

The urban context is the ideal context in which the Churches of Christ can grow and prosper. It should focus on gender equality and a renewed spiritual rhythm in one's life. (Galbreath, Lecture 4). Urban ministry should additionally emphasize "a racial reconciliation for a divided world, an interior examination for a world living on the surface, a sexual wholeness for a culture that splits bodies from souls, and a missional presence for a distracted and disengaged people." (Galbreath, Lecture 4).

In relevance to gender equality, which is one of the major and distinct challenges in some urban ministries, in the book called, "Preaching Through a Storm," Beecher Hicks discusses this concept. He contends that "We must face the fact that female preachers are not on the way, they are here! And if blame must be placed, then it must be situated squarely upon male shoulders."<sup>1</sup> He also pointed out the fact that "We have not encouraged, we have not trained, we have not taught our young men to make themselves available to be used by God."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the author is pointing out the irony that women who are perceived less suited for ministry than their male counterparts, are more educated and trained than them. He further states that "Not only do black women comprise the predominant church population, they are responsible through their consistent stewardship, for the expanding base of everything from beliefs to budgets."<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the author Eric Mason who wrote the book called "Woke Church," asserted that "The goal is the release for women for expanded Titus 2 and Great Commission mandates. Women can serve communion, teach in appropriate settings, lead ministries and small groups, be theologians, professors, apologists, deacons, evangelists, and missionaries..."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Beecher H. Hicks Jr., *Preaching Through a Storm: Confirming the Power of Preaching in the Tempest of Church Conflict* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1987), 49.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018), 155.

This signifies that rather getting fixated upon that fact that Jesus Christ had chosen only men as his disciples, the Church of Christ should become more receptive toward women by handing them more leadership positions. Beecher H. Hicks said regarding this that “The question is whether that choice was a matter of sex or a matter of tradition.”<sup>5</sup> Female biblical characters such as Debra, Esther, Phoebe, Lydia, etc., were all living examples within the biblical context who had some sort of leadership within the church, despite the time period being biblical antiquity. It is surprising to think that there are churches even now in the twenty first century who are being stricter upon their female congregates than in biblical times. Also, although there are conservative theological seminaries such as Westminster who allow women to become deacons, that is not enough in the twenty first century. Women should also be allowed to become pastors as well, because rather than the gender, the talent and the heart of the believer is more important in terms of pastoring.

In terms of attaining a renewed spiritual rhythm in one’s life, especially for those who are pastors, it is important to note that pastors have many roles. This is because a pastor is a “story teller, a spiritual educator, a sacramental educator, a prophetic agent, cultural teacher, discerner of gifts and a biblical interpreter.” (Galbreath, Lecture 10). As believers in Christ, we have to remember that “we are not transformed from the outside in; we are transformed from the inside out.” (Galbreath, Lecture 10). After all, “What use are the superficial changes we make if we neglect that deep work God wants to do inside us?” (Galbreath, Lecture 10). In the biblical scriptures, the Apostle Paul emphasizes that believers must have Christ formed in them in Galatians 4:19. (Galbreath, Lecture 10). We also need to remember to “be regularly called back

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<sup>5</sup> Beecher H. Hicks Jr., *Preaching Through a Storm: Confirming the Power of Preaching in the Tempest of Church Conflict* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1987), 49.

to the essence of our lives in God. That essence is one of ongoing transformation; that is, Christ being formed in us.” (Galbreath, Lecture 10).

In terms of the major and distinct urban ministry challenge of racial reconciliation, Mason discusses this notion. He asserts that “Many African Americans who engage in the white church end up feeling like pawns for diversity instead of true agents of gospel change. When they speak out against injustice and white silence, they find themselves sidelined.”<sup>6</sup> What is unfortunate is that a multitude of our African American brothers and sisters in Christ “have experienced more affirmation of their dignity from black power movements than they have from the church of Jesus Christ.”<sup>7</sup> For in the Bible, it states in Galatians 3:28 that “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

This is why in Galatians 2: 11-21, Paul writes how he had scolded Peter for not sitting with the Gentiles when other Jews had arrived, even though he had sat with them in the beginning in order to demonstrate that there is no racial discrimination in the Church of Christ. Other believers had also followed Peter’s example, because they have been influenced by his fears which is another reason why Paul treats this scenario as very unfortunate. Paul in Galatians 2:13, states that “The other Jewish believers also started acting like cowards along with Peter; and even Barnabas was swept along by their cowardly action.” This outcome of this racial situation was erroneous, yet it was more understandable because it was in biblical antiquity.

However, we as believers of Christ living in the twenty first century have no excuse at all for racial discrimination. Some believers and churches might claim to not be racist, yet their actions differ from their words. The Church of Christ must be united as one Body of Christ.

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<sup>6</sup> Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018), 90.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

However, this cannot happen as the church is divided not only on race but also on denominations as well. When we go into heaven, there is no denominations; there are simply fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Therefore, for unity, “It will require us to leave the baggage of political and denominational affiliation behind and respond to the call of unity and commitment. This is a vision for change.”<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, before we unite, “we need to lament what has happened in this country- the division in our culture and in the church.”<sup>9</sup> In order to properly lament, we need to review the history of our culture, the church, and our families to see where the lines were first drawn and how to overcome such trivial boundaries that hinder the Church of Christ from being united into one body. As Eric Mason states, “Family history provides a framework for how a person was nurtured in this sinful world.”<sup>10</sup> In terms of racism against African Americans, one can look at the history of America where “people from Africa from kidnapped and marched from the interior of Africa to be shipped in inhumane conditions across the Atlantic. They were sold to build an economy based on free labor.”<sup>11</sup> Even two centuries later, racism against African Americans and other racial minorities have not been eradicated because of how deep the historical roots go down.

In terms of the historical tension between the Gentiles and the Jews, they had not gotten along with each other initially. This is because the latter viewed the former as dirty and lawless while the Gentiles viewed the Jews as discriminatory towards them because they were not Jewish and did not have pure Jewish blood and did not adhere to Jewish laws. Another reason was because the Gentiles were already living in Jerusalem when the Jews had returned from their exile. The Jews had felt as though their jobs and homeland were being stolen by the Gentiles. In

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 78.

the same way, Caucasians and other racial minorities need to settle the historical grudges of their peoples before being truly united together.

Dr. Rob Reimer had provided an example of addressing this racism issue first so that the church can be unified. When he was there to give a sermon as a guest speaker to a predominately African American Church, right after he had introduced himself, he had apologized because of what his ancestors had done to their ancestors during colonial times. He had taken ownership of the sins of his ancestors even though it was not his fault. After this, the audience members had respected him more when he had preached and were more willing to listen. The Caucasian Christian Church should follow in the same way.

Furthermore, unification is crucial for the church because of two primary reasons. The first one is that they must exemplify Christ to the world in a godly manner. Often, the Christian Church is known for what they stand against rather than for what they advocate. If the Church is seen to fight even among themselves by the outside world due to race and denominational differences, atheists would claim that there is nothing unique or holy about Christianity. An additional reason why the church is criticized by nonbelievers is due to the passivity and disengagement of its believers. They have a Christ against culture model of thinking rather than a Christ with culture mindset. The second reason why unification is pivotal is because the Church can achieve more visionary goals when more people are collaborating in a Christ like manner with no grudges, tensions, and hostility.

Moreover, another distinct and major challenge of urban ministry is that we need to examine the world in which we live in. William Augustus Jones Junior states that “The Christian faith is often charted with being esoteric and ethereal, a religion so heavenly minded that it’s no earthly good.”<sup>12</sup> He additionally asserts that “Certain critics, historically and presently, have

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<sup>12</sup> William A. Jones Jr., *God in the Ghetto: A Prophetic Word Revisited* (Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 2021), 92.

looked on Christians and accused them of espousing an ethic that is tragically divorced from the problems and pains of this world, and the charge is not without some basis in fact.”<sup>13</sup> Rather than sharing the view of a fundamentalist which is a Christ against culture perspective, we as Christians need to be more open minded to the current cultural trends. In other words, we need to have a Christ with culture in paradox point of view according to Richard Niebuhr, a Christian theologian.

Additionally, Mason asserted that “Being woke has to do with seeing all of the issues and being able to connect cultural, socio-economic, philosophical, historical, and ethnical dots. A similar term is conscious.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the term of “Woke Church” signifies a church who is observant of all the world’s dilemmas and can determine whether the roots of those problems are in the cultural, socioeconomic, philosophical, historical, and ethnical” categories.<sup>15</sup> By understanding the cultural trends, the church can adapt its evangelistic approach and let people come to them rather than the other way around. William Augustus Jones Junior asserted that “Monasticism and asceticism are not presented in the Gospel narratives as models for Christian witness.”<sup>16</sup> By viewing changes during these times as not simply the work of Satan, the perspective of the church will no longer be black and white. This is something that urban churches could do better than their suburban or rural counterparts, because the nature of urban ministry should be dynamic. This is because constant changes are taking place in an urban setting whether it be new constructions, new people settling into their new homes, the rising of innovative fashion and musical trends, protests, fundraisers, etc.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018), 25.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> William A. Jones Jr., *God in the Ghetto: A Prophetic Word Revisited* (Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 2021), 47.

For an example, if a pastor is aware of such changes, he or she can alter the liturgy of their churches to make it more engaging to a younger generation who prefers hip hop music rather than a slow hymn with no instruments for worship songs. Perhaps by requiring that people in an urban church must dress up “properly” by coming in with a suit and a tie, newcomers are being pushed away who cannot afford such things or who prefer comfort over tradition. If a pastor in an urban setting is planning to plant a new church, it would be good to be cognizant of where the new apartment complex is being build or renovated as to place the church is a visible area nearby. This is so that newcomers can see the church building in a noticeable place rather than the new church being built in an obscured location which would be challenging to find. An alternative of examining the world in which we live in is if a pastor in the urban setting does research and discovers the main ethnicity of immigrants going into the urban region or city. Then that urban pastor can deliberately choose a helper who is bilingual and can act as a translator being the pastor and the immigrants who can be potential believers. In other words, the nature of urban ministry should also be flexible as well.

However, this of course, does not mean that every cultural trend that is occurring is not influenced by Satan. Inevitably, there will be some that are demonically inspired such as a possible trend of a rising of a cult, Satanic beliefs, a rising of a new religion which opposes Christianity, witchcraft, domestic abuse, etc. Other examples do not have to be so blatantly demonic. More subtle examples are an emphasis “based on accomplishments, possessions, efficiency, intellect...” (Galbreath, Lecture 4). Social media and politics can also lead people astray from the path of righteousness as well. (Galbreath, Lecture 4). This signifies that “You have to be shrewd to not be used for political means.” (Monrose, Lecture 7). This is to be done by “making your integrity clear so that others do not try to buy or sell your support.” (Monrose,

Lecture 7). William Augustus Jones Junior in the book called, “God in the Ghetto,” asserted that “Butchers have been crowned and brothers crucified. It always happens when politics is regarded as Messiah rather than means. It ineluctably occurs whenever piety and patriotism transcend justice and love.”<sup>17</sup>

As Beecher H. Hicks states, “we must be able to identify evil so we can understand it.”<sup>18</sup> This is why a pastor in the urban setting needs to have the spiritual discernment to differentiate between satanic trends and neutral trends. In order to attain such spiritual discernment, a spiritual transformation must take place within the believer’s heart. In contrast, “In conservative traditions, transformation is about getting the right theology in one’s head while overlooking the inner work God wants us to do.” (Galbreath, Lecture 4).

This leads to the next subtopic and one of the distinct urban challenges of having a missional presence within the community. William Augustus Jones had contended the point that “Jesus lived in the ghetto. Jesus prayed as a priest that his church would be prophetic. His petition made no room for a worldless witness. Believers are in the world and of the church.”<sup>19</sup> If a pastor is not engaging outside communities, but is solely focused on church matters such as paying taxes, maintaining financial records, planning for future bible studies for small groups, he or she will not reach nonbelievers. “As a pastor, you cannot be afraid of the community.” (Galbreath, Lecture 3). And it is also important to note that “you have to be known in the community for something.” (Monrose, Lecture 10). The best possible scenario for a disengaged church would be that the urban pastor is a good pastor only to individuals inside the church and not outside of it. This is why in an urban setting where there are large numbers of people, the

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<sup>17</sup> William A. Jones Jr., *God in the Ghetto: A Prophetic Word Revisited* (Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 2021), 101.

<sup>18</sup> Beecher H. Hicks Jr., *Preaching Through a Storm: Confirming the Power of Preaching in the Tempest of Church Conflict* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1987), 87.

<sup>19</sup> William A. Jones Jr., *God in the Ghetto: A Prophetic Word Revisited* (Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 2021), 47.

empowerment of the church congregates is crucial. “What people need is more than membership, it is empowerment of being.” (Monrose, Lecture 7).

Thus, in order to empower the church congregates, they need be fixated on a deeply formed mission rather than a superficial one. This is because a “deeply formed mission is first about who we are becoming rather than what we are doing.” (Monrose, Lecture 7). Rather than being concerned about whether you are right or wrong in terms of your decision making as a spiritual leader, you must have passion and be strong willed. “It is better to be strong and wrong rather than weak and right.” (Monrose, Lecture 10). Passion is also crucial to have because it can mean the difference between the success and failure of the church’s mission to the outside community. Without passion, a spiritual leader cannot lead his or her people to do the Great Commission or demonstrate servant leadership to the world. You can have the most skilled team and be a pastor with a varied skill set; however, if you do not have passion, that visionary goal will not be obtained in the long run and will end up being a wishful dream.

For the significance of missional presence, the Christian Church needs to become holistic as a faith without works is a dead faith as mentioned in James 2:17. Before addressing an individuals’ spiritual needs, we must first focus on their physical needs first. This demonstrates to them and to the entire world that we do care about people as much as we care about the church. This shows that Christians are not simply looking to increase their numbers. They are loving and caring for strangers on an unconditional basis, whether the individual believes or not.

It is also pivotal to note that a church’s visionary goal should first focus on nearby communities outside the church rather than doing a mission trip to a foreign nation. This line of reasoning is important because without first establishing your presence and influence in nearby communities, your church will not be known for being helpful to its own people. It is good to

first establish a strong relationship with the community and once a positive relationship is consolidated, then the church can focus its efforts elsewhere temporarily. Another benefit of focusing on nearby communities is to practice evangelistic approaches to nonbelievers within their own nation.

Whenever the church goes to a foreign nation for a mission trip, they adhere to their culture to the best of their abilities, but when they return to their homeland, they treat non-believers with insensitivity due to an inadequate approach to them. This is because the church gets lax when they are back in their homeland and talk to the people with the same language and culture. Thus, their approach to evangelism is not thought through sufficiently as compared to an international mission trip. For an example, it is not good if a Christian evangelizer uses the phrase, “you should.” Some bad examples are “you should be a Christian,” or “you should go to church,” or “you should repent of your sins.” This creates a negative connotation within our words and thus the recipient will block off further attempts from other evangelizers as well as the current one. For Titus 2:7-8 states, “Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned...”

It is also important to note that many churches often underestimate the significance of relationships. It is easy for a nonbeliever to refuse the attempts of a Christian evangelizer whom they had never met before. However, if the two people already know each other, the non-believer will have more patience and openness to listen and receive the invitation of the evangelizer to come to the church and potentially become a fellow believer in Christ. The key is patience and a gradual process of relationship building. It is also helpful if new Christians bring their atheist friends with them to church. Often times, new Christians will have more motivation to do the Great Commission since everything church or bible related is refreshing to them. It is typically

the opposite for some veteran Christian believers who have lost touch with their non believer friends and who have lost motivation and passion to participate in the Great Commission and missions.

Finally, a sexual wholeness is needed for urban ministry. Often times human sexuality has been emphasized in unhealthy ways through media, and is affecting how Christians and nonbelievers view the concept of sexuality as separate from that of the Lord. However, we as Christians need to remind everyone that sexuality is a gift from the Lord. It is something precious to be shared with your significant other. Proverbs 5:15-17 states, “Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers.”

Moreover, William Augustus Jones Junior asserted that “Jesus Himself is the role model of all who claim an affinity with Him.”<sup>20</sup> This means that the Christian Church should not strictly adhere to traditional thinking, as Christ himself was counter cultural. He did not concern himself with gender roles which demonstrated a strong sense of a sexual wholeness. For an example, in Mark 10:13-16, Jesus Christ was embracing the children and had admonished his disciples for trying to discourage this act. The reason for the action of the disciples was that it was not considered the social norm for a man to openly embrace children as the action itself was considered to be feminine, however, Jesus did not care.<sup>21</sup> Debra Hirsch in the book called, “Redeeming Sex” describes Jesus giving “the children access to himself, dignifying them by giving them attention...”<sup>22</sup> This once again demonstrates an aspect of godly sexual wholeness.

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<sup>20</sup> William A. Jones Jr., *God in the Ghetto: A Prophetic Word Revisited* (Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 2021), 47.

<sup>21</sup> Debra Hirsch, *Redeeming Sex: Naked Conversations about Sexuality and Spirituality* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 98.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Therefore, the Christian Church should be more open to the discussion of sexuality concerning sexual identity and abuse so that believers and even newcomers to the church can experience sexual wholeness in Christ Jesus. This will give opportunities for those suffering from sexual temptations and abuse to share their suffering with others in the church and gives such victims a much-needed social support group within the church. We must teach believers that sexuality is not a negative concept but a gift from God. However, we also must remind church members that even though it is a gift, it can still be corrupted by the sin in this world. Some examples of the corruptness of human sexuality are “sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these,” as it is mentioned in Galatians 5:19-21. This is a major challenge that many conservative churches still do not do even till this day. We have to remind ourselves that our sexual identity is rooted in the Lord and not in how others view us. God created us in his own image as our “body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within” us as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6:19.

In finality, as previously mentioned, the nature of urban ministry should entail the addressment of major and distinct issues such as gender equality, spiritual renewal in Christ, racial reconciliation and equality, a Christ like observation of the secular world, and a sexual wholeness. (Galbreath, Lecture 4). If the Christian Church focuses on the vast majority or all of these things, the world will see the Christian faith in a more positive light. The world will then know Christianity for what it stands for rather than what it stands against. This will then increase the chances for evangelization. Thus, the urban church must be the pioneer of Christian churches today to pave the way for them to follow in our increasingly secularized society.

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