
Editor's Notes

This issue contains several articles dealing with different aspects of practical theology. In these notes I would like to draw your attention to a number of recent books that are concerned with one area of practical theology, namely urban ministry.

One of the names most commonly associated with urban ministry is that of the late **Harvie Conn** who served for a number of years until his death as professor of missions at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. I remember hearing Dr Conn speak at a student conference when I was a student in the USA in the 1970s and being deeply moved by his love of the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ, passion for justice and concern for the city. It has been a delight then to read Conn's *Urban Ministry* (IVP/USA 2001) which he almost completed before his death and which was completed by his colleague and successor **Manuel Ortiz**. The book is essentially a manual for urban church leaders. While theological in nature, the book contains a vast amount of historical and sociological material as well chapters on practical aspects of ministry such as spiritual warfare, social transformation, prayer, pastoral care, training, mentoring and much else. Theologically *Urban Ministry* owes much to the redemptive-historical tradition pioneered by Geerhardus Vos. In relation to the city this means that Conn sees it within the unfolding plan of redemption whereby God's ultimate purpose is to bring into being a perfect city in which righteousness dwells. In some measure the peace lost at the fall is to be sought and realised among the redeemed living in the fallen cities of man in this world even as they wait for the perfect peace of the new Jerusalem. He has a wonderful image of churches being model homes in cities of man that demonstrate what God is planning in his city to come. For Conn such peace is not narrowly spiritual but embraces the whole of human life. I strongly urge all readers working in cities to read this book, but even for those who don't this book is a passionate call to preach and live out the gospel of peace in all its richness wherever we are. But we do need to hear Conn's call for evangelicals to give serious attention to urban ministry, which sadly too few do. For Christians cities are not only places where evil is concentrated and to be bemoaned, endured or fled from as too many evangelicals have, but rather places at the heart of God's redemptive purpose in history that are to be celebrated, enjoyed and blessed with the gospel (Proverbs 11:11; Galatians 3:14). When we realise that the nations are coming to cities in ever increasing numbers we can see how missiologically significant cities are. Who doesn't want to be where the action is?

Many of Conn's concerns are found in a book dedicated to his memory entitled *The Urban Face of Mission* (Presbyterian & Reformed 2002) and edited by **Manuel Ortiz and Susan Baker**. This book focuses on urban mission, but not exclusively and contains a number of chapters on challenges and issues facing missions in general today. One of the key issues dealt with in several chapters is ministerial training appropriate for urban mission. A previously unpublished article by Conn deals with this, as do those by Roger and Edna Greenway among others. Is the university model of training so prevalent today really the best way to train effective gospel ministers for

mission in cities or anywhere else for that matter? Manuel Ortiz's chapter helpfully looks at the missionary nature of the church in an urban context and particularly the nature of the leadership it needs. There are other articles by well-known missiologists such as Raymond Bakke (Urbanisation and Evangelism), Samuel Escobar, Tite Tienou, Charles Kraft, Mark Gornik (Doing the Word: Biblical Holism and Urban Ministry). As one would expect in a book like this the articles vary in quality and relevance, but overall they force us to think about mission in the increasingly diverse and fast-changing cultures in which we find ourselves. While not compromising the gospel we must think hard about doing mission today. Another book that can help us do this by **Mark Gornik** who contributed to the previous volume. In *To Live in Peace* (William B. Eerdmans 2002), Gornik offers one the best expositions of the holistic approach to gospel ministry advocated by Conn and others. Based on Gornik's experience in planting the New Song Church a inner city Baltimore, *To Live in Peace* explores how the gospel of peace is to be preached and demonstrated in an urban context. I found the chapter entitled 'The Things that make for Peace' particularly helpful. Here Gornik applies the theme of exile to the church and particularly the call in Jeremiah 29 that is taken up in the NT in 1 Peter and elsewhere for God's people to seek the peace of the cities where they live as sojourners. I find the case he makes for the centrality of social ministry in the life of the church persuasive and compelling. One of the themes of the books that I have mentioned so far is the need to look again at theological education. In *Transforming the City: Reframing Education for Urban Ministry* (William B Eerdmans, 2002) **Eldin Villafane** of Gordon-Conwell Seminary and others do just that. Much of the book consists of case studies of different approaches to theological education. There is some interesting material here, but I think this book will be of interest primarily to theological educators. Again the challenge is to think hard about what training is for and then develop training that is appropriate whether in cities or elsewhere.

In *Through Our Long Exile* (Darton, Longman & Todd) **Kenneth Leech** is as passionate about the city as the above writers, but theologically a long way away. Leech works in my neck of the woods as the Community Theologian of St. Botolph's Church in the City of London. For years he has been doing 'community theology' in the East End, which seems to involve reflecting on life and social and justice issues in the light of the broad themes of Christian theology. In this book Leech paints a fascinating picture of the East End that makes the book worth buying in itself if you have an interest in this wonderful part of London. What is less worthwhile is the theology, which is pretty thin. There is no real attempt to understand and apply Scripture or even the Christian tradition, but instead Leech throws out various theological lines of thought that are left to the reader to do something with. His theological tradition is Anglo-Catholic and I suspect that he would think the theological concerns of this journal and its readers are largely irrelevant to the inner city. Certainly what he says about homosexuality is unacceptable to evangelicals. Interestingly he does not mention any evangelical churches or leaders in his account of religious life in East London and yet evangelical churches of all varieties, past and present, have been and are very much alive and making an impact evangelistically and socially in the community.

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