

Toward an Ortho-Kerygma in the Urban Economy*

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The Christian church, from its very early days, has always had the concern for right doctrine (orthodoxy). This was largely the concern of many of the New Testament epistles, especially the Pauline and Johannean. This concern also accounts for many of the writings of the church fathers such as Irenaeus. The concern for orthodoxy was responsible for the rise of many of the early church councils and other such councils and controversies dating from the fourth century to the present day. Though a similar interest in right practice (orthopraxis) has also been evident throughout the history of the church, its accent in scholarly discussions assumed new heights with the writings of liberation theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez.¹ Since the rise of liberation theology and its emphasis on orthopraxis, the concept has become common in religious parlance. In religion, especially Christianity, three elements are very important; namely, belief, practice, and proclamation. While the first two of these have received a great attention in the various forms of the enunciations of orthodoxy and orthopraxis, the third is yet to receive a coherent and systematic articulation. In this paper, I hope to call attention to the need for the formulation of an ortho-kerygma for our gospel witness in our globalizing and urbanizing world.

Informing my focus in this paper on the urban economy is the understanding that our world is becoming increasingly urban and that the urban landscape is becoming dominant on the rural economy. H. Lefebvre defines the urban society as “a society that results from a pro-

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1. The magnum opus of his works is *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1971).

cess of complete urbanization.” He further specifies, “I used the term ‘urban society’ to refer to the society that results from industrialization, which is a process of domination that absorbs agricultural production.”² Lefebvre wrote these words over forty years ago, and their reality is even truer today than he could have imagined. Thus, our contemporary world is an urban society in two respects. First, by Lefebvre’s definition, the domination (and interconnectedness) of urban over (of) rural economies has reached unprecedented heights and the trend is escalating, not abating. Second, most of the world’s population now lives in cities.³ I have chosen to use the urban economy as the focus of our study because of its significance in the intersection of urbanization and globalization in our postmodern condition.

The City: Ancient and Modern

It is appropriate to commence our discussion with an understanding of the city. Dale T. Irvin posits that, historically, cities emerged as political centers but, along with that, they also had the important role of being centers of religion. He writes:

[Cities are where] kings and queens lived and from which they ruled in the ancient world and round the globe. The city was birthed as the semi-otic world of royalty, the ceremonial religious center where temples and palaces were located, the place where the divine and the human came together to shape the world.⁴

The growth and sustenance of cities was propelled by agricultural production surpluses, which freed segments of their populations to engage in endeavors other than food production. Understandably, this phe-

2. Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2003), 1–2. He further notes, “This urbanization is virtual today, but will become real in the future,” 1.

3. The 2009 United Nations *Statistical Yearbook 54* (p. 47) shows 50.5% of the world’s population as living in urban areas, with the annual growth rate of 1.9%, while 49.5% live in rural areas with the growth rate of only 0.3%, accessed September 6, 2011, http://unstats.un.org/unsd/syb/syb54/SYB54_Final.pdf.

4. Dale T. Irvin, “The Church, the Urban, and the Global: Mission in an Age of Global Cities,” *International Bulletin of Urban Research* 33, no. 4 (October 2009): 177. For detailed discussion of the rise of the cities in the ancient world, Irvin suggests the following sources: Paul Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters: A Preliminary Enquiry into the Origins and Character of the Ancient Chinese City* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1971); David Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Nezar Alsayyad, *Cities and Caliphs: On the Genesis of Arab Muslim Urbanism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991); Joel Kotkin, *The City: A Global History* (New York:

nomenon was more common along significant river basins. The ancient cities of the Fertile Crescent are excellent examples of this. Production diversification created the need for distribution. Traders and merchants, therefore, became catalysts to city growth. They made possible the movement of goods from one place to another, so that peoples' desires were no longer limited by what was produced locally, but distributive trade brought within close reach products from remote regions. As cities assumed their new role of being the centers of commerce, which through trade linked far-flung regions, "[e]ventually the merchants assumed control, giving rise to the commercial city, which became the engine of the global network called modern capitalism."⁵

Concomitant with the changing nature of the city's economy was the change in demographics. No longer did the city consist of farmers who journeyed daily to the countryside to work the fields. It was now comprised of an army of non-agricultural producers (artisans of all kinds), administrators, soldiers, priests, merchants, transporters (caravan drivers and porters), and other service providers. The city inhabitants were also not solely from the local populations but also included people of different nationalities or locations. Irvin observes:

[Cities] have always attracted immigrants from their surrounding countryside, but also they drew merchants who came from other cities and regions. The merchants from afar contributed much to making the urban a multicultural reality.⁶

Therefore, while multiculturalism as a feature of urban landscape has assumed new dimensions nowadays, it is not a novelty of our times.

Another important element of urban demography is that of class. The working classes have always dominated the populations of cities. In ancient times, the most dominant economic group often consisted of slaves.⁷ So dominant was the role of slaves in ancient societies such as

Modern Library, 2005).

5. Irvin, "The Church, the Urban, and the Global," 178.

6. Irvin, "The Church, the Urban, and the Global," 178.

7. In one estimate the population of Athens in classical period, for example, is thought to have consisted of 40,000 men (together with their families making up 140,000), the *metics* (resident-aliens) 70,000, and between 155,000 and 400,000 slaves, D. P. M. Weerakkody, "Demography," in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece*, ed. Nigel Wilson (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 213–15. Though Weerakkody questions the veracity of these figures, they seem to be corroborated by the figures Athenaeus (vi.20) said were recorded from the census conducted by Demetrius Phalereus, in which the population of Athens consists of 21,000 citizens, 10,000 *metics* (resident-aliens), and 400,000 slaves, accessed September 6, 2011, <http://www.1902encyclopedia.com/S/SLA/slavery-03.html>.

Greece and Rome that they were sometimes referred to as “slave societies” or “slave economies.”⁸ During much of the Middle Ages, the oppressive relationships of master and slave were taken over by feudal lords and peasants, but slavery was reintroduced toward the end of that era. And just as in ancient times, the slave population not infrequently outgrew that of freemen in most slave holding colonies of the new world. As the abolitionist movements recorded successes, the growing number of freed slaves poured into city centers, introducing or aggravating the urban poverty situations. Indeed, beginning with the industrial age of Western civilization onward into the twentieth century, the inner cities of western urban societies were inundated with hordes of poor, white, blue-collar workers, and recently freed slaves. This was the beginning of the rise of slums and their associated social problems.

Industrialization brought with it an increased capacity for both production and the diversity of the goods produced. This initially offered greater job opportunities both within the industries themselves and, subsequently, through the chain of distributive trade. It also afforded better means of communication and transportation. This in turn enhanced mobility of labor as the industrial urban society attracted people from different parts of the world. The consequence of all this was the further differentiation of urban demographics in every regard. Irvin comments:

The processes of class and cultural differentiation that historically marked the urban have accelerated in the globalizing city, intensifying the polymorphous while expanding the distance between rich and poor to astronomical proportions.⁹

As the city dominates, rules, and determines the fate of rural areas, so do its fortunes affect those of the latter. These changing demographics of urban areas (ethno-cultural diversity and exacerbating disparity between the rich and poor) are also becoming a common feature of rural areas.

The dominant feature of the post-industrial era in which we live is the worldwide web, the information “super highway” of the cyber space. The web has radically reduced our world to the so-called “global village.” The interconnectivity of our world is vividly represented in the ability

Indeed, Weerakkody, also shows that Greek population was small at the beginning of the first millennium BC, blossomed and reached its zenith by the middle of the millennium, and declined subsequently, especially beginning with the Peloponnesian War (circa. 415–413 BC), “Demography,” 215.

8. For a different view on this, see Ellen Meiksins Wood, “Landlords and Peasants, Masters and Slaves: Class Relations in Greek and Roman Antiquity,” *Historical Materialism* 10, no. 3 (2002): 17–70.

9. Irvin, “The Church, the Urban, and the Global,” 179.

to beam images electronically around the world in an instant of real time. Transnational migrations or networks, typified by multinational corporations and international public service (the UN, its agencies, and international NGOs) and their ability to connect and move people globally, thereby creating new type of “nomads” with new types of identity or non-identity (or, at the least, hyphenated identities) accentuate the multifaceted pluralistic character of the emerging urban society.¹⁰ This urban society is emerging and fast becoming the norm globally. Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk acknowledge this trend:

The contexts in which congregations live are changing. There are fewer and fewer communities with a wholly similar ethnic or racial background. Globalization creates a pluralist culture in which people next door are from around the world.¹¹

In view of this changing context of the urban space, we have to begin to conceive of formulating an appropriate and effective way of articulating our Christian witness to it (i.e., formulating the outlines of an orthokerygma).

The Bible and the City

The city is a common feature of biblical literature. It appears early in the account of human origins (Gen 4:17). Accompanying the mention of the rise of the city in the biblical narrative is a hint at the industrial diversity (Gen 4:20–22). There are over 850 references to the city in the entire Bible. Prominent among these is the city that humanity set out to build at Babel on premises that are counter to the divine mandate regarding human settlement (Gen 11:4), both in the pre-lapsarian (Gen 1:28) and in the post-lapsarian eras (Gen 9:1, 7).

Many features of the city mentioned in the Bible are still with us today. We have already mentioned industrial diversity. The city as a place of conglomeration of peoples is a place where vice and violence

10. This is the phenomenon that Karin Sotnik addressed in her essay on NPR’s “This I Believe” Series, in which she raised and illustrated the changed character of identity. She states, “I am . . . ‘Russian-speaking Latvian Jew’”; “Or take my good friend Ligia - a Romanian-born Israeli French transplant to Philadelphia and prominent architect, turned professor, turned therapist, turned published novelist”; and “My pre-teen children, if asked the same sort of question, will cheerfully tell you that they are Russian-American-Christian Jews. They don’t see anything strange about it, and neither do many of their classmates,” accessed September 6, 2011, http://www.whyy.org/91FM/tib_sotnik.html.

11. *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 173.

are rife (cf. Gen 18, 19; 34:1–28; 1 Kgs 21:1–13). Other characteristics mentioned include: commerce—with its trade negotiations (Gen 23:1–18); diplomacy (Gen 26:26–33); religious or cult centers (Gen 28:19; 1 Sam 9:6–13; 10:5; 2 Sam 6:12); transportation and communication hubs (Gen 33:18; John 4:1–8); administrative capitals and the administration of justice (Gen 36:32–39; Deut 22:15–22; Josh 20:1–6); absorption of surplus from the countryside (Gen 41:48); war theater (Judg 1:8, 17–25; 20:11–48; 2 Sam 20:15–22); subversion of the state (2 Sam 15:1–10); new cities (1 Kgs 16:23–24); public works and utilities (2 Kgs 20:20; 2 Chron 32:4–5); religious revivals and missionary outreaches (2 Chron 30:1–14; Ps 55:10–12; Is 1:21–23; Jer 6:7–8); ethnic diversity and tensions (Neh 2:19; 4:7; 13:28); religious pluralism (1 Kgs 11:1–8; 2 Chron 33:1–8; Ezra 8:1–16); and the place of suffering, oppression, and injustice (Job 24:1–12; Amos 4:1; 6:1–6). Additionally, the contemporary phenomenon of globalized cities as centers of global commerce is also found among the cities in the Bible (cf. Ezra 27:2–25).

At core, there is nothing new about the city that cannot be seen from the ancient or biblical cities. Douglas Rutt set Syrian Antioch as a paradigm of a center for urban mission. He observes that by the time of the apostolic church, Antioch already was the hub of east-west commerce in the Roman Empire. As the node in the nexus of the trade between the Mediterranean world and the Far East, it was “responsible for the shipping of goods from Arabia, China, India, Babylonia and Persia to Rome.”¹² Being a place that received so much traffic of persons and goods, Antioch was characterized by ethnic diversity from its foundation and soon adopted pluralism as the bedrock of its city culture thereby becoming the converging point of occidental and oriental cultures. These characteristics made it truly the first “postmodern” city. Besides the multitudes of merchants, soldiers, and others whom business brought from all over the known world at that time, its permanent residents consisted of native Syrians, Macedonians, Greeks, and Jews. By the time of Christ, Antioch had accommodated Hellenistic religion and philosophy to its local religions and cults such that the city became “filled with orientalized Greeks and Hellenized Orientals of all classes and all degrees of education.”¹³ Thus, as a pluralistic and open society receptive to new ideas, Antioch was more suited than any other city to become the center for world missions of the primitive church. This possibility only became a reality with the arrival of the Apostle Paul whose pedigree was in the mold of Antioch, with the *converge* of the horizons of

12. Douglas Rutt, “Antioch as Paradigmatic of the Urban Center of Mission,” *Missio Apostolica* 11, no. 1 (May 2003): 34–35.

13. Rutt, “Antioch as Paradigmatic of the Urban Center of Mission,” 36.

his Roman citizenship and his very Jewish/Pharisaic upbringing. He well understood and cleverly exploited the ethos and pathos of such a society for the ends of the gospel (1 Cor 9:19–22).

Models of the Christian Kerygma

The Christian proclamation of the kingdom of God has been as varied as the body of Christ has been over the millennia. I will highlight only the central models. They include logocentric,¹⁴ philanthropic, liturgical, charitable logomorphic,¹⁵ and presence proclamation models. Logocentric proclamation lays a heavy stress on the power of the spoken word. This kerygmatic model is often associated with orthodox purity or conservatism and evangelistic zeal. The initial witness of the leadership of the primitive church manifests a preference for this model. This is evident from the sermons of the Apostles Peter and Paul (cf. Acts 2:14–41; 3:12–4:4; Acts 13:13–43; 28:16–24). They were preceded by John the baptizer and Jesus the Christ (cf. Matt 3:1–12; 4:17; 5–7; 10:7), though Jesus had made use of other approaches as well. These fountainheads of Christian logocentrism took their cue from the Old Testament prophets.

Indeed, with a skewed comprehension of Jesus' missional mandate to the church, there has been a tendency to understand it in almost exclusively logocentric categories. In modern times, this stance was taken more as a reaction to the social gospel (philanthropic proclamation, discussed below) of the modernist (liberal) church than as a reclaiming act of the authentic Christian kerygma. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and at the dawn of the twentieth century, many Christians had embraced wholesale modernism and its presuppositions and as such had espoused the social gospel, almost to the exclusion of a propositional verbal witness to the gospel. The evangelical church reacted to this with extreme negativity to all social activity. J. Carl Laney writes:

There was a widespread fear that participation in works of social improvement would lead to neglecting more traditional evangelistic activities. Some Christians, in effect, minimized the importance of social con-

14. This refers to the kind of proclamation that is primarily (almost exclusively) word-based.

15. This refers to proclamation in word-form; the emphasis in this case is on the form. The difference between logocentrism and logomorphism is that the former has the "word" as its primary if not only strategy, while in the latter "word" form witness is one of the strategies.

cerns and shared no interest in improving the conditions of suffering humanity.¹⁶

Thus, to maintain orthodox purity over against the liberal church's minimalist approach that had reduced the gospel to a mere philanthropic and political activism, the evangelical church withdrew from all social actions. This is what Carl F. Henry has aptly called "the great reversal."¹⁷

Logocentrism in the church's witness held sway through much of the twentieth century and was epitomized in the ministries of evangelists like T. L. Osborne, Oral Roberts, Louis Palau, and Billy Graham. It is hypocritical to seek to address the matters of people's ultimate destiny but fail to speak to the concerns of their temporal existence, knowing well human life cannot be bifurcated into purely spiritual and temporal. Indeed, the temporal impinges on the eternal. Even in spiritual things, the choices made in temporal existence determine one's ultimate destiny. Hence, the two ought to be addressed *pari passu*. Jesus, as our supreme example, met the felt needs of the people he ministered to as well as their perceived needs (Matt 9:2–7; 15:29–37; John 8:1–11).¹⁸

The kerygmatic model is what I call philanthropic proclamation. With the posthumous publication in 1778 of H. S. Reimarus's *Wolfenbüttel Fragments*¹⁹ modernist historicism was on the march in biblical interpretation. The trail Reimarus blazed was followed by others like H. E. Paulus (1761–1851), F. C. Baur (1792–1860), D. F. Strauss (1808–74), and A. B. Ritschl (1822–89), among others. Their modernist interpretive approaches to the New Testament texts presupposed our world to be a closed universe, and they discountenanced the metaphysical or spiritual and the supernatural. Thus, the value that Jesus (and the New Testament) held for them ultimately, as summed up by Ritschl, was ethical. Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) brought this ethical conception of Christianity to its logical end, as he set forth the value of Jesus and his teaching as lying in the universal fatherhood of God, the inestimable value of the human person, and the ultimacy of the commandment of

16. J. Carl Laney, "The Prophet and Social Concern," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147, no. 585 (Jan–March 1990): 32.

17. Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). See also Perry C. Cotham, "Introduction: The Ethics of Escapism Versus the Ethics of Involvement," in *Christian Social Ethics*, ed. Perry C. Cotham (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 1979), 11.

18. For further discussion of these themes, see Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, and Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in the Age of Hunger* (New York: Paulist, 1977).

19. Discounting the supernatural, he portrayed Jesus as a messianic pretender and charged his disciples with inventing Christianity.

love. Towards the end of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, these moves in the academy eventually filtered into the church. Mainline churches were in large part persuaded, and their gospel witness whittled down to mostly socio-political action for the poor and philanthropy. This is what Henry called the “great betrayal.” Important as were the works of political actions for the oppressed and social activity for the poor, liberalism was inadequate since it addressed the earthly needs without attending to the issues of eternal destiny (this they ought to have done without neglecting the other, cf. Matt 23:23).

Liturgical proclamation describes the witness of churches like the Eastern Orthodox churches. In their case, the church’s rich liturgy becomes the point of contact with the community. In this model, festivals (such as the rich traditions of Christmas, Easter, and the like); rituals such as several occasions of prayers through the day; mass; and ceremonies at critical points like baptism, birth, weddings, and death served as the most potent witness for the faith communities. This model tends to for those whose pedigree is rooted in the church, where the church is more of a cultural institution than a vital missional body. It is only of late that evangelical elites, particularly in the US, disenchanted with the consumerist and commercial orientation of the independent evangelical moment, have on their own began to seek out and drift to the Orthodox churches.

Charitable logomorphism²⁰ derives from the evangelical church’s response to extreme logocentrism. In this case, social needs are addressed not necessarily out of concern for the plight of the people in the condition, but primarily as a means of discharging one’s obligation to bear witness to Christ. In other words, the social action is merely a bait to draw the needy in and to make them hear the logomorphic gospel.²¹ This kerygmatic form explains, to some degree, why there was a rise, in mid-twentieth century, within the evangelical community, of establishing urban shelters for the homeless, soup kitchens, and the distribution of clothes and other consumables to the poor. The problem with this is that it addresses the symptoms of the conditions of the poor, often in a patronizing manner, without addressing the root causes of their predicament.

Last but not the least is presence kerygma. In our postmodern condition, especially in the Western world, there has been a new trend

20. I used this word with the meaning of a dominant word-form or word-based proclamation.

21. For a detailed discussion of similar concepts, see David O. Moberg, *Inasmuch: Christian Social Responsibility in Twentieth Century America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), and his *The Great Reversal: Evangelism Versus Social Concern* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972), 41.

of suburban/urban population drift as a form of witness bearing. This development is a feature of the emerging church movement. Some in the emerging community are persuaded of the need to be present with those to whom they seek to minister. Thus, adherents of the presence kerygma sell their home in the suburb and move to buy homes within the inner city. An example of this is the Southside Community Church of Vancouver, of which Roxburgh and Romanuk write, "Southside has deliberately shaped its life around living in and being part of each neighborhood in which a congregation is involved."²² In other cases, families of similar persuasion have even gone to the extent of banding together to form commune-like communities in the inner city in order to be literally the "living witnesses."²³ They are commune-like because they are not in the typical fashion of communes; say, of the kinds established in the 1970s and 1980s by the Jesus People Movement. Rather, they prefer to call their communities cohousing.²⁴ Others choose not to relocate themselves but to bring their presence to bear on the urban community through community development efforts.

This kerygmatic form has some similarities with both the philanthropic kerygma and charitable logomorphism. The major difference is that the model of presence kerygma has a greater depth of commitment to those being ministered and exerts greater demands on those using the method. However, there is an uneasy tendency for the approach to be anthropocentric²⁵ rather than Christotelic.²⁶ There is less emphasis on

22. *The Missional Leader*, 165; see their chapters 9 & 10 on this feature of the church.

23. Southside does not form communes, but groups of families move to urban centers in order to live among their poor new neighbors and bear witness by engaging and transforming the communities, Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 171–72.

24. In discussing the example of The Temescal Cohousing Project in Oakland, California, Tom Sine describes cohousing, "The Temescal Cohousing Project looks very different from the suburban communities that several of its new residents used to call home. Clusters of buildings are set on a quarter acre in one of Oakland's older neighborhoods. In the center is a large common green where kids can play and families gather. Next to the green is an old barn that the teens in the community have already made into their own space. On the other side of the green is a common dining room where the members share meals together twice a week.... These young urban pilgrims believe that being the church should mean more than showing up at a building once a week. For them, church means a living faith community within a neighborhood" ("Not Your Father's Commune," <http://www.beliefnet.com/Love-Family/2000/08/Not-Your-Fathers-Commune.aspx#ixzz1lSwqsVFD>).

25. Humanity and its needs constitute the focus of the group.

26. This refers to having Christ as the goal of every action.

positive cognitive propositional teaching (such as doctrine or even exposition of Scripture).²⁷ The diction of such groups, more often than not, is saturated with a sense of indeterminacy and is reflected in their frequent talks about personal journeys or narratives.²⁸ Others would refrain from

27. In this mold of de-emphasizing doctrinal teaching, C. Peter Wagner, in talking about the curriculum of his Wagner Leadership Institute, even gleefully writes, "I have never offered a course in systematic theology simply because there would be virtually no demand for it among our in-service, apostolically oriented student body. This, I well know, would strike the traditional theological education establishment as unthinkable. . . . In Old wineskin schools, systematic theology is not optional; it is required for graduation" (*Changing Church* [Ventura, CA.: Regal Books, 2004], 145). This postmodernist approach (wherein there is no room for absolutes, and all forms of authority are perceived as structures of oppression) reckons with market forces (what the people want to know; cf. 2 Tm 4:1–4) rather than biblical *didaskalia* (what they ought to know).

28. Spencer Burke describes his own resignation from Mariners Church as pastor in Irvine California and subsequent endeavors in the emerging movement: "By choosing to live out the questions in my heart, I'm able to dialogue with people in a way I never have before. I no longer consider myself a tour guide. *I'm a fellow traveler* and, as Robert Frost said, "That has made all the difference" (emphasis mine). See Mike Yaconelli, ed., *Stories of Emergence: Moving from Absolute to Authentic* (El Cajon, CA: Emergent YS, 2003), 36, cited in D. A. Carson's *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 19. A similar emphasis on journey and story tellingly comprises Todd Hunter's testimony reported in the same book, for a summary of which, see Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 22–24.

Scott McKinght, writing as a postmodern emerging scholar explains: "The emerging movement tends to be suspicious of systematic theology. Why? Not because we don't read systematics, but because . . . God didn't reveal a systematic theology but a storied narrative, and no language is capable of capturing the Absolute Truth who alone is God. We believe the Great Tradition offers various ways for telling the truth about God's redemption in Christ, but we don't believe any one theology gets it absolutely right. Hence, a trademark feature of the emerging movement is that we believe all theology will remain a conversation about the Truth who is God in Christ through the Spirit, and about God's story of redemption at work in the church. No systematic theology can be final. In this sense, the emerging movement is radically Reformed. It turns its chastened epistemology against itself, saying, 'This is what I believe, but I could be wrong. What do you think? Let's talk.'" See "Five Streams of the Emerging Church: Key Elements of the Most Controversial and Misunderstood Movement in the Church Today," *Christianity Today*, February 1, 2007, accessed November 20, 2011, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/11.35.html?start=5>.

It is interesting that while the "emergents" make such a fuss about the incapability of human language to speak Truth absolutely, their denigration of old school or old wineskin evangelicalism vis-à-vis their projection of their own positions smacks of nothing but absolutism.

even overtly making any logomorphic gospel presentation, viewing it as either intruding into the mental space of others or an arrogant imposition of one's views on others.²⁹ The negative side effects include the creation of the non-threatening big tent rainbow communities wherein everyone is welcomed and the offense of the cross is removed. Put differently, people get involved with the church but are grossly lacking in biblical and doctrinal literacy and commitment.³⁰ Besides, it appears to be more suited to compact high-density inner city poverty-ridden neighborhoods. It is yet to be seen how it will work in low-density affluent suburban areas.

Contours of an Orthokerygma

The overview of the various approaches to gospel proclamation above indicates that each of these has taken an aspect, albeit a valid one, of the whole to the neglect of other vital elements. What is needed is an integrative and comprehensive approach that threads all the vital components into a holistic network of gospel proclamation strategies. Such components should include the message to be proclaimed, the media of communication, the manner of delivery, and the goal of proclamation, the discussion of each of which follows below.

29. Admitting this as a flaw of the emergent movement, McKnight writes: "This emerging ambivalence about who is in and who is out creates a serious problem for evangelism. The emerging movement is not known for it, but I wish it were. Unless you proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, there is no good news at all—and if there is no Good News, then there is no Christianity, emerging or evangelical." See "Five Streams of the Emerging Church." McKnight rightly attributes the root cause of the movement's lethargy toward logomorphic proclamation to the movement's avowed inclusivism. However, this is only part of the story. In my view, it ultimately relates to the question of attitudes toward absolute truth and authority. If the Bible is final authority in all matters of doctrine and praxis, then, there would be no place for inclusivism because the biblical gospel is unabashedly exclusivist (cf. Mark 16:15–16; Luke 10:22; John 3:35–36; 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Cor 3:11; 1 John 5:11–12).

30. Though commenting on an unconnected matter, a statement made by Roxburgh and Romanuk evinces of this pattern. They write, "[C]ongregations are increasingly composed of people with little sense of the Christian story," *The Missional Leader*, 158. Indeed, McKnight observes that strands of the post-modernist emerging church consider metanarratives, even the Christian one, irrelevant. ... Still others take postmodernity's crushing of metanarratives and extend that to master theological narratives—like Christianity. They say what really matters is orthopraxy and that it doesn't matter which religion one belongs to, as long as one loves God and one's neighbor as one's self," "Five Streams of the Emerging Church."

The Message to be Proclaimed

The core of the whole idea of proclamation is the concept of communication. Affirming oneself as a communicator presupposes a message (content) that one wishes to transmit. For the gospel proclaimer, the content (message) is the good news of the vicarious salvific work of Jesus of Nazareth in his life, death, and resurrection, within the redemptive historical context of the Christian Bible. Gospel proclaimers in the new world of the postmodern mindset, with its aversion to absolutes and incredulity to metanarratives, must remain committed to the absolutes of biblical truths and its metanarrative of redemptive history. It is only out of this commitment that true proclamation of the gospel will emerge. Otherwise, one will be proclaiming something not of Jesus Christ, which will be no gospel at all (Gal 1:6–9; cf. Deut 4:2; Prov 30:6; and Rev 22:18–19).

Cognizant of the centrality of the biblical text even in a pluralistic world, Irvin writes:

[The Bible functions] to play a critical connective role in our experiences of world Christianity in cities throughout the world. It is a common book, even when read from different locations, perspectives, commitments, and confessions and in different contexts and languages. It is a meeting place of sorts, a movable site to which is ascribed authority and from which is derived meaning.³¹

George Todd, on the same note, points to the Bible as the place to find God's intentions for his people—the intentions which were unfolded in his relationships with Israel, in the Law and the covenant, and ultimately in Jesus. It is in the Bible that we are to find the impossible possibilities and the eschatological promise of what we are to become, which provide for us the promises of power and possibilities of love as well as the premises and impetus to act for the good of contemporary urban populations. Indeed, for Todd, “The Bible and the experience of the Christian community give to the church the aims, goals, norms and values with which to judge the metropolis, and to inspire it with visions of what God wants the city to be.”³² Thus, the biblical text has to inform the content of the

31. Irvin, “The Church, the Urban, and the Global,” 180. While I affirm Irvin's sentiments concerning the centrality of the biblical text even in a pluralistic world, notwithstanding our perspectives, I differ with regard to our conception of biblical authority. While he writes of authority being ascribed to the Bible, I hold that authority is derived, in the Christian Kerygma, from the Bible.

32. George Todd, “Mission and Justice: The Experience of Urban and Industrial Mission,” *International Review of Mission* 65, no. 259 (July 1976): 257.

kerygma of the church, as the community of the Spirit of God, even in the twenty-first century. Twenty-first century Christians, like Christians in any other age of the church, cannot afford to have any other attitude to Scripture if they are to remain loyal to God and true to biblical faith. I here fully subscribe to James W. Scott's description of what the Bible is:

The pertinent didactic passages of Scripture, as correctly understood by orthodox Reformed theology, teach that the Bible is the word of God, written in the words of men under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Inspiration involved the direct work of the Spirit in the mind of the writer, so guiding his thoughts that what he wrote expressed the communication of God to his people. Hence, God is the primary author of Scripture.³³

If the Bible is understood as God's communication to humanity, then, all attempts to live in consonance with the divine will must be guided by this source of divine communication given to us. Thus, the centrality of the Bible in the church's kerygma cannot be compromised.

The Media of Communication

The pluralism of our world requires a multifaceted approach to gospel proclamation. As God's people, we can no longer cling smugly to our preferred approach of witnessing to the exclusion of others. The aim of the Apostle Paul remains as valid in the witness of the church today as it was two millennia ago, namely, *didaskonte panta anqrwpon en pash sofia* ("teaching everyone with all wisdom" Col 1:28). Every medium, therefore, has to be employed to bear witness to Christ's saving grace. Only broad outlines are sketched out here as patterns of what media could be utilized today in witness bearing.

First and foremost is presence. There is the need, now more than ever before, for the church to make its presence palpable to the world. Presence here is used in its widest sense, and includes the world-affirming aspects of presence, in which believers actively participate in the market or public square with the understanding of vocation as calling. They would, thus, pursue professional excellence with integrity as a way of creating testimony to the redeeming grace that flows from Calvary. Todd, in this regard, observes,

It is the mission of the church to affirm God's presence in all realms of life, to seek to discern his action there, and to seek obedience to his will through the action of Christians in the world. It is the mission of the

33. "The Inspiration and Interpretation of God's Word, with Special Reference to Peter Enns, Part I: Inspiration and Its Implications," *WTJ* 71, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 181.

Church to bring each person to an awareness of God's call to obedience in the use of skills and the exercise of responsibility in whatever place each may be set. The work situation is the arena for Christian obedience.³⁴

This understanding of the world and the opportunities it offers, therefore, help people to look at the work place not simply as the avenue for placing food on the table but as a mission field.

Presence includes not just the workplace, but also the home and the context of its location. The lifestyle of Christians as shown in their neighborhoods, whether as individuals or families, bears witness one way or another to their beliefs. This is the realm in which the work of church groups like Southside eloquently demonstrates what has been lost in the church's witness in modern times. Christians are being summoned by such examples to come out of their cocoons and return to their calling to participate redemptively in the life of their communities, and to show themselves to be lights and salt in their locales through such engagements with their communities (Matt 5:13–16).

Secondly, engagement with local communities ineluctably implies cross bearing and/or being a prophetic voice in the struggle against the oppressive societal structures. This often means standing with the poor, deprived people and working to address the surface manifestations of their plight through charity and philanthropy. It also means addressing their root causes for social justice and establishing economic empowerment. There are three crucial elements. The first has to do with charitable work that addresses the immediate or felt needs of the people, such as providing them with food, clothing, medical care, water, recreational avenues and the like. The second has to do with attacking the systemic structures of exploitation and oppression. This entails seeking justice for the poor, exploited, and oppressed, which may mean seeking the judicial or legislative overturning of the laws, customs, traditions, or such other structures that hold them in perpetual servitude and squalor. The third involves working for the empowerment of the poor so that they can stand on their own and reclaim their human dignity within their communities. This could mean providing them with relevant information, giving them access to means of production, and providing an enabling environment to thrive by means of free enterprise and income enumeration.

The third major medium of proclamation is logomorphic proclamation. The witness borne by the church in all the forms of presence must eventuate into a logomorphic witness to the good news of what

34. Todd, "Mission and Justice," 256.

Christ has accomplished for the depraved and doomed humanity. People need to be brought to the awareness of their fallenness and the predicament that the fallen state engenders vis-à-vis the work of Christ on their behalf. In view of the eternal ramifications of the responses to the divine provision for human redemption, it is just, right, and proper for people to be afforded with the opportunity to make their responses with the knowledge of the truth. Logomorphic proclamation itself is multifarious, and has to be explored in its diversity. These include, but not limited to, the traditional logomorphic kerygmatic approaches such as one-on-one evangelism (in all its forms), neighborhood outreaches, televangelism, cyber chat rooms and evangelistic websites, and citywide open-air campaigns.

The circle of the media of proclamation is to be completed with the presence of a living, worshipping community and its liturgy, where the Almighty God is worshipped, his presence amongst his people with the manifestation of divine charismata is celebrated, and his word declared and expounded for the edification of the body. Such a community by its embodiment is where love triumphs and will inspire its members towards effective presence in the community through holding out the light of the gospel for society.

The Manner of Delivery

As already pointed out above, urbanization and globalization have made pluralism a given in our contemporary world. As most of the population of the world now lives in urban areas, coupled with the dominance of urban over rural areas and the interrelationships of the two, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find places that are entirely monolithic (whether by religion, ethnicity, nationality, or occupation). More than ever, therefore, our present condition makes imperative the adoption of dialogue in our gospel witness. Our gospel witness has to adopt the manner of approach that I call the “dynamic dialogical engagement.”

The central element of the dynamic dialogical engagement is dialogue. However, this dialogue is dynamic because, in the first place, it has more than one dialogue partner; and secondly because it is not one-dimensional. It begins with dialogue within; that is, dialogue with the communities of faith. The starting point for this is dialogue with the biblical authors and their documents. For there to be a faithful proclamation of the gospel, there must first of all be a faithful understanding of what the biblical text says. This is a hermeneutical problem. The hermeneutical corollary of our postmodern condition with its implicit pluralism is multiplicity of perspectives of textual reading with the accent falling more (if not exclusively) on the role of the reader. Irvin calls atten-

tion to the fact that in “such multiperspectival readings of the Bible the temptation lurks to ascribe to the text a degree of translocationality that might give it the appearance of floating free from any particular context and location, including that of the original world of its production.”³⁵ Such textual translocationality inevitably results in the fracture or severance of the text from the historical milieu of its provenance—the ground and realm from which its meaning arises. This is why Irvin insists that the hermeneutics of social location must continue to play an important role in issues pertaining to biblical knowledge because “such a hermeneutics helps reground biblical readings in various Christian contexts and experiences.”³⁶ That is to say, it is only as the biblical text is properly grounded in the social location of its provenance that it can be re-grounded in the social location of the readers. Put differently, it is only as we ascertain what the biblical text meant to its original audience that we can establish what it means for us today.

This dialogue also includes engagement with the church’s understanding of the biblical text. There are three vantage points of the church’s reading of the Bible that have to be reckoned with. These are longitudinal perspective (the interpretation of the text through the long history of the church), cross-sectional perspective (the variety of textual interpretations of the different Christian traditions of the contemporary time), and idio-communal perspective (engagement with one’s present faith community). Underlining all of the different forms of dialogue is one’s own dialogue with the Spirit of God in prayer.

A third component of this dialogical engagement is the dialogue with the world.³⁷ This entails listening to the world so as to be in the position to answer the questions it is asking, instead of proffering answers to questions no one is asking. It also entails listening to the cultures and religions of the world in order to know their perspectives, worldviews, and presuppositions, so as to be able to address them at their core, dealing with their fundamental assumptions and perceptions of reality. In dialoguing with culture, one is engaging more than one culture. It first begins with dialoguing with the culture in which one was raised or the culture in which one is at home, i.e., the non-biblical culture that provides persons with their primary frame of reference for understanding and relating to the world. This helps them to be hermeneutically self-conscious, thereby helping them to minimize their prejudice and ethno-

35. Irvin, “The Church, the Urban, and the Global,” 180.

36. Irvin, “The Church, the Urban, and the Global,” 180.

37. What I have called dialoguing with the world, John R. W. Stott calls double listening. For more elaborate description of this, see his *The Contemporary Christian: Applying God’s Word to Today’s World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992).

centrism. Secondly, one engages the culture in which one ministers in order to understand its ethos and pathos. In this way, the right platform will be provided for the generation of transformational engagement of the eternal truth of Scripture with the falsity of human episteme as well as the predicament of the human existence.

The Goal of Proclamation

Proclamation is a form of communication. The three important function of communication are information, entertainment, and persuasion. Historically, ancient rhetoric and the homiletical discourse of the church that derive from it have always had persuasion as the goal of communication. The electronic mass media has ratcheted to the forefront the entertainment function of communication. In our postmodern condition, we are constantly being counseled not to seek to impose our perspectives on others, and attempts at persuasion are construed as imposition. Thus, in the postmodern world, information is projected as the primary goal of communication. As we seek to sketch the contours of an ortho-kerygma, we necessarily have to address this all-important issue of communicative goal in gospel witness.

A sharply dichotomist perspective on this matter fails to do justice for all three are present in any communication. The issue then becomes one of accent. The distrust of the persuasive goal in gospel presentation is attributable, howbeit, justifiable on some account, to the coercive methods of past generations of religious proselytizers. Nevertheless, the church can ill afford to dispense with the goal, hence the need to revisit this issue.

Ancient rhetoricians (e.g., Aristotle) emphasized persuasion (speaking), while modern rhetoricians (e.g., Kenneth Burke and I. A. Richards) emphasize understanding (listening).³⁸ For Richards, the most significant hindrance to communication is misunderstanding, and a communicator's goal should be the elimination of factors that breed misunderstanding. Educated listening, therefore, within the framework of his "Context Theorem," is to be far more preferred than forceful speaking.³⁹ Kenneth Burke, on the other hand, is an avid believer in the persuasive end of communication. For him, our world is rhetorical, because speaking presupposes meaning creation, and meaning is oriented towards a direction, and therein lies persuasion.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the concept of

38. David J. Hesselgrave, "Gold from Egypt: the contribution of rhetoric to cross-cultural communication," *Missiology* 4, no. 1 (Jan 1976): 95-96.

39. For a fuller understanding of this theorem, see I. A. Richards, *A Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936).

40. Cf. Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives and A Rhetoric of Motives*

“identification,” instead of “persuasion” itself takes priority in Burke’s rhetorical theory. He views the major problem of humanity as division, and human effort at communication evinces of the human search for unification. Burke, as such, posits identification as the means for achieving such unification.⁴¹ Identification, in my view, however, cannot be pursued as an end in itself. It has to be seen only as a tool for effective communication—a way of authentically creating rapport and connection with one’s interlocutors. Put differently, identifying with one’s dialogue partners leads to gaining their confidence. This would in turn serve as a stepping-stone for persuasive dialogue.

What gives people the sense of imperative and impulse for gospel proclamation is the grasp of the eternal dimensions of human destinies. Such knowledge, propelled by love would not be content to allow hapless souls to wander aimlessly in the endless journey of the postmodern quest for uncertain truth. Rather, it will lead one to challenge lovingly the consciences of depraved humanity with the sure truth of God’s revealed Word to bring them into obedience to Christ.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper has been to map out the contours of an ortho-kerygma in the globalizing urban landscape of the twenty-first century. It is my hope to attract more attention to one of the tripartite elements of religion (belief, practice, and proclamation) that has of late received less than adequate attention in our faith. In this discussion, paying attention to our contemporary social location of a globalizing and urbanizing postmodern context became imperative. Therefore, I began by looking at the city in its ancient and contemporary characteristics, the place of the city in the biblical text, and ways in which these features have been and could be harnessed for gospel witness. I equally gave attention to the various models of gospel proclamation in the church through the ages, before sketching out the outlines of an ortho-kerygma, particularly giving attention to the message, media, manner, and goal of gospel proclamation. At core, it is a call for us, as the new covenant people of God, to pay heed to how we seek identification with the nations amongst whom we live in the post-modernizing, globalizing, and urbanizing world. This thoughtful identification needs necessarily to pay attention to both the distinctives of the Christian life and gospel as well as the unique ways of being-in-the-world in the twenty-first cen-

(Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1962).

41. Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 543-583.

ture so that we neither become engulfed by the cultural ethos of the nations nor lose our capacity for effective witness in our world.