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**BOOK REVIEW 1:
The Urbanity of the Bible:
Rediscovering the Urban Nature of the Bible, Sean Benesh**



**UR 510-NA/NOS:
URBAN THEOLOGY
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a) Author's purpose for writing the book, including the author's Main point

How should biblical scholars, students, and Christians approach urbanism through biblical history and storyline? The Bible is often associated with the rural setting. However, the storyline from Genesis to Revelation reveals that the Bible is an urban book, and urbanism is at the center stage of each book in the Bible. Sean Benesh states that *Missio Dei* was and is urban and not rural.

Theology is not simply a conversation for the Church but spills into all areas of our lives and domains of life. This includes the city. (p. 17).

It is time to let our lights shine in the city, to be theologically aware, culturally sensitive, and passionately engaged in holistic renewal. God cares for urban people and urban places.

We should be encouraged and emboldened to let our theology spill out of the Church and into the City's streets, alleys, and sidewalks. Will you join me? (p. 18).

b) Author's social analysis of the target urban context and its connection to the resulting theological reflection and formation

The history of the Church's spiritualities reflects the spiritual pilgrimage of particular individuals and people at a particular time and context.

Jesus Christ, the anointed One, is the cornerstone of the Church, and his mandate to the Church is "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. Benesh refines the mission and the goal of the Christian through rediscovering the urban nature of the Bible.

He used a unique expression, "*Missio Dei*," and how God desires to redeem urban people and urban places, that the Gospel is about cosmic and holistic redemption more than simply populating heaven.

c) Author's urban theological reflection and formation, including biblical themes & principles and theological framework

In the first chapter, He argued that cities are a natural outflow of the triune God who made humanity in his image. We were created for the community. Add to that the scope of Genesis 1:28, dubbed "the urban mandate" (Conn & Ortiz, 2001, p. 87), and gives rise to the idea that cities were part of God's plan from the beginning. "A city is a social form in which people physically live close to one another" (Keller, 2012, p. 135).

Benesh stresses that: *The Urbanity of the Bible: Rediscovering the Urban Nature of the Bible* (p. 37).

d) Author's theological implementation approach and practice as it correlates to the stated urban theological reflection and formation

"All-out urbanization is fundamentally changing the condition of humanity and our relationship to the Earth. Humans have been undergoing a staggering transformation: from living in a world of farms, villages, and small towns, we are changing ourselves into an urban species" (Girardet, 2008, pp. 4–5).

Benesh observed that every community is structured around the culture and the people's history. In the neighborhood, corner convenience stores have given way to high-end organic grocery stores, unkempt taverns, trendy brew pubs, and hair salons catering to the black community to hip yoga studios. What does it look like to do and be the Church among both groups of people? How do a historic black church transition and translate to the demographic shifts taking place in the neighborhood? How do new white hipster churches translate to incorporate the black community? (pp. 140-141).

e) The extent to which the book informs the process of urban theological reflection and formation and may impact urban theological implementation

Urbanization should be distinct from city growth. Urbanization refers to the proportion of an entire society's or nation's population living in urban or metropolitan places. Cities can increase in population enormously without urbanization taking place. This can occur if the rural population grows as rapidly as, or more rapidly than, the urban population. (Philips, 2009, pp. 148-149)

Benesh stresses that We were never meant to dwell solely in the Garden of Eden, but the trajectory of humanity was destined to play out in cities. (p. 37).

Andrew Davey (2002), in his book *Urban Christianity and Global Order*, writes about the impact of the Church—regardless of the era—that takes place once it becomes interwoven in the urban landscape. "Urban experience and process affect all elements of life—social, cultural, and political; this is usually concurrent with movements of resistance and transformation, the significance of which should not be underplayed. (p. 135). We are ambassadors or even "diplomats" to our cities as we represent to a watching world what it means and looks like to live as God's covenant community. We do this by offering both arms of grace (p. 171).

During these tremendous urban transitions, we wonder whether God's people have developed a robust urban theology that will sufficiently shape and invigorate their witness among the nations in the City.

"Missional" or "missional living" is a Christian term that essentially describes a missionary lifestyle. Being missional includes embracing a missionary's posture, thinking, behaviors, and practices to reach others with the message of the Gospel.

The renewed cry for social justice in our day will only be a helpful corrective to middle-class lethargy if the social justice advocates do not exaggerate our failures and do not overstate their case from Scripture. "The Bible is clear from the Old Testament through the New Testament that God's people always had a responsibility to see that everyone in their society was cared for at a basic-needs level" (123). "Preaching the Gospel requires engagement and going out of our comfort zone." This book appeals to Christians and the Church to fulfill God's call. We must dedicate the rapid transformation and metamorphosis across the globe.

Benesh states, "The church in the city can be guided by a theology that affirms God's hand in the formation of cities and inherent common grace but at the same time recognize that at times, much of what is broken is the result of individual and systemic sin." (175)

Every follower of Christ must clearly understand why he or she is here. We are not on this Earth to raise our families and enjoy life. We have a mission and a calling. Every morning when we wake up, we should think: How can I serve Christ and His cause today, where I am, with the total commitment of my life?

This book had more to do with urging historians to go back to this fundamental quantitative way of analyzing history than it did for any Earth-shattering revelations on Christianity. When we want to learn about people, sometimes counting them is less important than trying to listen to their stories. Benesh uses storytelling to engage the readers with a compelling call to action. This book is relevant. The "essence" of the good news is that God's kingdom will begin on Earth through the changed lives of His followers.

Biography:

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

Timothy Keller, *Loving the City: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, Redeemer City to City, 2016)