

VOICES from the
MISSIONAL MOVEMENT



VOLUME ONE

THE MISSIONAL CHURCH



NORTH AMERICAN BAPTIST CONFERENCE

THE MISSIONAL CHURCH

VOICES FROM THE MISSIONAL MOVEMENT
-VOLUME 1-

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PREFACE

CAM ROXBURGH, NAB VP OF MISSIONAL INITIATIVES
VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

“He who has a why to live can bear almost any how.”
—Friedrich Nietzsche

One would not expect that a quote from Nietzsche would open a series of missional e-books, but in this case it is appropriate. Many have used this quote before, and it does have some relevance to this series of seven e-books about the missional movement. Here are a few thoughts that help frame what we are doing.

1. The missional movement correctly began with the *why*.

One of the reasons the missional movement has had so much traction around the globe is that we have focused first and primarily on the *why*. Mission is about God. It is not about the church—at first. We so often have started with the questions and then theory of the church instead of first understanding the nature and action of God. Lesslie Newbigin and then the Gospel and Our Culture Network have long pushed for a deeper understanding of the *missio Dei*.

2. The pull that we have is toward the *how*.

So many of us are practical beings. We lead churches or ministries and are really trying to join God on mission, but we rush ahead to the practical *hows*. It is so important to us that those on the team are active leaders in local neighborhood churches, *but* we also know and feel the temptation to rush past the *why* and get to the *how*. We resort to ecclesiology leading the way. We ask church questions instead of God questions, and this causes a drift in mission.

3. We need reminding we are in a liminal time.

There are times when the *how* just doesn't seem to be working, so we work harder and try other methods. We resort to the idea that we can bring the change. This is when we need reminding it is about God and about His mission. He is in charge. He will bring the change in His time. Although we are confident we cannot go back to when the church was in a position of privilege and power, we are in a time when we do not yet know where we will land. Liminal.

The reasons why our *hows* do not work may have very little to do with us, other than we have not clearly discerned what it is God is doing. Our efforts and strategies may be useless

no matter how many times we increase or change them. We may be stuck in an old paradigm.

When the NAB started down this path, our goal was to stir the missional conversation. We believe that many across North America have indeed been exposed to all things missional. It is a new time. Time to put much of what we have discussed into practice. Time to focus on establishing multiplying missional Christian communities into every neighborhood across the United States and Canada. And so many are working toward that end.

We believe we still have a role to play in what God is doing here in this great continent. We want to first **be a voice in our midst that will remind us as we go that the missional conversation is about the nature and action of God in our midst, and not first about how we develop a strategy for reaching our neighbors.** It is about God, and we want to keep reminding us all not to move from that place.

Second, **we believe that there is a need to equip local missionaries, leaders, and congregations so that they might join with God in what He is doing in that place.**

And third, **we believe that we can work with others to establish new communities of God's people in neighborhoods across North America.** These will likely look very different than the existing NAB congregations, but they will each become a faithful presence to the people and the place where God has called them in this time.

We trust that this e-book series will provide you with a reminder of where we have come from and an imagination of where God might be leading us all as we follow Him on mission.

INTRODUCTION – MISSIONAL VOICES

ANTHONY BROWN, REGENT COLLEGE
VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

This e-book is a compilation of articles originally published between 2008 and 2015 in *The Missional Voice*, the journal of Forge Missional Training Network. The articles were written by a variety of authors with a wide variety of academic and practical experience as a way to encourage pastors, church leaders, and thinking Christians everywhere to reflect on the challenges facing the church in North America. Our hope in gathering this collection is that we will once again challenge your thinking and encourage you as you seek to follow the missional God.

FINDING YOUR WAY IN THE MISSIONAL CHURCH CONVERSATION

SCOTT HAGLEY, PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

In the late 1980s, a group of pastors and theologians from across North America formed the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) in order to work together “on the frontier of the missionary encounter of the Gospel with North American assumptions, perspectives, preferences, and practices.”

The GOCN worked in three different areas: (1) understanding and describing the massive changes in North American culture(s) so as to discern God’s work and activity; (2) performing theological and biblical work regarding the Gospel itself, searching for ways in which the Gospel gives resources for a more confident witness to Jesus Christ; and (3) helping the church to shape its life around mission so that it might bear faithful witness to the Gospel.

While the GOCN published a regular newsletter, its first book-length publication came in 1996 as a collection of essays entitled *The Church between Gospel and Culture*. These essays feature some breadth, but they do not yet show a clear agenda for the conversation. Two years later, a cohesive team-written book—*Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*—focused all three GOCN concerns toward the identity and vocation of the congregation. From beginning to end, the authors propose a renewed vision of the church as a people shaped by and for the mission of God. The church is a people both “called and sent to be the unique community of those who live under the reign of God.”¹

It is *Missional Church* that brought the term “missional” out of obscurity and into widespread usage, even if the immediate impact of the book was a sustained academic conversation. By 2000, three more books were published in the Eerdmans GOCN series, most notably Darrell Guder’s *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*.

Guder draws from missiologists like David Bosch and Lamin Sanneh to suggest that North American congregations need to be regularly evangelized by the Gospel in order to engage in evangelism themselves. The North American church has a good news problem—it is not always convinced and convicted by the Gospel.

¹ Darrell L. Guder and George R. Hunsberger, eds., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 103.

These early books in the Eerdmans GOCN series continue to provide substantial guidance for congregations and Christian leaders in North America because they attempt to model a holistic way of engaging the question of missional church. Books like *The Church between Gospel and Culture*, *Missional Church*, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, and the later *StormFront: The Good News of God* work with the categories of God, world, and church in a dynamic way. In these early books, a biblical theology of the reign of God accompanies attention to the doctrine of the Trinity and the *missio Dei*. These biblical–theological concerns are then shaped in such a way that addresses the church and God’s world. Theology, biblical studies, missiology, sociology, and ecclesiology influence one another. This helps to set an interdisciplinary agenda as biblical scholarship, missiology, and cultural studies specialists all talk to one another. However, it also kept the conversation at an elevated level academically. Pastors and church leaders knew these books were important, but they also asked, “So what? What does this look like in practice?”

This began another stage of books when, in 2003, Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost wrote *The Shaping of Things to Come*. *Shaping* focuses many themes from the GOCN series into a call for a “revolution” of incarnational, messianic, and apostolic church starts. Filled with stories from their experiences in Australia, Hirsch and Frost make the missional church more accessible for their readers. At the same time as *Shaping*, Lois Barrett and a team of researchers published *Treasure in Clay Jars*, which tells the story of eight missional congregations across North America. Like *Shaping*, *Treasure in Clay Jars* provides a picture of missional in concrete circumstances, but unlike *Shaping*, it focuses less on new church starts and more on existing congregations. Furthermore, it provides the first published study of missional churches in which the research team notes eight “patterns of missional faithfulness” identified in the congregational study.

Both books eschew some of the biblical–theological work that characterize the first few missional church books; they each nod to the earlier work, wave the *missio Dei* flag, and then get on with a more narrow agenda that moves between a strategic missiology and the social sciences. Books in the missional stream after 2003 become less interdisciplinary for the sake of either in-depth biblical or theological analysis or, more commonly, to outline a strategic missiology that applies the social sciences in the name of building leadership capacity and facilitating congregational change.

The advantage of this shift is that researchers, consultants, and scholars have generated some profoundly helpful books on leadership and strategies for congregational change. Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk’s *The Missional Leader* and Patrick Keifert’s *We Are Here Now* stand out in these categories. Both books combine a deep understanding of the theological roots of the missional church while orienting readers toward the concrete practices and learned capacities for leading missional change. So also, in biblical and theological studies, James V. Brownson (*Speaking the Truth in Love*), Michael W. Goheen (*A Light to the Nations*), and Christopher J. H. Wright (*The Mission of God*) help us read the Scriptures as a missionary text that testifies to a missionary God. These books in biblical and theological studies strengthen the original commitments of the missional church conversation and help shape a biblical, missional imagination.

But something is also lost as publications have become increasingly specialized. The early

GOCN books followed the approach of Lesslie Newbigin in that they worked across disciplines of theology, missiology, and cultural studies. They worked hard to situate the missional church within a particular cultural understanding and around some particular theological commitments. The scope of books like *Missional Church* invited conversation because of the priority given to issues of identity. The GOCN was convinced that the church needed a renewed theological and cultural imagination, a renewed sense of who we are and where we are located. These broad and compelling brush strokes invited more focused conversation, which is why we see books focusing on how movements happen (Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*) and on leadership and organizational change (Roxburgh and Keifert) alongside books focusing on a biblical understanding of mission (Goheen or Wright). But when abstracted from the bigger conversation regarding an identity rooted in the *missio Dei*, these more focused works are interpreted by some as strategies for change, products for purchase, models to imitate.

And this is a big loss. Many now access books on missional without having encountered Newbigin's *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* or *The Open Secret*. Some other early works that kept the GOCN focused on the issue of missional identity, such as David Bosch's *Transforming Mission* and even Johannes Blauw's compelling biblical theology *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, fade into the background. In deepening our practical and theological understanding of the missionary call of the North American church, we must be careful not to fragment the conversation into theology and practical or identity and strategy.

Just as 2003 was a turning point in the missional conversation, moving from a wide-angle lens into more focused work, we see two new shifts taking place in the last few years. The first focuses on discipleship and the second focuses on neighborhood. Both, in a way, come together in missional communities or neighborhood mission groups. Books written by Dallas Willard and Richard Foster on spiritual disciplines have been popular for decades. But it was not until recently that the spiritual formation and missional literature have found resonance with one another. In 2012, Dwight J. Zscheile edited a book of essays on this topic, *Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation*, and Roger Helland and Len Hjalmarson published *Missional Spirituality* in 2011. This joining is important in that it helps identify the way in which one's life in the neighborhood is not the target for our spiritual formation, but part of it. Calling and sending forms the rhythms of our discipleship as well.

The second recent shift focuses on the neighborhood as the primary site and context for mission. Here, popular interest in asset-based community development, such as Peter Block and John G. McKnight's *The Abundant Community*, has connected with the local, contextual practice of congregations across Canada and the US. Recent books that describe this shift are Alan J. Roxburgh's *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* and *The New Parish* by Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight J. Friesen. We are convinced that these movements come together in small, geographical missional communities.

However, each of these new shifts struggle to retain the focus on a renewed theological identity that is at the root of the missional church. The creation of neighborhood missional communities cannot be a strategy for church survival or a plan for greater activism. The

original warning from *The Missional Church* stands for us today: the crisis of the church in North America is not one of strategy or resources or activism, it is one of theological identity. Who and whose are we? Where do we find ourselves? And what do we think God is up to? These are the questions that help us to again and again hear the call of God so that we might be sent out by His Spirit into His world.

DEFINING MISSIONAL CHURCH

CAM ROXBURGH, NAB VP OF MISSIONAL INITIATIVES
VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

“For ‘missional church’ to mean anything, it can’t mean everything.”

What It Is Not

The phrase the missional church seems to have passed its sell-by date. For the past number of years the innovators have given way to the early adopters who have now seen the term become so much a part of mainstream evangelical language that it is almost not worth using anymore. Leaders, churches, and denominations have all used the term missional to describe anything and everything from a women’s fellowship to their latest evangelism program. In many circles the term has become tired, and those who once wore the badge proudly are shying away from it altogether.

However, at the NAB we don’t want to give up on the term just yet. Admittedly, even saying missional church is misleading. It seems to us like saying bouncy trampoline. Yet we believe there is still value in the phrase. Becoming a missional church does not mean that you have adopted a new model of church. Many have used the term in their search for the latest silver bullet as they look for success and significance. It also does not mean a new approach to evangelism; although this may be part of becoming missional, it more than likely points out that the leader or church is still captive to a modern story.

Other Definitions

Many scholars and practitioners have walked this journey ahead of us and have defined missional church from their perspective. We thought it might be helpful to list some of the definitions we found were most helpful and got us headed in the right direction.

Alan Hirsch

“Missional church is a community of God’s people that defines itself and organizes its life around its real purpose of being an agent of God’s mission to the world.”²

Lois Barrett

² Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 82.

“A missional church is a church that is shaped by participating in God’s mission, . . . [which is to say] churches see themselves not so much sending, as being sent. A missional congregation lets God’s mission permeate everything that the congregation does—from worship to witness to training members for discipleship. It bridges the gap between outreach and congregational life, since, in its life together, the church is to embody God’s mission.”³

Micah Network

God by His grace has given local churches the task of integral mission. The future of integral mission is in planting and enabling local churches to transform the communities of which they are part. Churches as caring and inclusive communities are at the heart of what it means to do integral mission. People are often attracted to the Christian community before they are attracted to the Christian message.⁴

The NAB Definition

The NAB has adopted the basic ideas of Charles Ringma and would describe missional church in the following way.

“The missional church vision is not a programmatic response to the crisis of relevance, purpose, and identity that the church in the Western World is facing, but a recapturing of biblical views of the Church all too frequently abandoned, ignored, or obscured through long periods of church history. It is a renewed theological vision of the church in mission, which redefines the nature, the mission, and the organization of the local church around Jesus’ proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom. Missional churches seek to respond to God’s invitation to join Him in His mission in and for the world, as a sign, a servant, and a foretaste of His Kingdom.”⁵

Making It Land

Since the Gospel and Our Culture Network began to raise the issue of the *missio Dei* and the implications for the local church, the missional church conversation has been growing. Many have jumped on the bandwagon in various ways and have actually done some damage to the understanding of what it means to be missional. However, there has also been a criticism—one that has some merit—that missiologists who support the missional church position have spent much of their time theorizing and less of their time in practice.

Perhaps there is truth on both ends of the spectrum. Some who are so crucial to the movement spend much of their time in the theoretical and do not land when it comes to practice. Others focus too much on the practice without reflection and inadvertently end up remaining captive to a modern perspective. What is needed is an approach that allows the

³ Lois Y. Barrett ed., *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

⁴ Micah Network Declaration on Integral Mission, September 2001, http://www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/page/mn_integral_mission_declaration_en.pdf.

⁵ Leonard E. Hjalmarson, *An Emerging Dictionary for the Gospel and Culture* (Eugene: Resource Publications, 2010), 100.

theology to land in the context of a local neighborhood. One of the key texts is still Alan Roxburgh's *Reaching a New Generation: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church*.

Over the past year or so I have been deeply encouraged by a move toward a more practical approach. A number of new books are being published that are aimed at helping missional theology to land in a local context. The danger is that we will end up copying the format instead of getting inside the practices. If we are to be truly missiologically faithful, then the context is crucially important and must not be ignored. This was the foundational problem with what so many did in the '80s and '90s when they tried to copy Willow Creek. Some of the helpful books that are starting to emerge are books like *The Tangible Kingdom* by Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, as well as Alan Hirsch and Darryn Altclass's *The Forgotten Ways Handbook*.

There are no magic bullets to this question. Many have articulated the same principles in different ways. Craig van Gelder listed five practices that he believes are a part of the out-workings of a missional church. Mike Frost and his community in Australia also have five, which they have put into the acronym B-E-L-L-S. Alan Roxburgh has taught in the past about there being four practices that missional congregations are involved with. Mike Breen, in *The Passionate Church*, talks about his experience at St. Thomas in England and now in the United States with Walt Kallestad. In each of these places they practiced three missional principles: in, out, up.

Southside Community Church in the Vancouver area, where I am a member, has five areas of missional practice. In the end, they are only an articulation of what some others have said, but they are our effort to try to faithfully live this missional journey. We believe that the conversation should be more about who we are than just what we do, but we would also agree with Alan Hirsch when he says that we need to practice our way into a new way of thinking.

The five that we use are:

- **Heart** – Loving God with all of our hearts (worship/spiritual disciplines, prayer and more)
- **Mind/Will** – Loving God with our minds/wills (Kingdom worldview)
- **Strength** – Loving God with all of our strength (our use of the resources God has given to us to use)
- **Neighbor** – Loving our neighbors and neighborhoods as ourselves
- **One Another** – Loving one another so that all will see Christ in us

At the NAB, we believe that there are practices that we need to be keeping as missionaries to the neighborhoods in which God has placed us. What we call them and what they look like locally may vary, but for consistency we have chosen to use the five listed above.

Our goal is to equip the local church to both hold to a deeply theological understanding of what it means to be missional and to grow through a very hands-on practical approach to life together that sees our hard work in theology landing in a local context. We need to hold both in tension without compromising on either.

THREE KEY ISSUES FACING LOCAL CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA

DONALD GOERTZ, TYNDALE SEMINARY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

The local church in North America is in arguably the most exciting context for ministry in living memory. We live in a wonderfully rich and diverse region of the world where a faithful enacting of the Gospel can touch every corner of the world as we follow our networks outward. Yet, if we hope to realize this possibility, there are a number of issues we must address. Let me highlight three.

First of all, we must deal with our past. The local church usually lacks any significant awareness of its own story, let alone an understanding of the impact of the church in its community over the years. To compound this, we seldom even see any value in trying to understand what has happened and how this colours people's experience of the Gospel. While we recognize that the past shapes our personal lives and spend large sums of money on therapy in an effort to come to terms with it in order to move forward, we rarely translate this insight to our corporate level, except in meta-issues, such as native schools or the crusades. As a result, we are not aware of the range of stories that the church evokes locally: narratives of judgmentalism, well-intentioned but irrelevant actions, and oppressive attitudes, to name a few. There is a reason why people view us with hostility, indifference, or irrelevance. It is not enough to posit some type of conspiracy or to place the blame on previous generations. Our call is to actively practice and accept hospitality in a way that will allow us to hear these narratives and own them. Unless we see the church as a communion of the saints that spans time as well as geography, in which our stories all come together into one, we are always building on sand.

Second, we have a serious issue in the present, of which very few of us are even aware. Our present reality is caught in a battle between personal faith highlight reels. Each of us has one or two seminal memories of when we met God in deep, life-shattering, and life-changing ways. Those experiences have shaped us, and now they stand as a grid through which we run and judge all subsequent experiences. We do this for both ourselves and for the larger church community. It is very seldom that the present can live up to the memories of the past. That nostalgia is as real, as powerful, and as imprisoning for the newer generations as it was for those who tried valiantly to maintain those models that led to traditional/contemporary worship battles. It is vital that leaders in the church learn to practice kenosis and give up the hegemony of their understanding around the best ways to engage God. We do this in order to allow new generations to enrich the community. Our

present community context must be one that celebrates those stories that root it, but is always open and welcoming of the new ways God is working. This is seldom easy for those in leadership as it means opening up again something which they have often fought long and hard to achieve. The present must always be open and rooted in dynamic tension.

Third, we lack imagination for the future. Our faith has become very private. It is about my life and my future. We are seldom acting out of a deep concern for the welfare of our city or region. Few evangelical churches have even wrestled with what it would be like for the Kingdom to be breaking in here, now. All of us struggle with this disconnect between a desire for a bigger church and larger budget on the one hand and what the contours of the Kingdom would look like in our location on the other. Here we will need to open ourselves up to Scripture, but in particular, to the role of the artist. In the twenty-first century, the artists will lead us. They are the ones who dream. Dreams and pragmatism are always in tension. Unless we learn how to make this tension more creative, we will never be able to see the future for our region. We will always be buying it from someone else. And this is the greatest tragedy of the local church in North America; when we sing a new song, we have bought it from someone else. When we dream a new dream, we have bought it from another church in another region. God is always doing a new work. Even in Canada and the United States. The artists help us to see it.

FOR THE CHURCH IN CANADA TO BECOME MISSIONAL . . .⁶

GLENN SMITH, CHRISTIAN DIRECTION
MONTRÉAL, QUEBEC

For the church in Canada to be truly missional, I sense several issues need to be integrated into our corporate and ecumenical life as the people of God. As an urban missiologist, let me speak to these issues out of that framework.

First, we need a new framework to think about Canada. It is remarkable how the urban landscape has evolved throughout the history of the country. At Canadian Confederation in 1867, fewer than one in five citizens lived in towns and cities with populations of 1,000 or more. By 1924, Canada was considered an urban nation by Statistics Canada, as better than 50 percent of the population lived in an area of 1,000 people or more. In 1965, the country was truly metropolitan as 50 percent of the population lived in cities of 10,000 people or more. Now there are 140 urban centres occupying less than 3 percent of the land. In the three largest urban centres—Vancouver, Toronto, and Montréal—we find 35 percent of Canada’s population occupying 0.8 percent of the land. It is for this reason that I say, “The urban system of Canada is Canada.”

At first glance the analysis is striking. For years urbanologists spoke about the North American city, combining Canadian and American cities in their analysis. Although most Protestant denominations in Canada have separate administrative structures, the missional approach is still amazingly “(North) American.” However, it becomes obvious that Canadian cities are distinct. In our urban form, Canadian cities are more compact in size and therefore considerably denser in population. (For example, my city of Montréal is the third most densely populated city in North America, slightly behind New York and Boston.) In transportation and travel, Canadian cities have four times fewer freeways, relying two and a half times more per capita on public transportation.

Interestingly, Americans own and operate 50 percent more motor vehicles than Canadians. Montréal has the highest number of commuters and people walking or biking to work per capita in North America. Urban populations represent more ethnic diversity, higher incomes, and more traditional family units. Canadian middle-income families show more propensity to stay in the central city. In monetary terms of urban growth and decline,

⁶ While this article is first and foremost directed at a Canadian audience, many of the core concepts remain applicable to the entirety of the North American church. –Editor

Canadian cities are more stable, perhaps because urban safety is much more in evidence. (Montréal's homicide rate is 2 per 100,000 people compared to an average of 20 in major US cities.)

Finally, urban government is radically different between the two countries. However, in urban fiscal policy, American cities depend on property taxes for only 27 percent of their total revenue in contrast to 52 percent for Canadian cities. In Québec municipalities, 76 percent of total revenue is from property taxes, severely limiting, for example, Montréal's ability to manoeuvre. US cities have more access to local sales taxes and income taxes and receive greater state and federal transfers than Canadian cities.

These realities force the church to take metropolitan areas much more seriously. More theological emphasis on the city as a specific geographical place needs to be emphasized in our preaching and teaching. Bible studies on the mission of God in the city are needed if the church is to equip the whole people of God to love the places in which we live. Church renewal initiatives need to be more intentional in populations in our cities where the good news has been marginalized.

Many pastoral leaders do cultural studies and wrestle with the sociology of place. On a different track, other practitioners try to get their heads around the worldviews that make up the personality of our cities, sometimes referred to as a horizon or space. We need to help urban ministry practitioners put these two approaches together so that in examining the city as a place we are also learning to look very closely at the worldviews that are reflected in the urban context. Place is space with historical meanings, different identities, varied societal preoccupations.

But beyond definitions and the demographic function of cities known as urban growth, one may ask, "What is happening to Canadian urban society?" What were the conditions, inherited from the past, that have been transformed in these last forty years that help us understand its present state? This is a fundamental question we need to explore if we are to understand the cultural context in which we pursue community development. But our concern points in a further direction with a second question, "How will the church reflect and pursue relevant community development in the years ahead?"

Increasingly we hear the use of the word "transformation" as a term that encompasses all that the church does as followers of Jesus in God's mission in the city. But what does this mean? What does it entail?

I would suggest that a transformed place is that kind of city that pursues fundamental changes, a stable future, and the sustaining and enhancing of all of life rooted in a vision bigger than mere urban politics.

If we accept that the Scriptures call the people of God to take all dimensions of life seriously, then we can take the necessary steps to a more holistic notion of transformation. A framework that points to the best of a human future for our cities and regions can then be rooted in the reign of God.

Within Jewish writings and tradition is the principle of shalom. It represents harmony,

complementarity, and establishment of relationships at the interpersonal, ethnic, and even global levels. Psalm 85:11 announces a surprising event: Justice and peace will embrace. However, a good number of our contemporaries see no problem with peace without justice. People looking for this type of peace muzzle the victims of injustice because they trouble the social order of the city. But the Bible shows there cannot be peace without justice. We also have a tendency to describe peace as the absence of conflict, but shalom is so much more. In its fullness it evokes harmony, prosperity, and welfare.

The term goes to the very heart of God's picture of what He has created and desires for creation. The word occurs 236 times in the Old Testament. It refers to a state of fulfilment resulting from God's presence and covenantal relationship with His people. It encompasses concepts of completeness, harmony, and well-being.

In the New Testament, the image persists, but the term changes. The reign of God is the royal redemptive plan of the Creator, initially given as a task marked out for Israel, then re-inaugurated in the life and mission of Jesus. This reign is to destroy His enemies, to liberate humanity from the sin of Adam, and ultimately establish His authority in all spheres of the cosmos: our individual lives, the church, society, the spirit world, and ecological order. Yet, we live in the presence of the future. The church is between the times, as it were: between the inauguration and the consummation of the Kingdom. It is the only message worth incarnating for the whole city!

In spite of the vast and excellent literature on Canadian urban issues that exists today, unfortunately very little has been written to document the experience of Christian ecclesial reflection and practice in our census metropolitan areas. Over the past decade very few significant articles have appeared. (Among them are three, fine, accessible pieces about faith in the Canadian city written by David Ley, professor of urban geography at the University of British Columbia.) There are three reasons to explain this.

First and foremost, people doing urban ministry in Canada (and across the globe, for that matter) rarely take time to reflect in writing on their actions and learnings. We all are impoverished because of this. Second, American perspectives influence far too many notions about urban mission and ministry in Canada. Christians continue to identify urban ministry (solely) with inner city poverty issues, neglecting the broader issues of Canadian urbanization and urbanism. For that reason alone, one must insist on describing metropolitan orientations by using Canadian data. Finally, far too many practitioners, especially church planters, are using American paradigms. The unending debates about the usefulness of seeker-sensitive models, purpose-driven initiatives, and Christ and our culture forums are examples of this.

We are not taking the time to think biblically so as to act contextually!

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