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THE URBAN CHILD, CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRY AND THE CHALLENGE OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Introduction

A persistent question for urban Christian pedagogy is how, and even if, the local church should witness to and with people of other living faiths. This concern has reached a higher level of awareness in light of the attack on America on September 11, 2001. While people in other parts of the world have lived for decades in situations of war and terrorism, American public theologians and congregational leaders are now, as never before, confronted with questions such as, who are the Muslims who live, work, study and worship in our communities; what is the appropriate Christian response to them (as individuals) and to what they believe (as a faith community)? By re-examining and reclaiming the role and nature of Christian identity and mission within the multicultural and multiethnic urban context where the plurality of diverse religious voices, theological paradigms and theological pedagogies are operable to sustain faith communities, the local church can rethink the fundamental question of how belief in God impacts urban culture. Therefore, it is the writer's suggestion that one of the greatest challenges facing the contemporary Church and Christian mission is that of theological reflection on the multireligious dimensions of urban living in shared local space; and how it requires that the local church,

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as well as mission advocates and activists, not only reconsider urban theological education, but also local church pedagogies. The goal is to stimulate the local church to engage in congregational pedagogies that enable the church to discover and integrate urban mission praxis with faithful church (communal) life so that congregations may learn what it means to be used and sustained as the "beloved community" (Martin Luther King Jr.) committed to urban community development in the midst of religious pluralism.

This is done from a womanist theological perspective concerned with three primary foci: the missiological, the pastoral, and the academic. Womanist theology refers to theological discourse that takes the interconnected three-dimensional experience of racism, sexism, and classism as a source of God's revelation. It emerges out of the context of theology in the lives of African-American women in the United States. In tracing the historical constructive contributions of womanist theologians, the hermeneutic, multi-dialogical, liturgical and ethical analysis, which is embedded in womanist discourse, has significantly broadened Christian understanding of how God's power is at work in human experience by articulating important, illuminating, and fresh insights. This perspective suggests that the distinct issues facing the "girl" child and those of the "boy" child must be delineated with specificity and deliberation if they are to grow into whole, healthy persons.

Cast within an urban missiological framework, this essay provides an investigation of factors related to why theological leadership, mission advocates, and activists in the context of the U.S. must be concerned about congregational pedagogies. Given the dynamic nature of religious pluralism, churches must be empowered to respond appropriately to the complex social and religious change factors impacting the nature of local congregations (as

the core for change) in urban areas. The processes and conse-quences within the complex urban contexts must also be con-sidered. While it is the African-American community that pro-vides the context for the perspective presented here, insights gained from the writer's experiences in other grassroots Christian communities of Palestine; Capetown, South Africa; Salatiga, Indonesia; Accra, Ghana; and Juba, Sudan indicate that religious diversity issues facing children is also a concern for the global Christian community at large. Congregations and their leaders must engage in pedagogies that enable them to live out a liberating theological understanding of what it means to be a peo-ple of God as defined by Jesus Christ, first called out and then commissioned to live responsibly in the world toward children.[1]

As we seek to address this issue of raising local church aware-ness to the issue of religious pluralism and the challenges it poses, we need only to begin to examine the neighborhoods where urban congregations are located to see why this task is impor-tant. Due to the complex nature of issues, problems, and prospects facing urban centers, not only have urbanization and urbanism become marginalized by denominational church lead-ers, but also by business and financial entities, environmental-ists, and others who help to determine the quality of life in the urban context. Anti-urban sentiments cause some churches to flee from inner cities instead of seeking them as places where the "shalom of God" is represented. Yet, it is in these urban centers where local churches are birthed. When congregations fear reli-

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[1]See Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001). This is perhaps one of the best written current resources on the study of Christian theolog-ical approaches to children and the responsibility of families and society toward them. Also, in this work, see Marcia Y. Riggs, "African-American Children, 'The Hope of the Race': Mary Church Terrell, the Social Gospel, and the Work of the Black Women's Club Movement," 365-385, as most informative.

gious diversity and exclude themselves from interacting with other religious persons, the local urban church can no longer become the "yeast, salt and light" in the world (Matt. 5:13-14; 13:33).

Raising Local Church Awareness of Urban Challenges

How do we change beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of the local church so that it may be enabled to engage faithfully through public theology and community revitalization within the urban setting? How can the local urban church discover or re-discover, through raised awareness and education, what God is calling it to do and be—"to love God" with all of our heart, soul and mind and to love our neighbor as ourselves? (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37-39). Such tasks require the local church to listen to questions about the biblical faith that are frequently in the minds of Christians in the pews, attempting to apply faith teachings to their daily lives. Awareness is raised as the local church's self-understanding of increased concern about its relationship, not only with God as revealed through Jesus Christ, but also with persons in the community whom God so loved enough to give a Savior. Those who live and share physical community space with a grassroots congregation, need to be able to look at the church, and say "This is an institution, a community we can trust because it has integrity as it seeks to live out its purpose and mission."

Within the open democratic urban society heterogeneity is marked by ethnic, racial, gender, sexual, age, economic, linguistic, and cultural differences; and there are many religious voices claiming the ability to reconstruct and redevelop lonely, hurting and spiritually searching people. Consider for example, hip-hop as a popular form of music among urban children and youth.[2]

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[2]See Gregor and Demitri Ehrlich, comps., *Move the Crowd: Voices and Faces of the Hip-Hop Nation* (New York: MTV Books/Pocket Books, 1999) for male and female articulations of self-expression.

There is a growing number of Muslim performers such as Maspyke, a group that is described as delivering the Islamic message with a powerful beat. "You're tolerant 'cause they came from the worst place. Nonsense—urban love, use your common sense. You have a man with prominence, a man who doesn't break promises, a man who's conscious about what Allah is."[3]

The Message of Maspyke is "to Break Out of Yourself and You Can Change"

Consequently, the local church is challenged to reclaim and proclaim holistically, in word, deed and lifestyle, a new sense of Christian identity within the public arena of the urban context. This identity will emerge as local churches grow in their willingness and ability to address specific urban challenges.[4]

For example, as the economic values of God's reign are compared to the dominant values of modern life, such as consumerism, status, power, privilege and prestige, these must be reviewed in light of Jesus' teaching on agape and modeled after his incarnational model of ministry. Or, in light of urban discrimination against persons of color, the poor and homeless that still prevails under the guise of re-gentrification and urban redevelopment, the church must be willing to move from engaging in

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[3]Menoru Moriya, ed., *Islam Rising: The Quran and the American Dream*, prod. Hideaki Shimamoto and dir. Shigehiro Ryuke, 52 min, Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 2000, videocassette.

[4]It is important to note that while congregations may be slow in acknowledging the need to address interreligious issues among children and youth; other religious institutions are addressing the challenge. Auburn Theological Seminary has initiated a new multifaceted youth leadership program, which aims to reveal the power of faith to create a just world. The "Next Generation" is a 1999 youth movement of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions geared toward encouraging youth worldwide to engage one another in discussions about reconciliation, spirituality, and sustainability. These are two examples of interfaith activities, bringing children together across religious boundaries and differences.

ministries of social service acts to engaging in the deeper more penetrating ministries of social action. It must seek to respond to the questions about why people are discriminated against and why poor and homeless persons are in some of the world's wealthiest cities. Or, consider yet, the plight of urban children, especially African-American children, who consistently score lower on national achievement tests than white suburban children and Asian children. These children hardly speak English or process basic calculations, leaving them totally unprepared to function meaningfully in today's technologically advanced world. While the "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001" is an emerging issue in educational reform, the urban church must participate actively in the education of urban children. According to Christian mission advocates and activists, the cross of Jesus is so pivotal in theological reflection that it has to be presented as a deliberate choice mandated by local churches for Christian ministry. It must be seen as an expensive decision resulting in radical social consequences—such as denying self and institutional ambition. It must lead to making decisions that run counter to popular opinion or sentiment and to a willingness to engage in a daily ministry which runs counter to the prevailing societal values. This cannot be viewed as impossibility, but rather as an intentional and deliberate part of God's design for local congregations.

Pedagogy for True Life

One way of nurturing such an identity is based on a two-prong Christian pedagogy that emphasizes recognition and awareness of how important the local church is to the process of urban ministry and the ability to incorporate the city as the key learning place related to both pedagogical content and process. The question of urban pedagogy, as it relates to theological educa-

tion, can no longer be left to a few urban specialists trained in Bible school and seminary. Rather, it must be enlarged to embrace the entire church as the whole people of God, clergy and laity, young, and old. Traditional educational approaches, in which the congregation is viewed as a passive learner/actor engaging primarily in urban ministry acts, can no longer be viewed as biblically based, culturally appropriate or socially relevant. What is needed is a pedagogy that enables congregations to discover anew the meaning of true life within the urban context. This will be achieved as local churches first discover and reflect on urban issues that are convergent within their life; and secondly, reflect communally and critically on the issues, as they engage in suggestions for appropriate response and re-envision new possibilities.

It is only then that factors—theological and cultural—are examined and understood in such a way that helps shape the local church and the type of relationship it has within the urban context. Attention is also given to the forces and powers inherent in the Christian faith, which cause the local congregation to re-evaluate its purpose and reclaim the mission of God, *missio Dei*.[5] It is important to recognize that expressions and shapes of the local church in the urban context, such as public policies, immigrant growth, racial profiling, changing prison demographics and numerous other factors, together with the interdependent nature of missional praxis, any of several definitions of

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[5]We must be mindful that Muslims turn also to their faith to discern appropriate behavior toward children. Often, publications such as Fathi Osman, *Muslim Women: In the Family and the Society* (Los Angeles: Minaret Publications [a Division of the Islamic Center of Southern California], 1991), circulate among women's groups at the mosque to educate and train women in Islamic attitudes toward children. In addition, Ihsan Bagby, *The Mosque in America: A National Portrait* (Washington, DC: Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2001), enables us to examine closer how the mosque impacts the lives of children.

Christian mission may be identified as a launching pad for pursuing urban congregational pedagogies. Thus, the critical issue is not how a specific congregation defines itself in light of the mission of God as it seeks to respond appropriately, but rather that it engages in a process that allows its attitudes, beliefs, and practices to be transcended into visible, reflective action.

Sharing Sacred Space in the Urban Context

Beginning from a womanist perspective, the writer's concern about mission as witness among people of other living faiths is based on a triad of <u>pastoral care</u>, <u>missiology</u> and <u>scholarship</u>.

Pastoral Care

From the perspective of the pastorate and pastoral care, the local congregation has to struggle to respond with authenticity to the multitude of issues and concerns related to religious diversity, interfaith dialogues and interfaith engagements.[6] Parents find it difficult to describe their feelings when their adult daughter—once Christian now Muslim—first said she could no longer eat in her parents' home because the food was unclean. More and more Christian grandparents are interacting with non-Christian grandchildren.

Even pastors find themselves searching for answers when asked to provide guidance related to interfaith dating and marriage. Is it theologically acceptable for Christians to purchase

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[6]A leader who supports the beating of children as congregational punishment (as they interpret the Bible) pastors the Atlanta-based congregation House of Prayer. This situation serves as an illustration of yet another congregation wrestling with issues of faith and culture.

services and goods offered by Muslims? Is it permissible for Christians, because of how they regard the quality of their educational system, to have their children educated in Muslim schools? Is it acceptable for Christian men and their sons to participate in the Million Man March organized under the leadership of Muslim Minister Louis Farrakhan? These and other similar issues can no longer be ignored by professional church leaders, but must be responded to by the church. They must be viewed within the larger context of seeking what it means to be human within shared urban contexts where people understand that they can see other faiths as viable options. This speaks to yet another reason why urban identity formation and community reformation must locate critical response within congregational life and community.

Missiology

The church must be encouraged to take seriously the role of pastoral care to the physical, spiritual, and psychological needs of the community. This leads to the second concern, that of missiology. It is the world, not the church, that is the subject of God's concern as expressed in John 3:16. In the historical past, the Black Church was the beacon in the community primarily because it viewed the responsibility of Christian ministry as an extension of the ministry and life of Jesus Christ. However, in pursuit of the American dream, many churches consequently lost the dynamic concern and compassion they had for those beyond the doors of the church. This has been particularly true for children and youth who bring no resources to the church. While committed to social justice and liberation, many congregations do not want to do the hard work necessary to bring about the desired change. Congregations must be willing to be

daring in actions, courageous in speech, and willing to bring a renewed faith to the task. Only such a dedication will reclaim a new sense of mission identity. Just as children and their families around the world have lived with terrorism for decades (a state of being to which Americans are only now attempting to adjust in light of anthrax and other threats) and with the diverse realities of religious conflict, so must Christian missiologists, advocates, and activists be poised to help urban children deal with escalating violence in general.[7]

As a missiologist, one who has sought to teach and learn about religious pluralism from a variety of global urban contexts, the writer understands that the historical relationship between Islam and Christianity has been marked less by cooperation and mutual respect and more by conflicts of religious intolerance and violence—physically, socially, culturally, politically, psychologically, and economically. Although the constitution and policies of urban centers have been designed to foster and maintain an environment of protection and security among its citizens, the factor of religious pluralism in the U.S. still remains largely unexplored.

While local churches may be clear and unambiguous in their statements of who they are, their religious identity must be viewed in light of prevailing and emerging issues of social change affecting common urban life and community—culturally, politically, economically, religiously, ethnically and racially. Yet peace, "shalom," protection, compassion, and justice cannot be achieved and maintained unless there are individuals and religious communities willing to work for the common good of

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[7]See World Vision International, *Children and Violence: The Washington Forum: Perspectives on Our Global Future* (Federal Way, Washington, DC: Office of Advocacy and Education, World Vision, 1995).

public life. Understanding how traditions of interfaith relations and interfaith dialogues are shaped in urban settings, how religious attitudes and behaviors, e.g., of Muslims and Christians encourage common public dialogue, are critical issues to raise. The local church must seek to discover the answers to such questions as:

- What is the contemporary public meaning and place of religion in the shared urban context?
- How are current public issues addressed, e.g., by Muslims and Christians, as an interfaith community?
- What forms of interreligious dialogue are most appropriate given the current context and why?

It is only then that the local church can determine how it can best identify with public issues and policies, serving as a conduit and resource for interreligious efforts and networks in each city context. It is only then that the church is positioned to receive fresh insights for congregational teaching and learning, especially concerning the urban child. The outcomes should enable personal and communal development geared toward reconciliation and positive social reconstruction.

Scholarship

Lastly, awareness of the lack of scholarship in formulating a Christian presence and response to Islam has enabled the church to slip into what is perceived as a silent and gradual dissolution by assimilation. North Atlantic theological education formulated out of Christian hegemony has traditionally ignored and devalued the growth and development of non-Christian religious traditions. As a consequence, professional Christian lead-

ers today often lack the historical and theological perspectives to respond intelligently to the presence of Islam in its various manifestations, as well as other religious standards of non-Christian faith communities. Since the last decade, few scholars have been in a position to observe how Islam has challenged and continues to challenge Christianity in several ways. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya have described the Muslims as they have been impacted by the challenge of a worldwide fundamental resurgence as "highly motivated evangelists" within African-American communities. They have observed that the historical Black-church denominations will face a far more serious, powerful competition for the souls of Black folk with the Muslims than the white churches ever would.[8] Earle Waugh described the conversion of Black Muslims to Islamic orthopraxy after the pilgrimages to Mecca and visits to other countries by such leaders as Malcolm X as perhaps one of the greatest events of the twentieth century.[9] Former president of Howard University School of Divinity, Lawrence N. Jones, has commented on how the Muslims have challenged the African-American protestant churches' position of authority.[10] While these change dynamics are observable, what has yet to be determined is how religious identity and differences impact faith development within dynamic context of religious plurality. More research is needed in the following areas:[11]

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[8]C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 388-391.

[9]See Earle H. Waugh, Baha Abu-Laban and Regula Qureshi, eds., *The Muslim Community in North America* (Alberta, Canada: University of Alberta Press, 1983).

[10]Lilly Foundation, "The Black Church in America," *Progressions: An Occasional Report*, vol. 4 (Indianapolis: The Foundation), verso of inside back cover.

[11]Phyllis Wilson, an educational specialist, recommended these themes in child development, developed and provided by Region IV Education Service Center, Houston, TX. The writer has adapted and reconstructed these to address religious concerns.

Familial vs. environmental influences: Is congregationalism (urban) or environmental influence greater? Active vs. passive child: Does the religious child act on environment or does the environment (multi religions) act on the child? Continuity vs. discontinuity: Is faith development a continuous, gradual process, or does it have discontinuous, abrupt shifts? Cultural universals vs. cultural relations: Does religious identity development occur along the same continuum in every culture, or does culture influence the course of development? Risk vs. resilience: What are the religious/spiritual outcomes of exposure to risk factors, and what factors contribute to these outcomes?

In addition, an increasing number of scholars of both Hebrew scripture and Greek are revealing that the biblical world, as well as the primitive church, was not as homogeneous as we have often been led to believe. A closer look at mission history bears witness that new realities, such as the growing number of persons who are claiming a dual religious identity as both Muslim and Christian, are perhaps not actually as new as we suppose. The phenomena, for example, was known to have existed in Spain by 717 (A.D.) whereby both Muslim and Christian groups practiced not one, but two religions, making it difficult to know where their real loyalty remained. To understand what it means for congregations to view the urban context as shared sacred space is a new phenomenon. The ability to do so raises the question of urban pedagogy for Christians and how they ought to witness to and with people of other living faiths.

The multireligious and multiethnic urban context is the place where the plurality of diverse religious voices, theological paradigms, and theological pedagogies operate to sustain faith communities. By reclaiming the role and nature of Christian identity and mission among children and youth in this very context, the local church must rethink the fundamental ques-

tion of how does belief in God impact urban life. Therefore, as congregations throughout the world consider the multireligious dimensions of urban living in shared local sacred space, we are reminded—most often by non-denominational congregations—of the importance of stressing the holistic dimension of personal involvement.

A Missiological Framework

The way to raise awareness of urban challenges through the local church is centered in a missiological framework, an emerging product in process that emphasizes local church pedagogy and locates critical response to urban community development and revitalization with congregational life. By focusing on pedagogy as the means to prepare the local church to assume its role of witnessing about belief in God and Savior in an imperfect urban society, this framework enables the prevailing values, beliefs and norms of our community to be brought under the scrutiny of the biblical and lived-out Christian faith. Womanist theological insights related to the interconnected, three-dimensional experience of racism, sexism and classism as a source of God's revelation have the ability to enable us to see clearer. It pronounces that within the African-American community, it is the local church and the local mosque that are the core centers responsible for raising and responding to current issues of how God's power is at work in human experiences and how current issues of social change must be addressed holistically. Certainly, within the context of the Christian faith, this becomes more evident as congregational life increasingly replaces the traditional extended family and serves as a community and support group.

Within the suggested proposal for raising local church awareness of urban challenges, it is the discipline of missiology that

provides the framework for assisting the church in identifying and claiming its mission as a bridge between God's vision for the community and the actual reality. Academically, missiology may be defined in part as the academic discipline or science which researches, records and applies data relating to the biblical origin, the history (including the use of documentary materials), the anthropological principles and techniques and the theological base of the Christian mission. The theory, methodology, and databank are particularly directed toward:

1. The processes by which the Christian message is communicated [in word, deed and lifestyle];
2. The encounter brought about by its proclamation in non-Christians [and nominal Christians]; and
3. The planting of the Church, the incorporation of converts and the growth and relevance of their structures and fellowship, internally and externally in and outside the church walls in a variety of culture patterns [in local, regional, national, and global partnership].[12]

In the life of a congregation, missiology invites persons as both individuals and a community of faith to actively embrace and participate in a pedagogical process shaped by six stages of theological deliberation: engagement, exploration, explanation, extension, emanation, and evaluation. An illustration of how these stages interact with each other follows.

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[12]Alan Richard Tipplett, *Introduction to Missiology* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1987), xiii.

1. Engagement

Planning and preparation: The proposed pedagogical goal, which is to utilize the urban context as both content and process for critical, holistic and integral Christian thinking about the meaning and purpose of the local church, is marked by the notion of engagement. Using the tools of community-based learning serves to localize and decolonize people as spiritual and religious subjects. The objectives here are to use Christian values and ethics to interpret the role of the local congregation and equip it to experience a willingness to engage the city in theological reflection related to urban life. Intentional engagement allows the church to discover the importance of planning and preparing for ministry, not only as a matter of good stewardship, but also because of its positive effects on common life in the wider community.

In terms of competencies, it is suggested that a diverse core group representing the populations of the congregations work with the local church to determine its desired outcomes and what it considers important for Christian nurturing and growth. Based on biblical reflection of urban ministry and effective urban leadership, the following competencies have been identified as minimum necessities: A strong biblical and theological perspective; partnership building capacity; economic development; conflict-transformation; social analysis; anti-racism/anti-sexism training; urban evangelism; multicultural awareness; spiritual formation; and ethnic identity formation and skills to develop community.

2. Exploration

The local urban church: What processes best enable the local church to locate critical response to urban challenges within con-

gregational life and community is based primarily on the con-
gregation's self-understanding. An exploration of the various
theological resources utilized by the church is a key indicator. As
an addition to studying the nature, history, and personality of
the local church, it is important to recognize how past issues of
social change have been addressed from the perspective of faith.
For example, when considering the issue of religious pluralism,
the local church must consider what resources its theological
tradition—both as congregation and denomination—brings to
dialogues with people of other living faiths. Also, an explo-
ration into how the congregation understands its role of recon-
structing and developing people—body, mind, spirit and
soul—as well as the social systems that affect the quality of
urban living is important in obtaining an honest examination of
the church's profile and how much trust it has built within the
larger community. This factor acknowledges that while some
congregations are willing to subscribe to the ecumenical observa-
tion made at the World Conference on Mission and Evangelism
at San Antonio, Texas in 1989 that "we cannot point to any
other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time, we
cannot set limits on the saving power of God" (Acts 17:28),[13]
not all agree. Regardless of whether a congregation understands
its positional stance in regards to other people of faith as that
of theological exclusivity, theological inclusivity or in terms of
theological pluralism, it is important to be sincere in relating to
others as persons also created in the image of God.

3. Explanation

The urban context: What is the impact of the local church
in the urban context, especially in times of crisis? By emphasiz-

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[13]Frederick R. Wilson, ed., *The San Antonio Report: Your Will Be Done:
Mission in Christ's Way* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1989), 32.

ing the notion of explanation, each church should be able to provide a demographic and prophetic analysis of the context in which it is located. Explanation allows us to understand how in the urban context both personal and communal religious identities are developed and hope is affirmed. It is important that congregations grow in their understanding of the various roles played by religion in today's postmodern urban contexts, as well as the various functions fulfilled by religious communities.[14]

In light of the enduring presence and vibrancy of religious communities, it is crucial to view the urban context as the best representation of what the reign of God is all about. When the city is viewed as a gift of God, neither as a curse nor a place from which to escape; and when its values are regarded as the locus of positive changes where people seek life and not death, then Christians can better validate this locus and themselves as key players in urban institutional community involvement. Even in the midst of neighborhood succession, where, for example, African-American congregations are struggling to respond faithfully to the growing influx of Muslims and where new mosques and Islamic businesses are being built, it entails experiential learning that allows congregations to learn the lessons of life needed to promote contextual community-building interfaith dialogues and Christian ministries.

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[14]According to the Clinical Center for the Study and Development and Learning, a University-Affiliated Program at the University of North Carolina, Mel Levine, executive director, these roles would include eight new developmental constructs. Attention is given to two: social cognition (including verbal pragmatics, social behavior and political acumen) and higher order cognition (concept formation, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity/brainstorming, reasoning/logical thinking, rule use and mental representation) in children. See the following web site: www.allkindsofminds.org.

4. Extension

Professional responsibility: In the midst of our postmodern society marked by the tendency to place a high value on emphasis on technology, science, secularism, and economism—the spirit of consumption—and less on the dignity of human beings, theological education has a high responsibility. It has to help shape and mold women and men as leaders both for congregations and denominations and for church institutions committed to proclaiming the reign of God. Persons called by God to influence people for God's purposes must be properly equipped and commissioned so that human transformation can occur. A love toward people, as well as toward God is critical, given the plurality of philosophical aspects of cultural and ethnic differences at seminaries or bible colleges will not prepare today's congregational leaders to address issues that emerge from erroneous opinion that religious beliefs are private and should not affect public life.

5. Emanation

Congregational spirituality and mission: Because of the interrelatedness of religion and spirituality, congregations must be especially aware of how they are perceived when emanating the God-human-world relationship as followers of Christ. What specifically is emanated, consciously or unconsciously, speaks loud and clear. Congregational presence, practice, persuasion, and pronouncements are often more revealing to outsiders than we ourselves are aware of and acknowledge. Given the primacy of communications in word, deed and lifestyle, what comes forth in terms of both the Christian message and method is perceived as flowing from a source. Consequently, if either the

message or the method is flawed, then so too, for better or worse, the source is perceived as flawed. For example, Jesus Christ is often rejected or accepted based on the attitudes and behaviors of Christians who proclaim him.

6. Evaluation

Ministry and theology: Where would the local urban church be today if it had not practiced what it professed in its faith in the priesthood of all believers? The notion of evaluation is the last component of the proposed pedagogy, and it draws attention to the need to continuously evaluate faithfulness and to relate this effectively to the overall ministry and theology. Because theology does matter, it provides (along with ministry) an important measurement of congregational faithfulness and effectiveness. In part, due to Christian hegemony, particularly since the Civil Rights Movement in America, neither professional church and mission activists nor the laity have felt the same urgency as they did in the past to understand and participate in the dynamics of urban leadership. On the other hand— built on the hypothesis that because of its distinctive religious-social location in local communities, and given the long history of relevant leadership in the urban context—the Islamic faith communities, both Sunni Islam and the Nation of Islam, are prime candidates for the development of people who are actively offering direction and guidance for today's community and nation. Christian churches, building on the notion of the priesthood of all believers, must once again take seriously the God-given call to lead congregations into attending to the current shifts in society and church. They must encourage them in an increased conscious effort to exegete both the Word of God and the urban context. Transconstruction, the building from the past to the

present, and from the present to the future, utilizing value trans-
formation, is how local congregations and Christians can make
a significant difference in their community.

These are critical components of any Christian pedagogy
that seeks to respond to social issues with a sense of authenticity
and integrity. Set within a missiological framework, each stage
represents distinct features and responsibilities related to an
increased awareness of urban challenges that the church must
identify. Whatever issues and concerns are raised as a result of engag-
ing this congregational pedagogy articulated through Christian
inquiry should be identified as areas for further exploration. While
the distinct stages of the process apply in some manner to all urban
ministry settings, they do so in different ways.

By examining concerns related to Christian and Muslim rela-
tions within such a frame of reference, their interrelatedness and
interdependency are highlighted. It is crucial to refer to relevant
missiology not in the classical sense as marked by paternalism,
elitism, neo-colonialism and racism, but rather as a liberating
theological process of problem solving, reconstruction and
transformation with both personal and communal implications.
The result is that the congregation will gain a better self-under-
standing of its purpose and mission. It will be ultimately better
positioned to determine both the method and the context that
must be critically appropriated to particular issues, styles, etc.,
and the sense of urgency dictated in each urban setting. Not
only will awareness be raised, but also the church will be better
enabled to engage in effective missional praxis.

Perhaps the best description of what is needed in terms
of the proper synergy represented by the integration of min-
istry and theology, is described by Donna Markham in *Spiritlinking
Leadership: Working through Resistance to Organizational Change*.
Spiritlinking is defined here as "The deliberate and untiring

act of working through resistance to organizational transformation by building the circle of friends, fostering networks of human compassion and interweaving teams of relationships through which new ideas are born and new ways of responding to the mission find expression."[15] While church leaders do not have all the answers, they must learn how to help their congregations identify and develop gifts, talents, and skills so that they can be used for Christian ministry within congregational life, as well as within their daily settings. Fear of change or of too much flexibility or a blinded commitment to the status quo and/or tradition must not cause congregations to accept ambiguities that preclude them from taking appropriate Christian action. Congregations have to earn trust and respect as a people of God, and they do so by being persistent in connecting with people in the community who can read economic, political, social and religious trends. Then they will respond accordingly, even when it is not popular or convenient to do so.

Each domain of this pedagogical process reveals reasons why the local church is encouraged to identify how each component of urban development relates to theological faith. Vision, stewardship, commitment, and leadership development are characteristics necessary to move the church from nonawareness to growing awareness and then to discovering new avenues for creative contextualization by the congregations. The understanding of what it truly means to engage in a relevant urban ministry and to do so in the midst of religious diversity is achieved only by employing hermeneutical categories derived from a concern for biblically faithful, socially relevant, and culturally appropriate theology of mission.

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[15]Donna J. Markham, *Spiritlinking Leadership: Working Through Resistance to Organizational Change* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 5.

A Mission Metaphor and a Challenge

In an effort to understand the significance of what it means to be willing to cross the new urban frontier as it relates to this discussion, the writer investigates briefly the text of Acts 1:8 as a mission metaphor: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

By focusing on the urban centers articulated in this passage, i.e., the relationship between Jesus, the Church, the people of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth, the powers and contexts of the cities and the need to be willing to cross diverse social and cultural boundaries, local congregations will be better able to comprehend what it means to engage in Christian witness and mission. Because Acts 1:8 is as relevant in our modern complex and changing world as it was for the first Christian hearers, readers are invited to revisit this biblical image for several reasons.

First, this image best draws attention to the significance of the incarnation—the incarnational nature of Christ—and therefore, the incarnational model of ministry for congregational life. God so loved the world that God shared God's very self with women, men, and children in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In him, Christians continue to experience new life and seek to invite others to a life-giving relationship through Jesus. The incarnation makes clear God's approach to mission, one of willingness and desire to cross boundaries of differences; it is through God's living word, Jesus the Christ, that we are provided with the most complete model of how we are to approach mission.

Second, this passage provides a significant image for local

churches to share and reflect upon their missional experiences, as well as lessons learned and taught along their communal journey with God. The attention derived from focusing on the original disciples as persons living in specific urban contexts of religious diversity (Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria) and of differing social stratifications and of an array of political complexities, reveal commitments for the local church. Congregations must be challenged to grow in their understanding that the need to respond to issues such as contextual theologies, religious formation, interfaith dialogue and leadership development in urban contexts—where crossing diverse social and cultural boundaries are greatest—is not only a social requirement, but also a theological mandate.

Third, the passage reminds us of the importance of acknowledging worldviews and worldview differences. While there is no denying the social diversity (ethnic, gender, class, religions, and age) represented in the image of Jerusalem, the image of Judea intensifies that likeness by alluding to an even greater social diversity and to more cultural differences. Just as the land of Judea described in the scripture indicated a wider extension into the country of the Canaanites, including ancient tribal peoples, the Judean experience analyzes the challenges resulting from living in a multicultural and multiethnic society. While the boundaries of Samaria in the time of Christ are difficult to determine, biblical history does record the animosity between the Samaritans and the Jews. Endeared to their religious worldview, sacred beliefs, place memories, myths and ritual, the Samaritans considered their religious faith as superior to that of the Jews; and the Jews, too, were ethnocentric. We see this attitude clearly reflected in the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4) and the command to "think globally and act locally." This requires the ability to understand one's particular setting in an

effort to integrate, biblically and genuinely, the local and global manifestation of an authentic Christian witness holistically.

Lastly, Acts 1:8 is a reminder that every Christian congregation throughout the world is challenged by Jesus Christ to live out the *missio Dei* in its full implications of diversity. We can and must train ourselves to respect and learn from one another. As we listen to the theologically lived-out stories of women, men, and children within and concerning their own "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and ends of the earth" types of encounters with the Christian faith, we cannot help but be reminded that the world belongs to God and that the church is commissioned by Christ. They know how the Spirit has been working in their lives in ways that we have no way of knowing. This challenge is best described by Robert Schreiter in the notion of "glocalization"[16] (a combination of the words local and global) as the new paradigm for doing theology by local churches in urban communities in relationship to global contexts. Our ability to respond faithfully to the new missional realities of the twenty-first century depends largely on our collective efforts to confront hopelessness and loneliness, violence in its many forms, economic disparity and poverty, health-related crisis and religious, cultural, and ethnic discrimination. Such an approach to ministry has the potential of communicating Christian mission and evangelism as processes of liberation and restorative spirit strengthened by a great awareness, biblical faith and Christian praxis.

Conclusion: Two Key Realities

In closing, what have we learned about the urban child and congregational ministry related to religious pluralism? Formulated

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[16]Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 12.

within an urban missiological framework, the womanist perspective demonstrates two key realities that impact congregational pedagogy and Christian ministry as mission among people of other living faiths. Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot has described the first key reality in the foreword of Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community as "human archaeology."[17] (The writer has coined the term "spiritual geology" as one which is a natural extension of the first concept). Human archaeology is defined as "a form of inquiry that involves a deep examination of human relationships, development and experiences that seeks to uncover mask and persona and reveal the authentic core of a person's identity. It requires a sustained dialogue, whose success depends on extraordinary trust, empathy, symmetry and synchrony between storyteller and the narrator."[18]

Spiritual geology, on the other hand, describes that form of inquiry, which involves a deep examination of what it means to be human in relation to the quality or state of being both spiritual and religious. Spiritual geology seeks to unmask and discover the activating or essential principles influencing a person's spiritual growth, or lack of growth. It is the study of the solid matters, principles, and powers we embrace to give life to our physical and spiritual organism. It is related to the spiritual self-understanding in relation to God that impact ourselves and the world in which we live.

Together, these two concepts derived from a womanist theological discourse, have the ability to empower theologians, congregational leaders, mission advocates, and activists in the U.S. to understand their roles as midwives, called to assist congregations to engage in appropriate pedagogies that will result in favorable

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[17]Katie G. Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1995), see foreword.
[18]Ibid., 9.

outcomes. Given the dynamic nature of religious pluralism, congregations must be enabled to respond appropriately to the complex social and religious change factors that impact the nature of local churches (as the core for change) in urban areas. The processes and consequences discussed demonstrate the need for urban congregations to respond to the contemporary felt needs of children and youth holistically in words, deeds, and lifestyle.

Concerning congregational ministry as urban ministry, the challenge of religious pluralism is greatest in urban contexts. Every community and every person in it has special needs that can be addressed by the Christian gospel. Appropriate witness and ministry must therefore not be perceived as relegated to Sundays only, but has to impact daily the various situations in which people work, live, worship, study, build relationships, and seek to live with dignity as human beings created by God. The capacity of Christian congregational theological education to develop personal, communal, and cultural values by which to respond to diverse and often complex mission challenges is the major concern of the writer. The ability of the church, in all its diversity, to have a collective testimony and impact on the inter-related issues facing Americans during this period of unknown terrorism and unprecedented violence, will be the result of local churches recognizing and taking seriously the common call to mission and ministry in the midst of religious pluralism.