

## Book Review

*Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City and the People of God*  
**Harvie M. Conn & Manuel Ortiz**  
(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2001) 469 pages

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The impact of cities is evident around the globe. The constantly changing skylines of the Northern Hemisphere and the sprawling metropolitan expanses of the Southern Hemisphere tangibly demonstrate the reality of urbanization. Cities not only visibly communicate their growing presence, but impact the cultural, economic, political, and informational aspects of society on a worldwide scale. Over the last century, the massive migration and immigration of people from around the world to cities has created a majority urban world. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, 3 percent of the world's population lived in cities. Today, over 50 percent of the people of the world live in urban contexts. If people did not move to the city, the city came to them. Rural areas near the city are now shaped and overwhelmed by population increases.

Christianity, especially in foreign nations, is increasingly an urban religion. However, this is also true in the U.S., especially as it applies to *Diasporas* and minority populations. So, how can believers bring the

gospel to these contexts? The city presents serious challenges, such as poverty, racism, human exploitation, and government corruption, which cry out for answers. How can the church move ahead with the gospel of hope in the midst of these demands?

In *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City, and the People of God*, Harvie Conn and Manuel Ortiz, two noted scholars and proven practitioners of urban ministry, address the vital work of the church in the city. Their twofold goal focuses on understanding the city and God's work within the city.

Through four great waves of development, Conn and Ortiz trace the history of the city around the world. In addition, they tackle the critical issue of a biblical theology for urban mission. How does the Bible view the city? Are people closer to God in the country than the city? Does the Bible have an anti-urban bias? Is the Bible an urban book rather than a rural text? The authors provide a thorough analysis of these questions and thereby unveil God's urban mandate as reflected in both Old and New Testaments.

From this foundation, Conn and Ortiz unpack the multifaceted nature of the city as place, process, center, power, and a place of change and stability. They help the reader understand that God created the city as a sacred place with the purpose of fulfilling the salvific, just, and compassionate mission of God.

Conn and Ortiz develop the history of cities from ancient to modern times. This becomes particularly relevant as they study both the Old and New Testament texts, which reveal that the Bible is more of an urban than a rural text. Their historical reflections assist the reader in understanding the urban life settings of Scripture. From their historical reflection, Conn and Ortiz bring the sociological perspective to the existential moment for incarnational ministry.

The authors move beyond fragmented stereotypes about urban contexts and present a holistic approach that can facilitate the development of a fully biblical ministry. In addition, they lay out what the social sciences have to offer urban mission, including ethnographic and demographic studies. They focus on the particular issues and needs of urban leadership, including a plan for developing and mentoring leaders while equipping the laity for ministry in the city. The authors provide excellent processes applicable to contextualized ministry for the local church that will help the body of Christ fulfill the mission of God with vision, hope, and confidence in urban contexts around the world.

Conn and Ortiz take a bold step in Chapter 19, *Spiritual Warfare in the City*. Many authors of urban ministry text either shy

away from the topic completely or contextualize spiritual warfare solely into the systems of government. Without a doubt, demonic principalities and powers affect systems of government. The authors reflect on this; however, they boldly and clearly discuss the place and purpose of Satan and demonic activity. This vitally important chapter discusses how the urban church must biblically: (1) identify its authority over demons and Satan; (2) review the strategy of Satan, in general; (3) identify the strategy of Satan as territorial; and (4) act in accordance with Scripture (371). Such information is absolutely necessary for the urban pastor, missionary, and parishioner. Conn and Ortiz conclude the chapter by stating, “Prayer is our most important weapon (Eph. 6). We must arm ourselves with God’s weapons and Spirit as our neighborhoods come into freedom through the preaching and living out the gospel” (374).

Finally, *Urban Ministry* focuses on the essential element of leadership. While many books exist on the topic, little has been said about the particular issues and needs of urban leadership. Therefore, the authors give significant attention to developing and mentoring leaders while equipping the laity for ministry in the city.

The authors display a weakness in incorporating the Person and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the urban church—an area where much could be written. The book of Acts, in particular, illustrates this time and again as the Early Church starts and grows through the Word of God being confirmed through signs, wonders, and

miracles. Such was the norm in the early urban Church.

Overall, this is an excellent text for people engaged in urban ministry. It could serve as

a classroom textbook or a ready reference manual regarding urban ministry. I highly recommend this book.