

Book Review

The Urbanity of the Bible: Rediscovering the Urban Nature of the Bible

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Introduction and Author's Purpose for Writing the Book

As I reflect upon Urbanity of the Bible, there are many salient points which were presented and discussed by the author. Be that as it may, in my opinion, the central theme or objective of the book is that "the Bible is actually an urban book" (Benesh, 2015, 20). For some individuals, examining the scriptures from Old Testament times can produce a misconstrued opinion that the rural environment was the norm of God's expectation for humankind's existence. However, as was

emphasized by the author, “The Bible says much about cities, their origins, their development and progression, how God’s people lived in cities, their scope, function, and purposes, and ultimately their outcomes” (Benesh, 2015, 131).

Author’s Social Analysis of the Target Urban Context

As was shared by Benesh, “The process of urbanization has been around since the formation of the first cities, although cities of today stand in stark contrast” (2015, 34). There are varying focal or target points which can be considered or analyzed as one pursues a greater understanding of the social component of our diverse communities. In my opinion, the author’s analysis encompassed their perspective that “ Cities have been growing since their early beginning, whether through elevated birth rates, rural-to-urban migration, or international migration” (Benesh, 2015, 36). I believe their focus as it relates to the target urban context was correct as they took into consideration different elements which can impact the composition of the population. This was supported when the author stated, “ Urbanization should not be confused with city growth. Urbanization refers to the proportion of an entire society’s or nation’s population living in urban or metropolitan places” (Benesh, 2015, 35). It is important to note that urbanization within communities has been promoted even throughout Scriptures.

Author’s Urban Theological Reflection and Formation, Including Biblical Examples

As clearly stated by Benesh, “Therefore, it can be argued that the formation of the first cities was and is a God-glorifying endeavor” (2015, 39). This position and view of the author in regards to their urban theological reflection and formation is adequately supported as one explores Biblical passages from Genesis to Revelations. There are numerous scriptures about life in cities which can be found throughout the Bible. As it was denoted in the book, “The basis of our urban existence is actually found in the triune nature of God and it begins in Genesis” (Benesh, 2015, 24). As a starting point, one can find that “Genesis 1-11 is indispensable for the unveiling of the biblical worldviews and recognition of the mission of God” (Benesh, 2015, 24). There are other Old Testament examples such as Nehemiah and the rebuilding of Jerusalem which also highlights the importance of city living. When one transitions to the New Testament, as expressed by Benesh, “In Acts 17: 22 -27, Paul paints the picture of a sovereign God who helped form and shape the urbanization process up to that point in human history” (2015, 30). The biblical theme continues even to Revelations. It is key to consider that “Instead of a garden in Revelation 21 – 22 we find a city” (Benesh, 2015, 30). The applicable principle which can be seen as the common thread in urban theological reflection and formation is that, “We were made relational beings to enjoy community with not only God, but with one another. This then is the foundation for the urban trajectory of humanity as well as Scriptures. We were meant to live in cities” (Benesh, 2015, 31).

Author's Theological Implementation Approach and Practice

The question that then surfaced was what is the author's theological implementation approach and suggested course of action which should be practiced. As was expressed by the author, "The Great Commandment and Great Commission pave the way for healthy, vibrant, life-giving urban life" (Benesh, 2015, 120). These two points of consideration provide a sound foundational implementation approach which can be fostered and cultivated towards reaching those of the city. I agree with the author, "The crux is found in Matthew 28 when Jesus says His disciples are to reach out to others" (Benesh, 2015, 93). Reaching out to others will not only give attention to what is to be implemented, but will also emphasize the best practice for us to follow. As we engage in the practice of not only reaching out to others, we must continuously be mindful that "God is at work; the Kingdom is at hand; the Gospel transforms lives and cities; and the mission Dei is still in process" (Benesh, 2015, 108).

Student's Clear and Organized Impressions of the Author's Arguments

There were various take-aways which I extracted from what the author presented in this book. One of the fundamentally clear and concise truths which resonated with me is the following: "It is incumbent upon Christians today to recognize and enthusiastically enter the challenge of the new, emerging world. God is calling the church into the city" (Benesh, 2015, 49). This is not optional if our desire and determination is to please God. As stated by Benesh, "Because we are a covenant people living for God, our theological framework actually determines how we live life in the here and now" (2015, 17). Our framework for what we do and how we engage must be in alignment to the Bible and as directed by God. We must remember that "Theology is not simply a conversation for the church, but it spills into all areas of our lives and into all areas and domains of life. This includes the city" (Benesh, 2015, 17). If that is the sentiment of our focus and connection to the city, that will work towards validating that, "The Bible is an urban book. The central stage of where the drama of biblical history is played out is in the city" (Benesh, 2015, 99). We must endeavor to fulfill our roles to reinforce the view of the urbanity of the Bible.

Works Cited

Benesh, Sean. 2015. *The Urbanity of the Bible: Rediscovering the Urban Nature of the Bible*.

Portland, OR: Urban Loft Publishers.