental, social and cultural context" (Ro 1989:1; cf. "Seeking the Peace" 1989:18-24). But Christian research has still not caught up fully with the shift of ecclesiastical gravity from the Northern to the Southern Hemisphere.

Some agenda topics related to broader studies of the urban process have received considerable attention. The interest of the church growth school in the homogeneous unit principle has fostered wide research into questions of family and kinship groups. But little, comparatively speaking, has yet been done to relate these issues to the urban setting. General inactivity in sociological research and reluctance among some toward a holistic approach to ministry has minimized such mission studies. Issues of neighborhood, role relationships, societal structures and networks receive some attention, but it is often hit and miss.

If there was one issue that gained mission ascendancy in the 1980s, it was poverty and social transformation. The global city is reminding the church of our calling to serve the poor. Why poverty exists and how the church should fulfill that calling are still debated. Mainline discussions within the Anglo-Saxon world join with many minority communities in underlining a systemic approach to the problem. A substantial number of evangelicals from the Two-Thirds World, joined by many from the Anglo-Saxon world, plead for a holistic balance that will unite the systemic and the personal in a vital connection with evangelism and church planting (Nicholls 1986). Others are concerned that such a balance is too fragile and evangelism will be minimized in such a wedding.

### **Urban Misperception**

Left behind from this history of academic study and popular perception are accumulating images of the city. Scholarship through the years has rejected some and corrected or modified others. We will be dealing in more detail with some of these images in future chapters.

One particular image continues to capture and summarize many others into one popular ideology—the city as an urban wasteland. Christian joins with non-Christian in a stereotype of concentrated chaos and disorder, the city as a maze of disruption and dislocation, bewildering sprawl





and confused worldviews. Everything about the city then becomes “too much”: too much crowding, too much noise, too much stress.

Just how realistic is this chaotic image, particularly as a negative barrier?

Why do migrants

with enthusiastic optimism still seem to ignore it and move into the cities across the developing world?

They continue to pour into what the expert perceives as the disorder of Jos and Lima, Tokyo and Cairo, pulled by the attractions of cities struggling with the chaotic growth that their presence helps create.

The pull factors are usually stronger than the push factors. Why? For the migrants growth, however disordered, means change and progress. It means educational and medical benefits, improvement of family income. For many

young men and women it means freedom from social constraints and traditions. How do they cope? They create positive mental maps of the city that allow for mobility, communication and enough organization for emotional security (Krupat 1985:70-71).

**Creating the chaos image.** Where then do the ideological images of chaos and disorder come from? They come in large part from the spectated presuppositions through which we filter what we want to see. The images are shaped by more than objective reality; they are shaped also by our social, cultural and human ideologies. Chaos is in the eye of the beholder.

**Cities and Chaos**

Whatever has been my taste for solitude and natural scenery, yet the thick, foggy, stifled elements of cities, the entangled life of so many men together, sordid as it was, and empty of the beautiful, took quite a strenuous hold upon my mind. I felt as if there never could be enough of it.

*NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE*

New York City, the incomparable, the brilliant star city of cities, the Cyclopean paradox, the inferno with no out-of-bounds, the supreme expression of both the miseries and splendors of contemporary civilization . . . at once the climactic synthesis of America and yet the negation of America.

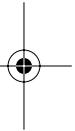
*JOHN GUNTHER, AUTHOR*

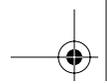
New York is great. I've got so much noise. Subways. Horns. I can't stand something quiet, I go nuts.

*MILES DAVIS, JAZZ MUSICIAN*

President Anwar el-Sadat and I, separately considering the Egyptian capital city of Cairo, recently arrived at the same conclusion; it was about to explode. . . . I do not mean seismically. Cairo is not a city of meteorological extremes. . . . No, I am speaking of the metaphysical condition of the place, its political, social, historical state, which is never languid or lethargic, but which seems to me now almost to be almost lethally excitable. . . . Hush and tumult: the ancient and majestic streaked indefinably, somewhere among the city lights, with the ominous.

*JAN MORRIS, DESTINATIONS*



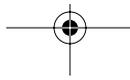


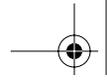
The rural-urban polarization outlined in this chapter surely affects us. It assumes our response will be, "The city is too much." On the other hand, some research has looked at the rural model and affirmed, "The noncity is too little." There is a human need for complexity, novelty, excitement and exploration. And those are needs uniquely met by the city (Geller 1980).

Change, linked to the rural-urban polarization, can also be seen as a part of negative chaos and disorientation—moral and cultural. "Human beings need the framework of ideas, images, and behavioural norms that culture provides in order to develop, to communicate and to interact with one another. Culture gives significance to experience and is the basis for the human articulation and creation of meaning" (Shorter 1991:141). So when Koreans move from their homeland to North American cities and members of ethnic tribal groups make their way to African cities, they find themselves a cognitive minority bombarded by new cultural signals. Traditional norms and comfortable social institutions are not quickly at hand. The result can be a profound cultural alienation and moral upheaval. In Africa "family life, sexual mores and the socialization of children all suffer, and crime, alcohol, drug-taking and sexual promiscuity appear as viable survival strategies" (Shorter 1991:141). In Korean-American homes there are role changes for husbands and wives and frequent conflicts between first and second generations as the new culture is either assimilated or ignored.

Change, as part of the human process of adjustment, can also mean growth and transformation. The Mataco Indians of the northern Argentine Chaco plain, twenty-five thousand strong, are traditionally a hunting, fishing, gathering society. Their traditional society now faces rapid urbanization, many being drawn by the "glitter of the city" syndrome. Crowded in barrios at the very edges of the urban centers, they often lose the dignity and security of their cultural identity and forest existence. Their concepts of ownership and property are threatened, their traditional extended family system undergoes change; white Argentinean racism continues its harassment of them (S. Barrett 1997:29-30).

Yet the Matacos, with the encouragement of the Anglican Church, are seeing change in a new light. "We can't resist or reject change," some acknowledge, "but we must know how to distinguish between good and bad change." Apprehension for the future of the culture, a sense of insecurity, remains. But it is not a fear of chaos. In the language of one church leader, "In the past, the Indians did not have salt, herbs, and spices to flavor their food. When these condiments became available to them, their food took on a new and more appealing taste. Positive changes can have



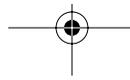


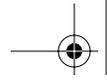
a similar effect on the life of our communities" (Barrett 1997:37-38).

The negative judgments of social class, especially outsider (etic) judgments, surely play a part in the discovery of chaos. Middle- and upper-class observers assume the good life is defined by order and the choices that wealth makes possible. They look at the inner-city slums of Chicago and the vast peripheral squatter settlements of Calcutta and see congestion, a cluttered sea of huts constructed from sacking, packing cases and rusting sheets of corrugated iron. Four miles from the beauty of downtown Nairobi, along the sides of the Mathare River, there is a squatter settlement of some 200,000 people. "The area . . . is ugly," writes one sympathetic commentator, "the houses crammed together in an apparently haphazard fashion. . . . The roads are makeshift, garbage is piled high in open areas, and the children play in the dust." Its inhabitants, the report continues, are "highly marginal in every sense of the term" (quoted in Lloyd 1979:17). Note the consistent language of rootlessness, disorder, and chaos used to describe this area—*ugly, crammed, haphazard, makeshift, marginal*. Do these descriptive words not point to an ideological judgment that the outside observer has added, and in the adding missed other features clearer to the (emic) insider?

In the maze of Mathare Valley, what of the kinship and ethnic ties that still bind Akamba to Akamba, Luhya to Luhya in community? An outsider also could easily miss the highly organized and politically integrated organization that a 1973 observer perceived in the life of Village Two in the valley: a "clearly identifiable group of community leaders who direct the village committee," a village-run cooperative society that maintains nursery schools and has a social hall for dances to finance the schools and pay beer fines (Lloyd 1979:17-18).

Is there nothing but chaos and disorder in the inner-city slums of the United States? Gerald Suttles, in his classic 1968 study of the Taylor Street area of Chicago, found otherwise. He noted a social order structured around ecologically settled ethnic areas, boundaries invisible to the outsider but well known and respected by insiders. Ordered segregation marked the Italian, Mexican, Puerto Rican and African American communities. And within that negotiated order of stability among competing groups one found a stable moral order based on shared values. Within those ethnic borders were safety and comfort, in-group membership designating churches, parks and business establishments as in-group territory. Frequently even distinctive ways of dressing and local speech patterns marked off social order (Suttles 1968), and graffiti at strategic corners was a means for youth gangs to mark off their territoriality and zones of safety.





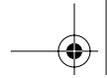
**Seeing a new way.** Changing the chaos mindset from fear to favor has not been easy for the Christian community. In 1900 a statement of the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church looked at the American city and saw “the menace of the American State and Church. To penetrate this alien mass by an evangelical religion is as difficult as it is imperative. The question of the city has become the question of the race. How to reach the heart of the city and to change its life is, indeed, the question of questions” (quoted in Handy 1969:94).

As late as 1962 the question remained, unanswered perhaps in part because of the high proportion of Protestant ministerial students coming from rural backgrounds. Out of a sampling of 1,079 students, only 36 percent came from cities of more than 250,000 people. Concluded Truman B. Douglass, “Because of their rural and small-town origins many ministers bring to their work in a city church a distaste for city ways—a distaste which is the more disabling because it is largely unconscious” (Douglass 1962:90).

In 1994 evangelical urbanologist Fletcher Tink suggested a new path for investigation in the future. In a survey of 265 urban laity, pastors and missionaries, both international and U.S.-based, he focused on perceptions of the city in terms of order and chaos. He found among them a strong view of the city as a place of heightened disorder. In a comparison of metaphors of ministry, he found a high majority turning repeatedly to less-ordered descriptors like “three ring circus,” “a community clinic,” “a sandlot ‘pickup’ game,” “a flea market,” “a fiesta,” “a lifeboat” (Tink 1994:210-12). But along with these metaphors, there was also “common consensus that disorder is not necessarily hostile” (Tink 1994:300). Like a jazz combo, urban ministry aims not for order but resolution into harmony. Tink’s own conclusions, drawn out of a rich biblical investigation of the role of chaos, suggest that a healthy skepticism toward order is an appropriate stance for the urban practitioner of ministry.

“Malignant chaos” will need exorcising as surely as an order chosen primarily because it is secure and comfortable. Is the manifestation of chaos truly disordered or only apparently so? Is the urban practitioner equipped emotionally and theologically to see chaos as an ingredient of harmony? Or will a phobia or reticence toward chaos as a path to harmony step around it or trample it? What discernment gifts are needed to mete out order for those governed by chaos and offer some measure of appropriate disorder for those bound by exaggerated order (Tink 1994:301-2)? Safety, after all, is not always salvific, nor is security always sound. Boundaries, Tink reminds us, are not always beneficial, and surprises are not always subversive.





Randy White, a former realtor who became national director of urban projects for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, describes his family's awakening to these new images of urban reality at Oxford, England. There they met Michael and Robyn Duncan and their "three very young, bouncy children," a family from New Zealand who had been working and living in a squatter settlement in urban Manila. The photograph albums they showed one another painted two worlds.

Our pictures were filled with smiling, well-dressed children amidst their toys. Michael and Robyn's were of smiling children too, but amidst the rubble surrounding the cardboard and tin shacks they lived in. Ours were filled with extended family, healthy and affluent, treasuring the grandchildren. Theirs were filled with Filipino friends, barely surviving, treasuring their "adopted" grandchildren. Ours were filled with the well-ordered, edged and trimmed world of suburbia; theirs with chaos, pollution and the ceaseless efforts of the urban poor trying to clear a space to raise and feed their families. (White 1996:21)

Puzzled, Randy commented, "You must be an amazing person, and your family must be an amazing family, to be able to do this."

Michael's reply was an eye-opener to the upside-down urban kingdom of God: "No, we're not. Jesus lives in our neighborhood, in the slums, and we've moved there to be with him."

