

Article Review

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What is one concept that stood out to you in this article?

“Looking to a City: Current Themes in Urban Missions” by Jeff K. Walters reflects on the challenges of missions when faced with the complexity of urban contexts. He helps to define the terms urban and city to help missionaries evaluate their fields and strategy development. Jeff highlights a definition from Gottdeiner and Budd, “a bounded space that is densely settled and has a relatively large, culturally heterogeneous population.” (P. 55) Walters argues that the focus is on the wave of migration and diaspora missiology. In terms of migration, he said there are two great migrations taking place, urbanization, and global migration. Urbanization is when individuals or families move from rural to urban, and global migration, where individuals or families move from their places of origin to a new location. (p.54) The text explains that urban missions is not new and in fact, around in Paul’s time. However, he does highlight, that in 2050 the global urban population will double to 6.4 billion. (pg. 52) Understanding the dynamics of urban missions was informative, but the concept that stood out to me is due to the contemporary theology of the kingdom of God to social concern is the current debate as to the priority of evangelism or social responsibility. (p. 56)

What implications does this concept have for Missions?

The implications at play are how to share the gospel when there are many complex issues in the urban context. Walters highlights how racism and systemic injustice plays a factor of suffering and can make it difficult to share the gospel. There are language barriers and cultural understandings especially when persons are from a different place of origin. Although the city may be heavily populated, it can be also very lonely. There are serious social issues at play that we need both evangelism and social ministry not one or the other. He uses terms “revisionist

holism” which considers evangelism and social action to be equal partners and “retrained holism” means to prioritize evangelism. (p. 57)

What needs to change in your life as a result?

I believe growing in cross-cultural understanding and a theology in an urban setting is something key for me to change in my life. To be able to speak God’s truth and word to bring hope, however, to be aware of the practical ways of helping. Making connections with the community and helping to meet the social needs through resources, but being mindful of cultural boundaries of what is considered “helpful.” I understand certain cultures may find it insulting when trying to assist without permission, though well intended. Within the church context, to not just make sure our program is performing well but really be in tune with the heartbeat of the congregation and meeting the needs whether it be food insecurity, housing insecurity, or immigration status. I agree with Walter’s argument that evangelism and social issues should not be either or but a both/and when focusing on missions in an urban setting.

References:

Walters, J. K. (2011). Looking to a City: Current Themes in Urban Missions. *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 15(2), 52–63.