

Urban Mission aims to accomplish at least three things: First, to work toward a biblical theology of the city which addresses the wide range of issues affecting urban life. The support of the Westminster faculty, with its commitment to biblical authority and application, offers assurance that this goal will be accomplished. The solutions which Christians bring to the city must be as theologically valid as they are sociologically relevant, or we have nothing of special significance to say to the city.

Second, *Urban Mission* is designed to be a practical journal, moving its readers from their studies to the streets. The fiercest battles for minds and hearts are waged on city streets. Satan launched his urban mission years ago, for he knew that cities were strategic for the conquest he had in mind. Now the church must challenge him to let his captives go. Theology must be translated into action, that Christ be crowned in the streets.

Third, *Urban Mission* will deal with the *global* task of the church in cities throughout the world. Articles and case studies will be drawn from Asia, Africa and Latin America, as well as from Europe and North America. Everything urban is grist for our mill.

Will you join us in this venture with your prayers, suggestions, subscriptions, articles, and perhaps a gift? *Urban Mission* is launched by faith, with our faces toward God and the future. The future is urban, and the broad implications of that fact we will explore together.



Roger S. Greenway

Dedicated to the Advancement of Christ's Church and Kingdom in the Cities throughout the World

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New Urban Faces of the Church

Donald McGavran

Churches must fit the segments of population in which they are ministering. Each must read the Bible in and worship in the language spoken by its segment. At church suppers each must serve the kind of food which that group likes. The pastor must appear to the members and to potential members as "one of us." The house of worship must be one to which Christians can invite their pagan or worldly friends, knowing that they will feel at home there. The expositions of Scripture must speak to the actual inner life of that particular section of the population. If we wish to be *effectively* evangelistic, we must multiply congregations which, in these and many other ways, *fit their segments* of the citizenship.

Since urban mankind is a vast mosaic made up of innumerable pieces, my thesis is that the Church in the cities of the world must have multitudinous new urban faces. A significant part of the plateaued or declining membership of many congregations and denominations is that they have taken the image of the church in *their* segment of the population and imposed it on other segments where it does not fit and another model is required.

For example, an upper middle class denomination will build and maintain an urban face which suits upper middle class people. But as that comfortable denomination works at discipling the cities, it must expect to create and appear in

some new urban faces in order to make the gospel known to *all* pieces of the mosaic. Its present face fits upper middle class people, and cities have many segments which are not upper middle class. The denomination will develop a new face in each segment it evangelizes effectively.

Ministering to the Urban Mosaic

Let us study the urban mosaic for a few minutes. We shall first look at cities in the United States. This nation is English-speaking, democratic, and prides itself on being a melting pot in which groups of immigrants from many lands speaking many languages—German, Swedish, Italian, Spanish, Chinese, French, Rumanian, Russian, Latvian, Greek, Japanese, Filipino, Tagalog, Ilocano, Mono, Kikongo, Ashanti, Hindi, Tsutuhil, and on and on—have been assimilated. Since they now speak English, have indoor plumbing, and drive cars, we may be sure they are now all one people—Americans. In one very thin sense they are all one people; but it is more realistic to see them as many peoples.

As I was writing this article, my phone rang. My caller talked for half an hour concerning the kind of congregation which would meet the needs of the piece of the urban mosaic in which he was working. He found that if he evangelized and gangs made up of 50 or more young men and boys, he would win many converts. If he took these to conventional English-speaking churches, the converts would disappear. If he formed groups of converts into living churches where they felt at home, they stuck. He was develop-

ing a new urban face of the Universal Church of Jesus Christ.

At the other end of the scale a southern Californian minister of a respected small denomination found that if he concentrated his efforts on owners of \$400,000-houses, a largely unchurched population, he could win them. Most were nominal Christians but did not attend any church. When encouraged to form a congregation, most of whose members lived in \$400,000-homes, they responded favorably. The church which resulted had much financial power.

These examples give us a glimpse of the multitudinous situations in which churches form, transform sinners into saints, influence their way of life, map out their areas of evangelistic potency, and determine what kinds of mission they will carry out.

The many peoples of the United States exist in a nation dedicated to the dictum that all citizens are equal. All have the vote, none may be paid less than the minimum wage. We Americans are proud of our oneness. Equal rights are guaranteed by the Constitution. We shy away from any idea of different ranks in society. Christians carry this feeling a step further. In Christ there is no Jew or Greek, no slave or free, no male or female. Every Christian is equally loved by God and has an equal vote in the Church. The Church fights for brotherhood. All readers of this article will feel a Christian hesitancy in believing that the urban mosaic legitimately continues in the Church.

Nevertheless, readers will also, as they survey their city scenes,

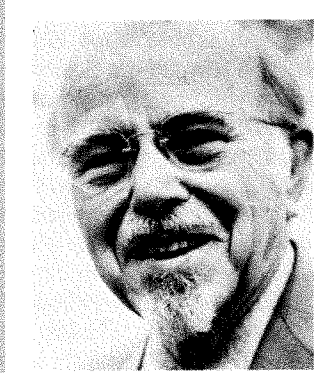
agree that our cities (and churches) do manifest many different styles of living. The communities in which university professors live are quite different from those in which coal miners are the major element of the population. Congregations in which farm owners are the main members are different from those in which farm laborers and small-town mechanics constitute nine-tenths of the membership. Congregations made up of first-generation Hispanics, speaking very little English, are different from those made up of fourth-generation Hispanics, who speak little Spanish.

New urban faces of the Church form in this multi-colored mosaic. Each group differs from the others in degree of education, amount of income, cost of home, amount of crime on the streets, degree of prostitution tolerated in the neighborhood, kinds of employment, and a thousand other ways.

Perhaps the single greatest obstacle to church growth is the face of the church so common in America—a splendid building with a five-acre parking lot, a Christian education plant, and many helpful activities carried on by various groups. The more groups there are, the more kinds of people can be served and held in the orbit of the church. This may be called THE FACE of the American church. It fits suburban, middle-class communities very well; but it does not fit the inner city at all. In the inner cities of the world, congregations must fit the physical, social, economic, and racial characteristics of the various segments of population—the *ethne*—being evangelized.

The most striking example of this

may be seen in the churches which multiplied during the first 50 years of the Christian era. They met in homes, rented halls, patios, gardens, and other convenient places. They spent nothing for buildings or upkeep. They never assembled 100 people for worship. Their assemblies were small gatherings in which everybody knew everybody else.



The "dean" of contemporary missiologists, Donald McGavran has written or inspired the writing of more mission books and articles, research projects and dissertations than any other person in this century. He was born in India in 1897. His grandparents and parents were missionaries. After graduating from college and seminary in the U.S.A., Donald McGavran returned to India for a missionary career lasting over 30 years. In 1961, he began the Institute of Church Growth in Eugene, Oregon, which in 1965 became the School of World Missions at Fuller Seminary, with Donald McGavran as Dean. He is now Dean-emeritus and continues a vigorous teaching and writing ministry in North America and abroad. He is the founder of the Church Growth School of missiology.

As Pentecostal Christians from Puerto Rico streamed into New York City after World War II, the Christians among them leaned in the direction of the New Testament churches. They rented small stores on the streets of the city. These were 15 to 18 feet wide and 60 feet long. They had a small room or two at the back. When 100 people came in, the place was crowded. At the Sunday School hour, teachers sat on the narrow backs of the benches. Each faced a couple of rows of people who formed his class. Often a church would have four classes in that one long, narrow room. The noise was terrific. Such storefront churches were self-supporting. They fitted the way in which the poverty-stricken Puerto Ricans lived. Scores, perhaps hundreds, of such churches were founded. The unemployed, poor, shaken men and women from Puerto Rico were a hugely receptive segment of humanity. Had the missionary societies of North America recognized and reproduced this urban face of the church, a mighty harvest would have been reaped. Instead they too frequently opened social service institutions which did little multiplication of *churches which fit this population*.

As urban missions of all denominations, from Friends to Roman Catholics, set about discipling urban multitudes rapidly growing more multitudinous, they must be obediently pragmatic. They must not, of course, be pragmatic in regard to eternal truth revealed by God to us in the Bible. They must be pragmatic as to what face of the Church fits the piece of the mosaic to which God sends them, to disci-

ple it and teach it to observe all things our Lord has commanded us.

Is this pragmatic approach pleasing to God? If it is obedient to the Bible, filled with the Holy Spirit, feels comfortable to the Christian citizens of that segment of society, *and works*, then it is pleasing to God. The key principle here is that voiced in Romans 16:25—Eternal God has *commanded* that the gospel be made known to all pieces of the human mosaic (*panta ta ethne*) *to bring them to faith and obedience*. If a given way of evangelizing does *not* bring men and women of that piece of the mosaic to faith and obedience, it thwarts God's command. That way of preaching, worshipping, evangelizing, and living must be adjusted till it *does* bring members of *that* ethnos to faith and obedience. God commands it. That way is pleasing to Him. We want new urban faces which God does bless to the winning of sinners of *panta ta ethne* to faith and obedience.

The ways we work and worship must be *effective* in bringing members of each segment of society to saving faith in Christ and responsible membership in His Body. This principle has been overlooked by many denominations in this and other lands. The needs of human beings are many and clamant—destitute children, abandoned women, hungry people, oppressed minorities, destitute elderly, youth roaming the streets, and on and on. Each of these groups has needs—physical, educational, emotional, and economic—which charitable Christians feel they must meet. Consequently they engage in urban work which, while meeting many

highly visible needs, fails to feed starving souls. It does not give away the bread of heaven.

I am thinking of a "Church of All Peoples" in a great eastern city, which over the past 50 years has spent more than \$5,000,000 and has an institutional presence on three acres of very costly urban soil. It has rendered tremendous service of one kind and another to multitudes of immigrants. But the single church it has planted is made up of the staff of the institution and 63 other people, only 38 of whom live in the vicinity. It has *not* brought the many *ethne* it has served to faith and obedience. New urban faces of the Church must be multipliers of biblical on-going *congregations of the saved*. Urban "work" must never be substituted for urban "mission." The word mission must be reserved for the conscious effort—including all kinds of charitable work—to bring sinners to repentance and faith and to build them into soundly Christian, reproductive congregations.

Four New Faces of the Church

Faces always have noses. They come in a variety of forms—upturned, saucy, Roman, broad, narrow, hooked, and on and on. The nose is a prominent part of the face. So is the leadership pattern of a church. Today the common leadership pattern is for all the ministers of the Church to be highly educated. That this pattern was not manifested in the New Testament churches, where to Jewish rabbis the leaders of the Church seemed to be "uneducated and untrained men" (Acts 4:13 NAS), makes little difference to us. "Today" we say,

"ministers in our denomination must be seminary graduates. We are a respectable church."

This leadership pattern (this nose) fits one kind of face. It does not fit many others.

If churches are to grow and multiply (and they will have to do that if urban masses are to be disciplined), then the leaders, the ministers of those churches, will have to be perceptibly men of the masses, each of whom feels quite at home in his segment of the urban population. If we are thinking of Hispanic millions in America, we must recognize that the Hispanic mosaic has many pieces. First-generation Hispanics can be seen as multitudes of factory workers, unemployed scavengers, casual day laborers, and the like. They will not be effectively addressed by men who have passed through high school, college, and three years of seminary training. That kind of education will *unfit* them for effective harvesting in these ripe fields. A high thin Roman nose does not look right in a congregation made up of upturned saucy-nosed people. The face must fit the forming congregation. A leadership pattern which fits the segment of population which has been disciplined (enrolled) is the first of four faces which I describe.

The second is equally important. The church appears as a cluster of "house churches." This face is being seen more and more in many countries.

In Sao Paulo, Brazil, I visited an Assemblies Church of more than 6,000 members. Its building seated only 700. "How," I asked, "could 6,000 be served by such a small

building?" The pastor replied, "In addition to this, we have 207 churches." "How many of these are rented halls and empty sheds?" I inquired. "Thirty-seven," he replied. "And the rest?" "They are homes," he said. "All my house church people come here when they have need. Every Sunday this church is full."

That urban face fitted that section of Sao Paulo made up of poor, often unemployed Brazilians. They had become Christians in house churches, where each knew all the others and all felt completely at home. The pastor and his assistants and the leaders of the 207 house churches were themselves working-class migrants from northeast Brazil. These leaders were continually establishing new house churches by splitting one into two or by encouraging new believers to form new house churches.

The house church face of today is seldom that seen in the New Testament, where there was no central building at all. Today there is generally a central building, tabernacle, or large rented hall. This central congregation led by a full-time pastor encourages the formation of many Christian cells or Bible study and worship groups. These are expected to function as *full churches*. In a few cases the unpaid leader of the group celebrates communion with his small flock. In most cases communion is observed in the central building once a month or once a quarter.

Most ministers in America and most missionaries regard the quality of Christian instruction given in house churches and of the worship experienced in them as deplorably

low. However, it appears sufficient to hold large numbers of city dwellers in the Christian orbit, to give them at least some biblical teaching, and to lead many to genuine faith in Christ.

A Californian example of the multiplication of house churches comes from the town of Eagle Rock, just west of Pasadena. There a Christian Assembly, affiliated with the Four Square Church, in 1975 had a membership of 300 and worshipped in a small well-built church. Its pastor, Donald Pickerill, decided to "decentralize." He formed 30 house churches, each led by a local person. Each church met in the homes of its ten members. These knew each other well and lived near each other. Once a month five churches would meet as a company of 50 in some home with a large front room. By 1979 the membership had grown to 800. There were now 70 functioning house churches. Meetings at the central church also continued.

I asked Mr. Pickerill, "When are you going to build a bigger church?" "Never!" he answered. "We believe that in today's cities 'house churches' lead to a more actually Christian way of life than the 'one big building' form. However," he went on, "We have not grown in the past three years. We must find ways to get going again."

Indeed they must. The house churches, being free of the need to build hugely expensive sanctuaries, theoretically have no limits to growth. The Full Gospel Church on Yordo Island, Seoul, Korea has now passed the 100,000 member mark. Its *thousands* of house churches are multiplying in all parts

of that great urbanization. Growth there is greatly assisted by the central church, which seats 9,000 and occupies the most visible church site in Korea. The pastor, Dr. Paul Yonggi Cho, an eloquent speaker and organizational genius, is aided by a full-time paid staff of more than 60. "But," he was careful to emphasize, "the unpaid leaders of our thousands of house churches (more than half of them women; they are more compassionate than men) are the most essential part of our church."

The third new urban face of the Church is made up of churches, all in one highly responsive segment of the urban population. This face is usually produced by powerful, purposeful, missionary effort.

A fine example is found in the city of Madras, India. There a small denomination, the Evangelical Church of India, fathered by the Oriental Missionary Society, found a highly responsive segment of urban society and, for the past 15 years, has been multiplying churches in it. Membership has zoomed from 1,000 to more than 12,000. The new Christian urbanites have said to their country relatives, "You also ought to become Christians," and in that segment of society, village churches also have sprung up.

The plan of evangelization is as follows. The church-cum-mission recruits several evangelistic teams largely from the high school educated young men of this segment. These teams locate communities of their people in which churches might be started, and hold evangelistic campaigns there lasting from one to three weeks, depending

on response. Men and women deciding to follow Christ are baptized and formed into ongoing congregations, which for a while meet in convenient places. As soon as it is certain that a church is going to result, the church-cum-mission purchases a small piece of land—perhaps 25 by 40 feet in size. On it is erected a one-room brick church house. Two or three thousand dollars a church are raised in America. The building gives this congregation a permanent, gleaming, white house of worship. It gives the Christian status. It assures regular worship.

The best of the team members are sent on to seminary, and thus a constant supply of well trained pastors—*of the people*—is assured. This year, 1983, the Evangelical Church expects to plant a church a week in India, many of them in Madras City and its environs.

The fourth new face of the church is that seen in millions of migrants to new lands. These are frequently highly responsive. There are scores of such migrant minorities, each presenting a unique opportunity to carry out Eternal God's command to bring all *ethne* to faith and obedience.

The face assumed in each migrant multitude will be different. The Cambodian refugees on the eastern side of Thailand, while still refugees, built the largest congregation and largest church building in all Thailand. That is unusual. Most faces will be some form of house churches or rented halls or temporary structures, with central buildings going up as Christians multiply. If the economy prospers as Christians multiply, they erect big

church buildings. In most cities, however, Christianity spreads among the proletariat, and costly buildings are not a part of the new face.

Faces for Urban Migrants

Let me now mention a few examples of churches multiplying in urban migrant minorities. Twenty-five years ago a Roman Catholic priest in Italy, who had espoused the biblical faith and come to America, said to me,

All across Canada in the big cities are tens of thousands of recent Italian immigrants. These are mostly from Italy's country districts. The men are intensely anti-clerical. Many are believing Marxists; but this faith seems to wane on getting to Canada. If any missionary society in America would throw half a dozen missionary families into this ripe and responsive segment of humanity, it could soon plant dozens of congregations of soundly believing Christians. This is a spiritually starving half million.

Subsequent inquiries in Canada have led me to believe that my informant was correct. Of course, the missionaries would have to learn both standard Italian and the dialect of Italian spoken by the immigrants from each particular section of Italy. Small groups of ten to twenty Christians, meeting in rented halls or on Sunday morning in empty bars, could be formed. With help from the founding missionary organization, permanent places of worship could be obtained, and what the Oriental Missionary Society has done in Madras

could be duplicated here among a very different kind of people.

Rev. Dan Kelly is a Canadian missionary to the American Indians. When studying at the School of World Mission in Pasadena, he explored the American Indian population in the sprawling Los Angeles urbanizations. He found that there are more than 100,000 American Indians in the area, of whom less than 1,000 are in church on Sunday. Ninety-nine thousand unchurched American Indians live here! Nothing could possibly be done for them which would more quickly elevate their character and status than for thousands of them to become Bible-believing and obeying Christians. If invited to join existing white churches, they will decline. In them they will not feel at home. But if some denomination or missionary society would plant—say, 600 *Indian* churches among them, then perhaps 60,000 would become responsible members. Six thousand dedicated Indians would become leaders. They would carry back to their relatives in the reservations the good news that when you obey and worship Him, Christ redeems and elevates.

Cubans, Haitians, Portuguese, Turks, and many others in America constitute scores of distinct segments of humanity. Some are more responsive than others. In most there are sub-sections. Thus the first generation Mexican immigrants are highly responsive if properly approached. Fourth generation Hispanics are less responsive; but if won, present fewer problems as they multiply congregations.

This face of the Church re-

sembles that already mentioned of the tens of thousands of Pentecostal Puerto Ricans who, in the fifties, worshipped in store fronts in New York and other cities. The aiding missionary society may be able to help the multiplying indigenous churches to house themselves permanently. But where the groups worship is a secondary matter. The primary matter is that in a responsive unit of humanity hundreds of congregations, by God's grace, are established.

I recently visited Japan and lectured on church growth to a gathering of pastors from many of the great cities of that nation. A highly perceptive missionary expounded at some length on the fact that in Japan the men live in many sections of the city; but they leave those sections every morning to go to their company and do not return till late at night. The corporate life at the company, and the social times there make that the most meaningful group in the life of most Japanese men. The company is their income, their work, their comradeship, and their life. The pastors discussed this concept with considerable agreement. Were a group of believers to form in that most meaningful group at the place of work, it would be natural and influential. It would certainly be a new urban face of the Church. It might reach back into the city bedrooms and form sub-congregations there!

New urban faces of the Church will all have one feature in common. All will be composed of persons who have heard the gospel, believed it, obeyed Christ, and become responsible members of His Body. But the faces of that Body

will be multifarious. As land gets more and more costly, few faces will look like a beautiful suburban sanctuary with a five-acre parking lot!! As gasoline runs out 40 years from now, many small humble places of worship will be seen. Worshippers will walk to them. The Lord will find hungering pieces of the human mosaic and in them will multiply gatherings of believers. Through these He will distribute the bread of heaven. The Church will spread through the lower ranks of society. We shall then look back with amazement at the time when the most orthodox churches were those composed of the most prosperous citizens.

The Church will not transform all segments of humanity into one homogeneous unit, all of whose members speak Esperanto, English, or Hindi. The Bible tells us that on that Great Day men will be there from every tribe and nation and people and *tongue*. As the Church spreads throughout the unbelievably complex fabric of urban mankind, it will assume many faces. Each is an urban face of His body, the Church.

What is Needed to Heal a City?

“What we want is profound change in people so that they will act to heal the city. To produce basic change, we need more than mass media. We need to be more drastic than that. We need prophets. And we need a total, coordinated program. We need a way of making men into disciples of the living God. In short, we need a church.”

John F. Alexander