MONEY AND URBAN MISSION

In this issue:

DOING WELL BY DOING GOOD?
ECONOMIC DIVIDE AND MINISTRY
– Jonathan Bonk

EFFECTIVE COOPERATIVES:
IDEOLOGY, DISAPPOINTMENT, AND SUCCESS
– H. Michelle Kao

LESSONS FROM THE GOOD SAMARITAN
– Shane Claiborne

WASTE LAND: THEOLOGICAL
REFLECTIONS ON BROWNFIELD REHABILITATION
– Paul Ede

CITY FOCUS: NAIROBI
– Wallace and Mary Kamau

more including News, Reviews, and Regular Columns.

www.newurbanworld.org
Editorial
Stephen Burris 5

Features:
DOING WELL BY DOING GOOD? ECONOMIC DIVIDE AND MINISTRY
Jonathan Bonk 7

Response:
Father Paul Uwemedimo 19

EFFECTIVE COOPERATIVES: IDEOLOGY, DISAPPOINTMENT, AND SUCCESS
H. Michelle Kao 21

Response:
John Quinley 35

LESSONS FROM THE GOOD SAMARITAN
Shane Claiborne 37

Response:
Ruth Callanta 49

WASTE LAND: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON BROWNFIELD REHABILITATION
Paul Ede 51

Response:
Michael Moey 65
Columns:

FROM WHOM CAN CHRISTIAN AGENCIES ASK FOR MONEY?
Daniel Hillion 67

CHOOSING A MISSION OVER A MORTGAGE
Scott Bessenecker 70

THE RICH YOUNG RULER
Brian McLaran 74

ECONOMIC ADDICTIONS
Joel McKerrow 79

LESSONS FROM SUFFERING
Nigel Branken 81

THE SPIRITUALITY OF ... TOILETS?
Alissa Wachter 85

URBAN ASIAN CHRISTIANITY BY THE NUMBERS
Bert Hickman 88

AN ECONOMY OF THE ORDINARY AND EVERYDAY
Geoff and Sherry Maddock 92

LIFE IN THE CITY OF JOY
Grecia Reyes 96

CITY FOCUS: NAIROBI, KENYA
Wallace and Mary Kamau 99

Reviews:

TO TRANSFORM A CITY: WHOLE GOSPEL, WHOLE CHURCH, WHOLE CITY
Lynette Leach 107

GEOGRAPHY OF GRACE: DOING THEOLOGY FROM BELOW
Michael Crane 109

RUBBLE & REDEMPTION: FINDING LIFE IN THE SLUMS OF MANILA
Stephen Burris 111

VOICES OF HOPE
Adrienn Vasquez 113

WHY CITIES MATTER
Kendi Howells Douglas 115

REACHING THE CITY: REFLECTIONS ON URBAN MISSION FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
Kevin Book-Satterlee 117

NEFARIOUS
Pippa Pearce 119
“…others can stay home and decisively adopt a missionary support level as their standard of living and their basis of lifestyle, regardless of income.”  

While many are aware that this quote is lifted from Ralph Winter’s call to a wartime lifestyle and, therefore, will find Winter’s overly militaristic language offensive, he does draw attention to an important factor in urban mission today. But does Winter go far enough? What he does do is challenge all Christians to think seriously about the lifestyle they choose to live. The fact is most Christians will not relocate to the slums and live incarnationally among the growing numbers of urban poor. The reasons are as many as the individuals making this important decision. All can, however, live much simpler lifestyles in order to support those who can and do relocate to the difficult places on earth. Imagine what might happen if we all lived on the same level as those who are part of organizations such as UNOH, Sojourners, The Micah Network, and others are doing.

This edition of New Urban World underscores the necessity of looking seriously at all of our purchases and the lifestyles we live. Jonathan Bonk, who wrote the book on Missions and Money, continues to sound the warning of how our standard of living impacts our witness. It is very difficult to argue with Bonk’s logic or theology. This goes beyond those obvious solutions such as fair-trade purchases, not doing business with corporations that exploit and oppress for profit, not incurring debt, and intentionally not purchasing items just because we can afford to do so. Those decisions are what responsible, globally aware Christians should be doing every day. But is that enough? The fact remains that all Christians are called to live in the same way and by the same principles regardless of geographical location, profession, or income.

In addition, Michelle Kao gives us a case study of how a cooperative might work. She doesn’t back off on the problems either. Perhaps those who have money and
influence need to stand in solidarity with those who are attempting to survive on all too little. John Quinley’s response involves an important look at the systems that continue to oppress and exploit in the face of honest efforts to make life better for many who have so little.

Shane Claiborne’s article is a transcript of his featured presentation at the International Society for Urban Mission held this past January in Bangkok, Thailand. Claiborne’s approach is unique and novel. Would we expect anything less from Shane? His conclusion is startlingly simple. We can’t just bind up the wounds of the people we encounter who have been beaten up by life; we have to make the road safer. This involves bringing the kingdom of God into some of the darkest and most neglected areas of our world. While few have focused on this extension of the “Good Samaritan,” it is essential that we do so wherever we encounter injustice and oppression.

We want this edition of New Urban World to challenge you, even make you uncomfortable at times, as we work to bring shalom into the growing urban areas and among the urban poor of our world.

Stephen Burris is a pastor, teacher, and author. He currently serves as Research Missiologist with CMF International and Pastor of the Golden Valley Christian Church in San Bernardino, CA. He has done mission service in Zimbabwe. He has edited or co-edited several books including, River of God: An Introduction to World Mission.

I thank Stephen Burris for inviting me to contribute to the *New Urban World*. I accepted his invitation with some trepidation, since readers of this journal include men and women whose dedication inspires and humbles me. These readers are, as Stephen explained in his email, “submerged or incarnated into poor neighborhoods, slums, and squatter communities.” I, on the other hand, have spent these past 16 years as an administrator and editor, far removed from the hustle and bustle of communities struggling to eke out an existence in some of the world’s toughest urban environments.

As Stephen explained, it was because of my book, *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Western Missionary Problem* (Orbis 1991/2006) that he invited me to submit this article. The book was a direct result of many years in Ethiopia, where my missionary parents spent most of their adult lives, and where I too would subsequently serve. It was an outcome of painful personal experiences during the military coup that overthrew Haile Selassie on March 21, 1974, plunging the country into several decades of social and economic chaos. Through these experiences the hazy silhouette of my privileged life among an impoverished people was brought into sharp focus, making it a poignant case study illustrating the negative dynamics of gross economic inequity in close social proximity.¹

Exploration of the roots of poverty and elucidation of the supposed wellsprings of affluence were not the purposes of the book *then*, nor are they the focus of this paper *now*, as important as these subjects may be.² Rather, my attempt was and is to show how both the effectiveness and the integrity of dedicated servants of God can be compromised when their relative material affluence appears to be at odds with much that is taught and modeled by biblical authors and exemplars, such as Paul and Jesus.
Among those who make their living by speaking for God and about God, Christian missionaries—perhaps more than any other professional religious group—are acutely aware of the need for consistency between what they say they believe and how they actually live. Those of us who get paid for being pious are in constant peril of our Lord’s scathing indictment of the religious leaders of his day (Matt 23). It seems to have been this awareness that informed St. Paul’s personal modus operandi, as summarized in his final farewell to the Ephesians:

33 I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. 34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. 35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:33–35 NIV; cf. 1 Tim 6:6–11, 17–19).

My argument is this: When those who proclaim the gospel are affluent in comparison to those among whom they serve, it follows that what the Bible says to and about the rich, it says to and about them.

As surprising as it may seem even to those who are familiar with the Bible, only one subject—idolatry—receives more attention in the Bible than the recurring theme of economic justice and equity. And the two subjects are often related. Since greed is idolatry, any society or smaller community marked by gross social and material inequity in close social proximity can neither thrive nor survive for long. That is the painful lesson the Hebrew people were obliged by their prophets to draw in biblical times, and confirmed repeatedly through history and more resoundingly by recent research.

While economic and social inequity within communities pose profound relational and communicatory challenges, more serious are complex questions of integrity and credibility that confront wealthy followers of Jesus living and ministering in contexts of profound poverty. If greed be understood as the insistence on more than enough in
contexts where neighbors have less than enough, even the best intentioned religious philanthropist can be regarded as greedy. And greed, in St. Paul’s undiplomatic words, is idolatry (Col 3:5). A missionary or a minister of even very modest means might in the minds of those who are poorer be peddling the word of God for profit (2 Cor 2:17), earning a comfortably secure living from their professional piety—“doing well by doing good.”

However inadequately missionary support levels might sustain a missionary family at levels of even modest western material norms, in the economic hierarchy of the slum such entitlements guarantee them a place of privilege. Furthermore, we in the West are shaped and defined by a way of life known as “consumerism,” whose survival relies on its capacity to escalate each successive generation’s sense of material entitlement, so that one generation’s luxuries mutate into the next generation’s needs.

While the relative affluence of a missionary has serious strategic implications, more serious is its corrosive effect on missionary incarnation. Possession of wealth virtually ensures social insulation. Wealth serves as a buffer from the harsh realities of everyday life. The word insulate derived from the Latin insulatus—meaning to make into an island. In its common use, “to insulate” means “to prevent or reduce the transmission of electricity, heat, or sound to or from (a body, device, or region) by surrounding it with a non-conducting material.” Both the etymology and the definition of this word are instructive in the context of this article, since Christian missionaries frequently inhabit islands set in seas of poverty. Their modest affluence constitutes the “non-conducting material” that protects them from the “heat” and “sound” of the poverty around them. Biblical faith is, above all, relational faith—lived out only in relationship to God and neighbor. For one Christian’s relative affluence to prevent, distort, or even destroy relationships within the community of faith is a matter of grave and even ultimate concern.

The relational price that a missionary often pays for his or her affluence is acerbated by its corrosive effects on the gospel communication process itself, since material prosperity affects both medium and message. If the message of the cross were comprised
merely of a series of theologically correct propositions about God and salvation, the obligation to proclaim the gospel would be a simple matter of media news releases. But the Word must always become flesh, and dwell among ordinary folks. The Way can be shown only by those who are on the journey themselves. A missionary is not simply a voice box, but a pilgrim whose way of life can be imitated by other would-be followers.

I turn now to consideration of **ethical implications** that emerge as a consequence of a missionary’s relative affluence, for integrity is of paramount concern to any missionary. To properly frame this discussion, it is necessary to sketch the broad contours of biblical teaching on poverty and privilege, possessions and piety, “all these things” and the one who, taking up his or her cross, follows Jesus.

In both the Old and the New Testaments, there is a modest stream of teaching that is of comfort to the rich: the sanctity of private property, the association of wealth with happiness, prosperity as a reward for righteousness, and the frequently close link between personal behavior and poverty. Such teaching reassures those who, by whatever means, find themselves in the happy state of relative comfort and affluence.

But in counterpoint to this strand of teaching is the more common unflattering portrayal of the rich that suffuses both the Old and the New Testaments. Only the sketchiest outline of what I have elsewhere more fully discussed is possible here, but it will be enough to make the point.

A. **Rights associated with acquiring, using, or disposing of personal wealth** are—for the people of God—**subordinated to an obligation to care for poorer, weaker members of society**. The divinely sanctioned guidelines outlined below seem to have been intended to prevent the permanent division of God’s human community between those who enjoyed economic advantage and those who endured economic hardship. Thus,

a. **In recurring Jubilee years** all land was to revert to its original owners (Lev 25:8–28); **the Jubilee** seems to have been designed to have a leveling effect.
Its practice meant that whatever economic advantage, momentum, or mass which might for any reason—luck, good management or mismanagement, ability or lack of ability—have been gained by one person over another, could not be legitimately sustained indefinitely. Jubilee was a time of fresh beginnings for the land and for the personal economic prospects of the unfortunate. Compliance with Jubilee made the endless accumulation of properties impossible (Lev 25:8–43). Unfortunately, in Jewish history compliance seems to have been the exception, rather than the rule.

b. Regular **Sabbatical years** called for the forgiveness of all debts (Deut 15:1–6; 2 Chr 36:15–21) and were clearly intended for the well-being of the poor, wild animals, and the land itself. Debts were to be cancelled, giving those who had suffered catastrophic economic misfortune opportunity for a fresh beginning. It was as though life was a game, played in seven-year segments. At the end of the game, the pieces were redistributed and everyone began to play again (Deut 15:1–11). What one might consider a sound business principle—refusal to lend money to someone unlikely to repay it—God calls a “wicked thought” in Deuteronomy 15:9.7

c. **Annual tithing** was mandated, with aliens, orphans, widows and the landless as primary beneficiaries every third year (Deut 14:22–29). Most of the practical provisions of Mosaic Law governing property and possessions had the poor in mind, perhaps anticipating the instability and unviability of any community characterized by gross economic inequity among its members. Tithes were emphatically not designed to enrich the religious establishment, the equivalent then of today’s clergy (Deut 26:1–15).

d. **Guidelines for loans, interest, and collateral** were deliberately crafted and interpreted with poor borrowers in view—widows, orphans, aliens—rather than lenders (Exod 22:25–27; Lev 25:35–38; Deut 23:19–20; Deut 24:6, 10–13, 17–18).
e. **There should be no poor among you**, said the Law (Deut 15:4). An entire complex of laws were meant to preserve society from reified, intergenerational inequity. Employers were likewise strictly prohibited from taking advantage of poor employees (Deut 24:14–15).³

f. **Gleaning regulations were designed to sustain the poor** (Deut 24:19–20);

g. **Debt repayment guidelines favored the poor** (Deut 15:1–11);

h. **Guidelines for employers favored employees** (Deut 24:14–15).

Much more could be said, but this is enough to show that God intended that among his people, the poor were not only to be protected from exploitation, they were to be the Law’s chief beneficiaries. Only the briefest sketch of other strands of biblical teaching is here possible, but will suffice to hint at the ethical peril threatening any “rich” missionary.

B. **Wealth is seen as inherently dangerous**, and is frequently associated with fatally destructive behaviors of persons and nations alike. Thus,

a. **The prosperous tend to marginalize God** (Deut 8:10–20);

b. **Wealth is the natural culture in which pride and the delusion of the self-made person or nation inevitably to flourish** (Ezek 28:4–5; Jer 6:13–15; 12:1–4; 17:11; 1 Tim 6:6–19);

c. **Wealth is almost inevitably associated with overindulgence, gluttony, and greed, which is idolatry** (1 Kgs 6–7; 10:14–29; 11:1–6; 1 Cor 5:9–11; Col 3:5);

d. **The wealthy frequently abuse personal power by their mistreatment of the weak and their contempt for the poor** (1 Kgs 10:14–29; cf. 1 Kgs 12:1–24; Jer 22:13–17; Ezek 16:49; 22:25–29; Job 12:5);

e. **The priorities and orientations of the rich are often fatally misguided** (Isa 5:7–8, 20–23);

g. Our Lord pronounced woes on the rich, declaring that it was almost impossible for a rich man to inherit eternal life, and that to be a “wealthy disciple” is almost an oxymoron (Matt 19:16–24; Jas 5:1–6);

h. Preoccupation with self, money, and pleasure are signs of the doomed ‘last days’ way of life (2 Tim 3:1–5);

i. Personal wealth demands absorption in mammon, deadening a person’s or a nation’s sense of their spiritual destitution (Matt 13:22; 22:5; Luke 12:13–21; Rev 3:14–21);

j. Wealth is never sufficient, breeding greed… a continual desire for more (Eph 4:17–19; 5:3–11).

C. Wealth and prosperity are not generally signs of righteousness, but of self-indulgence, greed, and exploitation of the poor (Prov 13:23; Isa 32:7; Job 21:7–16). Thus,

a. Faithfulness to God is no guarantee of either prosperity or security (Jer 44:15–18);

b. It is possible to have too much (Prov 30:8–9);

c. Passive neglect of the poor leads to judgment (Deut 8:19–20; 28:15; 2 Chr 36:15–21);

d. Religious orthodoxy without practical concern for the poor is a hollow sham (Isa 1:10–23).
D. **God actively identifies with the poor and the socially marginalized** (Exod 22:21–27).

   a. **The promised Messiah would identify with the poor and the oppressed** (Ps 22; Isa 53). Jesus was born in a stable, and, judging from their offering, his parents were far from rich (Luke 1:46–56; 2:1–20, 21–24; cf. Lev 12:8). His Nazareth manifesto focused explicitly on the poor (Luke 4:16–30; Matt 25:31–46);  

   b. **God’s children are marked by their proactive concern for the poor** and the oppressed (Job 30:24–25; 31:16–28; Amos 5:4–24; 6:4–7; 8:4–7);  

   c. **God meets the needs of the poor through the actions and interventions of his obedient people.** This was the intent of the laws dealing with the treatment of the poor by the rich (Neh 5:1–13);  


What can we do? Is it possible to “turn around?” Toward a Missiology of the **Righteous Rich.** In the biblical narrative, economic repentance is rare. A reading of the prophets makes one quickly aware that those with power found ingenious ways to annul or circumvent any provision that impinged upon their entitlements. According to the Prophets, the nation collapsed and its people were forced into exile precisely because it broke both the spirit and the letter of the Law, with its heavy bias toward the poor: *This was the guilt of your sister Sodom,* Ezekiel reminded his nation’s doomed but smugly complacent leaders: *she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy* (Ezek 16:49).  

Scriptural teaching on wealth and poverty is disquieting to those of us shaped by cultures that foster, laud, and rely on ever-increasing levels of material consumption. Of course, we North Americans are well aware that our shared planet is home to vast numbers of impoverished and destitute peoples, and that some of these are found in our own cities. But our niggling discomfort is easily quelled. What, after all, do
such people have to do with us? Our very helplessness in the face of endemic human tragedy is, in its own way, reassuring, because it lets us off the hook. But for those who live and serve among the poor, the luxury of such detachment is not possible. When a missionary serving among the poor is the only person enjoying a relatively lavish standard of living, he or she is in danger of being a living contradiction of biblical teaching. What is a missionary to do?

For incarnational ministry to be effective, personal behavior must correspond with professed belief. As the old adage says, “what you are speaks so loud that I can’t hear what you say.” I propose that missionaries serving in contexts of urban poverty accept the status of “righteous rich” and learn to play its associated roles in ways that are biblically informed and contextually appropriate. This recommendation is predicated upon the assumption that the missionary understands Jesus to be both the message itself and the exemplar of all those who minister in his name.

It is clear that the Christian Scriptures draw a sharp distinction between the righteous who are prosperous and the rich who are unrighteous, and that the distinction between the two is determined chiefly on the basis of their respective dealings with the poor. For missionaries serving in contexts of urban poverty, a biblical study of this subject should be an essential part of both their initial preparation and their ongoing ministry.

In his masterful summary of Old Testament teaching on the righteous rich, Christopher Wright observes that “God may choose (but is not obliged) to make a righteous person rich.” Job is the most ancient and probably the best known biblical character to be characterized as both rich and righteous. This being the case, it is appropriate to bring this brief article to a conclusion by listening to his views on the subject. A laudable goal for any modern righteous person of means, whether missionary or corporate tycoon, would be to truthfully repeat Job’s words to God, and to then hear an echoing “Amen” from the poor among whom he or she resides.

*Job 29:11–17.*  11 Whoever heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me commended me, 12 because I rescued the poor who cried for help,
the fatherless who had none to assist him. 13 The man who was dying blessed me; I made the widow’s heart sing. 14 I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban. 15 I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. 16 I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger. 17 I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth.

Job 31:16–28. 16 If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eyes of the widow grow weary, 17 if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless—18 but from my youth I reared him as would a father, and from my birth I guided the widow—19 if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing, or a needy man without a garment, 20 and his heart did not bless me for warming him with the fleece from my sheep, 21 if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, knowing that I had influence in court, 22 then let my arm fall from the shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint. 23 For I dreaded destruction from God, and for fear of his splendor I could not do such things. 24 If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, “You are my security,” 25 if I have rejoiced over my great wealth, the fortune my hands had gained, 26 if I have regarded the sun in its radiance or the moon moving in splendor, 27 so that my heart was secretly enticed and my hand offered them a kiss of homage, 28 then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high.

Whether one subscribes to the “hidden hand of the market” as the source of all good things, or whether one detects in the regional, national, and global marketplace the not-so-hidden hand of the economically and politically powerful, it is clear that Job understood himself to be personally responsible for playing a proactive role in the material wellbeing of poor people in his orbit, and that this is the way God wanted him to be. And we can be certain that this is the way Jesus wants his contemporary followers to be as well.
Dr. Jonathan J. Bonk is Senior Mission Consultant, Overseas Ministries Study Center Director, and editor of the Dictionary of African Christian Biography.


5. Peter C. Whybrow observes that "As America's commercial hegemony has increased and our social networks have eroded, we have lost any meaningful reference as to how rich we really are, especially in comparison to other nations." See American Mania: When More is Not Enough (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 38–39. Whybrow is the Judson Braun Professor of Psychiatry and Bio-behavioral Science and the director of the Jane and Terry Semel Institute of Neuroscience and Behavior at the University of California in Los Angeles.

6. Collins English Dictionary of the English Language, s.v. "insulate."

7. See also Exodus 23:10–11; Leviticus 25:1–7.

8. See also Leviticus 25:35–43; Deuteronomy 15:12–18; Proverbs 14:31; 19:17.

   • Remember the source of their riches — namely the grace and gift of God himself, and are therefore not boastingly inclined to take the credit for achieving them through their own skill, strength, or effort—even if these things have been legitimately deployed (Deut 8:17–18; 1 Chr 29:11–12; Jer 9:23–24).
   • Do not idolize their wealth by putting inordinate trust in it, nor get anxious about losing it. For ultimately it is one's relationship with God that matters more and can survive (and even be deepened by) the absence or loss of wealth (Job 31:24–25).
   • Recognize that wealth is thus secondary to many things, including wisdom, but especially personal integrity, humility, and righteousness (1 Chr 29:17; Prov 8:10–11; 1 Kgs 3; Prov 16:8, 28:6).
Set their wealth in the context of God’s blessing, recognizing that being blessed is not a privilege but a responsibility—the Abrahamic responsibility of being a blessing to others (Gen 12:1–3). Wealth in righteous hands is thus a servant of that mission that flows from God’s commitment to bless the nations through the seed of Abraham.

Use their wealth with justice; this includes refusing to extract personal benefit by using wealth for corrupt ends (e.g., through bribery), and ensuring that all one’s financial dealings are non-exploitative of the needs of others (e.g., through interest) (Ps 15:5; Ezek 18:7–8).

Make their wealth available to the wider community through responsible lending that is both practical (Lev. 25) and respectful for the dignity of the debtor (Deut 24:6, 10–13).

See wealth as an opportunity for generosity—even when it is risky, and even when it hurts, thereby both blessing the poor and needy, and at the same time reflecting the character of God (Deut 15; Ps 112:3; Prov 14:31; 19:17; Ruth).

Use wealth in the service of God, whether by contributing to the practical needs that are involved in corporate worship of God (1 Chr 28–9), or by providing for God’s servants who particularly need material support (2 Chr 31; Ruth).

Set an example by limiting personal consumption and declining to maximize private gain from public office that affords access to wealth and resources (Neh 5:14–19).
I began my response to Bonk’s article just a few hours after I had celebrated Mass. I preached on Jesus’ statement that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven! I had preached for the sake of others. But as I asked God how I should respond to Bonk’s article, I believed I was to respond in a personal way, that I should not be primarily writing a response for others but primarily making a personal response.

Bonk’s article is very relevant to me as I am in the middle of a discernment process on how to respond to the Lord’s calling in my life. I have believed for years that God gave me a particular calling, which can be summarised as being a “Missionary servant of God’s love for the poor,” but specifically whether I should join a Catholic Religious Institute called the Missionaries of God’s Love (MGL); joining would entail taking a vow of poverty. It would be a big step, and among other things it would mean I would no longer have any money or possessions of my own. Yet even if I take this step and join the MGL (which is very likely) and if I live among the poor in an urban slum area with other MGL members, we would still be living in luxury compared with so many of the people whom we are called to serve. We would also be choosing our level of material poverty. And Bonk is right that our relative wealth would serve “as a buffer from the harsh realities of everyday life” in terms of how those realities affected us.

Bonk is correct that I am indeed “acutely aware of the need for consistency between” what I say I believe and how I actually live. He is also correct to state that “the effectiveness and the integrity of dedicated servants of God can be compromised when their relative material affluence appears to be at odds with much that is taught
and modelled by biblical authors and exemplars.” In my case, I need to go further. My effectiveness and integrity as a MGL really is compromised when my relative material affluence contradicts the message to proclaim, not just in words, but in my lifestyle.

Additionally, I need be aware, as Bonk emphasizes, “What the Bible says to and about the rich, it says to and about [me]” and the “unflattering portrayal of the rich that suffuses both the Old and the New Testaments.” In this respect, Bonk gives an outline of scriptural teachings that are important for me to consider. I am indeed in great “danger of being a living contradiction of biblical teaching.” I need to be honest about my lack of consistency and my need for repentance. I need to allow the Lord to touch my heart so that the decisions I make are in conformity both with the universal commands that the Lord gives to all people in his word and also with the more specific calling he is giving me as a MGL.

However, I also need to allow the Lord to show me that he understands my weaknesses and that he will give me grace as I struggle to follow his calling. I must not fall into the trap of thinking that all wealth is evil. In the area of wealth and poverty, as in so many other areas in Christian life and faith, we need to hold in tension truths that seem to pull in different directions.

As I decide about my future, I must realise that even as Christ wants me to become poor and live among and share my life with the poor, I am nevertheless to do this without guilt as someone who has been blessed with the undeserved privilege of relative wealth. Bonk is correct that I do need to “accept the status of righteous rich and learn to play its associated roles in ways that arebiblically informed and contextually appropriate.” I need to do this with wisdom and in a way that does not blunt the radical nature of Christ’s specific call to me, a call which includes downward movement and material divestment as well as a desire to see an upward movement and material improvement in the lives of the poor among whom I live and serve.

Fr. Paul Uwemedimo is a Catholic priest of Uyo Diocese, Nigeria, who grew up mainly in England and has served in the Philippines for many years. He has been greatly impacted by Viv Grigg and the New Friars movement. The vision that guides his life is that of being “a missionary servant of God’s love for the poor.”
The Cooperative Movement in Thailand

The current global trend in urban development in virtually all sectors (economic, urban planning, community organizing, political, etc.) is moving towards greater cooperation and collaboration. Models of democratic process and shared leadership are the touted primary vehicles for development for local, sustainable, and just institutions. Thailand’s own political history illustrates this shift. Originally a feudal state in the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries, it became an absolute monarchy in 1782, but ultimately adopted a democratic government and transformed to a constitutional monarchy in 1932 (Baker 2005). The rise of the populist Pheu Thai Party [“For Thais Party” (PTP)], currently holding the parliamentary majority and the role of Prime Minister, Yingluck Shinawatra, further manifests the popular movement’s shift.

However, regarding economic development of poor people, Thailand lacks relative maturity in the areas of microfinance institutions, microloan programs, and effective business development among the poor. There exists no Thai version of a Bangladeshi Grameen Bank (Yunus 1997) or a Delhi Shikhar Microfinance (Robinson 2001). The formal commercial banking system is largely unattainable for the poor, requiring a 15,000 THB\(^1\) (approx. 490 USD) monthly salary to acquire a loan and informal moneylenders truncate any possibility of economic growth, charging 20 percent interest. A common sentiment among low-income citizens is fatalistic acceptance of this reality: there can be no other alternative banking and loan system aside from the informal moneylenders, for, faithful repayment is impossible in a low-pressure organization; therefore, people need to depend on a usurious system for their essential loans. Accordingly, formal savings groups and Rotating Savings Credit Associations,
or ROSCAs (Ledgerwood 1999), have failed to popularize in the development sector in Thailand because of prevalent loan defaulting and the resultant strained relationships. It is not uncommon in poor communities for families to hastily and covertly vacate their homes under the cover of night to flee unresolved debt and those associated relationships.

Furthermore, regarding business development, the cooperative employee model is virtually non-existent. According to the Cooperative Auditing Department of Thailand, who describe the types of cooperatives formally recognized in Thailand (including agricultural cooperatives, thrift and credit cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, etc.), employee cooperatives are not included as one of the seven distinctions (2008).

Therefore, the question is raised, “In such a collective society of remarkable entrepreneurial character set within a global collaborative milieu, what type of Microfinance and Microenterprise system will work”.

The Center for Informal Labor Cooperatives

At the seldom-traversed north end of the Samaki Pattana community, a small, plastic blue sign hangs on a house stating Sun Prasan Raeng Ngan Nawk Rabop translated to “The Center for Informal Labor Cooperatives” (I will refer to it as the CILC). The house it adorns is typical and ordinary in style in the community and also serves as a work center for amulet artisans. The owner of the house, Sampan, is a man in his 30s with a young family, active in community affairs and a helpful neighbor. I recently ran into him accompanying a neighbor in her legal proceedings and has been known to help others when casually passing by during repairs. He invited us to the main center of the CILC for the Bangkok Metropolitan area in the Rom Klao district, headquartered in the Bangkok director’s own home, where he volunteers his time.

Sujin Rungsawang, the president of the CILC, was giving an interview with a local news station as we arrived and graciously gave us an hour of her limited time to explain the story and the work of the CILC. Sujin initially became involved with the CILC in 1997 to “add her voice” in order to push forth healthcare rights legislation
for informal workers. She is a seamstress by trade and has only received a fourth-grade education. Originally started as a small group by the Foundation for Labor Development (a private foundation) in 1994, it now identifies itself as an independent citizen agency and only recently received official organizational status in 2008 by the Thai government. Its work, strategies, and methodology are born entirely out of small groups solving problems cooperatively.

It is difficult to narrow the works and purposes of the CILC to a succinct package; it seems that they will address any issue that could affect workers in the informal sector. Sujin described some of the purposes as such:

1. **For the rights of workers in the informal sector**: lobbying for policies and legislation regarding protection, educating people of their rights, and ensuring accountability in the enforcement of those rights.

2. **To obtain benefits for informal laborers** (of which are standard for those in the formal sector): access to healthcare and health insurance, life insurance, and preventive and protective services.

3. **To strengthen and empower people in their trade and occupation**: providing reproducible training, education in business development, supporting the formation and growth of occupational cooperatives.

4. **To advocate for informal laborers and to connect people to appropriate services and organizations** (i.e. consumer protection agency, ministry of social welfare, disability services, etc.).

How are they able to address such an expansive range of issues as one organization? Ostensibly, their community cooperative groups are the CILC’s primary vehicle to accomplish their vast goals and vision. These groups represent the CILC’s collective strength and are the bread and butter of their efforts. Anatomically, these co-op groups are self-organized with at least 10 members, of which they engage in the same trade or occupation within the informal sector (i.e. tricycle recyclers, seamstresses, vendors, etc.). These groups perform multiple functions as such:
A. They are an ASCA savings group. Opposed to the ROSCA savings group model, the ASCA (Accumulating Savings and Credit Association) model determines a regular fixed amount that each member agrees to contribute, while individual borrowing can occur at varied times and amounts. In the CILC scheme, each member regularly saves 50 to 100 THB in the collective savings, depending on the group's decision. They also collectively decide how to appropriate the money, whether in purchasing materials, shared tools, microloans, etc. The group may also devise other methods of saving. For example, the ubiquitous convenience stores offer a service to pay bills for a small fee. Rather than paying utility bills or insurance payments through them, some groups have appointed a person to collect individuals’ bills and pay collectively directly at the utility offices. The fee for the service is then reappropriated to the community pot.

B. They are a knowledge dissemination and training group. Aside from the administrative roles of President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Secretary, groups also elect a gan-nam, meaning “one who leads the way” or the “Guide.” The Guide role is arguably the most vital of the roles within the group. Chosen by the group and further evaluated by the CILC, he should be a person who is knowledgeable about their trade (where to get raw materials, resources, marketing and selling, and how to acquire money for investments) and who is able to learn and pass on information in a clear and understandable way. The Guide is the representative for the group to receive training from the CILC and bring it back to the group. Thus, the CILC does not train groups directly, but supports and trains the Guide. The Guide is initially given opportunities to train while being evaluated by the CILC, who will assess via questionnaires within the group how much of the knowledge was understood and retained. The CILC will then tactfully offer suggestions or supplement the knowledge and skills of the Guide. Via this strategy, the CILC utilizes the group structure for continued practical learning.

C. They are a support group. The foundation and the glue of the cooperative groups are the challenges, pressures, and problems that they each face. Strength is drawn from empathy and from identifying with each other through common obstacles and issues. The group provides a forum for corporate innovation and collaborative
problem-solving. Therefore, some groups will decide to create additional roles as well, for example, a designated visitation group. This group may be appointed to visit sick members (and their families) to offer encouragement and support. Furthermore, the moral support aspect of the group is what keeps the cooperative from the problem of khayap mai dai, or “being stuck,” which Sujin states as an issue which can debilitate groups. In those instances, the problems of a member may prevent them from being a functioning affiliate—the support of the group offers emotional and practical restoration. The group will consult, gather information, and decide together how to answer the question “How will we help?” Sujin offered two cases in which groups become “stuck” and how the group might respond supportively and constructively. In the case of personal financial problems (i.e. a family doesn't have enough money to support their children's education, health crises, etc.), the group may decide to offer financial help (either through the collective savings or from their own monies). In the case of a personal problem (i.e. family brokenness or family crisis), they may decide to help through corporate encouragement and relational support. At the surface, these strategies seem quite inelaborate, yet prove effective. Because traditional Thai culture is collective and shame-based, the communal initiative for inclusion and expression of empathy are particularly critical for a group's progressive cohesion. Especially for people earning low incomes and possessing fewer resources, sources of social capital are certainly significant and technically profitable.

D. They are a collective political power. The small trade groups comprise a broader network that stretch not only across the city, but throughout the entire nation. In the Bangkok metropolitan area alone, there are ten established centers with over 10,000 members/participants. The trade cooperatives operate on a large-scale in the same way, meaning they exercise the same organizational cooperative methods throughout the broader network. During the 2011 Bangkok floods, the rural CILC networks gathered to support the Bangkok groups through rice and food donations. In other broad works as well, the CILC has harnessed the collective voice of informal laborers and directed it toward policy change. They have even reached a parliamentary level for some policies,
but remain active in lobbying policies at all levels of government. Currently, they are campaigning for this legislation:

i. At the Bangkok city level, they are advocating to allow cooperative groups legal contracts by city government to provide goods and services. Rather than restricting contracted services to private limited companies, cooperative groups would be able to bid for commercial contracts, opening up new markets. For example, sewing cooperatives might be awarded a government contract for uniform production services.

ii. At the federal level, the CILC is pushing Article 14264, in which the national government would assume 50 percent of the healthcare costs for informal laborers that is traditionally assumed by the employer in the formal labor sector. This law also demands equity and equality for the three sectors of labor (formal, informal, and immigrant) regarding healthcare rights.

iii. Under Section 33 of Article 14264, regarding people who are informally hired to perform services (i.e. seamstresses who are paid per piece), new policy would require contractual agreements between service providers and employers in order to protect both parties. Contracts would protect informal laborers by legally ensuring payment and clarifying tax responsibility. For employers, contracts would protect employers from losses or damages incurred by the service provider.

The CILC is proud of its identification as a citizen organization and, as such, most of their work is volunteer-based. They distinguish themselves by being neither an NGO nor a governmental agency and are independent financially; they do not receive regular, formal support from any one person or group [though the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) is their “mentor”]. They maintain their organizational and financial independence for the sake of sustainability and, therefore, search out and rely on local experts, local government, and local supporters. They avoid foreign support which could terminate and jeopardize momentum and progress.
In Thailand’s 2012 survey on Informal Employment, 24.8 million working persons were working in the formal sector, comprising 62.6 percent of the labor force (NSO 2012). Though lower than the 76.8 percent reported in the 1994 survey (NSO 1994), it is still a clear majority of the nation’s workforce. The CILC is clear that they work for the welfare of the large informal sector and hope to create formalization, bringing these shadow laborers into the light of government responsibility and protection.

The Disconnect between Effective Organizations and the Bangkok Context

Inherent in the pursuit of a viable solutions for microfinance is the necessary evaluation of why models and organizations that have been effective in other contexts have failed to develop to such magnitude within Thailand.

The former squatter community of Samaki Pattana organized itself to contract a lease agreement with the landowner and manage the collective rental payments. They formed a formally recognized land cooperative which effectively finds enough capital to cover the lease. However, the greatest obstacle that the cooperative indicates is a lack of full ownership/participation. Over one-half of the members of the community do not pay their allocated land rent (which is considered low at 100 to 200 THB/month) despite the fact that each individual household signed a contract of membership to join and participate in the land co-op. The result is that the rent-paying residents cover the deficit, preferring to bear the financial burden for the sake of keeping their own homes. Throughout its history, community leaders have attempted to build unity and encourage full participation, including open council meetings, formal social groups, and communal business enterprises. Kankaew, a long-time board member of the land cooperative and community leader, is certain, however, that if a crisis were to present itself (e.g. fire or imminent eviction), the community would unite to face and solve the problem. Regarding other possible strategies, she regrets that she and other leaders do not have the time to visit all the members, which she believes would help members to feel included.
The obstacles of the Samaki Pattana land cooperative echo common sentiments of why many MFIs fail to work: personal failure of members to repay debts. Members of the Samaki Pattana community have commented that the 20-percent-interest moneylender is the only viable solution for loans who employs a strict strategy of daily debt collection (in installments) and repossession by force. And so, the challenge of the land cooperative further illustrates this issue: if refusal to pay or incurred debt do not result in coerced payment or repossession, people who do not pay do not face any real consequences. They will neither be evicted nor experience any change. Socially, the ideal of a united, cooperating community has not been effective in motivating members to participate. Neither have positive capital gains been incentive enough for involvement; the cooperative-initiated income-generating enterprises (fish farming, bulk rice sales) for corporate profit has failed to increase participation. For all the challenges of the Samaki Pattana land cooperative, it is still considered successful: it has faithfully paid rent to the landowner for the entire duration of the lease contract and has governed itself as a credit union according to legal standards. But, it still demonstrates the challenges nearly all cooperative financial groups continue to encounter in this context.

To briefly summarize, the challenges of cooperatives are as follows:

1. Full cooperation of members (i.e. ownership and equitable effort in participation).
2. Individual, irrecoverable repayment failure.
3. Irreparable relational rifts caused by shame resulting in the breakdown of groups.

Lessons Learned and the Challenges for the Christian Cooperative.

Engaging economic and financial issues are paramount in addressing alleviation of poverty; the church cannot choose to ignore this crucial piece in journeying with poor people. However, the church and Christian organizations might presently approach economic and microfinance initiatives more shrewdly in light of global experience and local context.
First, while addressing personal economic issues is critical, cooperatives may achieve greater success if they engage financial matters indirectly. It would seem that cooperatives formed around secondary issues are more effective than MFIs directly addressing debt and finances. The formation of the group around common occupation, around shared land, around a common product, etc., is necessary to create solidarity before the issue of cash is addressed. Savings and loan groups that form over a common need for money are unable to develop the relational attachments necessary for group collaboration. Therefore, successful groups must be formed on a non-financial platform and members should be initiated on the basis of a common positive circumstance, I believe. Groups with strong relational ties are able to endure hardships in both personal and shared spheres. Because shame is such a strong and aversive factor, groups built on a positive foundation (a shared aspect in which members may take pride) shore up social capital. Greater social capital buttresses the group against shameful circumstances which frequently deplete a group’s strength or momentum.

To use the CILC as an example, they have chosen to work with homogenous groups according to vocation. Therefore, members’ identities are not determined by financial prowess, rather they are identified foremost by their skill or their ability. If a member experiences financial failure or crisis, his or her membership identity would not necessarily be jeopardized, as in the case of a straight savings group.

Biblically, this may be supported by affirming equality as created beings and beloved children (Ps 139; 1 Cor 12). From a theological perspective, all people—men and women—bear the image of God (Gen 1:26–30), giving the created individual great worth. To emphasize the value of life, God remarked on human lifeblood and declared that he will “demand an accounting for the life of his fellow person...for in the image of God has God made man and woman” (Gen 9:4-6). Human beings are intrinsically precious and require an appropriate reverence and respect (Jas 3:9) which translates to humility, hospitality, forgiveness, encouragement, and so on. Before addressing people’s changing conditions or circumstances, individuals must be regarded as valuable and with mutual respect. The affirmation of people’s dignity is preeminent
and conditions of need ought to be regarded as assaults on a person’s dignity rather than an identification. For God did not create humans out of a root of need or lack, but out of a core gift. It is understandable to see why co-op groups founded on a principal need (lack of cash, lack of skills, etc.) lack the strength to weather shame and adversity, for they are communities with a disempowered identity. Rather, biblical people groups are led forward and called by their shared, affirmative identity to act upon a needful action. Frequently, the appeal is based on family or blood ties, using the terms “brothers” or “house” (2 Sam 7; Neh 5; Ps 135; Acts 2) or invoking the names of forefathers or even naming the group by ancestral lineage (Abraham, Israelites, Levites, etc.). On other occasions, the appeal is based on a shared common history, reminding the Israelites of their deliverance out of Egypt (Lev 25:38; Ex 13; Ps 105), exile and subsequent redemption, monuments or even the Lord’s supper (1 Sam 7; 1 Cor 11). Another compelling point of unification is for common vision and faith that draws people forward, as in the case of the Promised Land, rebuilding, or common faith and hope in Jesus (Ex 11:1–3; Ezra; John 17), which asserts a positive direction for the group identity. A notable case is the story of the Daughters of Zelophehad (Num 27:1-11; 36:2-12; Josh 17:3, 4) who, on behalf of their father’s name and lineage, petitioned Moses and Joshua for a share of property as inheritance, since their father bore no sons. Their sense of honor and heritage emboldened them to make their plea and acquire what was necessary for their livelihoods. And, ultimately, they changed rabbinical law regarding women and inheritance rights. The centering of a cooperative group around a distinguishable, positive common group characteristic is both empowering for action and fosters relational attachment. A compelling and dignifying group identity establishes grounds for healthy pride, and sets the cooperative in a direction towards positive advancement.

Secondly, repayment and personal failure must be considered not only as possibilities, but as inevitabilities. Crisis, hardship, and personal failure are to be expected. According to UNESCAP regarding the failure of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in general, half of all new companies close within the first two
years. Furthermore, the start-up phase for entrepreneurial enterprises is usually 3.5 years (or 42 months) in which most young companies tend to fail (UNESCAP 2009). It would be naive to believe that low-income cooperative groups are immune to the challenges affecting small businesses in general. Rather, if the expectation that obstacles, challenges, and inevitable failure and crisis were expressed from the beginning, there may be greater hope for sustainability through contingency plans, buffers, and acceptance of disappointment. Specifically regarding cooperative saving groups, failure to repay debt often results in irremediable shame and uncertain fate of the whole group as membership is unstable. If, however, from the outset, the group assumes that they will face individuals’ problems corporately, the shame may be ameliorated and they may be able to both address problems as well as remain intact as a group. As a negative instance, within the Samaki Pattana land cooperative, truant neighbors are regarded as outsiders and the leaders of the group are disconnected relationally. Because it was not expected or projected, there was no subsequent plan to pursue reconciliation nor collective assistance to those in crisis, further resulting in greater distancing.

From a Christian perspective, failure should not come as a surprise and failure itself is an essential concept of faith in salvation. The provisions for restitution, atonement, and forgiveness in both Old and New Testament underlie a fundamental understanding that people commit wrongs and fail (Ex 22: 1-17; Lev 16; Mark 14:27-31). However, the acknowledgement of failure can be viewed as constructive rather than despairing. First, acceptance of fallibility is unifying. Second, it can be freeing. In Romans 3:9–20, Paul points out the absurdity of divisions between Jews and Gentiles because of the universality of sin. In Christ, all are recipients of the same grace and forgiveness. In the same vein, Paul also addresses an attitude of fatalism later in chapter 6: “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” The acceptance of failure leads progressively towards renewal. Biblically, that renewal is transformation to “righteousness” and “eternal life in Christ.” But as God prescribed a solution for redemption, so should we as Christian MEDs³ not only acknowledge failure, but also offer a prescription
for reconciliation and restoration. In practical terms, perhaps we may translate those concepts of restoration to mean “renovation,” “security,” and “positive direction.” Renovation expresses the reflective learning process as a means to grow and innovate both personally and corporately; security reaffirms relational preservation and positive direction as members draw toward a common hope.

The moral support of the CILC model serves as an example for social reconciliation and overcoming difficulty. And, as it stands, is one of the most key (and simple!) strategies for their work with informal laborers. Oftentimes, organizations attempt to prevent failure by prescribing negative consequences for policy offenders. While enforcement of mutually agreed-upon negative consequences is necessary for community health, the experience of personal failure should not be one that is avoided or minimized. If the shame can be lessened by the expectation of failure and crisis and the strength of relational support is bolstered in those crucial times, the group faces a better chance of survival and growth. Shame and crisis are common enough within poor communities and practical restoration is what is most longed for and yet often most elusive. Ergo, let us not ignore failure under the guise of “grace,” but let us facilitate and then guide the way towards redemption.

H. Michelle Kao is Servant Partner’s site leader in Bangkok, Thailand, where she also directs the Bangkok Internship, developing Thai and expat young people as learners and leaders in incarnational, urban-poor ministry. She is also pursuing an MA in Transformational Urban Leadership at Azusa Pacific University.

1. Thailand Baht.
2. This is an idiom for a person’s livelihood or source of income.
3. Microenterprise Development, or MED, is a development strategy that provides a broad package of financial services (savings, credit, and insurance) as well as other business development services (business training, marketing assistance, etc.) to entrepreneurs and the poor to enable them to operate their own productive economic activities, in David Busseau & Russell Mask, Christian Microenterprise Development (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 2.
Bibliography


Great Lakes Christian College and Urban Neighbours of Hope partner to offer a fully accredited minor towards a Bachelors Degree in Urban Ministry.

In 2012 Great Lakes Christian College and UNOH partnered to offer students and opportunity to receive 24 academic credit hours (a full minor) for participating in UNOH’s Submerge program.

Great Lakes is proud to be the only school in North America with a minor of this caliber. With the current urban population at more than 50 percent and the projected slum population of two billion by 2050, this new minor prepares students for urban ministry, not just with classroom theory but practical work.

Students earn credit by doing the very things that they study, all while living and growing in community with established UNOH workers. This year-long intensive program aims to:

• Provide and intense community mission experience that will infect students with the passions, ideas, and actions of Jesus;
• Build foundations so the student’s life can mean something in a world facing poverty and injustice;
• Give a lived experience of UNOH’s ethos through community living, serving the poor and mentoring;
• Help discern if serving with UNOH in a long-term, full-time vocation is what he or she wants to pursue;
• Give a fresh start to a lifetime commitment to the poor and marginalized.

The program starts in Bangkok where all students spend two weeks together and then go their separate ways in one of four UNOH communities (Bangkok, Melbourne, Sydney, or Auckland) to do their formal class studies and practical work.

The units of study for the minor are;

• Radical Discipleship
• Theology and Practice of Community Living
• Love and Justice
• Engaging the Bible among the Poor
• Christian Community Work
• Practical Work

If you have questions or are interested in learning more about the program please contact:

Dr. Ash Barker - ashbarker@unoh.org  www.unoh.org
Dr. Kendi Howells Douglas - kdouglas@glcc.edu  www.glcc.edu

www.newurbanworld.org
Michelle Kao’s investigation of the ups and downs of the co-op movement in reference to the working poor and informal sector in Thailand is enlightening as it looks at the impacts and possible strengths of co-ops. Looking at ancient national history and reaching from the days of Thai royal and feudal beginnings, and running up to the current populist democratic government that now carries on and actually still extends by proxy—for better or worse—the arguably strongest democratic movement in modern Thai history, the rise and now subterfuge reign of Taksin Shinawatra.

Undoubtedly, Taksinomics and Thaksinocracy have fully eclipsed all ongoing business and politics as usual in the kingdom. Granted in this context, as Ms. Kao rightly points out, there has certainly been no opportunity to see a Thai iteration arise of Muhammad Yunus’ *The Grameen Bank*. The closest program ever to surface was actually a central populist government policy of the “Thai Rak Thai” party of Thaksin. It was dubbed *The Peoples Bank* and was essentially a grand extension of the massive Government Savings Bank (GSB, existing since 1947) and ran alongside the nationwide populist policy of “The Million Baht Fund.” Indeed, the major 2005 conference¹ was Taksin’s clear signal to the nation and the world that his administration had the issues of grassroots economics fully in hand.

As the leader of a small MFI, *Step Ahead*, running in Bangkok’s largest slum community of Klong Toey, I was invited to join the show with the likes of Grameen’s eminent Professor Yunus and other global microfinance leaders. Admittedly, I enjoyed the opportunity to have dinner at the Government House with the Prime Minister himself, and the rest, but it was clear that the team was putting all on notice that the playing fields were all reserved by the Thai government itself.
Therefore, it seems apparent that historical grassroots economic movements like co-ops and the possibility of significant economic social impact via major microfinance institutions, as have occurred across many other majority world Asian nations like Bangladesh and the Philippines, simply were precluded because of the Thai political realm established and holding over the last decade.

Even so, it is still true that various co-ops and indeed Savings and Credit Co-ops are yet playing an ongoing important, if limited role, for the poorer communities across the country, in spite of these massive political movements. Perhaps this is the case as since 1966 when the government established the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC) as a state enterprise under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance.

All this finally can be seen as something of a double-edged sword as it remains ever less likely that any external players will have significant impact in grassroots economics; it still is true that the swords are available for good use by the people and also by those of us who desire God’s best for those whom we might call “the least of these.” If for nothing else, the use of these tools can help mitigate against the ubiquitous and onerous moneylender. Further, if we will appropriately use the GSB, the BAAC, and the very positively motivated “Center for Informal Labor Cooperatives” and others like it to help us as we seek to display God’s love through our work in poor and distressed communities across the kingdom, we may discover that God is still able to put a coin in any fish’s mouth he chooses. What’s more, if we are wise we may have faith and dare to look to discover the coins—the funding that can be available for those needing provision and opportunity as well as us who serve with a desire to pursue economic shalom.

John H. Quinley, Jr. is the Founder and CEO of Step Ahead: Integrated Community Development (www.stepaheadmed.org). Step Ahead seeks to bring breakthrough entrepreneurial solutions through microenterprise development, mentoring, and training. John’s passion is to see increased economic and personal development opportunities for the working poor, people in crisis, and disadvantaged or at-risk situations.

1. The conference was hosted by the Government Savings Bank of Thailand and co-sponsored by the Secretariat of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Finance, and other Thai government ministries and agencies. See Empowering the Grassroots Economy: Microfinance for Growth and Happiness.
When it comes to reading Scripture, most of us know there are 2000 verses that talk about God’s care for the poor and the marginalized… so for this morning I decided that we’re just going to walk through each one of those!

Actually, I thought it might be fun to do something a little different, at least for me. I don’t know how many of you do Lectio Divina? It’s an ancient way of reading Scripture. It’s hundreds of years old and it’s where you contemplatively and prayerfully read it three or so times together and take different things out of it each time. This is a variation of it. What I want to do this morning is read a text that is pretty familiar to us from Luke’s Gospel. I want to offer a retelling of it in two instances, one from our neighborhood and one from outside, which might invite us into the story today. We’ll have three different readings from Luke’s Gospel of the Good Samaritan:

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said,
‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” (Luke 10.30–36, NIV).

As we listen to the story just as Jesus told it, some things that jump out at me are, first of all, that it’s one of the most scandalous stories, where Jesus is like “I’ve got one for you, the religious folks walk by, and then a Samaritan!” And then everyone is like, “Whoa, a Samaritan?” — the one that they don’t even talk to, the one they shun — “That’s the one who went into the ditch and brought the beat up person out?”

According to Sister Joan Chittister, constantly in Jesus’ teaching you can see that he is challenging the chosen and including the excluded. That challenge to the chosen — the religious folks — does nothing. The Samaritans — who were shunned both partly because of their race, religion, and how they thought of God — were ostracized in the whole community, yet they are the ones celebrated as the heroes of the story! As I think of that, there’s also something that comes to mind. One of my elders said, if the devil can’t steal your soul, he might just keep you busy with church work! We don’t know what the religious folks were doing; maybe they were late to a trustee meeting or going to serve in the soup kitchen, but they were too busy to be interrupted. It occurs to me that this is the case so much of the time: we are too busy to be interrupted and this story — and half of the gospel — is about being interrupted and about our patterns. For example, when Jesus is on his way somewhere and somebody pulls on his shirt or they say, “My sister is dying” or “We just ran out of wine at our wedding… can you help a brother out?” That interruption is what the gospel is made of and it’s what this story is about. The strange thing is, people get beat up at the most inconvenient times, don’t they? The call is that we have to allow ourselves to be interrupted by injustice and pain. And yet as we continue this work, we have less and less space for interruption; we get our rhythms and schedules down, our programs and nonprofits and NGOs; and our work has a space, a category, a compartment; and yet the Spirit moves inside and outside of that, so we always have got to be ready.
In our community in Philadelphia, it started with an interruption. I’m thankful that we were students in the suburbs, studying theology, and, all of a sudden, we saw on the front page of the newspaper that there were groups of homeless families living in this abandoned cathedral in Philadelphia. They were getting evicted. The story explained that they were given 48 hours to get out. If they weren’t out of this abandoned Catholic cathedral, they could be arrested for trespassing on church property. And we were interrupted. Something in us didn’t feel right about that. There are those times you throw your hands up at God and say, “Why don’t you do something?” and he says, “I did, I made you! Get out! You’re the one passing the person in the ditch.” Maybe you’re the answer to your prayer.

What also strikes me in this verse is that this story would not have been told if the Samaritan had not been walking down the road where people get beat up. So often we move our lives away from the suffering of the world; we don’t want to walk down the roads where people get beat up. Yet that’s what the gospel is all about: Jesus moving into the neighborhood—a neighborhood from which people said nothing good could come. Jesus knew suffering from the moment he entered into the world until he died on the cross. He entered into the pain and the suffering. It’s that story that calls us to an inertia different from the pattern of the world, to move out of suffering; the gospel calls us into it.

There’s so many ways we can insulate ourselves from people who get beat up in the ditch. Subtle ways that sometimes even our programs and charities become ways that we no longer encounter people but that we run stuff. That call to the personal is what I love about the work that so many of you are doing. I love the title of Ash Barker’s book, *Make Poverty Personal*. We get all excited about making poverty history, but we can’t do that until we make it personal, until we have the courage to respond and walk in the places that people get beat up, where everyone and everything will tell us to move out. There is a great song by a guy in the States, Derek Webb, where he says, “Thanks be to God, I am finally able to move up and out of Jesus’ neighborhood.” He’s talking about upward mobility, and as one preacher said, “We better be careful; if we are climbing
our way up the ladder to success, we might pass Jesus on his way down.” The call is to those places where people get beat up, where there is pain and suffering. Every one of those responses in Matthew 25 about the least of these are personal responses: when I was hungry, you fed me; when I was a stranger, you welcomed me; when I was in prison, you visited me. We always have to keep that call to make poverty personal at the heart of what we do.

The other thing that a friend pointed out to me about this story is about the person in the ditch. He has been stripped and left unconscious. My friend who is a Bible scholar says there are the two ways you can identify people: (1) by the clothes on their back, so you can see where they are from; and (2) by their language and their dialect. So you have a person who is stripped of their identity and left in the ditch, which leaves us with this: we have no idea who this person is who got beat up except that they are a human being, a child of God, of unbelievable value, and precious. We don’t know the person’s religion, sexual identity, who he or she voted for in the last election… just a human being beat up in the ditch. Our call is to respond.

What I love about the way that the Samaritan responded is that he took his time and his own donkey (everything he had), and put the guy on it. That call is to take whatever we have and offer it to God and to the suffering of the world and say, “God do something, with what little we have, we give it to you.” I love how Frederick Buechner said we have to take our deepest passions and connect them to the world’s deepest pain. Whether it’s a donkey or a cooking degree, that’s what we are to offer up to God, and we see it used to heal and to redeem; we see God work through the gifts that we have. So these are the things that jumped out to me with the first reading.

On to the second reading of this text: I want to offer it to you from the context of our little world in Philly. It was about midnight a couple of years ago when we heard the gunshots ring out; they sounded really close. My friend and I were nearly asleep and we jumped up, came out the front door, only to see a young teenager fall on the steps with bullet wounds in his body. We didn't know what else to do but hold his hands, whisper to him that he is precious, that he is beloved. I prayed the Lord’s Prayer with him.
He’s just shaking and we’re waiting for the ambulance to come. Finally it does; he’s put in the ambulance. The next morning we find out he died. Something happened in our neighborhood: we’ve had a lot of gunshots, we’ve had a fair amount of murders, and this one shook everyone. Stuff started happening. It’s amazing because within weeks, we had a movement of neighbors and advocates calling attention to the problem of gun violence in our city. There have been news stories calling our city ‘killedelphia’ as we had almost a homicide a day, over 300 gun murders in 2012. This is an epidemic in our country. We have over 10,000 homicides a year largely to gun murder, and it’s the largest killer of young people and teenagers—second to car accidents. As you look at that, there comes a point where we did lift this young man off the streets, but part of God’s integral mission is that we begin to ask questions: what is causing people to end up beat on the road to Jericho? Let me offer Martin Luther King, Jr.’s words as we think of that: “On the one hand we are called to be the good Samaritan on the road side, but that may be only an initial act, one day we come to see, maybe the whole road to Jericho needs to be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life’s highway.”

Dr. King says, “True compassion is more than flinging a coin at a beggar, it’s not haphazard and superficial; it comes to see that an edifice, which produces victims, needs restructuring.” Amen.

That reading offers us the sense that we are to respond to those who get beat up, but after you see so many teenagers get shot and killed, you start to say, “Maybe the whole road to Jericho needs to be rethought.” Maybe we need to ask, “Where are the kids getting the guns?” We saw this in our city where there are a few notorious gun shops who were selling irresponsibly—just a few blocks from our house. They were notorious for selling over 200 guns in one year that were tracked to violence on our street. Those are places where we need to pray for God to move. We began prayer vigils outside the gun shops. We weren’t trying to shut the gun shops down, but we were trying to get them to change in order to solve the gun problem. We were just saying that we wanted the businesses to look more responsible; some did change. If
they changed their practices, we had a celebration; if they didn't, we had a protest and continued praying.

One of the most powerful services, on Good Friday, the kids in our neighborhood carried a cross to the gun shop, and hundreds of us gathered outside of the gun shop. Our teenagers carried the cross and they sat it outside of the gun shop on Good Friday. We connected the suffering of Jesus on the cross to the suffering on our streets. We listened to the gospel reading of the women weeping at the foot of the cross, and we heard women and men share their testimonies and stories of seeing their kids shot on the streets of Philly. There was something powerful that happened. We had good preaching too; he said it might be Friday now, but Sunday is coming. In the end of the story, Jesus triumphed over the sting of death, all that is evil, ugly, wicked in the world; he rose to show us that love conquers death and hatred. This one woman, as she had tears rolling down her face, said to me, “I get it. God understands my pain, because he watched his own son die a violent death.” I thought, that’s good theology. This is the God who comes in and enters our pain, walks our streets, moves into our neighborhoods, and understands deeply the oppression that our friends suffer every day.

It occurred to me that what’s so beautiful now is that many of the faith community throughout the United States are now raising attention to this issue. Many deeply committed out of their faith imagined what God’s kingdom would look like if it came to their neighborhood. It looks not like 300 young people getting killed in a year. What would it look like if God’s most perfect dream came in our neighborhood?

About one of those gun shops in Philly: there came a time when the religious community said we cannot just continue to let business as usual happen and they bowed down on their knees and gathered in front of the gun shop, literally putting their lives and bodies in the way of the flow of guns. They were eventually arrested, and for a nonviolent MLKJ-type demonstration they were brought to court in Philly. What was amazing was that it was in the paper. Schools were let out so kids could see justice at work. What was amazing was that through the course of the trial, each one of these
religious leaders from all different streams of faith shared why they did what they did. And that gun shop went on trial.

And that’s what Dr. King said: our job is to expose injustice that it becomes so uncomfortable that people have to respond. So the judge found all the religious leaders not guilty. In the ensuing days the gun shop owner was found guilty of trafficking illegal guns, his license was revoked, and the shop was shut down. It is a beautiful story.

We are also people of restorative justice, so we still believe that gun shop owner can do different. He can run a paint shop. In the end, God moves in the midst of this, and it’s when we respond. In that story, it wasn’t the religious folks, but the leaders in our city who stood up and said we will not allow our young people to continue to end up in the ditch. There are all kinds of different demons and principalities at work in our neighborhoods. This is not the story of every neighborhood. In fact, most of the world seems to be doing better at this than the United States. I think of Ray Bakke, the great urban theologian, who said that we talk a lot about exegeting Scripture, but we’ve also got to exegete our neighborhoods. We’ve got to read them with the eyes of the Spirit, to see where God is at work, where the devil is at work. As we exegete our neighborhood, gun violence is one of the principalities and powers we wrestle against. It is a spiritual battle; it is a battle we take on to the streets; we pray outside of the gun shops; we teach our kids nonviolence; and ask, “Where are they getting the guns?”

Finally, the third lens through which I want to invite you to see the story of the Good Samaritan is an experience that I had that transformed the way that I read this story. I think when we read stories we often have different eyes that we look at the story through. I always read the story as if I was the person that needed to lift the person out of the ditch. But then through this experience I began to see the story through the person in the ditch, rather than the person responding. It was right at the beginning of this story, almost exactly 10 years ago, when I was inspired by the Christian Peacemakers Team, and other doctors and nurses who had gone to Iraq to voice concern about the bombing and the war, and also a real missional innocence to go: “God loves you, we love you no matter what the United States government does
to your country. We want to be with you through that.” So we were there and we had no real idea that we would be there during the bombing, but we were in March 2003, 10 years ago. It was the shock and awe campaign: the bombing of Baghdad. We were there and I encountered some of the hardest things I had ever seen in my life. During the bombing, we lived there and volunteered at the hospitals. I also experienced things that spun my world upside-down. There was one worship service with Christians from all over Iraq and the Middle East. They had come together, we sang “Amazing Grace” in Arabic. Bishops from all denominations read a statement from the Christian church to all Muslim people saying,

_We want you to know that we love you; we come from the same dysfunctional family of Abraham and Sarah; we’re praying for peace._

I was so moved; tears were rolling down my face. And I went up to one of the bishops and said “this is amazing, I can’t believe there are so many Christians here,” and he said very gently, “Yeah, this is where Christianity started; that’s the Tigris River and the Euphrates over there, you heard of them? The Garden of Eden is right down the street, bro!” As we were leaving Baghdad, which is where the Samaritan story comes to play, we’re driving through that desert road from Baghdad to Amman, Jordan. Hours and hours of that sandy desert; it’s surreal. Bombs were falling, bridges were down, cars on fire. In this little entourage coming out of Baghdad, our car hit something in the road that popped the tire of our car, spun us off the road, and flipped our car over. All of us were injured. I was one of the least injured, and I had a separated shoulder. I was trying to gather us together. The car was on the side. Two of my friends had pretty bad head injuries; we get everybody somehow to the curb, and we’re sitting there as planes fly over, and wondering what do we do now. So we pray. I’m convinced that part of why so many of us Christians don’t see God at work, or see miracles in a very visible way, is because we are rarely in a place where we really need a miracle. This was one of those. We said, “God, you’re gonna have to do something in this desert, my water bottle is almost empty.” My two friends were very deeply injured. As we’re praying, we see the
first car coming down the road. It was the first car to come past us. It stops and these Iraqi guys come out and I try my best to explain in broken Arabic why we were there and what was happening. They smiled, wrapped their arms around us and put us in the car and drive us to the nearest town. As we get to this town, called Rutba, a small town of 20,000 like the town I grew up in, in East Tennessee. When we get there, it’s big news. The whole town gathers and they see that one friend was going into shock, who needed to get to the hospital. When we get there, the doctors are waving their hands in the air, screaming “why, why is this happening!”

They start naming everything that has been bombed in their town; one of the bombs hit the children’s ward, so the whole hospital was shut down. They couldn’t take us in there. They see our hearts sink, but they smile and say, “Don’t worry, we’ll still take care of you.” So they set up a little shanty clinic for each one of us. We had a bed. As they started taking care of us, folks start bringing gifts, blankets and food, and I’m so moved by all of this that, as we finally wrap it up, I start thinking I’ve got to thank these guys. My American mind thinks, money. So we collect Iraqi dinar and take it to the head of the hospital and say, “We just want to thank you,” and he says, “Then what is this? Keep your money and say ‘thank you.’ We don’t want your money, we just want you to know we love you. Just tell people the story of what we did for you, that’s all you can do to repay for us.” So we’ve been telling that story for almost 10 years. It’s been so inspirational for all of us, that my friends started a community in North Carolina called Rutba House to practice that same hospitality to lift people out of the ditch. It’s always been our dream to go back. So a couple of years ago we got to go back—it’s not easy to travel from the United States to Iraq. We get back to that town and we are given the most amazing welcome to that town; it’s like we were kings! They said, “We don’t get a lot of visitors and we haven’t had anyone visit us without guns since you were here before,” and then they said “You’ve got to know that there are a few people that might want to hurt you, but only a few, so we will protect you.” And I’m like “that does not fit into my theology, but we’re so grateful for your hospitality.” As we are there, it’s so
amazing. We share stories and we meet the doctors that had saved our lives 10 years ago; some of them came a long way to see us.

As we're sharing, the mayor of the town comes and says, “This is beautiful! This is what changes the world, we need a sister city between Rutba and the U.S.!” and I’m like “Philadelphia! It’s the city of love,” and the mayor is like, “No, no, it’s also a big city. We need a little town to be our sister city, have you ever heard of Durham, North Carolina… the only city I’ve ever been to in America. It reminded me of Rutba, I wonder if we could ever become a sister city of Durham, NC.” The Spirit moves in ways I can hardly even imagine. I don’t have a theological container for it all—that’s what the story’s all about: we can’t put containers around God, certainly the church is God’s primary instrument for bringing in the kingdom and yet God is not confined to Christians. If we read Scripture, God is at work. He can work through pagan kings and brothel owners, Samaritans, and politicians, and anybody in the world. So we pray that we would be the people that God would use. One of my friends even said, “There’s that old story in the Old Testament where God speaks to Balaam through his ass, his donkey, and he said God spoke to him through his ass and he’s been speaking through asses ever since.” If God should chose to use us, we shouldn’t think too highly of ourselves, and if we look at someone else and think God could never use them, we better think twice, because God is big and God is bigger than the confines of our imagination.

So as we find ourselves now in that story after a few ways of retelling it, I don’t know if you find yourself seeing the story as the person beat up in the ditch, when all the religious folks have abandoned you, or the religious folks who are on their way somewhere or fearful and pass by on the other side, or maybe you’re the Samaritan who is worn out because you have lifted so many people out of the ditch, or maybe the innkeeper who has helped from a distance. It’s my prayer that we would allow God to move in us, that we would pray that God would give us eyes to see those who are wounded, beat up, and that he would give us imagination to collaborate with the innkeepers and those who have tools that we may not have on our own. Because it’s
the story of community, that's what this ISUM gathering is about. We can do more together than we can on our own; we need each other; we see God move where two or three of us come together. There are 38,000 different denominations in the church, and yet Jesus’ prayer is that we would be one as God is one. That is my prayer this weekend as we gather: that we would feel that unity, that we would feel God speak to us and among us, that we may not all see everything through the same lens.

Let me close with something that one of my mentors, Dr. John Perkins, said,

> We’ve all heard that saying, give someone a fish and they’ll eat for a day, teach them to fish, they’ll eat for the rest of their life. We’ve also got to ask: who owns the pond? Why have gates been built up around the pond? Why is there pollution in the pond that has poisoned the fish? Why does a fishing license cost so much?

So that’s the work of integral mission: it is responding to people who are hungry, and offering food. We have brothers and sisters in the neighborhood that are hungry, so obviously we’re going to share food. We’re also going to try to create jobs, so they can provide for their own families and have dignity in themselves. And we’re also going to ask the questions of the systematic stuff, the principalities and powers that are landing people in the ditch over and over… that’s what it means to be the church. All of us may not do every one of these the same, but we can see more fully as a body than any of us can on our own. May we be one as God is one.

**Prayer:**

*Oh God, we thank you for your word that invites us to see you and your movement in the world, and to see our world with new eyes.*

*Pray that you would continue to meet with us this weekend, that you would speak to us through one another, through your Spirit moving in the midst.*

*We pray that we would be people who interrupt injustice and allow ourselves to be stirred with compassion when we see someone who is hurting.*
We pray that we would indeed be integral in the work that we do and seek your Spirit with all that we are, and know that your hands are bigger than our hands. And yet also know that you want our hands and want our gifts and you want our passions.

So let us see the kingdom that is within us and among us, and let us seek your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us the eyes to see you at work in the world and the courage to respond.

We love you Jesus, in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Shane Claiborne graduated from Eastern University and did graduate work at Princeton Seminary. His ministry experience is varied, from a 10-week stint working alongside Mother Teresa in Calcutta, to a year spent serving a wealthy mega-congregation at Willow Creek Community Church outside Chicago. During the recent war in Iraq, Shane spent three weeks in Baghdad with the Iraq Peace Team. Shane is also a founding partner of The Simple Way, a faith community in inner-city Philadelphia that has helped birth and connect radical faith communities around the world. He is featured in the DVD series Another World Is Possible and is the author of the several books including The Irresistible Revolution, Jesus for President, and Becoming the Answer to Our Prayers.
Response to Shane Claiborne

LESSONS FROM THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Ruth Callanta

This article’s refreshing take on the story of the Good Samaritan is commendable. Shane Claiborne’s *Lectio Divina* variation of reading and listening to the text has aptly combined the implications of the story’s original setting to the situations of the modern-day readers. Thus, he was able to draw out how the story challenges religious expectations then and now, turning the assumed value system upside down. Samaritans are outside the Jewish ambit of good!

Modern day religious ought to hear the lessons the author drew out from the reaction of the religious character in the story. “We are too busy to be interrupted.” He rightly pointed out that often in the gospel Jesus’ ministry arose from interruptions. Can it be that our programs and charities (our services) have “become ways that we no longer encounter people”? And for those of us who are in the ministry, this is short of tragic. As Claiborne pointed out, Jesus’ “call is to places where people get beat up, where there is pain and suffering,” to respond to someone we don’t know who is in dire need (the man in the story who is stripped of his clothes) with everything that we had like the Good Samaritan. These alone are life lessons, but the author showed us more.

Sharing his neighborhood experience about gun violence in Philadelphia, the author takes the lessons to the next level. His hypothetical reflection, “maybe the whole road to Jericho needs to get rethought,” is no longer hypothetical in our time. A lot of people get beaten up (in the crowded slums in the cities), a lot of kids get shot (their experience in Philly), a lot of people get hungry (the experience of the Majority World), and so on. The author subtly challenges us to address the structure that fosters the social injustice and evil around us. We need to rethink the road to Jericho. But before we lose ourselves in the enormity of addressing social injustice in the world,
the author brings us back again to the story and to the only place where each of us ought to start—we are the victim in the story. It is only from this perspective where we can overcome our prejudices—as Claiborne demonstrates as an American trying to thank his Iraqi saviors—and where we can learn the necessary sensitivity in addressing the deep problems of our world. No wonder this very sensitive reading of the story!

It is with the sensitivity that we have learned in our own ministry in Center for Community Transformation (CCT) that I would like to add another take to the story. We have learned that a lot of rich, well-meaning Christians are more than willing to be the Good Samaritan in the story; they just don’t know how and are afraid. A lot of them can easily see themselves as the priest and/or the Levite in the story. As their brothers/sisters in Christ, let us be sensitive to their own struggles to be faithful. We need to help them overcome their prejudices, their fears, and their lack of knowledge. Sometimes all it takes is a program that enables them to contribute in their unique way and the rest will follow. In CCT we now have mentors, rich Christian entrepreneurs, who visit the slums and even the garbage dump to meet with the poor entrepreneurs they are helping, sharing not only their business know-how but also their lives. They testify of how much they too have learned. It is in this way that we can begin to build communities like that of the Lord (Luke 8:1–3) and that of the early Christians in the book of Acts (2:42–47; 4:32–37).

Dr. Ruth Callanta has been involved in social transformation and social development work for more than 40 years. In 1992, she founded the Center for Community Transformation which has since evolved into a group of ministries that reaches out to the entrepreneurial poor, the homeless, poor children and youth, landless agricultural workers, and informal service workers through integrated services that include feeding, basic healthcare, access to savings and life insurance, vocational skills training, and microfinance. Undergirding all activities of the CCT Group is a strong spiritual development component expressed through evangelism, discipleship, and church planting activities.
The area of Possilpark in Glasgow is marked by the presence of large areas of degraded brownfield sites, a legacy of the old Saracen Foundry. Polluted, undeveloped land, in fact, is most prevalent in the poorer areas of Glasgow and presents one of the most intractable problems for the governance and wellbeing of the city. Seen in this light, brownfield rehabilitation has become the locus of meaningful missional engagement for Clay Community Church (CCC), a new charismatic-evangelical church plant in Possilpark. As a church committed to a contextual approach to outworking the gospel, seeking the transformation of brownfield sites has emerged as a major strand of its missional work. As part of an evaluation of the work, an Action Plan has been drawn up using Action Research by a working group from the church. This pioneering work has now been continuing for a number of years. In this article, Paul Ede, a founding leader of the Community Church, reflects on the implications of this Action Plan and project in the light of Christological, Trinitarian and biblical considerations.

Christology

The Action Plan drawn up for the brownfield rehabilitation project expressed the desire ‘to keep ourselves in perspective regarding our environmental work’. This arose from the realisation that it is God, ultimately, who redeems the land and the people of Possil, not us. Retaining a focus on Christ as the redeemer, moreover, was put in place for several practical reasons. First, it prevents the danger that a ‘God-complex’ should develop in Clay Church’s perception of its mission.¹ Focusing on Christ as redeemer is

* This article was previously published in Theology in Scotland 19, no. 1 (2012): 63-77. The editors of NUW have retained the article as close as possible to its original version.
a key way to make sure that practitioners within CCC retain an appropriate self-image and power-relinquishing humility towards Possil’s land and people. In terms of the values of the church, this reinforces the capacity to work ‘with’ not just ‘for’ the people and non-human creation of Possil. Secondly, focussing on Christ as redeemer calls us constantly back to faithful practice, so that this work does not simply degenerate into an amusing hobby or pastime, devoid of Kingdom orientation. Third, it places Christ as the sustainer of the mission of the people of God at the heart of what we do, ensuring the capacity to pace ourselves in the long-term.

These convictions demonstrate the intuitive understanding among research participants that CCC’s praxis of brownfield rehabilitation must primarily be rooted in the salvific work of Christ. Willis Jenkins has opined that Christian environmental ethics has tended to base its foundation on renewed forms of creation theology and the realignment to a theistic worldview. He claims this tends to happen to the exclusion of soteriology and Christology. But, Jenkins asks, ‘Why should Christian theologians talk about nature and worldviews when Christianity centers around talk of nature and grace?’ Faced with the choice between the bio-centrism of Deep Ecology and the anthropocentrism of the conservation movement, many Christian environmental ethicists (including Michael Northcott) suggest a shift to theo-centrism as the way to relativise the centrality of either nature or man to the detriment of the other. While acknowledging the importance of the shift, Jenkins critiques this tendency for not drawing deeply on the rich soteriological traditions of the Christian faith. He was spurred to make these observations through his study of Majority World practical eco-theologies, including a group of revivalist tree-planters in Uganda.

Following Loren Wilkinson, Stephen Bouma-Prediger’s ecological Christology suggests that the idea of Christ as the new Adam is the most helpful metaphor of the atonement with regards to environmental mission because it ‘does the most justice to the full New Testament teaching of Christ’s involvement in the cosmos both as Creator and Redeemer’. In light of CCC’s experience of brownfield rehabilitation, we can perhaps go even further and say that Christ is the New Gardener.
was once given the cultural mandate to care for creation, but failed (Gen 1:28; 2:15), so Christ as the new Adam becomes the truly faithful Gardener who will faithfully fulfil that mandate. It is intriguing to note here the question as to whether there were deliberately ironic undertones to Mary’s mistaking of the risen Christ for a gardener (John 20:15). Christ not only renews creation in its ultimate glory as the renewed Jerusalem-as-garden-city (Rev 21), but also sends his Church by his Spirit amidst today’s cities to anticipate and concretise the reconciliation of nature and culture implied in that vision. It is nestled in this Christological understanding that CCC can faithfully outwork the implications of the Christian vision of the redemption of nature and culture through its contemporary context of brownfield rehabilitation in Possilpark.

**Keeping the Trinity at the heart of the work**

The image of Christ as the New Gardener, however, must be balanced with similar biblical images of the Spirit and the Father. The former as the one who brooded over creation (Gen 1:2) and descends to empower the new ‘Gardener-disciples’ at Pentecost (Acts 2); the latter as the one who tends the vineyard in which Christ is the vine and the Church its branches (John 15:1). In this we are reminded that Christology is always inherently Trinitarian.9 The doctrine of God and pneumatology (particularly in the form of the doctrine of missio-dei)10 must therefore shape a missional Christology. In *The One, the Three and the Many*, Colin Gunton puts forward the thesis that a Trinitarian, relational theory of creation is foundational to reconstructing the distorted understanding of nature promulgated by modernity.

In terms of urban greenspace, Jane Jacobs has sought to counteract the influence of both Romantic sentimentalism (through the urban parks movement) and enlightenment instrumentality (through modernist city design and planning) by turning to systems thinking. This move is rooted in an intuitive understanding of how multi-faceted inter-relationships combine to uniquely shape each instance of urban greenspace. Studying relationships between periphery and centre, between desire-lines and exits, between geology and identity, is critical to understanding essence, form
and function. To this must be added an understanding of how human interactions with one another and with the land shape a given urban space. Jacobs’ embracing of ordered complexity as a mode of thinking that seeks to take seriously the way that inter-relationships are foundational to greenspace construction, reveals a desire to move beyond the false quasi-divination of nature and the opposite urge to instrumentalise it. This concern was shared by Colin Gunton, as James Houston points out:

*The loss of this relatedness leads to the modern plight of ‘disengagement’ and of ‘instrumentality’ in our attitudes to reality, so it was in concern for the relational recovery of truth and reality that Gunton wanted to explore a Trinitarian understanding of creation.*

What Jacobs intuited about greenspace design, Gunton explicates theologically. To Gunton, modernity was the product of a rejection during the Enlightenment of a narrow theism that portrayed God in monistic terms. This narrow theism had abandoned notions of God’s immanence in creation through the incarnation and the Spirit. In turn, the false monist portrayal of God was perceived to suppress human individuation, and so it was concluded that the very concept of a transcendent God must be rejected. As a result, it was suggested (bifurcatedly) that human freedom could be found both in the exaltation of the natural world to the space of transcendence (Rousseau) *and* through humanity’s dominance over nature (Kant). Taking the anthropocentric logic of both together, a simultaneous severing of humanity’s relationship to God and creation is observed. Modernity not only alienated humans from nature (as also observed by Louv and Northcott), it also alienated humans from God.

Gunton’s solution is to recover a more accurate understanding of God’s relationship to the created order than the false conception rejected by modernity. In so doing, he heals modernity’s conceptual severance between man, land/nature, and God. Gunton offers a third way beyond the nature-culture dualism promulgated by modern thought. This involves rediscovering the true nature and activity of the triune Godhead in what Gunton calls an ‘open transcendentalism’, characterised by the concepts of perichoresis, substantiality, and relationality. Of particular interest is Gunton’s
concept of *substantiality*, by which he asserts that our freedom can be discovered as the Holy Spirit reveals our substance in relationship to God’s purposes for creation. True freedom is not discovered in the immanent order alone, but in the convergence of immanence and transcendence amidst nature as the Holy Spirit draws humankind and creation towards their eschatological end.

The reality that the Holy Spirit brings the transcendent into our immediate immanent experience as part of his role in drawing humankind and creation to their eschatological end (Ps 104:30) is the pneumatological counterpart (in terms of a Trinitarian creation theology) of Willis Jenkins’ Christological assertion of Christ’s role as the mediator of salvation to the cosmos. Tony Campolo offers a similar reading of John 3:16. One way to explore Trinitarian creation theology (and by implication ‘new creation’ theology) from a pneumatological angle is to ask the question, ‘to what extent is the Spirit of Pentecost the same Spirit that brooded over the waters of creation?’ The obvious answer belies the point of the question. It serves to make connections between creation, redemption and the activity of the Spirit that are almost never made in charismatic churches in the West. Could this be because the Western charismatic movement (and perhaps also global Pentecostalism – as far as it has been exposed to Western thought) has remained overly syncretised with modernity? It is interesting, for example, that in their recent global review of progressive Pentecostalism engaged in social action, Miller and Yamamori’s list of eight types of social ministries does not include any mention of ecological mission. The *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* defines the charismatic movement as:

> the occurrence of distinctively Pentecostal blessings and phenomena, baptism in the Holy Spirit with the spiritual gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 outside a denominational and/or confessional Pentecostal framework.

In light of Gunton’s work, this definition seems overly anthropocentric and rooted in the work of the Spirit only as redemptor of humanity rather than creator/redeemer of the cosmos.
Indigenous forms of Spirit-led environmental mission have, however, emerged in contexts less influenced by the modern worldview. Inus Daneel describes the work of ZIRRCON in the 1980s in such terms. In 1988 ZIRRCON set up a network of African Independent Churches to support them as they developed a response to the ecological devastation of Zimbabwe. They were particularly concerned with afforestation, the protection of water resources, and wildlife conservation, and they developed an innovative set of liturgical practices and theological insights to support that mission. There was a focus on the Holy Spirit as ‘Earthkeeping Spirit’, devoted not only to the healing of humanity but also to the healing of the land. A new tree-planting Eucharist was developed, encoding the honouring of God as the first planter of trees in Genesis. This bound the praxis of ecological mission to the heart of the church’s liturgical life, and simultaneously celebrated the immanence and transcendence of the Gardener-Christ. In addition, the Eucharist became a place of the ‘blending of healing–of humans and of the land’. Daneel continues: ‘In such blending the interpenetration between Son and Holy Spirit is evident. Ritually, therefore, Christology and pneumatology become one, as Africa enacts the conviction that “the Spirit always brings the activity of the Son to its goal” (Moltmann). In evidence here is a full-orbed understanding of the work of the Spirit that re-establishes the connection between his work in Genesis, Acts, and Revelation. Tellingly, Daneel’s reaction to this new missiology was to admit that ‘no longer could I maintain the Western dualism of spiritual as opposed to physical reality. African holism became the hermeneutic for theological reorientation.’ A similar holism, much closer to home, can be found in Scotland’s pre-modern heritage of Celtic Christianity, which combined a strong Trinitarian focus with a rich theology of creation.

Other examples of the praxis of environmental mission in an African context include the work of the recently deceased Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai who in 1977 set up a tree-planting movement among Kenyan women called the Greenbelt Movement. She helped transform the attitudes of Kenyan churches
towards environmental mission by encouraging them to celebrate Easter Monday with the planting of trees:

If we could make that Monday a day of regeneration, revival, of being reborn, of finding salvation by restoring the Earth, it would be a great celebration of Christ’s resurrection. After all, Christ was crucified on the cross. In a light touch, I always say, somebody had to go into the forest, cut a tree, and chop it up for Jesus to be crucified. What a great celebration of his conquering [death] it would be if we were to plant trees on Easter Monday in thanksgiving.\(^{27}\)

Of particular interest in the context of this report is the fact that Maathai’s movement began in an urban context with the planting of seven trees at a public park in Nairobi. Fifteen years later, Tony Campolo was encouraging evangelical Christians in Western cities to engage in urban tree planting as a legitimate form of environmental mission:

The big cities of America are, for the most part, on the verge of bankruptcy. As these cities cut their spending, one of the first things to go is any ongoing program to plant trees. ‘But trees are a fundamental building block of a healthy urban environment,’ says Dan Smith of the American Forestry Association [...] This kind of tree planting is a whole new kind of missionary work for urban Christians. It becomes a way for the church to say ‘we care’ to the rest of the community and for Christians to live out their calling to rescue dying creation.\(^{28}\)

Returning to Jane Jacobs, from a Christian perspective we realise that a relational understanding of human interaction with urban greenspace cannot be truly humanising without also reconnecting people to the three-in-one Godhead who is the relational foundation of all being. Systems theory remains a helpful tool for greenspace development, but it must be grounded in a robust theology of the Trinity to be truly faithful. The relationships between humans and the urban environment are held together by the One in whom all relationships find their source.
In summary, we can see how the praxis of African Christian ecological mission, illumined by Jenkins, Gunton and Daneel, can point beyond Jacobs to an innovative form of Trinitarian and Spirit-led ecological mission appropriate for urban greenspace development in Western cities.

**Cities and the healing of the land – biblical theology**

The question might well be asked, however, ‘if environmental mission is legitimate why don’t we see more of it in the Bible?’ What follows is a necessarily short answer to the question, rooted in biblical narratives from 2 Chronicles, 2 Kings, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Psalm 87, Romans 8, and Revelation 21. The intent is to lay the foundation of a holistic biblical theology for urban eco-mission. One caveat, however, is of utmost importance: while we now read the scriptures from the perspective of significant power over nature, the opposite was the case in biblical times. As Richard Bauckham writes: ‘Whereas for us the healing of the relationship between humans and the rest of creation most obviously suggests that humans stop destroying nature, for them it most obviously suggested that nature be friendlier to humans (so, e.g. Isa 11:6–9).’29 Walter Brueggemann nevertheless states that ‘the matter of creation as healthy environment is unavoidably implicit everywhere in the Old Testament.’30

The promise of 2 Chronicles 7:14 is very familiar in charismatic church circles:

```
if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray
and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from
heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (NIV)
```

The last four words of this verse, however, tend to be used as a biblical foundation for prayer seeking structural change and the establishment of the presence of Yahweh above the powers, rather than a mandate to seek ecological healing. This is another sign, perhaps, of modernity’s successful severing of the connection between God’s people and creation in the Western world. Much less well known than 2 Chronicles 7:14 is a short passage describing the ministry of Elisha in that perfectly illustrates an ecological outworking of this promise:
The people of the city said to Elisha, “Look, our lord, this town is well situated, as you can see, but the water is bad and the land is unproductive.”

“Bring me a new bowl,” he said, “and put salt in it.” So they brought it to him.

Then he went out to the spring and threw the salt into it, saying, “This is what the Lord says: ‘I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.’” And the water has remained pure to this day, according to the word Elisha had spoken. (2 Kgs 2:19–22 NIV)

Here we see an example of Daneel’s Earthkeeping Spirit at work in an urban context (Jericho), healing the degradation of the land. The actual causes are not named. In this healing miracle an anthropocentric benefit occurs but the vector is creational. Note particularly the use of the Hebrew word rapha (to mend, cure or make whole) with reference to the water of the well. This is exactly the same word used of the land in the Chronicles passage. T. R. Hobbs notes that the use of salt as a healing agent is ‘unknown elsewhere in the OT.’ Was it this passage that Christ had in mind when he told his disciples ‘You are the salt of the earth’ (Matt 5:13)? And if so, how might this insight shape urban mission today? If nothing else, this passage reminds us that the coming Sabbath rest for the land promised by the Lord of the Sabbath, Christ, will result in sustainable land usage, be it the restriction of unjust over-production (encoded in the Jubilee laws of Leviticus 25:4) or the reversal of unjust disuse, as anticipated here.

In Ezekiel 47 a similar elemental rejuvenation of earth by water occurs as the Spirit, flowing from the Temple of Jerusalem, brings life to the land of the Dead Sea. Often read in charismatic and Pentecostal circles after an anthropocentric and gift-oriented pattern, this passage can also be read as a model of ecological renewal rooted in the resurrection of the city by means of a renewed Temple. The former approach usually asks the ‘renewal question’: ‘how deep have we gone into the water?’ (meaning by this ‘how deeply have you partaken of a personal experience of the Spirit and asked for his gifts?’). The latter instead asks missiological questions: ‘where does the
river flow to, and for what purpose? Answer: it flows to a degraded habitat and miraculously restores life there. Like most translations, the NIV translates Ezekiel 47:8b as ‘When it empties into the Sea, the water there becomes fresh.’ The Hebrew for ‘becomes fresh’ is in fact *rapha* (as before in the episode of Elisha at Jericho) and could also be translated ‘the waters of the sea shall be healed’ (as for example in the ASV).\(^33\) This, in turn, results in a further healing of the surrounding land. The use of the word *rapha* here connects the vision of Ezekiel to the promise of 2 Chronicles, just like the passage in 2 Kings. The Spirit of creation is as concerned with healing the land as the people, because the two are interdependent.

Walter Brueggemann shows that this vision of land restoration is a demonstration of Yahweh’s covenant commitment to the exilic generation to bring them again into the land promise that he had laid down in the Torah.\(^34\) God’s covenant purposes always involve the redemption of his people as an integrated whole, along with the alien, the poor, and the land. This promise of land restoration remains in the New Testament but is extended to all peoples and the whole of creation, as we see in Romans 8:21 and Revelation 21. The co-mingling of an anthropocentric interpretation of this passage with a broader, biotic one yields rich biblical material for a charismatic and Trinitarian urban eco-missiology. This is especially the case when we recall not only that Christ considers himself the ‘spring of water welling up to eternal life’ (John 4:14) in a deliberate echoing of this passage in Ezekiel,\(^35\) but also when we recall Paul’s description of the Church as the new Temple (Eph 2:21; 1 Cor 3:16).

Just as Ezekiel’s vision was given by God as an encouragement to the exiled Babylonian Jews before their return to Jerusalem, so too the stirring prophecy of Isaiah 61 was later used by Christ as the foundation of his vocation (Luke 4). Here again, we observe a strong connection between the work of the Spirit (Isa 61:1) and the healing of the land (although the specific word *rapha* is not used). Although Luke has Christ read out only the first two verses of this chapter, the implication is that, through the anointing of the Spirit, Jesus will be the one who will fulfill and enable the entire promise of the following verses. This includes verse 4: ‘They will rebuild the
ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.’ (In the KJV the word for ‘ruin’ in Isa 61:4 is translated as ‘waste’, meaning ‘wasteland’.) Taken as a whole, then, this prophecy forms a strong foundation for a pneumatology and Christology of whole-city redemption. Colin Symes, part of the collaborative support group for the Action Plan, observed that the word here translated ‘devastated’ is from the Hebrew root *shamem* which means (in the intransitive, as here) ‘to be stunned, grow numb, be desolated or lain waste’. This recalls the way creation groans in Romans 8:22. It certainly seems a rich description of the state of the urban wasteland in Possil, and in context may point not only to the idea of the walls and buildings themselves being restored but also any wasted land (*in situ and ex situ*) being rehabilitated to fruitful use. Walter Brueggemann points to the same root word *shamem* in Isaiah 62:4 and describes this passage as a particularly rich evocation of God’s desire to restore such defiled land to his people.36

Ultimately both Ezekiel’s vision and Isaiah’s prophecy point towards the eschatological promise of shalom. This is the reconciliation of whole of the creation and each of its constituent elements – including land and wildlife – to the Godhead.37 The imagery of Ezekiel 47 and Isaiah 61 is recapitulated in John’s great vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21. Here, the Tree of Life has been replanted by the New Gardener at the centre of a resurrected city devoid of brownfield land, where creation and human culture are intimately intertwined and all is reconnected to the pervasive presence of God. Referring to Ezekiel 47, Leslie C. Allen writes ‘Barren land was to be transformed into a scene of sustenance and herbal healing, a perennial antidote to pain and need. Rev 22:2, drawing on a slightly different tradition, firmly equates this blessing with the tree of life.’38 David Smith has shown how the narratives of Israel and the early Christians point towards God’s over-arching calling to the people of God to partake in his mission to redeem entire city-systems.39 This also implies the redemption of urban ecological systems. N. T. Wright, commenting on Romans 8:19–21, writes that ‘as God sent Jesus to rescue the human race, so God will send Jesus’ younger siblings, in the power of the Spirit, to rescue the whole created order, to bring
that justice and peace for which the whole creation yearns.\textsuperscript{40}

The trope of city-redemption is certainly evident in Psalm 87. While the meaning of this Scripture is ultimately difficult to pin down,\textsuperscript{41} this psalm does suggest that in the New Creation the many diverse Gentile and Jewish cities of the known world will be found finally and fully ‘in Zion’. This is redolent, in an anticipatory sense, of how the redeemed people of God will find themselves fully and finally ‘in Christ’. The psalmist is clearly stating that it is the cities themselves that will be declared to have been ‘born in Zion,’ with Zion being imagined as the eschatological mother-city of all cities.\textsuperscript{42} It therefore seems natural to add Glasgow to this prophetic list. And if Glasgow will be found ‘in Zion’ in the New Creation then the call of the Church today is to anticipate this in all its multi-facetted aspects: not just the anticipated inclusion of the Gentiles, but also the healing (rapha) of (urban) land.\textsuperscript{43} The promise that the cities themselves will sing that ‘all my fountains are in you’ takes on particular resonance for urban ec-missiology in light of the water imagery employed in 2 Kings and Ezekiel.

Taken together, then, these narratives demonstrate the tension between modernity and Judeo-Christianity with regard to the latter’s concern for the integrity of the relationships between the the created order, humankind, and God. Biblical thought, action and prophecy is committed to the reconciliation and healing of these relationships (Col 1:16) even as modernity seeks to tear them asunder.

Paul Ede co-leads Clay Community Church in Glasgow and is a team leader with InnerCHANGE. His PhD studies are in Pentecostal Urban Ecotheology at Aberdeen University. He works at Neopolis, the Scottish Centre for Urban Mission and Ministry, and won the 2013 BIAPT Dissertation Prize for his master’s thesis, of which this article is an extract.

3. Ibid., 13.
6. Ibid., 15.
7. Ibid., 6.
11. By ‘disengagement’ here, Gunton is referring to the modern belief that to correctly appropriate reality, humankind can and must step back and assess it objectively from a rational perspective. To modernists this objectivity is possible from within creation without reference to anything external to creation. Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 13.
14. Ibid., 27.
15. Ibid., 224.
16. Ibid., 210 ff.
17. See Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*.
18. John 3:16a is translated ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son’ in the NIV. Evangelicals usually read the ‘world’ to mean ‘those who do not know Christ’ (an anthropocentric reading). Tony Campolo, however, has pointed out that the Greek word used here is cosmos, and argues for a straight transliteration. This reading instead emphasises the cosmic dimensions of Christ’s salvation. Tony Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth Without Worshipping Nature* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1992), ix.
32. Ibid.
33. Hobbs, 2 Kings, 23 f.
34. Brueggemann, The Land, 134.
35. Dave Bookless, God Doesn’t Do Waste: Redeeming the Whole of Life (Nottingham: IVP, 2010), 84.
37. Smith, Seeking a City, 163.
39. Smith, Seeking a City, 127.
41. Marvin Tate, Psalms 51–100 (Word Biblical Commentary 20; Dallas, Tx.: Word Books, 1990), 387.
42. Ibid., 389.
43. The usual reading of v. 7 is to connect it to the Pauline letters (Eph 3:3–9 and Gal 4:26), and their emphasis on the inclusion of the Gentiles into the promises of God (Tate, Psalms 51–100, 393). This misses the reading of Paul’s letter’s which also emphasises the healing of creation (Rom 8:19–22) – an equally important theme of eschatological fulfilment often marginalised by evangelical scholarship (but recovered by, e.g., N. T. Wright, “The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections”).
Response to Paul Ede

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON BROWNFIELD REHABILITATION

Michael Moey

Paul Ede has contributed to a greater awareness and commitment to a theology of Christian ecology. Clearly, land restoration is part of Yahweh’s covenant commitment to the exilic community and the Christian Church. In the pursuit of a biblical basis to support his ecological ethics, there is concern about the manner in which some biblical texts are used to support a charismatic and Trinitarian praxis of urban eco-missiology. He starts with helpful examples of his position with the Glasgow brownfield sites, ZIRRCON, and the Greenbelt Movement. There are some concerns though, and I will make my response in three points.

Firstly, there seems to be confusion over what constitutes the primary meaning of a text. One can take a literal view of the passage or one can consider its primary meaning especially, parabolic texts and metaphorical passages. It is interesting to ponder if Christ had thought of Elisha’s salt when he told his disciples to be salt of the earth, but the question is whether Paul had overstretched the example. There is a possibility that Christ might have thought about it, but the immediate context provides the clue for the interpretation of what it entails to be salt. Also, he needs to clarify the relationship between salt and Sabbath.

Regarding Ezekiel 47, to position it as a model of renewal may be to miss the point of the prophet’s speech. John B. Taylor in his commentary states any attempt to interpret this passage literally is to miss the point completely. For example, the refreshing water that gives life to all kinds of fishes and living creatures might be seen literally as the water that will flow out from the Temple of Jerusalem rather than viewing it as the blessings of God. On the other hand, the water in Ezekiel 47 can be viewed as the waters of baptism! Undoubtedly, ‘water’ in the text has an anthropocentric and eschatological
reference, but to interpret it as a concern for the healing of land may be a conflation of what the periscope intends. The healing of humanity and the healing of the land is interdependent but it may be asymmetrical in nature. Another commentator, Ronald E. Clements states that the text is full of symbolisms and the Temple is presented as being essential to Jewish life—with the Temple representing a true worship of God.

Further examples of conflation in interpreting metaphorical texts may be observed when the writer cites Jesus who proclaimed himself as the spring of water welling up to eternal life in John 4:14, and Paul’s description of the church as the New Temple in Ephesians 2:21 and 1 Corinthians 3:16. Earlier in the article, he makes reference to Mary’s mistaking of the risen Christ for a gardener. The relationship of these texts with ecological ethics while it is attractive is a rather strained interpretation.

Secondly, about prophecies, one major issue is the time of their fulfilment: Have they occurred? When did they occur? When will they occur? In referring to texts such as Ezekiel 47, Isaiah 61, and others, the question is whether Paul gives due regard to the time-element of the prophecies? Or, are they to be used as guarantees of whole city redemption now when the Spirit of Creation has come? There is no doubt that redemption of the land is part of the missio dei but the time-element and the meanings of the prophecies form the primary consideration of these prophetic texts.

Thirdly, the image of Jesus Christ as the New Gardener is appealing and in terms of theology and missiology, it brings out the Christological concern for ecological renewal, but it needs a balance in its portrayal of the relationship between the redemption of humanity and the redemption of creation. It is a rather nuanced title as the creation-ecological theme appears to overshadow the redemption of humanity motif.

Michael Moey has been married to Grace Lee for 28 years. Together they have three lovely daughters and two dogs. Moey loves badminton and trekking, and has a keen interest in urban mission. In addition to teaching law and theology, Moey pastors a small local urban church that runs a refugee education centre for Myanmar youths aged 16 to 20.
Fundraising raises funds… and problems also! Not everything that works can be considered ethical. Of course some principles would be quite clear: it is wrong to lie in order to raise funds, even if it helps to finance an excellent project! But some problems cannot be solved with a clear-cut answer.

One such issue could be formulated thus: does receiving money from non-Christian sources affect the integrity/integral character of our mission? I once had to face the following assertion: Christians should not accept the world's money in order to do the work of God. By “world's money” it was meant “money coming from non-Christian people” and by the “work of God” probably something like “work done by Christian ministries or agencies.”

My first comment on this would be that I cannot remember one single Scripture containing the idea that Christians shouldn't receive money from non-Christians in order to do the work of God. To the contrary, we can see that the people of Israel received many riches from the Egyptians at the time of the exodus (Exod 12:35-36), and we might guess that they used part of it to build the tabernacle. Of course there are limits to this idea: not all riches should be welcomed wherever they come from (Deut 23:19). But we should remember that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it and not think that part of it is intrinsically impure and unfit to be used for the work of God. By the way, I think it is confusing to single out specific ministries that we label “the work of God” in contradistinction from all the activities that Christians can be involved in. Every Christian doing her or his job is doing the “work of God,” and most of them receive their salary from a non-Christian employer.
Nevertheless, there is a point in the objection. A Christian agency is supposed to direct its activities in a distinctly Christian manner—some would say as a contribution to the integral mission of the church. In some way, it is only a tool in the hands of Christians and churches to help them fulfill their God-given mandates. One could argue that the integrity of our mission and its integral character would lead us to try—as much as possible—to see to it that the donors share in the missional process and our Christian conviction.

The trickiest part of the matter is that money represents a power issue. Whether we like it or not, the one who pays most often turns out to be the one who commands. Dare I say that in a way this is even normal? After all, nobody is obliged to give their money to my organization, and anyone giving to it may do so under certain conditions. If I don’t like the conditions, it’s up to me to refuse the money, but the more I have become dependent upon the donor, the harder it will be.

A certain number of Christian organizations have become very dependent on non-Christian sources for their funding, especially from institutional donors. Most western Christian organizations also depend on public help because their private donors benefit from tax deductions. The state funding in this case in not direct, but the dependency is. I wouldn’t say that this is necessarily wrong (because there are no biblical principles forbidding us to receive money or help from non-Christian sources), but may I suggest that it is more risky than most of us assume? Can we really pretend that this has no bearing on the way we direct our activities?

So what should we do? I will just give a couple of ideas to stimulate further thinking and debate.

Biblical and theological thinking should have priority over commonly accepted patterns of thoughts in today’s societies and especially within the development and emergency community. Christian organizations—whether focusing more on the “proclamation” side of integral mission or on the “demonstration” side of it—should let theology challenge and help build the way they conceive of and do their work (and also their
fundraising methods, but this is a distinct issue!). If theological considerations are given the weight they deserve, this could sometimes lead us to decisions unpalatable to our non-Christian donors, including institutional ones. Are we ready for this even if it makes us lose money? If not, then it shows that the money we receive from them has a huge bearing on our activities and has compromised our integrity.

*Support from Christian sources should normally have priority over support from non-Christian ones.* To put it differently, I think it is better when we are able to dispense the support we receive from non-Christian sources without putting our structures at risk.

So when we try to raise funds to support Christian organizations, the goal of our funding should have been theologically defined and justified and the overall target of our fundraising efforts should be primarily the Christian community.

**Daniel Hillion** is Church Relations Responsible for SEL France, a Protestant NGO created in 1980 by the French Evangelical Alliance. He studied philosophy and has published several articles on issues related to poverty, Christian social action, and integral mission.
The launch of Adoniram and Ann Judson from New England in 1812 is often celebrated as the beginning of North American missions. In some senses this is true. The structure upon which the Judsons and their colleagues stood was the first formal American missions sending structure, and it has changed very little in 200 years. Missionary boards run by and large by professionals (whether business leaders, secular professionals, or professional clergy) and supported by funds raised from individual donors, is standard fare to this day. So are the college-educated, middleclass professional missionaries which have made up the majority of those sent by these for-profit styled missionary boards.

This sort of missionary machinery is costly. The young New England collegians sent to Burma in 1812 required $6,000 ($158,000 USD today) just to get started. When start-up money was slow in coming, they considered joining the London Missionary Society (LMS), but the LMS was already overrun with their own burden of raising 10,000 pounds for the coming year of their mission ($500,000 USD today).

The money required to run the western-run missionary industrial complex has always been exorbitant, and so long as the middle and upper classes were on board, it sort-of works. Much like capitalism, western missions, as it is constructed today, will only work for those with access to capital. The reason there are so many White American missionaries on the mission field is not necessarily due to the fact that we (I’m one of them) are more qualified than anyone else, but because we can afford to buy our way into mission. Many of my highly qualified Majority World friends, or some of my American friends of color, simply do not have the kind of connections required to pull together $50,000 to $100,000 USD worth of yearly financial support.
Today in America the middleclass is shrinking and healthcare costs are ballooning. This is why it is becoming increasingly difficult, even for those who grew up in relative wealth, to raise ongoing monthly support. But economic hard times do not necessarily guarantee we will radically change our costly structures. American missions in the late 1920s went through a financial crisis. Giving to missions was plummeting and nobody knew exactly why, so a study was undertaken to find out. It turns out that American Protestant Christianity had been on a building spree. “In the Methodist Episcopal Church alone, $4 million in interest was being paid each year out of receipts of roughly $100 million. Methodists were paying more interest to banks each year in the late 1920s than they were giving their Board of Foreign Missions.” Somewhere around the turn of last century, the American church moved out of the school house or town meeting hall and had constructed monstrosities devoted exclusively for their Sunday gathering. This had been accomplished by going into debt. In essence, the church chose a mortgage over a mission.

That trend has continued. The lucrative mortgage rates of the mid-2000s lured many churches into an expansion craze. Many are now in default and the money that was once going to missions is tied up in bankruptcy court.

But there is another way.

There’s an African proverb which says, “Until lions write their own history, tales of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.” For centuries the story of the first American missionaries were written by and about the White, middleclass Ivy League, New England collegians. But, as the Judsons were preparing to go to Burma in 1812, a pair of freed Black American slaves, George and Hannah Liele, were busy with a burgeoning ministry in Jamaica which they had cultivated for 30 years.

George Liele was intent on bringing the gospel of freedom to those in slavery. After he had been freed by his master, Liele sold himself into indentured servitude to a ship’s captain in order to gain passage to Jamaica. He took whatever job he could find in order to build relationships among slaves working on the sugar plantations. The congregation he established contributed their pennies to grow the work amongst their
fellow slaves. A few years before the launch of the Judson mission, the Liele mission faced intense persecution by plantation owners. The lords of Jamaican commerce believed that the gospel was a subversive and dangerous notion when planted in the hearts of their human chattel. Slaves might get the idea that they were created in the image of God and that they were to be treated with dignity. They might even come under the perilous conviction that it was possible for them to be equal members of the body of Christ alongside Whites. The liberating message of the gospel might morph into the kind of revolution that spawned the Haitian slave revolt of the early 1800s. E. A. Holmes, who was among the first to write about George Liele, notes that, “The planters rightly felt that ‘the message of freedom embodied in the Gospel of Salvation to all men [sic] endangered the social and economic foundations upon which depended the Institutions by which they maintained their livelihood.’” Meanwhile, the economic colonizing engine of the British East India Company was becoming part of the machinery of western Protestant mission, which capitalized on their transportation and their colonial holdings in order to establish beachheads for Christianity in places like India and the Far East.

At the turn of the twentieth century, missionary statesman Roland Allen noted that the Anglican mission was more enamored with the costly trappings of buildings and clergy than in following the ways of the “unschooled and ordinary” men and women who operated with few resources and minimal structure, yet established hundreds of churches around the Mediterranean basin during the first hundred years of the life of the church.

Those of us in the West must be willing to learn from the Chinese, Indian, and Nigerian missionaries (who today greatly outstrip the number of missionaries from Europe and North America) who operate with fewer resources and lean structures.

Until we are willing to value a mission over a mortgage, those of us in the West will be consigned to selling our foreclosed buildings in an attempt to prop up the resource-hungry mission structures which are available solely to those with privilege and capital.
Scott A. Bessenecker is Director of Global Projects with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA. He is the editor of several books including *Living Mission: The Vision and Voices of New Friars*.


When interpreting the story of Jesus’ encounter with the “rich young ruler,” traditional interpreters struggle because of certain assumptions they bring to the text.

For example, the young man’s desire to “inherit eternal life” is equated with “going to heaven when I die.” In reality, “eternal life” would better be translated “life of the ages,” and understood not in the binary of “time and eternity,” but in the tension between “how things should be” in contrast to “how things are in this present age.” His underlying problem is traditionally understood to be greed when it is more likely power and identity. After all, the only way one becomes a rich ruler at a young age in Jesus’ context is through collaboration with the Roman occupiers.

Jesus’ call for him to sell all he has and give to the poor, in this way, has nothing to do with scoring a “good work” to earn heaven. Nor does it have to do with proving that he is a sinner in need of grace provided through some form of atonement. It has everything to do with mission.

The mission of the Romans is to consolidate and maintain power and privilege over their colonial holdings so they can (as Jesus explains in the Sermon on the Mount) calm their constant anxiety about what they will eat, what they will drink, and what they will wear.

The mission of Jesus is to embody and proclaim the kingdom or reign or justice of God—which exposes the neurotic domination of the Romans and proclaims liberty to those it occupies, dominates, and enslaves. In his encounter with the rich young ruler, Jesus makes clear that participating in the kingdom of God requires withdrawing from the mission of the oppressors and joining Jesus in his mission to set the oppressed free.

The young man is obsessed with “goodness,” as reflected in his addressing Jesus as “Good Teacher” and his question about “what good thing must I do?” Religious systems that are in denial about their complicity with systems of oppression frequently
share this obsession with goodness. Religious chaplains to the unjust status quo can’t address the most obvious reality of their situation—that the game is rigged and controlled by a small elite. So like magicians in the midst of a trick, they shift attention to fine points of personal morality. They make the victims feel guilty and then, like a protection racket, provide forgiveness, always careful not to upset the economy in which they have carved out a secure niche.

Jesus exposes this tendency when he allows the young man to proclaim that he has kept all the commandments since his youth. Jesus doesn’t dispute the man’s personal morality. He doesn’t say (as some of us would wish) that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Instead, he simply says that personal morality isn’t enough: “One thing you lack....”

All this has enormous relevance for people involved in urban mission today. Cities bring together in close physical proximity—although seldom in social proximity—elites that include today’s rich young rulers and the poor multitudes by whose cheap labor or stolen land those elites are typically enriched.

Based on this interchange (included in all three synoptic gospels), urban mission would want to address financial realities in at least four ways.

1. **By giving to the poor.**

Charity is highly problematic. While it can spring from the purest motives of compassion, it can unwittingly mean raising surplus funds from the middle and upper classes to sustain the poor in conditions in which the richest elites continue to profit. Charity keeps the poor somewhat pacified and dependent, and in so doing it oils the machinery of injustice. Charity in this way unconsciously perpetuates a status quo that frustrates God’s will being done on earth as in heaven, even as it does God’s will by helping desperate people survive.

Jesus’ call to give to the poor, I propose, is not simply a call to charity. It is a call to redistribute wealth that has been accumulated in unjust ways.

Redistribution of wealth resembles charity on the surface, but it springs from a different motive and anticipates a different outcome. Charity, as a paternalistic act
of generosity, reinforces three dominant assumptions: a) that the poor receivers are pitiable and powerless; b) that the generous givers are virtuous; and c) that the system that thrusts the poor into poverty deserves no scrutiny at all.

Redistribution of wealth says the opposite. It says, “The poor deserve better, and by this giving, we are protesting the injustice of the current have-versus-have-not system. We are proclaiming the dignity of all people and empowering the receivers to participate as protagonists in their own active (but nonviolent) liberation.”

Urban missionaries who raise money from the have's to help the have-nots may choose not to advertise this fact, of course; but if they are not merely practicing charity in a way that supports the status quo, they are in fact practicing redistribution of wealth in a way that subverts it.

2. By engaging with the rich.

The rich, in Jesus’ view, are not necessarily or especially evil. They too are enslaved by the system, caught in a web of desperate perpetual anxiety, an insatiable need for “more,” and a drive to be and stay on top—which is an inherently insecure and unpleasant way to survive.

To engage with them is not to shame them or vilify them, but rather to help them see the absurdity and unsustainability of their position and invite them to a better, more fulfilling, and more constructive project.

Sadly, the modern mission-industrial complex often puts the missionary in a position of financial dependence upon the rich, thus reducing the possibility that the rich will be challenged in any way. Wise urban missioners will work to create relationships of partnership rather than dependency with their donors so that they will see their donors as part of the mission on which they have been sent. This will inevitably involve more than asking them for money.

3. By recruiting the rich to switch sides.

Jesus doesn't say, “Stick with your current job and give generously to my mission to help the poor.” He calls the rich man to follow him, meaning to join him in his work among the poor. Modern urban missioners are—wisely—doing this very thing by
bringing rich donors to join them walking the streets of slums, entering the homes (such as they are) of the poorest of the poor, and listening to their stories. In so doing, urban missioners turn mission trips into field trips by which privileged donors are forced to see complex realities that will forever disrupt their view of the world. In other words, they are bringing their donors to repentance—radical rethinking—about how the world operates and why it is as it is.

Imagine if a significant percentage of today's rich young rulers could be recruited to devote their intelligence, reputation, business acumen, access, and network of contacts to be in solidarity with the poorest of the urban poor—not as patrons, but as partners?

4. By empowering the poor themselves.

The rich young ruler refused Jesus' invitation. His refusal is contrasted in the gospels with the young boy who brought his lunch to Jesus in the presence of a hungry multitude. The result: thousands of people experienced not only a good meal, but also the power of self-organizing into small groups where they practiced an alternative economy—not trickle-down, but grass-roots up; not based on scarcity and anxiety, but based on generosity and abundance; not part of Caesar's empire, but an expression of God's kingdom.

If an alien spaceship visited from another planet, its occupants would quickly assess that there is enough food to feed everyone. There is enough work to be done to keep everyone productively engaged. They would see, as we seldom do, that the status quo of hunger and unemployment only reigns because people have faith in it and don't have faith in a better alternative. They would wish for someone like Jesus to come along, helping both rich and poor see that another way is possible for rich and poor alike. And they would wish for urban missioners to spread that good news everywhere, for the wellbeing of all.

Dr. Brian D. McLaren is an author, speaker, activist, and networker among innovative Christian leaders. His dozen-plus books include A New Kind of Christianity, A Generous Orthodoxy, and Everything Must Change. He and his wife Grace live in Florida. He's an avid wildlife and outdoors enthusiast who believes God's first language is this amazing universe.
Creating transformational communities through holistic initiatives
Between ethics and dollar bills
there lies a chasm too large and inconvenient. The great dividing range
She is impassable
    and filled with words
    and filled with intentions
    and filled with air. Hot air.

Many times I have attempted the tensions of this tight rope walk above the chasm.
Many times I have fallen.
Money is a slippery passage. Greasy fingers and stained skin.

Today I crossed the chasm, I gave my pocket change to Lawrence.
He swore that it was to be used
    for food,
    for himself,
    for his blind mother.
I am not blind.
I know it is likely spent on the alcohol of his breath.
On the track marks in his arms. I know.

Should I have withheld my money with this knowledge? Maybe.
And yet I realise

that in the push and pull of all that is life,

We are all addicts.

We are all track marked and scarred. We are all scared.

We are all scarred. We are all scared.

We suck down the after-breath of our secrets and force our smiles.

Unlike Lawrence

we have learnt to keep addictions behind closed doors.

Joel McKerrow is a performance poet, author, educator, and activist from Melbourne, Australia. He is the founder of The Centre for Poetics and Justice, a not-for-profit, community arts organisation focused on using poetics as a form of literary education, self-expression, and social engagement for marginalised teenagers.
My wife Trish and I have been living in the inner-city slum of Hillbrow, South Africa, for just over a year. We moved from a six-bedroom home in a gated-security community in Midrand, a suburb of Johannesburg. We left the suburbs and moved to Hillbrow for a number of reasons, including our wanting to allow our lives to prophetically declare that the current growth in poverty and inequality requires a church and the nation to live differently. We believe that God is extremely concerned about the brokenness around us and wants Christians to place themselves right in the middle of forsaken communities and become signs of hope.

Hillbrow is one of those communities that have the dubious distinction of having governments specifically issue travel advisories to its citizens not to travel there. With its reputation for crime, prostitution, drugs, and extreme poverty, it is not really a place tourists flock to anyway.

The first time I experienced an attempted robbery in Hillbrow was about a year before we moved in. We were on our way home after looking at possible apartments to rent, and had just seen one which we thought was quite suitable. The music was playing in the car, we were all excited, and my car window was down. As I was parked in heavy traffic while driving down one of the busy main streets, two homeless guys, both high on glue, came to my window and began to stretch their hands in and start feeling for cell phones, wallets, or whatever they could find. I grabbed their arms and shouted loudly at them, “Hey!” They both got a fright, jumped back, and ran away without taking anything. One would think the thwarting of this close encounter with crime would have resulted in my rejoicing, but on the contrary, I felt sadness that I had not responded in a better way. I had been reading the Sermon on the Mount, and in particular the sections on enemy love. I remembered Matthew 5:39 and 5:42,
where Jesus said, “But I say, do not resist an evil person!” and “Give to those who ask, and don’t turn away from those who want to borrow from you.” As I reflected on these words, and spoke to friends, I felt stirred to pray, “Father, I pray for another opportunity to represent you better and to reflect your heart.” It wasn’t quite the Jabez prayer, but I felt it was the right thing to pray.

Fast forward a year after we had moved into Hillbrow. As I was driving home from work that morning, in God’s providence, I had once more been reading Matthew 5 and reflecting on my previous experience. My window was very slightly down and I was stopped at a traffic light with Kombi taxis all around me with nowhere to move. At this point I was approached by a man who demanded, “Give me your cellphone!” I couldn’t really hear at first, so, thinking he was a beggar, and knowing that I had no money on me, I wound my window completely down and turned to him and replied, “I am sorry, my friend, I have no money on me. I will have to come back later and bring you something.” The man brought a gun hidden in his jacket closer to me and said, “This is a gun, now give me your cellphone!” Still not registering what he said, I again turned to him and said for a second time, “I am sorry my friend, I really have no money on me—I will have to come back later and bring you something.” This time he responded by putting the gun to my forehead and said, “I’m going to kill you; give me your cellphone!” Suddenly I registered what he was saying. It was as if everything paused, and in that moment I was reminded of the same text from Matthew 5 where Jesus said, “Do not resist an evil person” and “give to anyone who asks from you.” In response to this text, rather than in response to the gun, I reached out my cellphone and handed it to him. He ran away. The traffic light changed colour and the cars around me began to move and I drove about ten metres before I broke down in tears.

Questions flooded me in that moment. Why had I moved? Had God really called me here? What about my family—we were walking here at this exact spot just yesterday—was I an irresponsible father?

I got home and told Trish all that had happened. We phoned a friend who immediately came out from Pretoria. As we debriefed together about what had happened, I realised...
that while my heart was “forgiveness-ready,” I did not know what to do with the fear I felt. My friend suggested we go outside and tell the story to some street vendors nearby, who were selling their goods on the side of the road. We did this, and as I told my story to them, I asked them if they would help me by walking to the spot where I’d been held up. About 15 street vendors agreed and we walked the block and a half to the spot where I’d been held up. I felt so empowered, like I was on a human rights march. When we got to the place where it had happened, I prayed for three things: 1) I prayed that God would keep my heart soft; 2) I prayed that God would keep the community safe; and 3) I prayed that God would rescue from his sin the young man who had stolen from me. The street vendors prayed with me.

Two days later, a group of church leaders, together with my family and me, went to the local fish shop and purchased boxes and boxes of fish n’ chips. We took these boxes and handed them out to homeless people, street vendors, and passersby. We decided that we would sow love where there had been violence.

Through this I felt God remind me of the Scripture in Romans 8:28: “And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” This is a verse that is often quoted when reflecting on tragedy. As I reflected on this verse, I felt God speak to me about us being co-workers with him through tragedy and suffering to accomplish his purposes. We can utilise tragic events, and difficult things that happen, to shout out the glory and kindness of God. Our finest hour is when, in the midst of suffering, in the midst of tragedy, in the midst of all kinds of difficulties, we boldly proclaim the hope that we have. I am discovering, not just through this incident, but through many others over the year, that it is in times of suffering that our voice is amplified. As I have often reflected on being held up in the last year, I can honestly say that I am now grateful that it has happened, because through it all I’ve had the opportunity to declare that God’s love is more powerful than violence. I have also had the opportunity to sow love into my community. I am convinced that we cannot stop the crime or violence in Hillbrow with more violence. We will only be able to overcome it with love. Being held up has given
Nigel and Trish Branken live together with their five children in the notorious inner-city suburb Hillbrow in Johannesburg, South Africa. As they stand in solidarity with those facing extreme poverty, Nigel says, “What we focus on is primarily becoming friends to our neighbours and then trying to become good neighbours to our friends.”
The slums of Nairobi teem with life. Streets are lined with brightly-colored shops, restaurants, pubs, schools, churches, and mosques. They burst with pulsating musical beats and crowing roosters. The winding dirt pathways are filled with children playing, women braiding each other’s hair, and men gathered for a leisurely chat. The smell of hot, fresh chapati tickles the noses of passersby, followed quickly by the overwhelming smell of garbage. Ten-by-ten-foot homes made of iron sheets and mud stretch out as far as the eye can see. Sixty-five percent of Nairobi’s population lives in these slums.

Nairobi’s slum dwellers, like many throughout the world, survive without running water, electricity, sufficient food, security, or adequate medical care. They face a number of injustices as they are often completely ignored or mistreated by the rest of society. But perhaps that most inhumane injustice they face is a lack of one of life’s most basic necessities: a toilet.

I had been living in one of Nairobi’s largest informal settlements for nearly 15 months—and had used some rather squalid toilets myself—when I began to take an in-depth look at slum toilets. Working alongside several female residents of the slum, our research involved several days of trekking through latrines and recording the experiences of girls in hopes of securing funds and advocating for better facilities.

Some of the worst toilets we encountered were those in a girls’ primary school. The women I accompanied simply refused to enter and told me to go in alone. The smell was so overpowering I could actually taste it. As I entered, a teenage girl emerged from one of the stalls. Her feet splashed through a half inch of urine that covered the entire floor. I glanced inside one of the stalls. The latrine was overflowing with feces, covered by a pile of squirming maggots. Bloodied sanitary pads dotted the floor. I
wondered how the girls at the school could stand to use such a toilet every day, and I was angry that they had to.

While some of our questions about toilets were met with shy giggles, the severity of the situation revealed itself as we conversed with girls from the slum. One young lady explained that the conditions of their toilets were so poor that they simply put off using them for as long as they could. This led to some of the girls “messing” their pants and contracting regular urinary tract infections. Others shared the shame they felt using “flying toilets,” a reference to defecating in a plastic bag and throwing it as far as possible. Some girls described a constant fear of men peeping through the cracks of poorly constructed toilets, and that those men might rape them.

One of the most heart-wrenching stories came from an 11-year-old girl named Njeri. Njeri began by explaining that toilets are usually located far from the houses, forcing residents to walk long distances. On her way to school one morning, Njeri came upon a crowd of people. Approaching the crowd, she realized they were gathered around a naked body lying on the ground, and the body was that of her neighbor—an 18-year-old girl. Njeri felt tears well up in her eyes and a solid lump appeared in her throat, but she got a few words out to ask what happened. A woman responded, “This girl went out to use the toilet at night, and didn’t make it home alive.”

Returning home from the toilets each day, I found myself angry and disgusted. I frantically scanned the scriptures for passages that would communicate to the girls their worth in the eyes of God. I wanted to shout from the rooftops that this was not God’s purpose for them, and throw them into the safety of their heavenly Father’s arms. I didn’t expect trudging around slum toilets to be a spiritual experience, but it most certainly was. Toilets are deeply spiritual places because they represent a defilement of justice for the poor which is called for—no, commanded—throughout scriptures. They are places where a young girl’s God-given sexuality can be violated. They are places where the inherent value and dignity implanted by God into humanity is disregarded. But they are also places where God speaks loudly to his people, commanding them to take action.
As a result of this call to action, a group of women and girls from the slum organized themselves into an association that is lobbying for decent sanitation facilities. Together, we are working to raise awareness and address the deeper issue of gender-based violence; and we are seeking funding for the construction of safe toilets near the girls’ homes and school. To be honest, I can’t help but smile when I think of how it started: God spoke to his people in the most unexpected place—a toilet.

Alissa Wachter lives in Nairobi, Kenya, and completed research about slum toilets as a part of the Master of Arts in Transformational Urban Leadership program with Azusa Pacific University, which she completed in July 2013. Wachter currently works as a grant writer for a non-governmental organization supporting farmers throughout East Africa.
Asia has by far the lowest percentage of Christians among its population of any continent, estimated at 8.5 percent in 2010.\textsuperscript{1} Next-ranked Africa, in contrast, was almost 48 percent Christian. In absolute terms, fewer Christians live in Asia than in Latin America, Europe, or Africa.

On the other hand, Asia has by far the largest urban population of any continent (almost 1.8 billion in 2010, more than the total for the other five continents combined). Likewise, the urban Christian situation in Asia is something of an anomaly. For most continents, the percentage of Christians (of any type) who were urban dwellers was either essentially the same as (Europe, Latin America, Northern America) or slightly less than (Africa, Oceania) the percentage of the total population who were urban dwellers. In Asia, however, a higher percentage of Christians (51 percent) than of the total population (43 percent) were urban dwellers in 2010. Thus, cities are especially important contexts for Christian witness and ministry in Asia.

This difference between urbanites among the general and Christian populations arises largely from Southeastern Asia. The region was home to 14 percent of Asia's total population and 16 percent of its urban dwellers in 2010; however, 37 percent of Asia's Christians and 43 percent of the continent's urban Christians lived in Southeastern Asia (largely due to the highly Christian population of the Philippines). This means that 60 percent of Southeastern Asia's Christians were urban, compared to only 48 percent of its general population.
The following tables give a picture of the distribution of Christians among the various segments of Asia’s population:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>URBAN</th>
<th>RURAL</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Christian</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>91.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
<td>57.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When we turn to the cities themselves, the following patterns emerge. Asia’s 50 largest urban areas, which ranged from Tokyo (population 35.5 million) down to Kanpur, India (population 3.4 million), were home to a total of 402.6 million people in 2010. Among them were 38.5 million Christians, or 9.6 percent of their combined populations. Thus, in these 50 largest cities, Christians constituted a greater percentage of the population than in Asia as a whole. Even more interestingly, about one of every nine Christians (11 percent) and one out of every five urban Christians in Asia (21 percent) lived in one of these 50 cities in 2010. This is the case, despite Christianity being the largest religion in only three of the cities and a majority in only two of them.

When we look at the cities with the largest Christian populations in Asia, the pattern is refined further. These cities ranged from Manila (11.8 million Christians, or 94 percent of the population) down to Xiamen, China (356,000 Christians, or 13 percent of the population). Together these “50 largest Christian cities” were home to 51.9 million Christians, or almost 20 percent of the combined city populations of 264.8
million people. Christians constituted the largest single group of religious adherents in 21 of these cities and a majority in 15. About one out of every seven Christians in Asia (15 percent), and more than one in four urban Christians (29 percent), lived in one of these 50 cities.

The concentration of Christians in these cities is illustrated by the following statistics: Manila’s Christian population of 11.8 million in 2010 was greater than the entire Christian population of all but five Asian countries (South Korea, Indonesia, India, the Philippines, and China). In fact, Manila’s Christian population was greater than the combined Christian populations of 33 of Asia’s 50 countries (11.3 million)!

Furthermore, the 51.9 million Christians living in the “50 largest Christian cities” exceeded the Christian populations of South Korea and Indonesia as well, and approached that of India (58.3 million). They also outnumbered the combined Christian populations of 45 of Asia’s 50 countries (46.6 million). And when the Christian populations of these 50 cities are subtracted from their countries’ Christian totals, the Christians in these 50 cities outnumber all other Christians in 46 of Asia’s 50 countries combined (47.3 million).

So what does all this mean?

First, we must acknowledge that the term “Christian” as used in this article describes anyone, of any tradition or level of commitment, who identifies as Christian. The Center for the Study of Global Christianity does not have data that more finely subdivide urban populations by categories such as denomination, Christian tradition, percentage of Evangelicals, or level of adherence or commitment. Nonetheless, the data on Christians presented here are a good starting point for looking at the urban situation.

More importantly, the relative concentration of Christians in cities might actually be of great benefit, given Asia’s low level of Christian adherence. By focusing on a smaller but more densely populated area, Christians might find that evangelism and ministry efforts are able to touch more people. In addition, cooperation among churches might be easier in cities for the same reasons (although this is not necessarily a given).
Foreign partners whose help the urban Christians enlist might also find access to the cities easier, increasing their effectiveness as well.

It is increasingly true that cities are the key to reaching the entire country. This is certainly the case in Asia, where urbanization continues at a rapid pace. As a result, Christians in at least some of Asia’s countries might want to focus their attention more on cities, especially those in which they constitute a relatively sizeable share of the population (with some Christians even moving to urban areas specifically for purposes of ministry and witness). The result could prove to be a harvest of “thirty, sixty, or even a hundredfold.”

Albert (Bert) Hickman is a research associate in Global Christianity at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity and an associate editor for the Atlas of Global Christianity.

We live in a global economy that celebrates that which is spectacular. It is reasonable to assume in our day and age that great things can only be achieved through big plans and with access to huge resources. As urban missionaries, we might be convinced the best we can do to participate in an alternative economy is to become conscientious consumers. Fair-trade coffee, non-sweatshop clothing, and socially conscious investments become our new practices. While these are noble habits in our consumer world, these are still just ways to move us from mindless consumerism to a nicer, kinder consumerism. We want to explore another model and dig a little deeper into practicing ethics that harmonize with the reign of God through Jesus.

It is our conviction that economic health (sustainability) can be experienced and celebrated in a way that undermines this dominant story of big economy. To this end, we want to share some of the things we’ve learned and practiced as we cultivate an economy of sustainability in an urban context.

**Adopting agrarian responsibilities.**

More often than not, biblical images of sustainability include a garden. From Eden, to Exile (Jer 29:1-7), and reaching forward into Eschatology (Rev 22:1-2), agrarian images are present as God’s people choose to live under the loving-kindness of God’s reign. In these divine economies, humans live peaceably alongside fellow creatures in a relationship of mutual care. Such scenes are captured in the recurring imagery of passages like Micah 4:3-4:

*They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn*
war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid….

As we consider these biblical images of a sustainable economy, we take great encouragement from Kentucky farmer Wendell Berry. His life and writing make room for us to consider economics and culture from the perspective of new agrarianism—a philosophy that seeks to prioritize sustainable communities, cultures, and lives. This philosophy recognizes that limits are not problems, but rather orienting signposts that help us cultivate meaningful and abundant human existence. As the passage above attests, sustainability will be closely linked with peacemaking and broader cultural transformation. We can learn much from this perspective as we seek to live according to the ways of Jesus. Norman Wirzba outlines Berry’s ideas by suggesting these practical recommendations. We list them here and add short commentary. You will know how each of these is applicable in your own context:

- **Develop habits of accurate memory** – the stories of the place and people around us must be carefully attended to if we will inhabit the good news as it should be rendered in our particular context.

- **Practice patient attention** – we can counter the toxicity or “ready, fire, aim” approach to mission if we take the time to pause and listen to our neighbors. There can be many problematic, unintended consequences when we act impatiently.

- **Practice careful examination and reverence** – we may have been entrusted with the good news but we still don’t know it all. Humility should be at the heart of missional living. It is interesting to note the root word for humility is also the word for soil—humus.

- **Practice fidelity to community and place** – we can only come to understand what God is up to if we stay put.

- **Shop locally** – all economics should be local and relational and nearby merchants teach us how to practice accountability as well as providing for the dignity of work for our neighbors.
• Learn the arts of homemaking and homecare – in a “throw away” world, the arts of repairing and manufacturing are countercultural echoes of the first human vocation—to till and keep.

• Do good work that is durable and beautiful and that honors and sources recipients of the work – welcome the insight that truth and beauty are close siblings.

• Become responsible for other living human beings – practicing the call of neighborliness is, in Jesus’ estimation, the tonic for a world broken by sin.

Learn the art of the minimum – the sense of ‘enough’ and the virtue of contentment are critical signs of salt and light in a world overrun with faster, bigger, cheaper, newer.

**Watermelons and the miracle of the gift.**

We have a neighbor who struggles to experience the stability we all seek. His world is shot through with job insecurity, a paucity of hope, financial turmoil, and addiction. Over the last few years we have been able to literally root our friendship in a plant. He has asked us to make room in our one-tenth of an acre urban farm for a watermelon vine and we have watched this miracle unfold as he not only enjoys the ripe fruit, but has gained the ability to give and share with neighbors. He has acquired something of tangible value and has been overjoyed to give away his produce. From one seed comes a bounty of food and our friend is liberated to practice his own fledgling generosity; often this practice of giving is exclusively the privilege of the rich.

**Moving from economic dependence to holy interdependence.**

One major shift we have seen in our own efforts to practice sustainable economics is to move away from a one-way street of the wealthy giving to the needy. We have more resources than many of our neighbors and it is often easy to allow this power dynamic to dictate sharing. There are many ways we experience difference in our neighborhood—race, education, financial resources. These differences can be overwhelming. Each dimension of inequity can become a cause, each cause becomes
a campaign, each campaign, a struggle. While we are called to struggle and fight for justice, sustainable mission will need to be rooted in commonality and even solidarity. What do we share? How can we blur the lines between those who give and those who receive? An economy couched in this philosophy of new agrarianism helps us come to terms with the fact that all of us are recipients of divine generosity. The ordinary and everyday work of tending a garden teaches us that God is the creator and sustainer of life and our part—rich or poor—is to share that gift with others. In our experience, this has gone a long way in helping us imagine and practice an alternative, sustainable economy.

**Geoff and Sherry Maddock** make their home in the East End of Lexington along with their nine-year-old son Isaac. Sherry (originally from Atlanta, Georgia) and Geoff (originally from Melbourne, Australia) are delighted to be caught up in the slow work of belonging to their home-place in Kentucky. They graduated from Asbury Theological Seminary in 2001 with MAs in missiology and are most passionate about neighborhood transformation through urban agriculture.

The stories that I have stumbled upon are marked by movement. For some this is done by faith, falling in love with the city and letting this foreign culture become their family. For others, the move is made out of desperation—the city becoming a place of survival—where they take whatever work that is available. Perhaps one of the most joyful experiences in Kolkata has been working for Freeset, a fair-trade bag and apparel business offering employment to 170 women who had been trapped in Kolkata’s sex trade through trafficking and poverty.

The factory is a multistory building. There is much activity happening throughout the day and a whole lot of NOISE. Chaos reigns, especially when orders need to be met. Despite the chaos, there is always time to be in community and feel this sense of peace from the simple sounds of sewing machines, the children laughing in the crèche, and the women singing and gossiping as they get on with work. The loud voices of staff screaming across the factory for fabric and other needs is also a constant reminder that we are all working to rewrite new stories of faith. Life at Freeset is marked by freedom.

From the moment I enter and glimpse the countless colorful saris hanging and see the hard work of the men cutting jute and the beautiful skills of the women creating handles out of saris, I realize that this is where I encounter the goodness of God.

In life, we come across mentors or spiritual guides, people that teach us important values that shape our understanding of life. The women at Freeset have taught me that friendship is mutual and that we are not simply blurry faces to each other which we will eventually forget. They are women who I call sisters and aunties. When I arrived to Freeset, my desire was to practice honest love, actions that would present to them their humanity and dignity. In the process, the women began to teach me that sharing life together meant having the willingness to also receive actions of love even if that meant sacrificing some of their earnings to bring me a bag of mangoes the next day.
The women demonstrated actions of love when they invited me to their homes and communed with me during evening meals, cups of chai, and moments of laughter and joy.

Trust and respect were also earned—which was essential to becoming part of their lives. Eventually, a few shared their stories of vulnerability marked by poverty, deception, social exclusion, and brokenness. These violations also created a sense of hopelessness and marginalization. Women in the sex trade are psychologically broken into working on the line. These women suffered beatings, starvation, and brutal rape—violence that took away their courage—and then they were taken to a brothel with the false promise of being returned to her village. Upon their arrival, they saw many young girls who told them not to believe in the false promises of the pimps. They would never return her to the village and there was nothing she could do. In the end, these girls had given up and every dream of escape was squeezed out of them.

Freeset is about restoring courage, relationships, and hope. Women are employed not based on their skills, but on their desire to be free. For too long they have been forced to believe and see themselves as the nobodies, the unwanted, and good-for-nothing. Making the choice to take employment at Freeset takes boldness. It is not an easy process as many lack confidence and are often afraid of not succeeding through the training process. In addition, the women have to get used to the Freeset culture of community, hard work, and determination. They learn discipline and the structure of the business. One of the women argued that learning the discipline at Freeset was difficult. As an independent sex worker, she was not used to having a schedule, working with others, and the importance of reporting back to supervisors and senior staff. When she began working at Freeset, she gained new skills and a community; the mental oppression of working the sex trade was also gone. They have gained respect for themselves and co-workers. They return home not earning a few rupees in the red light area, but from an employment that provides them with dignity and worth.

In the time that I spent at Freeset, I was able to see the continual growth and strength of these women. Their teachings of love, compassion, and boldness will forever remain.
I leave India knowing that their lives are not easy, but that they wake up each morning aspiring to re-sew a new life of hope full of light, pride, and creativity. At Freeset, we are all part of the lives of these women and we walk with them on their journey to freedom.

Grecia Reyes is a Guatemalan American, born and raised in Los Angeles. She considers herself a field researcher and advocate for justice. She has been living in India for the past year and a half working on her master's degree in Transformational Urban Leadership.
Sixty percent of the population of Nairobi, Kenya, live in slums, and the Mathare Valley slum is one of the largest with one million people living in one square-mile. Most people live in shanties and pay rent to landlords. There is little infrastructure in terms of roads, electricity, and piped water. Sanitation facilities are largely nonexistent. The majority of the children are unable to attend school, both for lack of schools and lack of funds to pay for uniforms and books. But the people are not hopeless. Many share a vision to change this valley of darkness into the mountain of God.
Top: Forty-five dentists from the University of Southern California came to the center to provide dental work. Most people in Mathare Valley have never been to the dentist.
Bottom: Lack of running water affects sanitation and health.
Top: Drying clothes.
Bottom: Many goods can be purchased from small shops.
Top: Mission of Hope International (MOHI) school children receive two hot nutritious meals a day.

Bottom left: The majority of children in Mathare Valley do not attend school. The MOHI project schools now include 10,000 students.

Bottom right: The passing rate of MOHI students sitting for the high school entrance exam has been 95 percent over the past five years. The Kenya national average is 40 to 50 percent.
Top: Typical classroom in one of the 16 Mission of Hope International private schools.
Bottom: Certificate presented for the completion of skills training.
Top: The repayment rate for the 1,800 people who have received microfinance loans is 93 percent.
Bottom: Food is cooked on the “streets” for sale to customers.
Top: The Mathare Valley in Nairobi contains one million people living in an area equal to one square-mile. It is one of Africa’s oldest and largest slums.

Bottom: Going to collect water for his family.
Wallace and Mary Kamau founded Missions of Hope International in 2000 to minister among the urban poor. They partner with CMF International and churches from the U.S.A. in a ministry called Hope Partnership. Their holistic strategy for urban transformation involves child sponsorship, microfinance, skills training, church planting, leadership development, medical assistance, sanitation, agriculture, and establishing small businesses.
Inspirational, insightful, informative. These are the words that come to mind when describing *To Transform a City: Whole Church, Whole Gospel, Whole City*. The authors draw the reader into their experiences as though they are saying, “You can do this too.” This is a book for pastors who are leading churches, wanting to engage their local communities; for people going about their daily lives, exerting an influence for good wherever they are; and for community leaders striving for shalom in their city.

The book’s content is grounded in anecdotes, history, research (quantitative and qualitative), methodology, and examples of transformation in cities around the world. The practical advice offered throughout the book about what has and has not worked makes it useful. I was impressed with the authors’ honesty in sharing their failures, emphasising that there is no quick way to spiritual and societal transformation. It is a process requiring engagement with sociology, theology, prayer, and community connections. The vision for transformation can be as practical as considering what the community would look like if everyone could read.

Understanding the city and partnering with God in his redemptive mission is the underlying theme. The impact that Paul’s ministry in Ephesus had throughout an entire region illustrates the strategic importance of the city affecting change in society. The two great global movements of urbanization and immigration must be considered. What if every immigrant or refugee family was befriended by a local church? References are made to the influential voices of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jim Wallace, and Martin Luther King, Jr. for social change, as well as lesser-known examples from history of those who
possessed a commitment to justice issues, such as child labour being outlawed in coal mines. Christian leaders whose church members flout God’s precepts yet demand that secular society live by them are critiqued. A warning is given to churches that conversion must not be an ulterior motive in loving and serving others; rather, it is an ultimate motive. Churches who are concerned about playing the numbers game will have little motivation for discipleship or kingdom transformation.

Eric Swanson developed a broader perspective of kingdom work beyond evangelism and discipleship when he printed 152 New Testament verses referring to the kingdom and read them every day for a month. The kingdom picture of what all of life looks like when lived under the authority of Jesus Christ includes the welfare of the city.

Churches in a particular city are to consider themselves as one church with many congregations, unified by a common purpose. “The Whole Church,” the fifth chapter, contains a chart to identify needs and opportunities in a city. From this chapter, unique expressions capture the reader’s interest:

- “service puts shoe leather on our spiritual words”
- “saving the lost and serving the least”
- “good deeds, goodwill and good news”
- “kingdom workers, not just community volunteers”

Churches are encouraged to partner with community groups to solve common problems, groups who, if not faith-based, are morally positive and spiritually neutral (that is, not actively promoting another spirituality), demonstrating that people of faith can work with people of good will.

Questions at the end of each chapter provide a focus for personal use or by a group reflecting on the church’s mission. The authors give permission for diagrams to be copied and adapted for the local context. There is a helpful list of suggested online resources and a comprehensive booklist.

The final chapter includes six practical ways of getting started with community transformation and a timely reminder that “the world can be transformed only by those who themselves have been transformed by God’s Spirit.” Inspirational, insightful, informative.
Whether we want to admit it or not, we are all guilty of neglecting major portions of Scripture. In particular, many of us skip over some of the darkest passages in order to get to the more uplifting passages. In *Geography of Grace: Doing Theology from Below*, Kris Rocke and Joel Van Dycke seek to lift the cover off those dark passages because there is significance in even the deepest suffering. They liken these stories of anguish and lament to the blue notes in Jazz music.

The book begins in what the authors call the darkest chapter in the Bible, Judges 19. They don’t do this for the sake of grisly titillation but because the story has something to tell us. The structure of the book follows four broad movements correlating to jazz as well as to God’s response to humanity. The first section, descending, captures the incarnation of Jesus as he enters the pain and suffering of a fallen world. The second section, *hovering*, describes the loving presence of God’s Spirit, even in the darkest of contexts. In the third section, *hanging*, the reader is directed to reflect on death and how, in Jesus, even death becomes the doorway to hope. The final section, *ascending*, reflects on Jesus’ victory in the resurrection, which brings hope and freedom even when we are still in the valley. The authors navigate between narratives of Scripture and narratives from their very real life ministries in a way that highlights the relevance of the blue notes of the Bible in connecting with the pain of the world. The stories are raw glimpses of life on the edges of society. What emerges is a way of reading Scripture that no longer glosses over the agony and grief experienced throughout the narrative.
Evangelical readers may struggle with some of the fluidity of the theology in the book. The authors are not intending to provide a definitive theology; rather, they provide a different angle from which to view the Bible. In doing so, we can develop a more complete and nuanced theology that helps us minister more effectively in a world where brokenness is the norm.

The authors did not write the book in order to force readers to see only the darkness in the world. In each chapter, hope and healing begin to rise to the surface in order that the most marginalized and trampled in society might experience transformation. We enter the darkness long enough for our eyes to adjust, and only then do we experience the brilliance of the light of Jesus. There is risk and pain involved in this journey, but it is a journey that leads to amazing encounters with grace. Those who are beginning their journey in ministering with the poor and marginalized will glean much from this volume. Those who have been labouring among the poor and marginalized will find a great source of encouragement in these pages.
This is a fun and yet sobering book to read. The humanity, the limitations, challenges, victories, and even despair come through the experiences of a married couple who work with the poor. This book reads like a diary and the reader gets the impression that they are being given a window into the private thoughts of a couple who have accepted the challenge to be salt and light in one of the more difficult places on earth.

As missionaries with the organization Servants, the Schneiders do not attempt to sugarcoat the daily challenges they face, nor their own feelings.

The book takes the reader through the development of the work but also of their lives. We start with Christian as a single male missionary, the first meeting of Christian and Christine, their courtship, marriage, beginning a family, as well as the struggles any parent would have concerning what is best for their children such as education, medical care, safety, and disease.

The Schneiders offer a real look into the difficulty of the work. They are transparent and honest as they deal with culture shock, disappointment, and failure, along with the victories that they experience. In their lives and work they demonstrate the five principles of Servants: Incarnation (living with the poor), Simplicity (modest lifestyle), Community (to live and work together), Servanthood (to serve and empower), and Wholism (to live and preach grace and justice).
They also stop you in your tracks as you ponder what it must be like for a young person to be thrown out by a family living on a garbage pile. This book is full of perspectives that make those of us who have much stop and think, and seek forgiveness.

- “Power-hungry leaders always find enough volunteers among millions of poverty-stricken people who have nothing to lose” (39).
- “We in the North have too much; they in the South have too little. We have the ability in our own hands to do something to change that” (65).
- “Those who would ‘missionize’ people, without sharing a piece of their lives and seeking friendship, degrade those people to mission objects and the mission to shared event” (90).
- “I imagine how rich Christians in air conditioned, expensive-style buildings with the most modern music systems praise the Lord, while their siblings in faith in the same city, daily burrow in rubbish in order to survive” (152).

I found myself asking questions such as what type of leadership development programs would be most helpful in situations like the Schneiders are describing. Certainly our western style is out of the reach of most of those described in this book. Yet, leadership is developing. What do those who seek to bring shalom need from us?

This book should be standard reading for any who are considering God’s call to work in the slums of our world. It is eye-opening and real. And the challenge is real.

*Messengers of hope. That’s what they are. Because they have no chance and fight nonetheless. Because they seem lost, yet have faith. Because they are weak but love all the same, to the extent that they are able. Because they wander off the narrow ridge between life and death, between rubble and redemption.*

Voices of Hope is a compilation of stories and pictures celebrating Urban Neighbours of Hope’s (UNOH) 20 years of ministry in the slums and poor urban areas of Australia, Thailand, and New Zealand. It features about 25 different accounts of how someone’s direction and perception of life was completely—if not suddenly—changed by UNOH’s faithful work and by the ultimate Source of beautiful, life-giving Hope: Jesus Christ.

Most of the stories go like this: I went through all these horrible experiences for a long time, then I met God through UNOH, and this is how my life changed.

I am not going to lie, after the first 15 life stories, I became a little numb to all the suffering I was reading about. I had to stop and remind myself that I am reading about my sister’s life. My brother’s reality. I had to spend minutes looking at their faces and imagining them sitting across the table from me. Then I started to see the individual again, God’s fearfully and wonderfully created child behind the raw words.

There is Pui, the young mother of five girls who was left by her husband. Oi, who so badly wanted to get out of her life in the slums. Lily, an orphan and prisoner who had no idea where she was born or where she belonged. What I love is that their stories do not end here. After a while, I started looking for this little sentence: “Then I was befriended by someone from UNOH.” And from then on, everything changes, because Hope enters the picture. The God of the weak, the poor, the hurt, the
needy, the refugee; the God of the ones who are deeply aware of their own helplessness; the glorious God of love brings hope.

And people find healing, love, community, belonging, purpose, sharing, forgiveness, and restoration. You know that the struggle is not over: cheating husbands might not change, murdered parents do not come back, sexual abuse is not erased. But our perfect, unchanging, faithful Father of hope is with us. His love and the constant, stubborn love of his people transforms lives.

From small snippets in the stories we piece together how (urban) missions works: having people over for a meal, visiting others in prison, inspiring someone to use their gifts, helping single moms provide for their families, playing with your neighbors’ kids, praying for change, being present. Building relationships with the people who live around you, loving and supporting them in their hardship, all the while showing them the God in whose image they were made.

Real transformation of poor, dangerous, crime-stricken, hopeless neighborhoods happens by the grace of God, through willing believers, over a period of time, starting with individual people and families.

Read this book if you want to get a taste of what urban missions is all about. Read it if you need to remember why you are an urban missionary. Read it if you want to hear amazing stories of God’s redemption. Read it if you need hope yourself. It will refresh you, delight you, challenge you, and inspire you.
It is well known that the city has been portrayed negatively in literature for centuries and theologians have often been persuaded to view the city negatively—some even argue that Scripture paints that picture. Jacques Ellul, the French sociologist and theologian saw the city in 1974, for instance, represented human technological society as the epitome of human rebellion against God. According to Ellul in his *Meaning of the City*, the earliest references to the city in Genesis are negative, forever associating the building of a city with the murderer, Cain.¹

The city is a direct consequence of Cain’s murderous act and his refusal to accept God’s protection. Cain has built a city. For God’s Eden he substitutes his own, for the goal given to his life by God he substitutes a goal chosen by himself—just as he substituted his own security for God’s.²

Some urban theologians, though much in the minority (i.e. Harvey Cox’s 1966 book *The Secular City*), react and swing the pendulum too far in the other direction and point only to the city’s positives based on their interpretation of biblical literature.

Few have found a balance. Linthicum strove for balance in his 1988 *City of God, City of Satan* as well as DuBose (*How Churches Grow in an Urban World*) and Bakke in various writings within the last 30 years (see especially *A Theology as Big as The City*).

In *Why Cities Matter*, Um and Buzzard take a fresh look at Scripture and do a most thorough job explaining how cities were always a vital part of God’s story and
humanities’ role in that it is not necessarily because of rebellion and other negative attributes. In one notable example, which I use to show how Cain’s city can be looked at differently than the explanation Ellul chose in the example earlier, Um and Buzzard state:

Rather than being an act of self-aggrandizement [(Cain’s building of a city)]
the very act of constituting this city is the fruition of Cain’s own search for security in the world. In other words, Cain builds a city for the same reason that God will later instruct Israel to build cities, namely as places of refuge for sinners and murderers. Even in the midst of Cain’s self-interested city building God’s design for cities as places of refuge is being carried out. Though humanity is fallen as a result of sin the city retains at least a hint of the benefits and blessing it was intended to hold for humanity (60).

This is just but one of the many fresh and theologically balanced approaches this book holds for the reader—it turns out, that in trying to understand why cities matter, they offer several important reasons that ought to get anyone’s attention: cities (and urban life) are inevitable, they are the cultural, informational, religious, and technological centers of our world, and, most importantly, cities matter to God and are essential for ministry in this century.

This is a most excellent book that ought to be welcomed into not only every class on urban ministry, but every church and mission organization. Relevant, fresh, and honest, these scholars have done their work and make an excellent contribution to urban studies today.

2. Ibid., 51.
The twenty-first century, in its infancy, will be forever marked by the global population majority shift from rural areas to urban areas. Nobody knows how the century will end, but the global shift has opened up vast fields of ministry that require nuancing and interdisciplinary approaches. What is urban mission? How has globalization affected the church? How does the church address global immigration? Gary Fujino, Timothy R. Sisk, and Tereso C. Casiño seek to address—rather than answer—these very questions in the book they have edited: *Reaching the City: Reflections on Urban Mission for the Twenty-first Century*.

*Reaching the City* is the twentieth book of the Evangelical Missiological Society Series. A number of authors contribute to compile the 14 articles that make up the book. With so much to explore about urban global ministry, the book takes an interdisciplinary approach, and while much could never be covered in one volume, the editors chose solid works exemplary in the field, including topics on megacities, theology of the city, education and training for urban ministry, and a number of case studies demonstrating critical issues.

Some articles are more helpful than others, and as an urban ministry educator, and one who believes strongly in praxiological education for higher education ministry,
Larry W. Caldwell and Enoch Wan’s article “Riots in the City: Replacing Nineteenth-century Urban Training Models with Relevant ‘Urbanized’ Training Models for the Twenty-first Century,” was by far the most helpful article of the book as it is a key work discussing urban theological education, educational practice, and educational policy. They note that theological education does not serve but hinders urban workers today, principally critiquing an overemphasis in biblical studies and theology while generally neglecting urban context in classical ministry education curriculum. The authors take it further and state, “Most majority world training institutions are filled with such faculty ill-equipped for urban ministry at least in part because of the continuing emphasis in these training institutions upon the nineteenth-century classical disciplines” (103).

Not wanting to deemphasize the importance of biblical studies and theology, their shift from classical philosophical theology (static and western), is practical, participatory, and developmental, where the urban worker learns biblical studies and theology alongside their local community and including them into the worker’s education.

Most of the articles in this book directly supplement themes addressed in my courses on urban mission, and I consistently reference Caldwell and Wan’s article as a launching point for redefining urban ministry training. While Reaching the City leaves me wanting in certain areas, there is no way to address the rapid changes to urban ministry in just the one volume, so Fujino, Sisk, and Casiño’s work whets the appetite for further study of urban ministry and the implications of a migrant, globalized world. I recommend this book as a primer in global urban ministry issues, which takes seriously the need to deepen global studies in urban ministry.
NEFARIOUS: MERCHANT OF SOULS

Film review by Pippa Pearce

Nefarious. The word conjures images of the worst of fairytale villains, eyes blackened with bitterness and grief, capable of unfathomable evil. But what does Benjamin Nolot’s Nefarious look like? How effectively does his film-length documentary Nefarious: Merchant of Souls represent the dark world of modern-day sex trafficking? Will Nolot create the “incurable fanatic” that he so desires? I suggest, sadly, no.

In this first part of a trilogy, Nolot and his team present case studies of sexual slavery spanning five countries and three continents: Moldova and the Netherlands; Thailand and Cambodia; and the United States. Nefarious successfully weaves tales of power play and abuse with the compelling and emotive testimonies of ex-prostitutes, lawyers, counsellors, NGO workers, and—powerfully—ex-traffickers. Nolot’s frequent reference to abolitionist William Wilberforce evidences his belief that the modern world of sex trafficking is comparable with the scale and depravity of the transatlantic slave trade.

It was one of Wilberforce's quotes that left me questioning the purpose of the film. Emblazoned across the screen in a final attempt to shock the viewer is written,

If to be feelingly alive to the sufferings of my fellow-creatures is to be a fanatic, I am one of the most incurable fanatics ever permitted to be at large.

This film certainly opens the viewer's eyes wide to a world of corruption and is, at times, poignant in its graphicness in the hope that we might also become “fanatics.” But how informed will these fanatics really be?
The greater issue of human trafficking, under which sex trafficking falls, promises no such succinct, fairytale ending for all. I am not denying that the victims’ narratives of brokenness and redemption are humbling and need to be told. Simply, *Nefarious* focuses too heavily on the “success stories,” the “finished product” of the healed women—all of whom (bar one who we are told returned to the industry) are now rehabilitated from drug abuse, many married with children, some working to directly combat prostitution. Many organisations in Bangkok alone have invested decades into the lives of women in prostitution. The process requires longsuffering and a great deal of God’s refreshing grace to effectively serve the women, often seemingly without fruit.

Happily, *Nefarious* recognizes the complexity of issues that lead women (and men, although disappointingly they go unmentioned in this film) to enter into prostitution. In my opinion, Nolot’s sensitivity is lost however with misquoted and decontextualised facts regarding the number of trafficked Cambodian girls, or misused terminology that suggested girls from Thailand’s northeastern region, Isaan, were “stateless” or without citizenship in Bangkok. My fear is that this documentary will produce another swathe of short-term volunteers, fanatic about stamping out sex trafficking, but with little stamina for the slow process of unfurling the layers of hurt and mistrust these victims feel.

It is better to watch this documentary than to remain oblivious to this dark, far-reaching industry, but do so understanding that there is not just one perpetrator, no single *Nefarious*. We are called to break and reform the circle of brokenness and vulnerability that drives this industry. My hope is that *Nefarious* will stir its viewers to explore further the depths of this underground labyrinth and realise that the world needs an “incurable fanatic” who is ready to commit to running a race of endurance.
The 2014 International Society for Urban Mission Summit

Location: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Dates: June 28 – July 1, 2014.
See www.newurbanworld.org for details.