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Introduction

Alan McMahan

Biola University, alan.mcmahan@biola.edu

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Alan McMahan, General Editor

The world is rapidly becoming a city. Not in the literal sense of course. We haven't paved over all of paradise yet. A drive through remote deserts and endless forests would convince you that much land is still largely unaffected by human influence. Even so, the normative habitat for the majority of humanity will increasingly be urban in the years to come. United Nations projections state that by the year 2050, 70% of the world's population will live in cities. In the United States it is believed that by that same year, more than 90% of its population will live in cities.¹

This reality is altogether unprecedented in history. In fact, it was just as recently as 2008 that mankind crossed the threshold in which more than half of the world's population lived in urban environments. Far distant from our roots as hunters and gatherers, humankind will need to learn navigate the concrete jungles and make their home in rapidly expanding urban ecosystems.

These changing realities have left much of the evangelical church, which has arguably been more at home in rural and suburban contexts, unprepared for ministry in a increasingly complex, high-speed, and inter-connected world.

¹ United Nations, World Urbanization Prospects, 2007 Revision, (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, March 10, 2010), 1.

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A massive re-tooling is needed for the church to be perceived as relevant and indigenous to the urban landscape.

To address these emerging realities this issue of the Journal is focused. The first four articles speak to this challenge beginning with Jeff Walter's review of the contributions of four key missiologists of the 20th century that spoke to the challenge of urban missions and the accompanying strategic implications. While urban ministry is a rising concern among mission and denominational agencies, it is clear that the trends and opportunities we see today were part of the early literature of the modern missions movements.

As a veteran of inner-city ministry in Chicago John Thompson offers a "reality check" for urban ministry today. Noting both the assets and liabilities of the city as a place to do ministry he points out the difficulty of urban engagement as well as the strategic advantages for doing so. His article advocates for churches and mission agencies to take seriously the urban opportunities as a place from which to influence the world.

As a counterpoint to this emphasis on the city, Cory Wilson, offers a theological critique to warn of the dangers of an inordinate focus on the cities as opposed to the nations, the urban to the neglect of the rural, the poor to the disregard of other segments of society. Articulating a different perspective from the others presented in this issue his article will prompt the reader to think critically on the some of the key elements in this dialogue.

The next two articles relate to one our recurring themes, that of church planting. Richard Meeks chronicles the story of how the Wesleyans of East Michigan became a rural and suburban church as the result of a "perfect storm" of conditions that led to the loss of their urban churches in Detroit during the 1960's and '70's. Taking on the responsibility for the city once again out of theological and strategic considerations, he shares the lessons that emerged as they deliberately re-engaged with the urban context. There is much, here, that the academy can learn from the practitioners on the ground.

David Stein, writing out of his experience and that of others, reflects on some successes and failures in church planting and interacts helpfully with the literature to review the major models for starting new churches. The insights he provides will be instructive for those who themselves are engaging in church planting ministries or supervising those that do.

In each issue of the Journal we not only offer articles related to the featured theme but on a variety of other topics that address the need for effective evangelism and church growth. The next three articles challenge the way we have

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traditionally carried out our ministry strategies in North America and will no doubt stir you to engage in fresh thinking.

The first of these articles by Adam W. Greenway explores a topic that should be of emphasis in every evangelical seminary in the country. Noting the declining evangelistic effectiveness of U.S. churches in a context that is increasingly pluralistic, a case is made to better understand and address the worldview of the audience rather than assuming they hold to a theistic orientation. This evangelistic sensitivity commonly practiced by foreign missionaries is a vital skill for ministry today.

Will Brooks' fine article examines Paul's understanding of spiritual warfare and its significance for designing missiologically-informed strategies. Showing in specific ways how the enemy blinds non-believers and attacks believers and their churches he then goes on to show how these realities influenced the way Paul conducted his ministry to build strong churches that could withstand the attacks of the enemy. For those of us in Western cultures who tend not to think in terms of the spiritual warfare surrounding us, these insights serve as an important critique of our theology and methods.

In an article as thought-provoking as his title, Christopher Little's piece, "Saving the Church from the Sinner's Prayer," challenges the Western church's formulaic offer of salvation to the masses. Tracing the origins of the sinner's prayer through scripture and history, Little exposes the flaws in current evangelistic efforts that offer a cheap grace and neglect the life of discipleship that must follow. He concludes that baptism, when done properly may serve as the best marker of a person's new allegiance to Christ.

This issue of the Journal, like its predecessors, includes insightful book reviews of the books that will shape our strategies and structure the dialogue in which we engage in the months to come. Special thanks go to: Kevin Book-Satterlee, M. David Sills, Lloyd W. Rodgers, Matthew L. Pierce, Laurie Fortunak Nichols, Daryl C. Cornett, R. Scott Pace, Jeff Reynolds, and Karl Dahlfred for their summaries and critiques of these works. Their perspectives on these publications will help the reader quickly assess the value contained in their covers.

Finally, I want to thank the outstanding editorial team that come together to make each issue of the Journal possible. Phil Stevenson, J.D. Payne, and Gary McIntosh each contribute their time and expertise to interact with contributors, review the materials, and get it into a form that meets our standards with each successive issue. Their efforts are greatly appreciated.

As you peruse the pages of this issue centered around this important theme of

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urban ministry, it is our desire that you will find helpful insights, provocative
analysis and a spirit-driven passion that will compel you to consider the challenges
and opportunities of these new urban realities. May we together seek the
prosperity and redemption of the city as God sends us forth as servants and agents
of transformation to the great cities of the world for whom Christ died.

Dr. Alan McMahan
General Editor