
Cities Aren't All Alike

*The Common and Contrasting Urban Context
of the Christian Global Mission*

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The long historical process of urbanization has reached revolutionary proportions in the twentieth century, especially since World War II. All indicators point to the emerging future as one which will witness the urbanization of the world. And the prospect is immediate. *Two realities loom large in the wake of this astounding social revolution: one is that the majority of the earth's population will soon be living in or near urban areas, and the other is that all populations, rural as well as urban, will be forced to order their lives to a significant degree on the basis of the influences which emanate from the urban centers.*

The implications of this for the global Christian mission are profound. If the Christian faith is to be authentically contextualized in such a world—and indeed it must—then it will be compelled to come to terms with the realities that shape the lives of urbanites and the influences that significantly determine the issue of all people in the context of an urban-dominated world.

I

The Common Urban Context

The city has gone through some decisive and dramatic changes in history. It is a diverse entity that, in various parts

aspirin. They had no other recourse but to pray; but they prayed until they touched God and have lived in that place of power with God ever since. There is nothing too hard for God, but we must pray until we touch Him.

One of our goals for this decade is to see ten million Japanese turn to Jesus Christ. Our church has prayed steadily in all seven services on Sunday, in both services on Wednesday, and during the all night prayer meeting on Friday for God to breakthrough the spiritual darkness of Japan. I have regularly visited Japan every month in gospel meetings throughout the nation. It wasn't until August of this year that we saw our first great breakthrough when 1,000 Japanese stepped forward and walked the aisles to an old fashioned altar call. I am determined to give my next fifteen years to prayer and preaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to our Japanese neighbors until they know the Christian message as we in Korea do. Only prayer has brought Japan to the place where she is today!

How to Begin

And finally, many pastors and leaders around the world ask me, "Will the home cell concept work for me in the United States and in other countries as well?" My answer is "yes!"

It is already working well in Thailand and Australia, and in many churches in the United States. Those churches who have adopted the home cell plan are growing steadily. Many pastors of older, rapidly growing churches are ser-

iously considering developing the cell plan also. My answer to these pastors is that one must first adopt, then adapt. How can this be done? Churches with weekly or monthly programmed meetings should first train those leaders to follow the concept of the home cell meeting with a brief segment of time for a well planned devotional or Bible study, followed by prayer for those in attendance and their prayer requests. This is the first prerequisite. Secondly, as soon as possible, move the structured meeting into a home. Every church is richly blessed with several "Lydias" whose ministry of hospitality will blend with the ministry of a Bible teacher who will bring the devotional, with the pastor in attendance for the first few weeks. Begin small, then divide (but not too quickly) and prayer will cause it to grow in the direction it should go, while the pastor can keep it moving in the direction of ministry first, then the business at hand. It will surprise everyone involved how quickly the weekly or monthly meeting will grow, and soon need to be divided. The results? The church will revive, friendships will heal, members will be drawn closer together, and Sunday's services in the sanctuary will become a celebration of praise, drawing in new people and bringing others "home."

The home cell concept is going to be the one factor in days to come that will bring the church back into focus of her original purpose. That purpose is to evangelize, . . . beginning with her own little "Jerusalem."

of the world, reflects the culture of its unique area. The city of North America differs from the city of Africa. What is more, within any given country, every city will differ in function. There is the industrial city, the administrative city, the university city, the port city, etc. And on a third level, each city has its own unique personality. San Francisco and Oakland are both port cities on the same California bay, but they are radically different in personality.

Yet despite these almost endless varieties, there are fundamental characteristics which prevail among all the cities of these drastically differing urban worlds, and this has been true historically. Those concerned with urban mission need to understand them.

Massiveness

The city is always relatively large in population and therefore is characterized by massiveness. Its massive size exists to accommodate its massive population. Massiveness of form and life are inevitable elements of city life. And the interchange of massive form and life creates multiple phenomena and multiple stimuli. This is the first ingredient of urban life. It may take many forms and an infinite variety of shapes. It may manifest itself in a kaleidoscope of expressions. But a city of a million people is a city of a million people anywhere in the world. And a crowd of 100,000 is a crowd of 100,000 anywhere in the world. There is no way it cannot be impersonal. There is no way it cannot have profound social implication in terms of anonymity. There is no way it cannot have definitive

implications in terms of how communication takes place.

Social Heterogeneity

No matter how they may be stratified residentially, professionally and all other ways, no matter how homogeneous the private and voluntary social pockets may be, the city as city is heterogeneous. Its public sphere and the total integration and interrelatedness which make it possible as a social reality are the result of the dynamic interplay of all its varied parts. The variety of language, dialect, accent, tribe, tradition, class, education, vocation, avocation, age, recreation, transportation, religion, politics and almost no end of other categories highlight this social heterogeneity. Even the least heterogeneous cities such as those of the strong Muslim states have their stark economic contrasts and their clash of the traditional and the progressive.

Secularity

In all urban areas where there is a clash of ideology due to diversity of backgrounds, there emerges a kind of neutral ideological turf. Constant bombardment of one's ideological senses makes for a greater tolerance, and a pluralism develops as a part of the diversity and complexity of urban life. Therefore there is a tendency toward the erosion of traditional values and with it traditional belief systems. This tends to create a greater openness to new ideas. This may take two basic directions. One is the changing of the traditional belief system to a new faith more in consonance with the new setting in which persons or

families now find themselves. The other direction this process may take is the one more stereotypical of the urban image: the rejection of one's traditional religious and moral value system for a non-religious stance and style. In this case one opts for a new "secular" ideology or simply relegates faith to an irrelevant sphere in preference for a pragmatic approach to ideas and values.

The other way of viewing urban secularity is from the standpoint of the historical process where societies are moving away from sacral administrative systems to civic ones, from state churches or religions to freedom of religion. This viewpoint focuses more upon the historical process of urbanization itself and not on the secular as a belief system as such.

Movement and Change

Physical movement and social mobility have always characterized cities. A certain physical footlooseness and social shifting are essential ingredients of the urban process. In distinction from the more socially static rural societies, urban societies are dynamic and fraught with change. These changes are both of immediate and of long-range import. Viewed more from the standpoint of the longer historical process, we note the movement from the ancient city to the industrial city to the technological city, or from the town to the city to the super city (from the *polis* to the *metropolis* to the *megalopolis*). Seen from the Third World perspective, we may note the movement from the pre-colonial city, to the colonial city, to the post-colonial

(or neo-colonial) city.

Changes may be more situational in the urban context. There may be changes in whole peoples, groups, tribes, extended families, and nuclear families. New styles of families characterize modern urban societies: single parent families and communal families, for example. Detribalization may give way to new "class" identity in the urban social context.

Change is also more immediate, direct, and personal. Change is involved in the whole process of relating to the urban social context, especially when one first enters that



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context. There are new residences, new employment, new friends, new neighbors, new acquaintances, new roles, new status. Changes may be recent, sudden, and even traumatic.

II

The Contrasting Urban Context

Cities throughout the world share these common characteristics, but there are fundamental differences to be found among them as well. Perhaps the greatest fundamental difference between basic urban expression and function may be found between the cities of the developed nations on the one hand and the cities of the developing nations on the other. The cities of Asia, Africa, and Latin America differ classically from the cities of the West at the point of their origin. The former were linked more to the political than the economic process. They were developed as the result of a ruler's decision and not from an economic revolution emerging from a rapidly improving technology, as in the case of the Western city. The modern situation exists not just from that reality, however, but because of the meeting of these two historic urban cultures through the colonial expansion of Western nations into the traditional urban centers of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. With the emergence of the "colonial city" came the economic phenomenon we usually designate today as the Third World, with the Western industrialized world being in this frame of reference the First World.

The Social Structure

The imposition of the industrial technology of the Western cities,

with its profound economic orientation, upon these traditional cities did not change the traditional politico-social structure of these cities. The minority ruling class and the majority poor class remained divided in their traditional pattern of a two class system. The difference is that now the traditional elite class shares in the new economic wealth brought by the industrial development of the colonial power, and the masses continue their traditional role of survival without being a substantive part of this economic "development"—whether or not they are a part of the new work force. No economic middle class has developed in the wake of the industrial growth of the colonial city—in bold contrast to the majority middle class which emerged with the industrial growth of the Western city. Thus a fundamental difference between the Third World city and the First World city is the absence in the former of a distinct middle class.

The Demographic Process

In the Third World city, there has not been a decline in the birthrate. The "peasant mentality" resulting in large families persists in the Third World city, further reflecting the absence of a middle class. As a rule the birthrate is no lower in the cities than in rural areas. This is in striking contrast to First World cities where the city witnessed a decline in birthrate in direct proportion to the emerging affluence of the new middle class.

The Economic Process

Because the industrial develop-

ment in the Third World cities has been imposed by foreign influences, it has not been indigenous. It has not emerged out of the resources and expertise of the country itself. Consequently, there has been no transformation of the whole economy, and thus, there has been no parallel to the phenomenon of the Industrial Revolution in the Western World, which produced a relatively affluent, literate, middle class majority in the basic social structure. From the former colonial structure to the present multinational structure, the pattern has been essentially the same: a small minority of the national elite joining the foreign power to share in the "spoils" of economic profit. The current situation is appropriately referred to as "neo-colonialism."

The Political Process

In many if not most cases, the governments of the Third World countries are joint owners with multi-nationals of the industrial companies which operate in their cities. They therefore share jointly by whatever agreement in the fruit of industrial profits. This means, of course, that a substantial proportion of the industrial profits go out of the country as was the case in the official colonial era. What is doubly tragic, moreover, is that the profits which remain in the country are most often used for "custodial" rather than "developmental" purposes. They go to build the urban-based image of the new national state rather than to the general economic development of the nation and its people. The strain to maintain even the most essential functions of government is an enor-

mous burden on and challenge to these inexperienced political systems. Add to this the less than ideal operation in terms of waste and corruption which is more often the rule than the exception. When we reckon with the added pressures of local wars and almost endless internal struggles for power and control via either the democratic process or military maneuver, we wonder how they survive, let alone implement a grass roots economic development.

By the very nature of the situation, consequently, the Third World city draws its life-blood from a dependence on outside economic resources. Even the national companies are forced into this interdependence. In sharp contrast with the First World city which has always maintained a close and integral relationship with its surrounding indigenous region, the Third World city operates economically largely unaffected by its surrounding region. Despite the lack of any formal colonization, it is nevertheless caught in a web of international neo-colonialism, depending for its very economic survival upon the capital of the First World. The ultimate political implications of this reality are profound.

The Educational Process

This phenomenon of the Third World city, where the usual amenities inherent in classical industrial development have not accrued, has decisive implications for the educational system. Where there is no significant economic development of the rank and file, the traditional illiteracy of the rural

areas prevails in the urban areas as well.

The Cultural Process

The Third World cities relate in their cultural rootage to the patterns of the colonial or pre-colonial periods. Even though these cities have been impacted by the influence of both capitalist and socialist regimes, they seem little affected by them in terms of their traditional cultural values. The masses have their own lifestyle which is more reminiscent of archaic regimes than reflective of the values of the superficial systems which are now in control in the city.

The Administrative Process

Apart from the process of government itself with its national and international implications, at the local and practical level of running the country the Third World cities suffer immeasurably from the lack of experience in city government, urban planning, concepts of maintenance, and many other functions essential to an operational urban system.

III

Implications for Global Mission

The principles of strategy for global urban mission must address the two phenomena described above. The first is those aspects common to all of urban life. The second is those aspects where there are definitive differences between urban life in the First World and urban life in the Third World.

The Common Context

From a general perspective, the city anywhere in the world will of-

fer both opportunities and challenges. Some of the more obvious advantages are the advances of technology which are available for a more effective communication of the Gospel, the proximity of people in the urban communities and massive networks of urban life which afford unprecedented capabilities of impacting the masses with the Christian message, the opportunity to provide a positive Christian ideology to take the place of an irrelevant and unsatisfying traditional belief system, the opportunity to provide a sense of belonging and meaning in the midst of the loss of values and the breakdown of community.

Some of the more obvious challenges are the ills that plague cities everywhere: alienation, conflict, congestion, pollution, crime, violence, vices, slums, and on either end of the economic spectrum, poverty and materialism. Any strategy which seeks to communicate the Gospel to cities must contextualize that communication in terms of the ills which seem to find a special breeding ground in the urban concentrations of the world: from Chicago to Calcutta, from London to Lagos, from Cairo to Rio.

In terms of urban massiveness we must affirm the importance of mass evangelism in a mass society. The mass public meeting is still a vital function of urban societies. The mass media of the radio, television, cinema and literature, through which the urban masses and individuals are impacted daily, must be developed with regularity and relevance.

As heterogeneous societies are

being impacted by the mass public meetings and the mass media of the public sphere, the small group and personalized ministries must penetrate the various urban mosaics that make up all cities. The greater the complexity and impersonalism of the public sphere, the greater the need for these family-oriented and community-focused ministries in the private and voluntary social sub-entities of the city.

To address the diversities of cities is one of our greatest challenges. The cities of the Third World may be as diverse as their First World counterparts. Into the cities of Nigeria, for example, will come persons from the major tribes of Yoruba, Hausa, and Ibo, but also from the over 200 smaller tribes. In addition, there are those from all over West Africa and from other parts of the world. Into the streets of India pour multitudes of persons from every caste or no caste, and from every or no educational background, and persons from all over India and the world.

Even the secular is at work the world over. In India it may mean that the city provides an escape from the caste-conscious Hinduism of the village. In Singapore it may mean freedom from the superstitious Buddhism of one's parents and a new openness to a more viable Christianity. In Mexico City it may mean freedom from the priestly tyranny of the village and an openness to a more personal evangelical faith.

Movement and change in the cities call for a strategy which knows how to go mobile in mission to reach a mobile society. The explosion of house church ministries

around the world is witness to a dynamic Christianity relating effectively to a dynamic urban world.

The Contrasting Urban Context

Before we emphasize some of the differing implications, a warning is in order. We must be on the alert not to over-simplify the Third World situation. Though there are common aspects, there can be great varieties, and every situation must be viewed with great care and responsibility. Japan, of course, belongs to the industrialized First World. Numerous nations such as Singapore and South Korea no longer fit the Third World stereotype. India is a part of both worlds, and China is a world all its own. How does one compare Calcutta, India, which went for a hundred years (1850-1950) without the erection of one new Protestant Church facility, with Seoul, Korea, where one church alone has grown from zero to a quarter of a million in a quarter of a century?

Given this warning, we must nevertheless be deeply aware of the fundamental difference in the economics of the First and Third World cities. The fact that the typical Third World city has most of the problems and few of the amenities of the typical First World city has almost incalculable implications for urban mission. In the Third World city is a systemic dual economics: one economic level for the elite national and foreign minority and another for the great majority of the nationals. The latter majority operate on a day-by-day survival basis out of the traditional market place which has its roots in the pre-modern period. All the

"good things"—houses and lands and modern conveniences—are priced at the inflated rate that only the elite can afford. Case in point: how does a church in Nairobi, constituted of the average unaffluent urbanite, purchase even minimal land and erect a modest edifice to house its congregation in this kind of systemic dual economics? And what are the implications for the indigenous principles of self-support?

One cannot make the same assumptions about cities because they are comparable in size. Lagos, the capital of oil-rich Nigeria, has over 4,000,000 people and is one of the most expensive cities in the world. Yet it has no sewer system and no telephone system. Agra, India, the home of the Taj Mahal, is a city of 1,000,000, yet the size of its business section would compare with that of a Western city of 10,000.

Larger cities of the Third World may be more conducive to mass public meetings because they are a part of a street-oriented society. Moreover, the poorer the city, the less impact the electronic media has for the simple reason that persons cannot afford radios or televisions. Literature has less impact in cities of high illiteracy. And how do we address the millions who are born, live, and die on the streets of a Calcutta or a Bombay?

In terms of diversity and conflict, problems may arise from tribalism in Africa, caste in India, race in South America, color in North America, and class in Europe. To communicate through this diversity and to manage conflict will take different approaches in various cities of the world.

Secularity may lead persons of

non-Christian background to Christianity as a more viable faith-option in the modern urban age. By the same token, it may lead persons in the First World away from a Christianity with nostalgic rural roots. Lest these new urbanites abandon their Christian tradition, urban mission must call for an adequate urban theological base for the communication of the Gospel in terms which are meaningful to the urban mentality and way of life.

Movement and change will take varied forms in different parts of the world. For example, in Africa, segments of whole tribes, such as the Fulani in Nigeria, may move into certain urban areas for extended periods every year for purposes of trade. Or villagers may commute long distances to the city and return to their home villages several hundred miles away over the weekend. Some may work in the city for several years and then return to the village. This pattern may be repeated several times in a lifetime. In this shuttle type of worker commuting, men often never bring their families to the city. To cope with this complex life-style is a significant challenge to urban mission, particularly in Africa.

In the face of all the problems and challenges in the urban areas of the world, many encouraging signs are looming on the horizon. The Third World urban churches in some areas are especially encouraging and inspiring. In numerous ways, they are setting the pace for relevant and effective models of urban mission. The urban churches of Korea, for example, have developed a very meaningful balance between the massive structures of

worship and celebration and the small house-group structures of evangelism and nurture. This base-satellite model of the urban church in Korea perhaps best reflects for us today the pattern of the early church, which mastered this balanced principle of impact-penetration in its urban context. From this let us learn well how New Testament principles of urban mission may be applied in the modern context of our emerging urban world.

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