

NOVEMBER 2016

WHY DOES ANYONE BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

BY TIM KELLER

Many say that Christians who maintain the historic, traditional doctrines are behind the times, are too exclusive, and are “on the wrong side of history.” Two recent books that cast doubt on this view are from historian and biblical 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).

The earliest Christians were widely ridiculed, especially by the cultural elites, excluded from circles of influence and business, and often persecuted

and put to death. Hurtado says that Roman authorities were uniquely hostile to them, compared to other religious groups.

Why? It was expected that people would have their own gods, but that they would also be willing to show honor to all other gods as well. Nearly every home, every city, every professional guild, and the Empire itself each had its own gods. You could not even go to a meal in a large home or to any public event without being expected to do some ritual to honor the gods of that particular group or place. To *not* do so was highly insulting, at the least, to the house or the community. It was also dangerous,

since it was thought that such behavior could bring the anger of the gods. In particular, it was seen as treason to not honor the gods of the empire, on whose divine authority its legitimacy was based.

Christians, however, saw all these rituals and tributes as idolatry. They were committed to worship their God exclusively. While the Jews had the same view, they were generally tolerated since they were a distinct racial group, and their peculiarity was seen as a function of their ethnicity. Christianity, however, spread through all ethnic groups, and most of them were former pagans who

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LINK TO RISE NEWSLETTER

In the past, Redeemer has grown by drawing people in. But our future is going to be about sending people out — to love and serve this city like never before.

— Tim Keller

We are committed to keeping Redeemer congregants and Rise pledgers informed on the continuing progress of initiatives launched as a direct result of the funds raised through the

Rise Campaign. We are excited to share the first edition of Rise’s bi-monthly newsletter which you can read at rise.redeemer.com/updates/.

In this newsletter you will find more information about the financial progress of the Rise campaign, a Rise story of renewal, specific prayer requests, and much more.

We hope that we can count

on you for continual prayer and support. To receive these newsletters by email please subscribe rise.redeemer.com/updates/. Please note, those who gave or pledged to Rise will automatically receive these updates.

Thank you for partnering with us in this big vision for New York City.

— Rise Team

JOIN HIS TOY STORE IN BRINGING HOPE TO OUR NEIGHBORS THIS CHRISTMAS

Strings of twinkling white lights and gold garland. Red and green bows. Tricycles and Ninja Turtles and Barbie dolls. Sparkling cider and warm coffee. Smiling faces and Santa hats.

This is just some of what our neighbors find when they come to His Toy Store, Hope for New York's annual Christmas outreach for families in need across our city.

Here's how it works: This year, we're working with our affiliate and church partners to host 11 pop-up stores in strategic neighborhoods across the city on December 3 and 10. At these stores, parents can shop for new toys — think action figures, dolls, jewelry and crafts, cars, and trucks — at no cost!

"The place was beautifully decorated and I heard from many parents that it truly looked like a store," said Tatiana, a staff member at Operation Exodus, which serves families in Washington Heights. "They loved the toy selection and felt very blessed. The first parents were a bit anxious to go to the store on their own and getting lost. They complimented the

great service. Parents also noted how this year you all went out with the snacks. *A few of them said to me: 'Is this really for us?' I kept telling them that it was for them.*"

Hope for New York started His Toy Store in 1996 — meaning this year marks 20 years of bringing hope to families across the city through this ministry! Last year, we were able to distribute 2,606 toys to 855 families, and this year we hope to do even more!

Parents who participate in His Toy Store include the working poor in low-income neighborhoods, formerly incarcerated individuals reconnecting with their families, and moms and dads in residential recovery programs. For many of them, His Toy Store is the only opportunity they have to provide gifts for their children.

One shopper told us that His Toy Store is how her family marks the Christmas season. "We may not have the money or have very little economic resources," she said, "but God is big and He does wonderful things through his people everyday."

And that's just it — His Toy Store is more than a one-time outreach. Our hope is that parents connect with our partners for year-round support and spiritual community.

"As always, words could not express the gratitude and 'favor' of God you have shown through the years to the children at our residence," one staff member at a family shelter in Brooklyn said. "There is nothing more memorable than seeing a child's face light up as they open up a new toy."

Won't you help us bring joy to families in need this Christmas?

How to Give: Giving to His Toy Store is completely online! Simply go to hfny.org/HTS to supply toys for a child, family, neighbors, or to stock an entire store! All donations for toys must be received by November 28!

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

— James 1:17

REDEEMER REPORT

The Redeemer Report is a publication of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church.
Office: 1166 Avenue of the Americas, 16th Floor, New York, NY 10036
212-808-4460 (T) 212-808-4465 (F) www.redeemer.com

Kathy Keller
Heather Klein

Hunter College Auditorium
E. 69th St.
(between Park & Lexington)
Services: 10:30 a.m. & 6 p.m.

W83rd Ministry Center
150 W. 83rd St.
(between Columbus & Amsterdam)
Services: 9:30/11:30 a.m., 5 & 7 p.m.

Salvation Army Auditorium
120 W. 14th St.
(between 6th & 7th Aves.)
Services: 9:30 a.m. & 5 p.m.

REDEEMER CITY TO CITY INTERNATIONAL INTENSIVE

BY TIM COX

Redeemer City to City is hosting 16 church planters and 7 church planting trainers for four weeks of intense training, church plant site visits, prayer, and of course, fun. You, Redeemer, have been welcoming these leaders year after year into your church, coffee hours, and your apartments. And every year, the Intensives have been overwhelmed with your hospitality and generosity.

Due to the editorial cycle

of the Redeemer Report, I'm writing this article about the International Intensive before they arrive in New York and you're reading this article as the Intensive is underway. So I'm sure each church planter and church planting trainer is having an extraordinary time learning about gospel renewal, ministry design, and observing center city church plants. Below are a couple of snippets from the planters' bios explaining

their backgrounds and some of the work they're doing leading up to the Intensive.

Will you stop and pray for the 16 church planters and 7 church planting trainers joining us this month? And will you join Redeemer City to City in our work to help leaders build gospel movements in cities by giving to the CTC Special Offering? You can give by texting CTC to 45777 or online at **redeemercityto.com**.

Eli Birnbaum, Tel Aviv, Israel

For the last 6 years we have been leading a discipleship program for young adults that focuses on engaging Israeli Backpackers with the gospel in India and South America. For three years we have been developing a multi-purpose venue in our neighborhood with a variety of activities to engage and interact with our community like art galleries, music shows, second hand sales etc. A year ago our son Shalev was born, keeping us on our toes from day one!

Bilge Ileri, Global City in the Middle East

Although I had a secular upbringing, I always searched for God. During a time of personal crisis in 2002 I was introduced to the Christian faith by a friend, started reading the Bible, and going to church. My calling to full time ministry happened after years of studying and working as a physicist and postdoctoral researcher in the field of quantum optics at the University of Hamburg. Witnessing the plausibility of the Christian faith among my atheistic, secular friends soon became an integral part of my daily work.

Shebu John, Melbourne, Australia

I approached a church to see if there was an opportunity to serve on staff while I began some theological studies. I was given a part-time role while I studied. It was during this time our church went through some internal changes and the senior pastor decided to move on. I too wanted to leave, but God called me and another pastor to stay and begin the journey of re-planting. We have been in that journey for seven years now and by God's grace we have seen the church grow in various ways.

Sebastian Lopez, Santiago, Chile

We are leading a church plant project called 'Ciudad Nueva' in the east area of Santiago; praying and working toward launching in 2017.

I love outdoor life and good coffee. My best friend and I have started a coffee roasting business here in Chile called Peregrino Coffee Roasters. The vision for the project is to foster coffee culture in our country, build community and also create means for missions and ministry. I feel blessed and excited to be able to participate in 2016 intensive in New York.

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BECAUSE SOMEONE NOMINATED ME

BY CHUCK ARMSTRONG

November marks Redeemer's annual Officer Nomination month, a time when members have the chance to nominate other members who they think God might be calling them to serve on our Session and Diaconate. In 2013 I received a Diaconate nomination from a friend, and though I wasn't sure what to expect, after much prayer and conversation with my wife I decided to accept. Following the interview and training process, I officially joined the Diaconate as a West Side deek (our affectionate term for a deacon or deaconess) in June 2014.

At this point you might be asking yourself, "What is the Diaconate?" The Diaconate is comprised of deacons and deaconesses from each congregation, and as our Book of Church Order states, the office of the deek is one of sympathy and service, striving to "minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and

to any who may be in distress."

Care recipients of the Diaconate are fellow members and regular attenders who are often seeking financial assistance and spiritual guidance from the church. It is the distinct privilege of deeks to walk alongside them through these tough seasons of their lives. Though it may be hard for a care recipient to see God's work in their life during this time, I am constantly amazed at what he is doing through their experiences, and what he is revealing about the dignity of all who are made in his image. Hearing someone courageously reveal their struggles and frustrations is humbling, and it has helped me grow in empathy toward my neighbors and reexamine how I view success and comfort in my own life.

Beyond this, serving on the Diaconate placed me in a new family of brothers and sisters who actively seek God's glory in their service toward their cli-

ents. From monthly gatherings and regular meetings with our care recipients to our annual retreat, I am grateful for the lifelong friendships made and the lessons learned.

As I became more involved with the Diaconate, I felt God pushing me toward full-time ministry. Thanks to my time as a deek, I felt affirmed in making the decision to attend seminary and later pursue a huge vocation change by coming on staff with Redeemer just a couple of months ago. Though I'm now transitioning off of the Diaconate, I've already felt my experience influence my ministry, and I know that it will continue to do so throughout my life.

This month, join me in considering those in your community who might be a good fit to serve this wonderful ministry with which God has blessed Redeemer.

For more information visit redeemer.com/nominate.

WHY? ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

suddenly, after conversion, refused to honor the other gods. This created huge social problems, making it disruptive or impossible for Christians to be accepted into most public gatherings. If an individual in a family or a servant became a Christian, suddenly they refused to honor the gods of the household.

Christianity's spread was seen as subversive to the social order, a threat to the culture's way of life. Christians were thought to be too exclusive to be good citizens.

But in light of the enormous social costs of being a Christian in the first three centuries, why *did* anyone become a Christian? Why did Christianity grow so

exponentially? What did Christianity offer that was so much greater than the costs? Hurtado and others have pointed out three things.

First, Christians were called into a *unique "social project"* that both offended and attracted people. Christians forbade both abortion and the practice of
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REDEEMER LINCOLN SQUARE CHURCH PLANT SECURES ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY SITE

BY SARA KELLER

We are excited about so many aspects of this new church site planting venture, but because it is such a clear answer to our prayers and hope, we are especially excited to be able to announce that we will be *returning to worship at the Ethical Culture Society* on 64th and Central Park West. As this location is just north of the transportation crossroads of Columbus Circle, it allows us to reach the broader west side, as well as locations to the north and south.

We are looking forward to the opportunity to build on Redeemer's roots in this space. We seriously hope for your continued partnership with us in prayer as we prepare for our Easter launch.

Meanwhile, a little family background: In the summer of

2001 I arrived in New York for my summer training for Teach for America. Though I had grown up the child of native New Yorkers, I had yet to make New York my own. It was still a great sprawling metropolis where the streets sparkled and every corner held the promise of something new and exciting.

Within a few short weeks, one thing became evident. I remember standing on the corner of West 66th and Broadway and thinking that this was the place that I wanted to call home. Alistair Cooke was spot on when he said, "New York is the biggest collection of villages," and I had found my village — the Upper West Side.

Since that time we have learned so much about what it means to be part of a village. We have learned the beauty of

getting to know our neighbors. For in knowing and being known by others, we get glimpses of the great diversity of our God. It is that deep sense of being known and loved that we want to foster in this new congregation. When we are rooted amongst God's people with his word as our guide, we can then move out humbly and earnestly to serve those around us.

As we pray and prepare for Redeemer Lincoln Square, we pray for a community marked not only by its care and concern for those in its congregation, but also by its outwardly faced compassion and service for the neighbors who make up this village.

For more information, go to redeemer.com/lincoln-square.

WHY? ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 4)

"infant exposure," in which unwanted infants were simply thrown out. Christians were a sexual counter-culture in that they abstained from any sex outside of heterosexual marriage. This was in the midst of a culture that thought that, especially for married men, sex with prostitutes, slaves, and children was perfectly fine.

Also, Christians were unusually generous with their money, particularly to the poor

and needy, and not just to their own family and racial group. Another striking difference was that Christian communities were multi-ethnic, since their common identity in Christ was more fundamental than their racial identities, and therefore created a multi-ethnic diversity, which was unprecedented for a religion. Finally, Christians believed in non-retaliation, forgiving their enemies, even those who were killing them.

Second, Christianity offered a *direct, personal, love relationship with the Creator God*. People around the Christians wanted favor from the gods, and eastern religions spoke about experiences of enlightenment, but an actual love relationship with God was something that no one else was offering.

Third, Christianity offered *assurance of eternal life*. Every other religion offered some
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YOUTH MINISTRY PIE BAKE RAISING FUNDS FOR MERCY AND JUSTICE

BY CAROLINE ROYAL

For the last twenty years the Redeemer youth community has gathered to bake and sell pies to raise funds for the Youth Ministry. What started with a few people in a basement kitchen baking a couple dozen pies has grown exponentially over the years.

The youth ministry now partners with the Bowery Mission, which graciously opens its kitchen to the nearly 100 students, parents, volunteers, and youth staff who work until the early morning hours to prepare close to 600 pumpkin, pecan, apple, and apple-cranberry pies.

We donate around 200 pies to the Bowery Mission to be enjoyed by the Thanksgiving dinner guests served the following Thursday. The remaining pies are boxed and sold at each congregation on the Sunday morning before Thanksgiving to raise funds for the Youth Ministry.

In years past, the proceeds from the Pie Bake have gone towards a youth scholarship fund to provide the means for students to go on retreats, mission trips and other events. This year, however, the Youth Ministry is taking this opportunity to respond to the church

goal to “Rise Where You Are” and all proceeds raised from their work will be donated to a mercy and justice ministry of each congregation’s choice.

Please join the Redeemer Youth Ministry as we celebrate the 20 anniversary of the Pie Bake and seek to find new ways to follow Jesus in his mission to serve the poor and marginalized. You can pre-order pies online starting November 13, or purchase after the morning worship service on November 20. You can find more information in the Connect or at redeemer.com/youth.

6TH ANNUAL REDEEMER CFW CONFERENCE: THE WONDER AND FEAR OF TECHNOLOGY



David H. Kim gives the theological foundation behind this year’s conference theme, *The Wonder and Fear of Technology*.

Find out more at cfwconference.com.

Technology — both theoretically and practically — has staked its claim in our cultural moment. It is here to stay. This dominance has fostered much positive innovation, yet also exposed a great deal of fear and anxiety about our future, prodding the theological realm for greater nuance and application. Here CFW Executive Director

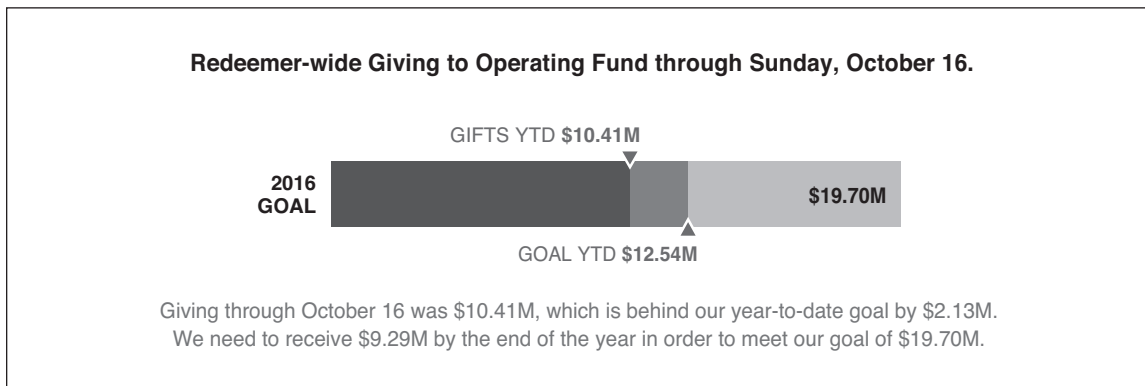
FINANCIAL GIVING UPDATE

We are grateful for your financial support of Redeemer's ministry to New York City. Your gifts make a difference and you can see some of the ways God is using your generosity to bring renewal to our city by watching stories of renewal at redeemer.com/renewal.

Through October 16, 2016 we have received \$10.41M in gifts to the General Fund, which is 17% behind our goal. Thank you to everyone who has supported Redeemer throughout 2016, and also thank you to those still who plan on supporting it.

Based on past giving data,

the 4th quarter of the year is when we typically receive more than 40% of our annual giving. Please prayerfully consider making a gift to the General Fund as we need to receive \$9.29M between now and the end of the year to reach our budgeted goal of \$19.7M (see chart below).



WHY? ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 5)

version of salvation—through human effort, and therefore no one could be sure of eternal life until death. But the gospel gives us the basis for a full assurance of salvation *now* because it is by grace not works and by Christ's work not ours.

I hope that by now you can see the relevance of these studies. The earliest church was seen as too exclusive and a threat to the social order because it would not honor all deities; today Christians are again being seen exclusive and a threat to the social order because it will not honor all identities. Yet the early church thrived in that situation. Why?

One reason was that Chris-

tians *were* ridiculed as too exclusive and different. And yet many were drawn to Christianity *because it was different*. If a religion is not different from the surrounding culture, if it does not critique and offer an alternative to it, it dies because it is seen as unnecessary. If Christians today were also famous for and marked by social chastity, generosity and justice, multi-ethnicity, and peace making — would it not be compelling to many? Ironically, Christians were “out of step” with the culture on sex to begin with, and it was not the church but the culture that eventually changed.

Another reason Christianity thrived was because it offered

things that no other culture or religion even claimed to have — a love relationship with God and salvation by free grace. It is the same today. No other religion offers these things, nor does secularism. Nor can the “spiritual but not religious” option really capture them either. These are still unique “value offers” and can be lifted up to a spiritually hungry and thirsty population.

The early church surely looked like it was on the “wrong side of history,” but instead it changed history with a dogged adherence to the biblical gospel. That should be our aspiration as well.



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— from “*Why does anyone become a christian?*” Read more inside.

RCTC INTERNATIONAL INTENSIVE ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 3)

Collins Ouma, Nairobi, Kenya

In our African situation church planting is also strategic because it is a self-sustainable, contextually relevant model for our resource-stressed context. New churches grow rapidly, reach out to new people, self-support, develop leadership and self-perpetuate over time. It is from this background that we initiated a school for Church Planting since 2012, where I have been providing leadership towards the task of preparing those that we are launching into our various communities.