

Improving the Quality of Human Life:

Theological Approach on Strategic Relevance for Urban Ministry

M.P.Santoso

*PETRA Christian University,
Surabaya, Indonesia*

ABSTRACT:

Improving the Quality of Human Life:

Theological Approach on Strategic Relevance for Urban Ministry

(Mrs. Magdalena Pranata Santoso)

INTRODUCTION

1. Since Growing cities and urban modern life styles cause individual and 2. social problems to both 3. physical and mental health. But 4. The church as a religious institution, however, still sits in its comfort zone to enjoy its religiosity without any attempt to answer these social needs. The church leaders still use the ancient formula, through preaching and teaching the Word of God. For many special occasions it does work well and still much desired. 5. But the real needs are much higher than covered. Most people need the language of genuine loving touch by creative actions not just donating or socializing but rather transforming their life to meet the real need of this society. Churches are called to serve the metropolitan society. This is called urban ministry.

In his book *A Theology as Big as the City*, Ray Bakke, eight percents of the world's population lived in cities. This was a

cybernetic era, We must be aware, that not only do half of the earth's nearly six billions persons live in cities, but the other three billions are also being urbanized. The challenge of migration is called missiological. The majority of the worlds who needs to know God and His love, is no longer distant peoples geographically, but rather culturally, Mission, therefore, is no longer about crossing the oceans, jungles, or deserts, but rather crossing the streets of the world's cities.

6. When Jesus Christ was on earth and lived among His people, He was deeply concerned with urban ministry in those days. Why should the Church as a Christian community who modeling Jesus Christ does not do the way He did to meet the needs of our society today? The church must learn how to go up to the urban powerful and down to the urban powerless with equal integrity.¹

1 THEOLOGY APPROACH FOR URBAN MINISTRY

7. What does the Bible say about Urban Ministry? According to Harvey Conn, the Urban Ministry has developed at least five areas of specialization, and the three of them are: (1)8. The working areas with the at risk people groups, such as street children, abused and abandoned kids. (2) The areas of at risk communities, which are the last, least, and lost neighborhood. (3)9. The multiethnic and multilingual ministries' areas. Also 10. from Harvey's five proposal urban ministries, I would only mention three of them. Firstly, urban ministry is cross cultural that we need to read the Scripture from global perspective. Secondly, the image of a pastor needs to be added with the image of a missiologist. It is an integrative discipline. Thirdly, we must identify the real barriers to make urban ministry more effective.

The majority of people living in urban centers, remind the church that 11. The urban ministry must be the focus of today's church. Ortiz

quoted from Robert Lintinichum in City of God, city of Satan, A biblical Theology of the urban church and described. why must the church engage in such mission?

12. Firstly, the theological reason: the church is the community of the kingdom of God. and The Church is God's colony in man's world.ⁱⁱ And, The Church is God's people in man's society. **13.** God will use the Church as king, prophet and priest to bring societal transformation. Urban ministry is a part of doing the Church's role as a priest, to serve our society. Therefore we pray and intercede for our community. We are admonished and equipped to provide mercyⁱⁱⁱ to a wounded world. **14.** Shepherding is the mission of the Church, Mission is not an optional activity for Christ's disciples. Mission expresses the purpose for which Christ came into the world."^{iv} For this age, there should be a great improved engagement between the church and the city.

The second reason why the church must be engaged in mission is that people from every corner of the world are entering into the cities. Urbanization and urbanism are the way of life and the new wave for missions. Urban ministry is one of the priorities that should be doing by the church and that is biblical.

2 **15.** INCARNATIONAL LIVING MINISTRY

Urban ministry is biblical; therefore it should be served in the biblical way. The focus of this paper is to share the above statement from the theological perspective based on the Bible. One of variety models of urban ministry is incarnational living. The paradigm of urban ministry is derived from reflecting the life of Jesus Christ in Philippians 2:5-8

16. *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to*

be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

17. As Christ has humbled and incarnated to be human and entered this world to save His people, His example has become the basic model of urban ministry which I call incarnational living. Like Jesus, we need to humble ourselves to serve our community. Incarnational living is the best model that Jesus Christ Himself has shown to His people. If we want to serve them, we need to be a part of the society and being involved in our neighborhood's activities.

18. By reflecting on incarnational living as a renewed paradigm for this urban ministry, as a lecturer and the principal of a Christian school, I pray to discern God's willing for me to do. I am convinced that I have to start this urban ministry with the following principles. First of all, I have to know what this Christian school should be doing for the urban ministry. What God did put in my mind and my heart is to start the a Community of Reading Group (in indonesian term is Library Garden) as an incarnational living ministry for the children surrounding our school area. I assume that the most powerful influence of culture is its worldview. 19. The purpose is to influence the children's worldview for better values. 20. By reading many good books, we may inspire them to learn more about good values and how to equip their life with something more worthwhile. 21. Secondly, this Community of Reading Group will be ushered by our school students who will escort the children who are coming. With incarnational living ministry as our paradigm, we might initiate and motivate our students to commit themselves serving their fellow children from different background.

2.1 22. *Incarnational Living Ministry as a Paradigm*

The term of incarnational should be connected to the Person of Jesus Christ. As the Bible recorded about His humble life, it means, first of all, we are to leave our comfort zone.

2.2 **23.** *Leaving a Comfort Zone*

The learning process at school in some situation has trapped the students to be stuck in their comfort zone. Their experiences of social life are mostly within parents, families, schoolmates, and the same community circles. They have been growing in their individualistic life style with strong ego-centered attitudes. The lack of touching different kinds of communities may create a big gap between the children at school and those who live in unfortunate environments.

The decision to help the student's manage the Community of Reading Group may encourage our students to leave their comfort zone and expand their heart to have compassion for another community's need. In this paradigm, our students, first of all, might stop thinking about their self-centered life and start reaching out to others from different backgrounds. By leaving their comfort zone, our students might become more open minded to understand other's life situation. This experience is a process of transferring knowledge and understanding in the students' life.

Secondly, we are committed to totally sharing life with those we need to love.

2.3 **24.** *Committing to Share Life*

By knowing the condition of the children whom they serve, they may develop a caring heart and loving affection. By listening and talking to serving the outside-children from variety backgrounds, our students will learn how to start a good communication with them. They might also learn how to encourage them to share their burdens and struggle of life. Our students should learn to listen and to have

empathy for them. 25. They also learn how to show passion and compassion for other children's need. This Community of Reading Group just the first step of an incarnational ministry. In this paradigm, our students will develop a heart of love and may mold their good characters.

Thirdly, 26. apply what we have committed, into the other different life styles, cultures, economic status, religions, ethnics, genders, etc

2.4 Practicing the Commitment into Reality

The students learn to understand the condition of the children they serve, they may continue serving them with any other activities such as teaching Computer skill, English, Art and Craft, Drawing, Electronics, showing good videos films, etc. The teachers may also participate in this ministry by teaching them some free lessons, such as health and sex educations. 27. All those activities have a task to influence the children's worldview that they may have chosen better and precious values of life.

28. Conclusion

Community of Reading Group is such a small thing to do but shall have a big impact. By reading many good books and serving the children with God's love, we may inspire and assure those children who are coming to think and plan something precious and meaningful for their own life. They may grow better understanding about life, not just a living. Once they find their life is worthy, they are able to choose what is useful and beautiful, what is true and holy for their life's values. On the other hand, our school's students who willingly and cheerfully take a part and serve those fellow friends will also develop their strong characters and grow for the best. 29

Indonesia is the fourth crowded population in the world with lots of social, moral, and economical problems. We urgently need a society transformation. The churches as well as Christian schools should give an accountability response and continue serving our society with more effective urban ministries, which will transform Indonesia to become a healthy and blessed nation. We might think that it is impossible to do such a huge transformation for our society. Well, yes, but we can start with just a simple act, such as do something effectively within the capacity of our own sphere of life.

By the blessing of our loving God, I do pray that may this kind of incarnational living ministry which I have learned and still learning from the Bible by modeling Jesus Christ's life, may inspire as many schools as possible to start this kind of ministries. May through this urban ministry, more children in Surabaya and Indonesia would start transforming their worldview, and their life values. Through this ministry, also, many more would have better understanding about their life purpose. May this urban ministry transform the at risk generation to become the winning generation. All these are for the glory of God, the Creator of the entire universe and all nations in this world.

[Thank God, Thank you and God bless you](#)

i Ray Bakke, 14

ii Ralph W.Christensen,44

iii Bible, Hebrew 13:16

iv Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church, Contours of Christian Theology*, as quoted by Manuel Ortiz,
in *Conn*, 45

REFERENCES

Bakke, Ray, A THEOLOGY AS BIG AS THE CITY, Pennsylvania: IVP, 1997

Conn., M. Harvie, THE KINGDOM, THE CITY THE PEOPLE OF GOD: URBAN MINISTRY,
Pennsylvania: IVP, 2010.

Linthicum, Robert C., CITY OF GOD, CITY OF SATAN, California: Zondervan, 1991