

# REDEEMER

R E P O R T

OCTOBER 1998

## CHRIST AND THE CITY

BY TIM KELLER

Some of you may be familiar with H. Richard Niebuhr's influential book *Christ and Culture*. Harvie Conn, professor of urban ministry at Westminster Seminary, has re-worked Niebuhr's models of how the church relates to culture and society in order to highlight the different theological perspectives which control the way urban Christians relate to their city. I recently presented these "theological-ministry models" to Redeemer's staff, with some of my own adaptations. The first two models are at opposite ends of a spectrum, and are very distinct. The last three models are in the middle between the first two extremes. The final model is the one to which I think Redeemer, and all urban churches, should aspire.

**Model 1: Christ Against the City.** Many Christians blame the city environment itself for the troubles of society. Rural regions and small town are seen as sacred and humanizing, while cities are secular and de-humanizing *per se*. This theological perspective expects that ministry in the city can do little to change it, and even expects individual evangelism to be very difficult or impossible. City churches influenced by this model are like "fortresses" which huddle Christians together for warmth in the spiritually cold urban wasteland. These churches seem to be unaware of what Augustine called

"The City of God"—the forces of

the Kingdom of God, advancing in every human city. Their pessimism about change ignores not only the Biblical teaching about the presence and spread of the Kingdom of God, but also the historical fact that early Christianity thrived and succeeded largely because it was urban. This kind of "fortress mentality" is fueled, we suspect, by a profound failure to grasp the grace of God. Legalism needs very strong "us-them" boundaries and very clear rules and regula-

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tions in order to assure our guilty consciences that we are OK.

**Model 2: Christ of the City.** On the other end of the spectrum is the theological perspective which views all historical movements which work to emancipate the oppressed, whether Christian,

non-Christian or even atheistic, as the Kingdom of God. Here, the church is not seen as a community in which the coming Kingdom begins its fruition in history, but as simply one of many human institutions which must join together and lead humanity toward liberation and freedom. These churches end up simply as "mirrors" of the city, celebrating and cheering the more liberal aspects of the city's culture.

While the **Christ/Against** model ignores "The City of God" and the depth of his grace, the **Christ/Of** model ignores the presence of "The City of Man"—the world system of idolatrous rebellion against God—and the depth of our sin. These churches have lost touch with the need for conversion of heart and life. While the first model misses the *sovereignty* of Christ over all the world, the second model misses the *uniqueness* of Christ in all the world. The result of this second perspective is a church which is nothing more than a community center, concert hall, or political action group. It has nothing unique to offer.

**Model 3: Christ above the City .** This model sees cities as good places for Christians to live and

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grow, but it neither recognizes nor engages itself very much with the brokenness of the city. Members use the city as an opportunity for self-improvement, but give little back to it. These churches do evangelism, and their programs may include “charity” volunteer work—but they do not challenge or equip members to heal social brokenness through mercy and justice, nor to transform its culture through their vocations. The result is a very privatized, individualized faith. This model tends to produce a “Christian sub-culture,” though a more open and accessible one than model #1 creates.

Although the **Christ/Above** model regards the city more positively than the **Christ/Against** model, it is still a failure. While it does recognize the uniqueness of Christ and the reality of sin and the need for conversion, it is still ignorant of the presence and

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power of the Kingdom of God to change both hearts and social structures. This model also tends to see sin as only personal moral lapses, rather than as idolatrous reliance upon wealth, beauty, power, and comfort. Thus members may be behaviorally “pure” but still very worldly in the way they use their time and resources.

**Model 4: Christ and the City in Paradox.** Harvie Conn calls this the “pilgrim” model. More than models 1 through 3, it has a good grasp on **both** the presence and reality of the “City of God” and of the idolatrous, evil “City of Man” in every city. It recognizes both the brokenness of the city and also the power of God to change lives. But in this perspective, these two forces stay very separate—at loggerheads, so to speak. (That’s why Conn calls this a “dualistic” model.) The church sets itself up on the border of the “battle line” and becomes a kind of M\*A\*S\*H unit for the people it finds. On the plus side, there is an urgent understanding that people need to be healed physically and spiritually, and these churches mobilize their people to help in ministries of vigorous outreach.

This dualistic model is much more realistic about sin than models 2 and 3, and much more engaged in people’s lives than model 1. It is much better than all three. But it still cannot envision how the city can be transformed culturally and socially—“structurally.” It still pessimistically looks more to a lost moral past than to a new kingdom-future. It also does not see the peoples of the city as partners in re-building it. In the end, this is because it still cannot grasp the promises of the Kingdom of God. It sees Christians more as pilgrims, passing through to help the poor residents, than as residents of a new, future, changed-by-the-kingdom city.

**Model 5: Christ Transforming the City.** This model is a hard one to find examples of, and a hard one to describe. Let me just follow Harvie Conn very closely.

*“The curse of Eden that brought physical, mental, social, and cultural alienation and brokenness (Gen.3:7-19) is removed in that new city that God is preparing”*

He begins by saying that the Transformation model is the most “hopeful about its holistic mission in the city.” Why? The other models tend to think of the redemption purchased by Christ as simply for the purpose of forgiveness of sins and attaining a place in heaven.

But the Bible tells us that the ultimate purpose of redemption is a completely restored creation. The book of Revelation shows us the final goal of all of Christ’s redemptive work—the city of God (Rev.21:2) which is the restored Garden of Eden (now in urban form, you’ll notice!) filled with the Tree of Life, healing the nations (Rev.22:2). The curse of Eden that brought physical, mental, social, and cultural alienation and brokenness (Gen.3:7-19) is removed in that new city that God is preparing (Rev.22:3). This is what Christ’s redemption was all about, not simply (as great as it is!) individual pardon and forgiveness. The “pilgrim”

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## REDEEMER REPORT

Kathy Keller  
Yvonne Dodd  
Dave Jacobs

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Redeemer meets Sunday at  
HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM • EAST 69TH BETWEEN PARK AND LEXINGTON  
services at 10:30 • 6:00

**Family Apple Picking Outing Saturday, October 3**

The Redeemer Children's Ministry will travel to Barton Orchards for an outing from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. to pick apples and pumpkins, enjoy a hayride and a petting zoo, and listen to live country music. Call Kate Johnson (718-788-0215) to reserve a seat in the van, or if you plan to drive and are able to take passengers. Meet other families and get to know your children's Sunday ministries teachers.

**Pre-Marital Seminar Held Saturday, October 10**

The quarterly pre-marital seminar will be held from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. at the church office, 271 Madison Ave. This seminar is required for anyone desiring to be married by a Redeemer pastor, and is highly recommended for anyone in a serious relationship. The fee is \$25 per couple for materials, and you must pre-register with the Redeemer receptionist (212-808-4460.)

**Racial Unity Ministry Retreat**

The Second Annual Get Along, Get Away Retreat, sponsored by the Racial Unity Ministry, has been rescheduled for MLK day weekend, January 15-18, 1999. Plan to come to this speakerless retreat with lots of time for building friendships, worship and recreation. Contact Jo Kadlecak at (212) 831-7234 or Jerome Walford at (718) 783-4390 for more information.

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**CHRIST AND THE CITY**

model does not see this link between creation and redemption, and therefore does not recognize that the Kingdom of God is not simply "in tension" with the "City of Man," but moves out into the city of man and transforms it. So what does this final model really look like? Let me close with Harvie Conn's description:

"Perhaps the best analogy to describe all this is that of a model home. We are God's demonstration community of the rule of Christ in the city. On a tract of earth's land, purchased with the blood of Christ, Jesus the kingdom developer has begun building new housing. As a sample of what will be, he has erected a model home of what will eventually fill the urban neighborhood. He now invites the urban world into that model home to take a look at what will be. The church

is the occupant of that model home, inviting neighbors into its open door to Christ. Evangelism is when the signs are up, saying 'Come in and look around.'

"...As citizens of, not survivalists in, this new city within the old city, we see our ownership as the gift of Jesus the Builder (Luke 17:20-21). As residents, not pilgrims, we await the kingdom coming when the Lord returns from his distant country (Luke 19:12). The land is already his...in this model home we live out our new lifestyle as citizens of the heavenly city that one day will come. We do not abandon our jobs or desert the city that is...We are to "seek the peace and prosperity of the city" to which God called us in exile (Jer.29:7). And our agenda of concerns in that seeking becomes as large as the cities where our divine development tracts are found."

**HOPE FOR NEW YORK  
SELECTS INTERIM  
DIRECTOR**

**K**ate Lemmer has been selected as the Interim Director by the Board of Hope for New York, effective September 15th. Kate brings many years of professional business management to the position, as well as a year of experience on the Board of Directors of Hope for New York. She has also served with the Women's Ministry at Redeemer and taught classes in the School of Discipleship, which will assist her with the networking and team-building which is an important part of the Director's job. Please pray for Kate during this transition time, as many of Hope for New York's major events occur during the fall holiday season. Ryan Myers remains as Volunteer Manager.

Hope for New York's Board is still seeking a permanent Executive Director to replace Yvonne Dodd, the founder and first director of the organization. Application deadline for the permanent position was September 30th, and the Search Committee is still evaluating the candidates with the goal of filling the permanent position by January 1st.

Yvonne Dodd will be married to the Rev. Charles Fredrick Sawyer during the Redeemer morning service on Sunday, October 11th. Rick is a PCA minister from Miami, Florida. He and his five children worship at Pinelands Presbyterian Church. Please pray for this new family unit and for opportunities to bring "Hope for Miami."

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## CHURCH FAMILY LIFE— BAPTISMS AND MEMBERSHIP

## OPERA OPEN FORUM OCTOBER 25

### Members Received:

Stan Sungchul Ahn  
Keith Archie  
Elli Bai  
John Bai  
Loretta Black  
Shu Chiu  
Cathy Durham  
Ross Durham  
Lee Chung Ho Glick  
Kyle Reeves Keith  
Eugene Kim  
Adrian Lauriello  
Miriam Mach  
Steve Y. Park  
Michelle J. Shin  
Robert Shin  
Susan Lee Shin  
Jeff Slocum  
Arvin Soh  
Brian Sumner  
Leslee Sumner  
Emily Walling  
Helen Yum Rno

### Infant Baptisms:

Somer Aldein Little, daughter  
of Joe and Mimi Little  
Sarah Emily Yoo, daughter of  
Sung and Miriann Yoo  
Helena Ruth Ojarovsky,  
daughter of Ted and Lynn  
Ojarovsky  
Elena Jordan Clemente,  
daughter of Karen and Victor  
Clemente  
Adelle Magdalene Ricci,  
daughter of Joe and Connie  
Ricci  
Anabelle Christina Durham,  
Daughter of Ross and Cathy  
Durham

### Adult Baptisms:

Stan Sungchul Ahn  
Miriam Mach  
Lee Chung Ho Glick

**O**ur series of Open Forums on the theme “*To Die For...*”, a look at the controlling passions in our lives, continues on October 25, 1998, at 6:00 p.m. in the Hunter College Auditorium. On that evening we will explore the deeper meaning behind our desires for physical beauty and sexuality.

A program of famous opera arias such as *Quando m'en vo* from *La Boheme* will serve as the creative launching pad, then Tim Keller will present a lecture and allow opportunity for questions from the audience.

As always, a stellar lineup of Redeemer musicians will perform, including Mark Oswald (Metropolitan Opera), Belinda Oswald (Washington Opera), Tom Barrett (Santa Fe Opera) and Angela Horn (New York City Opera). Plan to bring a friend and arrive early for what promises to be a fun and challenging evening.

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