

JANUARY 2017

THE EARLY CHRISTIAN “SOCIAL PROJECT”

BY TIM KELLER

In November we looked at two new books by scholar Larry Hurtado, *Destroyer of the gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Baylor University Press, 2016) and *Why on Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?* (Marquette University Press, 2016). These volumes explain that the early Christians were persecuted more than any other religious group in the first three centuries because they refused to honor other gods or worship the emperor and therefore they were seen as too exclusive, too narrow, and a threat to the social order.

Hurtado asks the obvious

question that a historian should ask. Why, if Christians were seen as so narrow and offensive and were excluded from circles of influence and business and often put to death — why did anyone become a Christian? One of the main reasons was that the Christian church was what Hurtado calls a unique “social project.”

They were a contrast community, a counter-culture that was both offensive and yet attractive to many. We mentioned this briefly in November, but here we will spell out what made the Christian community so different.

Hurtado points out that

the basis for this unusual social project was the unique, new religious identity that Christians had. Before Christianity, there was no distinct “religious identity” because one’s religion was simply an aspect of one’s ethnic or national identity. If you were from this city, or from this tribe, or from this nation, you worshipped the gods of that city, tribe, or people. Your religion was basically assigned to you.

Christianity brought into human thought for the first time the concept that you chose your religion regardless of your race and class. Also Christianity radically asserted that your

(Continued on page 2)

DISCERNING GOD’S CALLING: SPIRITUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT



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This ministry year Redeemer is committed to equipping congregants to rise where they are. To help you, Redeemer’s Spiritual Self-Assessment is designed to be a starting point that prompts prayerful and honest self-reflection and discernment about where God may be calling you to grow. This assessment begins with looking at what you are already doing — your life as you experience it presently. It is built around five spheres of life

(Continued on page 6)

faith in Christ became your new, deepest identity, while at the same time not effacing or wiping out your race, class, and gender. Instead, your relationship to Christ demoted them to second place. That meant that, to the shock of Roman society, all Christians, whether slave, free, or high born, or whatever their race and nationality, were now equal in Christ (Galatians 3:26-29). This was a radical challenge to the entrenched social structure and divisions of Roman society, and from it flowed several unique features.

(1) The early church was *multi-racial*, and experienced a unity across ethnic boundaries that was startling. See the description of the leadership of the Antioch church in Acts 13 as just one example. Throughout the book of Acts we see a remarkable unity between people of different races. Ephesians 2 is testimony to the importance of racial reconciliation as a fruit of the gospel in the lives of Christians.

(2) The early church was a community of *forgiveness and reconciliation*. As we have said, Christians were often excluded and criticized but also they were actively persecuted, imprisoned, attacked, and killed. But Christians taught forgive-

ness and withheld retaliation against opponents. In a shame and honor culture in which vengeance was expected, this was unheard of. Christians never ridiculed or taunted opponents, let alone repaid them with violence.

(3) The early church was famous for its *hospitality to the poor and the suffering*. While it was expected to care for the poor of one's family or tribe, Christians' 'promiscuous' help given to *all* poor, even of other races and religions, as taught in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) was unprecedented. (See Gary Ferngen, "The Incarnation and Early Christian Philanthropy" online.) During the urban plagues, Christians characteristically did not flee the cities but stayed and cared for the sick and dying of all groups, often at the cost of their lives.

(4) It was a community committed to the *sanctity of life*. It was not simply that Christians opposed abortion. Abortion was dangerous and relatively rare. A more common practice was called "infant exposure." Unwanted infants were literally thrown out onto garbage heaps either to die or to be taken by traders into slavery and prostitution. Christians saved the in-

phants and took them in.

(5) Finally, it was *sexual counter-culture*. Roman culture insisted that married women of social status abstain from any sex outside of marriage, but it was expected that men (even married men) would have sex with people lower on the status ladder — slaves, prostitutes, and children. This was not only allowed, but was regarded as unavoidable. This was in part because sex in that culture was always considered an expression of one's social status. Sex was mainly seen as a mere physical appetite that was irresistible.

Christians' sexual norms were different, of course. The church forbade any sex outside of heterosexual marriage. But the reason the older, seemingly more 'liberated' pagan sexual practices eventually gave way to stricter Christian norms was because the "deeper logic" of Christian sexuality was so different. It saw sex as not just an appetite but as a way to give oneself wholly to another and in doing so imitate and connect to the God who gave himself in Christ. It also was more egalitarian, treating all people as equal and rejecting the double standards of gender and social status. Finally, Christianity saw

(Continued on page 8)

REDEEMER REPORT

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Kathy Keller
Heather Klein

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W83rd Ministry Center
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(between 6th & 7th Aves.)
Services: 9:30 a.m. & 5 p.m.

CULTIVATE AWARENESS OF REDEEMER'S SHORT-TERM MISSIONS MINISTRY

BY CHRISTINA STANTON

*Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.
– 1 Chronicles 16:24*

The Redeemer Short-Term Missions ministry seeks to have the church fulfill the Great Commission by sending congregants out into the world to tell others about Christ. In 2017 we plan to make a contribution towards that goal by recruiting up to 200 people for fourteen trips that will travel to countries such as Madagascar and Guatemala.

Redeemer trips uniquely serve the purpose of connect-

internationally serve.

First and foremost, mission trips are about relationship-building and encouraging our hosts, which we do through various tasks and projects. Past trips have initiated finance and business courses, faith and work conferences, arts conferences, medical services, education initiatives, and have assisted in various vital outreach programs (orphanages, schools, soup kitchens, etc.). Teams of 10–20 people spread Christ's love, learn about other cultures, and grow in their relationships with Jesus and one other while serving. Teammates tangibly experience God's amazing compassion as they begin to know Him as Lord of the Nations.

January 29 is Missions Sunday, and live testimonies and videos will be featured during all services. There will also be Missions information tables at coffee hour that will be manned by 2016 teammates. Come and speak with "alumni" who will be happy to discuss

their personal experiences and answer questions.



The LIV South Africa team

Are you willing to take a step of obedience in faith and use your God-given gifts to serve others in a cross-cultural context? Look at our website, **redeemer.com/missions**, to learn more about the trips. We hope you become part of God's global mission and join these life-changing teams this year!



Heather Butsch, Nokuphila School, Johannesburg



A Mumbai teammate who is a doctor conducting check ups in the Red Light District

ing participants with church planters who have partnered with Redeemer City to City. This is Redeemer's church planting arm, and the relationships they've developed are where we send congregants to

TOOLS FOR EQUIPPING CAREGIVERS

BY JUDY CHA

Since opening its doors in 1990 Redeemer Counseling Services (RCS) has had the unique privilege of participating in both Redeemer's growth as a church and in the dynamic expansion of the gospel movement in NYC.

As an extension of Redeemer's pastoral care, RCS has grown exponentially in order to meet the counseling needs of both our congregation and those of network churches. Forty-three counselors now offer care to over 1500 clients a year, and more than 25 churches in the city regularly

refer their congregants to us. Over 15% of our clients indicate that they do not belong to a church.

RCS has been challenged not only to grow in scale but also to refine a brand of counseling that reflects Redeemer's core values.

First, this means that we approach counseling from a solid, gospel-centered theological foundation. Our team is unified in our understanding of human nature, the underlying reason behind our problems, and what will ultimately bring about healing and change.

Second, we seek to contextualize the gospel to those we counsel. Contextualization involves meeting every person where they're at and providing a safe space for people to bring their deepest struggles and honest questions, no matter where they are in their faith journey and in the healing process.

Over the years counselors and ministry leaders have sought to learn our model of gospel-centered counseling. Alongside Redeemer's gospel movement to New York City and the world, as highlighted in *(Continued on page 8)*

REDEEMER LSQ UPDATE

Redeemer Westside is in the process of starting a new site in the Lincoln Square neighborhood of Manhattan. The site will be called Redeemer Lincoln Square (LSQ), and services are planned to begin on Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017 at the Ethical Culture Society, CPW & 64th St. At our initial Prayer Night on October 20, over 100 people came to pray and learn more about this new church plant. Michael Keller, the designated pastor, spoke about how Redeemer Lincoln Square would seek to exhibit and continue the original vision of Redeemer – to love and serve the people of New York City and live out the good news of the gospel.

Michael also pointed out that because this new church

will last for generations, being a part of its launch could be one of the most significant and important events in the lives of the Lincoln Square volunteers, congregants, and community.

Since the prayer night the RLSQ team has organized volunteers and those interested in serving into four teams — prayer, hospitality, events, and Sunday operations. They are currently meeting regularly and discussing the best ways to start this church, care for its people and serve the needs of New York City. Many of the discussions have been focused on the narrative of Redeemer Lincoln Square — how it will exhibit the DNA of Redeemer, but be unique in its community.

Other events that have already begun building com-

munity at RLSQ are football gatherings in the park, serving at Redeemer's annual Birthday Party for Jesus, and enjoying each other's company at an LSQ Christmas Party.

The next large gathering for those interested in Redeemer Lincoln Square will be Lincoln Square Night on January 19. It will be an evening of vision-casting and community-building as together we imagine what God can do in and through RedeemerLSQ to love and serve this part of the city. Please continue to pray for this event, consider serving and joining, and keep up to date with the launch of Redeemer Lincoln Square by joining our mailing list. Go to our website, redeemer.com/lsq, for more information.

HOW TO PRAY WITH HOPE FOR NEW YORK IN 2017

We want to be a people who serve our poor and marginalized neighbors in both word and deed. We put feet to our faith as we tangibly serve the needs of our neighbors, and we also go to the Father on their behalf, presenting their needs to Him in prayer as we seek their welfare.

Please join us in committing to spend time praying earnestly for our neighbors in need this year. Each month our prayers will focus on a specific population in our city. You can learn more at hfny.org/prayer. Below is a short month-by-month guide to get you started as you pray for our neighbors throughout the year.

JANUARY

Pray for victims of trafficking

Pray that those who are caught in human or sex trafficking would find safety from their abusers as well as emotional, physical, and spiritual healing.

FEBRUARY

Pray for the homeless

Pray that all the men, women, and children who have no place to call home would find shelter and access to adequate food and health care.

MARCH

Pray for the elderly

Pray that neighbors would come alongside to care for and support the needs of seniors suffering from loneliness, poor health, and unsafe living conditions.

APRIL

Pray for people with disabilities

Pray that schools, churches, and other institutions would support disabled individuals and their families through staff training, accessibility, and collaborative partnerships.

MAY

Pray for the formerly incarcerated

Pray that formerly incarcerated men and women would be welcomed back by their communities and afforded job opportunities to support their reintegration.

JUNE

Pray for immigrants

Pray that immigrant families would be surrounded by encouraging neighbors who would help them find jobs and flourish in this city.

JULY

Pray for vulnerable women

Pray that women facing domestic abuse would be brave, know their true value, and find someone to confide in about the dangers they're facing.

AUGUST

Pray for those seeking free legal aid

Pray that families and individuals in troubling legal situations would get the help they need, all while resting in the Lord, who will bring about justice.

SEPTEMBER

Pray for children and youth

Pray that the youth in our city would experience loving homes where parents and guardians support and encourage them.

OCTOBER

Pray for those experiencing addiction

Pray that those struggling with such debilitating diseases as alcoholism and drug addiction would experience liberation and find ultimate satisfaction in Christ.

NOVEMBER

Pray for the hungry

Pray that individuals who are unable to provide food for themselves or their families would find employment and receive the support they need.

DECEMBER

Pray for foster care families

Pray for children in foster families, that their homes would be a safe and loving place, and that they would know the great love of the Father.

Learn to do right; seek justice.

Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.

— Isaiah 1:17

LOVE YOUR HOMELESS NEIGHBORS THROUGH *DON'T WALK BY 2017*

As New Yorkers, we do it every day. We see a homeless person on the street, huddled up in a sleeping bag or makeshift blankets, their few belongings littered around them ... and we keep walking.

What if we stopped? What if we engaged with that person on the street? Showed them that someone cares about their needs and their pain? And what if we did that on every single street in Manhattan — all the way from Inwood to the Financial District?

That would be powerful.

And that's exactly what we hope to do through *Don't Walk By*, Hope for New York's annual outreach (in partnership with The Rescue Alliance) to our homeless neighbors. During every Saturday in February volunteers come together to canvass every block and subway

platform in Manhattan, offering the homeless we encounter care kits, food, and an invitation to return to a home base for a hot meal and medical care.

This year our goal is to mobilize 100 people from each Redeemer congregation — 300 people in total — to put their faith into action and choose not to pass by their neighbors living on the street. That's where you come in. Below are the dates and locations for *Don't Walk By 2017*:

**February 4,
West Side Outreach —**
Calvary Baptist Church
123 West 57th St.

**February 11,
East Side Outreach —**
Fifth Ave Presbyterian Church
7 West 55th St.

**February 18,
Downtown Outreach —**
NY Chinese Alliance Church
162 Eldridge St.

**February 25,
Uptown Outreach**
Salvation Army Harlem Temple
540 Lenox Ave.

Through *Don't Walk By* our hope is to connect homeless New Yorkers with holistic residential recovery programs, offering a long-term alternative to life on the streets.

Visit hfny.org/dwb for more information and to register to volunteer. This is a great opportunity to serve as a community group or with your friends!

SPIRITUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

with questions to prompt what it might look like to begin to do these things with intentional Christian distinctiveness.

These spheres are:

- 1.) Your Christian Identity
- 2.) Family and Relationships
- 3.) Neighborhood and Justice
- 4.) Work and Rest
- 5.) The Church and its Mission

Question number 3, for example: all of us, by virtue of living in the city, are neighbors.

The questions we want to help you consider are: Are you being a neighbor in a way that displays Christian distinctiveness? Are you inhabiting your neighborhood with a clear sense of calling, that you have been sent by Christ to love your neighbors as yourself? Is the Gospel actively changing the way you inhabit your neighborhood?

We are asking all Redeemer congregants to take this assessment and to in-

vite a friend to take it with you! In the midst of busy lives, it might be easy to forget or disregard the insight gained from the assessment. To help process your answers and keep you accountable with actionable steps toward rising where you are, we hope that all community groups will dedicate the January 22 study week to the assessment.

Take the online assessment at redeemer.com/assessment.

AN EVENING WITH CHRISTIAN WIMAN

On Saturday, January 28, the Center for Faith & Work will host a special premiere event, *An Evening with Christian Wiman*, where this world-renowned poet, writer, and thinker will discuss and read from his newest work for the first time. Commissioned under CFW's inaugural artist fellowship, Wiman's latest work explores the weight of "Calling" in our daily lives, revealing how our desires and longings give voice to an ineffably personal God.

CFW is also hosting a hands-on workshop led by Christian Wiman on Poetry & Faith designed for people working in all fields.

Christian Wiman is the author, editor, or translator of ten books, including *Hammer is the Prayer: Selected Poems* (FSG, 2016), *My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer* (FSG, 2013), and *Stolen Air: Selected Poems of Osip Mandelstam* (HarperCollins/Ecco, 2012).

Mr. Wiman has written for *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Book Review*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and numerous other publications. He is a former Guggenheim Fellow and holds an honorary doctorate of humane letters from North Central College. His particular interests include modern poetry, the language of faith, "accidental" theology (that is, theology conducted by unexpected means), and what it means to be a Christian intellectual in a secular culture.

POETRY & FAITH WORKSHOP WITH CHRISTIAN WIMAN

Saturday, January 28 from 1 to 4 p.m.

How does the soul expand? It starts with an awareness of God's spirit communicated to us through people, through beauty, through words. In short, experiencing the poetry of God's glory in creation. In this hands-on workshop designed for people working in all fields, world-renowned poet Christian Wiman will guide us through practical ways that listening, reading, and writing can reawaken our faith. Together, we'll explore how language actually determines what we in fact feel and believe, discover how we can use poems to pray, and develop a new lens by which we can see the authorship of our souls.

AN EVENING WITH CHRISTIAN WIMAN

Saturday, January 28 at 8:00 p.m.

"What is it we want when we can't stop wanting? I say God." Such core revelations are what comprise the latest work of world-renowned poet Christian Wiman. The intermingling of calling and desire, the inhering of the self in our work, the catalyzing hunger of longing — these tensions form the high-wire of meditation that Wiman treads. Hear this critically acclaimed poet investigate the ineffable essence of God's calling in our daily lives in his brand-new work, presented for the very first time, commissioned under CFW's inaugural Artist Fellowship.



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“SOCIAL PROJECT” ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 2)

sexual self-control as an exercise of human freedom, a testimony that we are not merely the pawns of our desires or fate. (See Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late*

Antiquity, Harvard University Press, 2013).

It was because the early church did not fit in with its surrounding culture, but rather challenged it in love, that Christianity eventually had

such an impact on it. Is it possible that essentially the same social project could have a similar effect if it was carried out today? I'll write about that in next month's newsletter.

TOOLS FOR CAREGIVERS ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 4)

its recent RISE campaign, we believe that RCS will experience an even greater demand to provide direct counseling care and, in accord with our mission statement, "... equip others to counsel through the redemptive power of the gospel." As

Redeemer envisions growing gospel-centered churches to 15% by 2026, we hope to offer guidance and share our resources with other caregivers to participate in the health and flourishing of the city.

For this purpose, RCS is

launching a monthly newsletter that will focus on offering key tools for counselors, both pastoral and professional. We invite you to subscribe to this update that can be accessed at our redeemer.com/rcsupdate.