

***Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City & the People of God* by Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001, 527 pp., \$18.94, paper.**

Any serious student considering ministry in the world's population centers would benefit from utilizing *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City & the People of God* as a primary reference text for missions. Harvie M. Conn, along with his colleague, Manuel Ortiz, present an archetypical treatise of Christian ministry in the *polis*, ("city").

Prior to his death, in 1999, Harvie M. Conn was recognized as a leading urban missiologist. He served as the editor of *Urban Mission* and authored several works relevant to the fields of evangelism and mission. He, along with Manuel Ortiz, professor of ministry and urban mission at Westminster Theological Seminary, set out to "address today's urban reality in all its complex and interrelated facets" through a holistic, biblical ministry approach (14).

Divided into six parts, *Urban Ministry* offers academic reflection upon the major thematic underpinnings of the City. First, Conn and Ortiz provide an historical overview of *polis*, presenting ancient and modern movements as "waves" of urban evolution. Next, the authors study pertinent Old and New Testament biblical perspectives of ministry in urban contexts. Sections Three and Four review cultural understandings of the City with specific consideration given to social science implications and tools. Fifth, Conn and Ortiz explore relevant theological signs that God's Kingdom is at work in urban centers. And finally, the authors offer suggestions for the practice of leadership and discipleship in contemporary urban mission. As a whole, the comprehensive nature of these sections enable *Urban Ministry* to serve as an insightful research and contemplation guide in graduate-level studies or carefully selected upper-level undergraduate courses.

Written just prior to the urban horrors of 9/11 and the dramatic architectural rise of Dubai, this book could not have foreseen the intense implications for urban ministry resulting from terrorism, economics, and geopolitics in the last ten years. But to the credit of the authors, *Urban Ministry* stays current in the hands of the reader because, for the most part, the authors steered clear of statistics with expiry dates. This book was never intended to be a snapshot of data capturing one temporal picture, nor was it meant to be a fixed census report. *Urban Ministry* is, rather, a theological overview and practical ministry resource providing foundational insight into the practice of ministry in the context of *polis*. For this reason, the principles and insights contained in this tool

should prove themselves to stretch well into the future beyond the contemporary expressions of urban realities.

One major distinctive of *Urban Ministry* is the thorough integration of multiple disciplines with missiological biblical perspectives. As a resource, the most valuable distinctive of *Urban Ministry* is its successful incorporation of biblical reflection with past, present and future urban realities. For instance, introspection into the historical developments of the city as a gathering place for population, process and power are interwoven with biblical events and foundations. Elsewhere, the authors demonstrate how social sciences, such as ethnographic and demographic studies could be utilized towards systemic developments in congruency with the mission of God's Kingdom. Overall, *Urban Ministry* presents a healthy interplay between Kingdom principles and pressing urban issues of our day.

Urban Ministry meanders geographically in order to offer international, thematic glimpses. Steering clear of a limited North American perspective, this is a book organized according to biblical mission and cultural intelligence rather than a restricted locational worldview. Thus, readers are introduced to urban struggles, trends and faith issues that span the globe. In one moment, the authors may describe the state of organized religion in Shanghai compared with Sao Paulo, Brazil. In another moment, Conn and Ortiz may delve into matters of social reform within downtown Detroit compared with the experiences of reform in Calcutta. Elsewhere, the effects of geopolitics in Kuala Lumpur may be examined alongside developments in Geneva or London. As a result of the international itinerary in *Urban Ministry*, the reader must study with vigilance and allow the text to teach concepts and movements rather than attempt to force the text to dispense data and static information. Because this book is exhaustive in scope, principles and educational values are derived from holistic consideration of the breadth of topics embedded in its pages.

With this in mind, readers may notice that *Urban Ministry* lacks diagrams and statistic spreadsheets. In 527 pages, Conn and Ortiz utilize only three diagrams (two on page 193 demonstrating the sharing of power in city structures; one on page 420 describing the theological pillars of urban curriculum). At times, readers may be tempted to believe the book could be improved with certain tables or figures (e.g. adding a "City as Stabilizer vs. City as Change Agent" table on page 224). However, this book serves students and instructors as a primary missiological text from which lectures, seminars, and reference may be derived. So it must be recognized that this resource is not intended to provide recent data analysis or ready-made comparison tables, but instead is meant to primarily

relay foundational biblical, theological, and sociological principles of missiology for urban contexts. *Urban Ministry* does not aim to supply student or teacher with ready-made curriculum, power point slides or fill-in-the-blank handouts. Conn and Ortiz chose instead to intentionally provide significant groundwork upon which lesson bullets and data sheets can be structured. For instance, the student who desires to write a contemporary missiological treatise stemming from the interconnection between Jesus and *polis* has in this resource a tremendous foundation upon which to launch a discovery of practical applications. The potential lessons and conclusions that could be drawn from the thematic studies of this book will prove profitable to those willing to engage theologically, academically and creatively in urban studies. Thus, while some readers may at times wish that the work had already been done for them through more clearly presented figures, lists or charts, *Urban Ministry* educates students and practitioners in such a way that conclusions are easily, and perhaps more profoundly, extrapolated.

Finally, it should be noted that perhaps the most pressing support for this book originates from the developing realities of our contemporary world. For the first time in history more than half of the world's population lives and works in urban centers. A majority of the urban population is not Christian. Consequently, there is tremendous need for thorough reflection on the appropriate methodologies and missional practices stemming from exhaustive contemplation of biblical and theological foundations. *Urban Ministry*, therefore, is a pivotal resource for those interested in understanding God's perspective on ministering within urban contexts of the 21st Century.

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