Incarnational Training Framework

CHAPTER 5 MESSAGE: A WAY OF SEEING

WRITTEN BY KRIS ROCKE & JOEL VAN DYKE
Incarnational Training Framework

1. MESSAGE: A WAY OF SEEING

What is our Transforming Perspective?

KEY INDICATOR
Does our message call people from scarcity to abundance?

PATHWAYS TO PERCEPTION
• City as Classroom
• City as Parish
• City as Playground

2. METHOD: A WAY OF DOING

What is our Transforming Practice?

KEY INDICATOR
Does our method call people from theory to practice?

PATHWAYS TO PRACTICE
• Nurturing Relationships
• Stewarding Power
• Engaging Systems

3. MANNER: A WAY OF BEING

What is our Transforming Presence?

KEY INDICATOR
Does our manner call people from rivalry to peacemaking?

PATHWAYS TO PRESENCE
• Contemplative Activists
• Ecumenical Discerners
• Eucharistic Community
Touched by an Angel

We, unaccustomed to courage
exiles from delight
live coiled in shells of loneliness
until love leaves its high holy temple
and comes into our sight
to liberate us into life.

Love arrives
and in its train come ecstasies
old memories of pleasure
ancient histories of pain.
Yet if we are bold,
love strikes away the chains of fear
from our souls.

We are weaned from our timidity
In the flush of love’s light
we dare be brave
And suddenly we see
that love costs all we are
and will ever be.
Yet it is only love
which sets us free.

Maya Angelou
In this chapter, we practice seeing our cities through the eyes of abundance.

CHAPTER 5
Message: A Way of Seeing

What is our Transforming Perspective?

KEY INDICATOR
Does our message call people from scarcity to abundance?

Jesus’ message was shaped by a particular way of seeing. We are interested here in cultivating a shared perspective that is shaped by the Incarnation and transforms the way we see our cities. In his book, *And Now I See: A Theology of Transformation*, Robert Barron summarizes it well:

*Christianity is, above all, a way of seeing. Everything else in Christian life flows from and circles around the transformation of vision. Christians see differently, and that is why their prayer, their worship, their action, their whole way of being in the world, has a distinctive accent and flavor.*

Stanley Hauerwas makes an equally bold claim: “We can only act within the world we see.”

We have come to witness people that can see, touch, hear, and even smell love and hope in the most unexpected places. If this is true, and we think it is, the most urgent task of leadership is learning how to see. We want to see our cities and her most vulnerable residents through the eyes of Jesus. This is our “distinctive accent and flavor.” Seeing through the eyes of Jesus gives us an asset-based vision of life that begins with God’s “yes” and rooted in the assumption that there is enough—enough of all the ingredients for human flourishing in every context.

When we see our cities through the eyes of Jesus, we see them as living, breathing organisms filled with the presence of God’s Spirit. We pay attention to how the Spirit is already at work in cities and joyfully join her in unleashing forces for good. When seen this way, we do not bring the Gospel anywhere, rather we bear witness to the Gospel at work everywhere. We are called out of the myth of scarcity into a worldview of God’s abundance. This is Jesus’ peculiar way of seeing.
SEEING ANTHROPOLOGICALLY

We begin by admitting that we see reality filtered through a set of lenses. We do not see things as they are. Rather, we tend to see things as we are. That’s a problem, and it is why theological training traditionally begins with the study of philosophy, to make visible the lenses that we bring to faith.

The point here is that what sits behind our eyes largely determines what we see in front of our eyes. Our culture, our history, our families, friends and even our enemies shape how we see at massive levels. In other words, seeing is not simply a function of our eyes, it is a socially constructed process. The question for us is not so much “what” we see, but “how” we see. It is a question of interpretation or hermeneutics. Cities, like texts, need an interpreter. They do not interpret themselves. The Incarnation insists that Jesus is the hermeneutical key to seeing our cities as God does.

Pathways to new perception begin with the humble but liberating admission that we see through the eyes of the other. “It is always the eyes of the other that let me know who I am,” says theologian James Alison. The process of seeing through the eyes of the other begins from the moment we are born. It is through the eyes of our parents, family and culture that we see what we see.

The anthropological roots of sight refine our question even further. The most fundamental question we can ask regarding sight is, “Through whose eyes do we see?” The what and the how of sight is really all about the who. Unfortunately there are many urban leaders in the city who are followers of Jesus, but have never been taught to see through the eyes of the one they follow.

DIGGING DEEPER

READ
The article “Least Resistance: How Desire Paths Can Lead to Better Design” is a fascinating look at how urban planners, usability engineers and design specialists use “desire lines” to learn what people are actually going to do, as opposed to a reliance on focus groups to understand user needs.

LISTEN
Episode 2 of the City as Playground podcast features a dialogue about the anthropological implications in city transformation movements. Especially relevant to the ITF is the section where Leadership Foundations’ President Dave Hillis unpacks the work of French Anthropologist Rene Girard. (40:28)

WATCH
This short documentary tells the story of the infamous “Bartman Game” between the Chicago Cubs and Florida Marlins during the 2003 NLCS when the entire crowd at Wrigley field fed off the enraged reaction of leftfielder Moises Alou and turned into a vicious lynch mob. (11:21)
CHAPTER 5

MESSAGE: A WAY OF SEEING

SEEING BY THE LIGHT OF THE RESURRECTION

To see through the eyes of Jesus is to see by the light of the resurrection. This is our point of departure. The resurrection is the beginning of our faith journey, not its end. It is in the resurrection that we are given new eyes and it’s how we become truly incarnational.

The disciples did not see as Jesus saw until the resurrection. Until then, they were mostly blind. After the resurrection they became seers who changed the world. Their perspective was transformed. What happened? Luke captures this transformation beautifully. Three days after Jesus was crucified, two disciples were walking on the road to Emmaus dejected and completely defeated (see Luke 24). They were arguing, trying to make sense of the events and where things had gone wrong. Jesus appeared to them as a stranger and walked with them. He began to interpret Scriptures for them in ways they could never have imagined. They saw their sacred texts through the eyes of a stranger.

James Alison calls the stranger the “Forgiving Victim” and has written an entire series with this title. Alison points out that this stranger was the resurrected victim of a brutal murder. Jesus is the first murder victim in the history of the world to return to face his victimizers. However, Jesus does not return in vengeance as we might expect. In fact, there is not a hint of vengeance in any of the resurrection narratives, and this is quite shocking. What victim of a brutal murder wouldn’t return with a heart set on retribution, or at least a good scolding? Jesus comes in peace. Jesus returns as the “forgiving victim.”

When we see through the eyes of the victim who forgives his victimizers we can see things as they really are. We can see as God sees. It is the forgiving victim who can help us reread our sacred texts and locate God’s voice among those whom we thought were God-forsaken. Texts that once seemed toxic and appear to show a God of wrath and fury now reveal a God of mercy, and like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, it makes our “hearts burn within.”

Transactional religion has it wrong! We don’t repent so that we can be forgiven. We are forgiven so that we can repent. As theologian James Alison reminds us, without the light of love to guide us we do not know the true nature of our sin. That is why the best liturgies begin with forgiveness and then move to confession. Only when we know ourselves as loved and forgiven can we truly name our sin. Until then, it’s all hints and guesses. “Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).
It is by grace of course that we are forgiven in order to see ourselves and our cities as Christ sees. If we see at all it is only by the light of forgiveness and it is the victim of our sin who gives us the eyes to see. This is what it means to see through the eyes of Jesus.

At the end of the Bible study on the road to Emmaus, the disciples invite the stranger to dinner. Then another great twist happens—the guest turns out to be the host. The guest turned host re-enacts the Last Supper. The language in this passage is liturgical—Jesus took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them, and only then were their eyes opened (Luke 24:30-31).

These exact same verbs show up in each of the feeding miracles, which are in all four gospels and again at the Last Supper. Clearly, this is Jesus’ central message. Jesus transforms scarcity into abundance. Whenever he takes, blesses, breaks and gives the bread of God’s abundant love, we see as God sees. It’s interesting that the Latin word for host is *hostia*, which literally means “victim.” It is the victim who has the author preside over the table, and it is the victim who opens our eyes to see as God sees.

When we see through the eyes of Jesus, we are given what others have called the “intelligence of the victim.” Jesus, the merciful stranger, is the Rosetta Stone of life that allows us to interpret Scripture from a whole new perspective—from below.

**DIGGING DEEPER**

**READ**

Ruth Padilla DeBorst’s article, “At the Table Their Eye’s Were Opened: Mission as Renouncing Power and Being Hosted by the Stranger,” is a provocative piece that sheds light on the Emmaus Road passage from the Latin American perspective.

**LISTEN**

“The White Elephant of Tel Aviv” is an account of the building and subsequent failure of the largest bus station in the world around a grand vision of an indoor micro-metropolis. This is city planning gone amok by the wrong “light” that, in actuality, left everyone in the dark. (39:13)

**WATCH**

This video of James Alison introduces his *The Forgiving Victim* teaching series centered on an illuminating exposition of the Emmaus Road story. (14:34)
SEEING FROM BELOW

Dietrich Bonhoeffer reflects on the art of seeing from below with great precision and power:

“We have learned to see for once the great events of world history from below—through the perspective of the barred, the suspects, the badly treated, the powerless, the oppressed, the scoffed—in short the perspective of those who suffer.”

This perspective (from below) is what Jesus made possible in the Incarnation and ultimately revealed in the resurrection, showing us what has been “hidden since the foundations of the world” (Matt. 13:35). What’s been hidden is the fact that God is with the “least of these.” Whatever we do to the least of these we do to God (Matt. 25:45).

JESUS FROM BELOW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BIBLICAL PORTRAIT</th>
<th>THE COMFORTED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asian-Born</strong></td>
<td>Nearly 60% of the world is Asian-born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East is in Asia</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Political Refugee</strong></td>
<td>50 million people around the world have been forced to flee their homes in the last 10 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus flees to Egypt</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Immigrant</strong></td>
<td>8.7 million undocumented immigrants are currently living the in U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus returns to Israel</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Urban Dweller</strong></td>
<td>By 2020, over 60% of the world’s population will be urban, young and poor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministers in cities of Galilee</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Homeless</strong></td>
<td>There were 3 million homeless men, women and children in the U.S. last year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No place to lay his head</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lynched</strong></td>
<td>Black males (14-24) make up 1% of U.S. population, but 30% of all homicides.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Murdered on a tree</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resurrected as Wounded Healer</strong></td>
<td>More than 5% of the global population lives with depression.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Raised with wounds</td>
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“Most of us have been trained to see through the lens of power and privilege that so easily distorts reality.”

Seeing from below is not without its dangers and potential blind spots, but it is the most trusted route to clarity. Most of us have been trained to see through the lens of power and privilege that so easily distorts reality. Unfortunately, this not only applies to the powerful and privileged who are often blind, but also to the powerless and dispossessed who have adopted this same lens without knowing it. In other words the powerless and the dispossessed might live from below, but they do not necessarily see in a way that is liberating. For example, when Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, the poor, the meek, the hungry and the persecuted did not immediately
see their own blessedness. Very likely they saw themselves through the lens of the dominant culture, that is, cursed by God.

So the key to Gospel sight is not simply social location, as if being poor insures that we see things clearly. Seeing from below has a much deeper meaning. It has to do with the Incarnation itself—the mystery of the Word made flesh, which insists that God locates God-self not in the lofty heights of heaven, but in the frailty of the human condition. It is from this place that we see and experience God’s love and blessedness even in our most wretched state.

The eyes of the resurrected Christ let us know who we are and how we can love our cities. Put another way, God’s abundant love reveals the myth of scarcity for what it is: a lie. Mary Jo Leddy writes,

The economics of God’s love is not based on a law of scarcity but rather rooted in the mystery of superabundance. The personal or political decision to declare that there is not enough is the beginning of social cruelty, war, and violence on a petty or vast scale. On the other hand, the choice to affirm that there is enough for all is the beginning of social community, peace, and justice. The option to assume that there is enough frees the imagination to think of new political and economic possibilities.

The mystery of Gospel sight is that we become what we see. When we see by the light of the resurrection, we see our cities as God sees them and we become living expressions of the Shalom we desire.

**DIGGING DEEPER**

**READ**

In “Bebop Theology Part 2,” Pastor Tim Merrill of Camden, New Jersey reflects on lessons taught to him by prostitutes and drug addicts.

**LISTEN**

This episode of the Delve Denver features an interview with John Hicks, founder of the Network Coffee House. Hicks is a pastor and a sage who has been a friend of the homeless on Denver’s Capital Hill for more than three decades.

**WATCH**

In the video, “Camden Rising,” we see a city from “above” (8:26). Contrast that with this second video of Toronto entitled, “The City is Ours” (2:51). How do you compare and contrast these two videos and what would be the elements of a video if you were commissioned to produce one for your city?
CHAPTER 5

MESSAGE: A WAY OF SEEING

PATHWAYS TO PERCEPTION
Here are three practical ways to see the city through the eyes of Jesus and its implications for urban transformation.

CITY AS CLASSROOM
The city is a teacher and a living library of wisdom eager to be shared. The city is open 24 hours a day and is home to old sages and young prophets. The built environment and architecture have much to teach us. This can only happen if we are out in the city, engaging it, interacting, listening and celebrating.

If creation is the first Scripture (as the early church taught), and the Holy Bible the second Scripture, the city itself is the third Scripture. That is why we cultivate an open and inquisitive learning posture. We must learn to read the text of the city and see the urban shape of the Word made flesh.

In chapter two we mentioned ways of mapping the hurt, hope and heart of a city. These methods are consistent with seeing the city as a classroom and the Spirit at work in the lives of everyday residents as our teacher. Sitting at the feet of the city may strike us as odd, but it keeps us grounded and humble. This approach compliments the academic model of disciplined study and careful research. When the city is allowed its own voice and seen as a living text we can humble ourselves and acquire the skills necessary to become good students. We become storytellers who not only know the history book version of the city, but curators of the soul of the city as revealed by the grassroots stories and symbols that energize our cities from the ground up. The most effective incarnational leaders sit at the feet of the city they serve and let it teach them. And they create opportunities for others to do the same.

“\textit{The most effective incarnational leaders sit at the feet of the city they serve and let it teach them.}”

DIGGING DEEPER

READ
Joel Van Dyke’s \textit{Word from Below} piece \textit{“Poverty, Diversity and Justice”} is a report of a seminary class in Guatemala City where the city became the classroom and street youth the professors.

LISTEN
Listen to \textit{this fascinating interview} with Nathanael Johnson, amateur naturalist and author of \textit{Unseen City: The Majesty of Pigeons, the Discreet Charm of Snails and Other Wonders of the Urban Wilderness}.

WATCH
Join NYU Professor Mosette Broderick as she explores the history and architecture of New York City. At NYU, the city is the classroom so wearing good walking shoes is a necessity. (3:37)
CITY AS PARISH

We see the city as a sacred space and holy ground—a healing sanctuary filled with all the spiritual streams of faith needed for human thriving and wholeness. It takes a certain kind of courage and sanctified imagination to see the city as holy ground, but through the eyes of Jesus the whole world is a burning bush ablaze with God’s glory. Even the most defiled place is holy ground—from ghettos to gated communities. As the great reformer Abraham Kuyper would have said, “every square inch” of the city belongs to God, if we can only see it.

The Incarnation unites what the world divides, healing the major splits that divide our cities. In Christ there is no us/them, sacred/secular, life/death. These are not two realities as we are tempted to believe, only one. The dualistic vision that maintains these splits is what the brilliant biblical scholar Robert McAfee Brown called “The Great Fallacy.” The dualistic mind is violent in nature, contributing to the violence of the city. It is literally “diabolical,” a word derived from “devil” or *diabolo*. In the Greek, it means “to cast aside or throw apart.” The diabolical mind is always splitting and dividing reality in ways that do great violence to the most vulnerable, and thus to all of us.

But the Incarnation insists that there is only one reality—the underlying unity in all things. That is why Saint Francis could say, “The world is my cloister,” and John Wesley could say, “The world is my parish.” That is why we can say the city is our parish—the whole city and all its residents.

STREAMS OF FAITH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STREAM</th>
<th>GIFT</th>
<th>INVITATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>Acting justly and loving the mercy of God</td>
<td>Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical</td>
<td>Sharing the liberating Word of God</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemplative</td>
<td>Seeing the move of God</td>
<td>Discernment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiness</td>
<td>Living the complete life of God</td>
<td>Piety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacramental</td>
<td>Delighting in the creation of God</td>
<td>Sacraments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charismatic</td>
<td>Releasing the power of God</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ocean</td>
<td>Seeing and celebrating good news</td>
<td>Wholeness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is abundantly clear that with something as dynamic and diverse as the city that no single expression of the Church will be enough to heal it. In Chapter 1, we mentioned Richard Foster’s book *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* in which he identifies six historic streams of the Christian Church: Word, Social Justice, Sacramental, Charismatic, Contemplative and Holiness. Incarnational leaders seek out and affirm all of these streams. Jesus’ prayer for unity in John 17 will find greater expression not in the lofty heights of the Church’s intellectual commitment to ecumenism, but in the depths of urban centers around the world, celebrating all of the faith traditions necessary to love and heal our cities.

**DIGGING DEEPER**

**READ**

Chris Meekins’s essay, “The Role of Faith Communities in the Flourishing City” explores what it means to faithfully contribute to the flourishing of a city.

“The Six Streams: A Balanced Vision” by Richard Foster offers a brief description of the six streams of faith.

**LISTEN**

In the Episode 25 of the *Renovaré* podcast, entitled “Streams,” Richard Foster has an impromptu discussion with his son about traditions of the Christian faith and how they give us a more complete picture of life with God. (8:08)

**WATCH**

In this short video, Pope Francis sends a message to leading “Word of Faith” teacher Kenneth Copeland via Bishop Tony Palmer saying that Charismatics and Catholics must unite. (11:56)
CITY AS PLAYGROUND

The city is a prophetic sign of peace and a playground of God’s grace for all people. When seen through the eyes of Jesus, our cities are no longer the battlegrounds of rivalry and competition they appear to be. The prophet Zechariah imagines an urban playground, “One day the city shall be full of children playing in its streets” (Zech. 8:5). There are many good urban leaders who work tirelessly to achieve this wonderful vision of an urban playground, but do so using a battleground spirituality that is counterproductive. For example, it is easy to get caught up in marking turf and protecting territory in order to keep our programs funded and our churches filled. It is easy to demonize and scapegoat others to advance our own interests. It can be shocking when our attempts to do good become part of the problem.

The violent imagery of warfare and battleground must be transcended if we are to see our cities as playgrounds of God’s grace. The most mature forms of spirituality let go of these violent images that may have once been useful but are no longer necessary or helpful.

Zechariah’s vision of an urban playground emerged from the context of great violence. Zechariah was writing shortly after the time of Israel’s exile in Babylon 587 BCE—the holocaust of the Old Testament. Babylon was synonymous with violence and is the arch-rival of Jerusalem throughout Scripture. It is all the more remarkable that Zechariah could envision an urban playground here when all he has seen is violence.

Zechariah’s vision of peace may have had something to do with the prophet Jeremiah through whom God used to instruct the exiles in Babylon. God said to them, “Seek the peace of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its peace you will find your peace” (Jer. 29:7). This is the Old Testament equivalent of Jesus’ teaching, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:44).

It is tempting to see these instructions as a heavy dose of moralism, as if God is saying, “Be good boys and girls and pray for the bullies on the playground who keep beating you up.” This is not a popular message when you’re a victim of a holocaust. By the way, “holocaust” is from the Greek holókaustos: hólos, “whole” and kaustós, “burnt,” as in being a complete burnt sacrifice on the alter. Perhaps now we can understand the bitter cry of the psalmist who says, “O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take
your little ones and dash them against the rock!” (Ps. 137:8-9). Any vision of an urban playground that does not address this level of anger and injustice is merely romantic.

But God’s instruction is not a moral burden placed on the backs of brutalized victims. It is the sure, but difficult, route to freedom. When we see our enemies as God sees them, we can be whole and free. To hate our enemy is to be bound by them, nay, to become them. When we see our enemies as friends, no matter how unfriendly they behave, we reclaim their humanity and ours. This is the highest level of spiritual insight made possible by the Incarnation.

The irony, of course, is that when enemies are at each other’s throats and ready to kill each other, they are mirror doubles of one another. They are exact replicas, indistinguishable, the same. The Incarnation rescues us from battleground spirituality based on fear, rivalry and deeply held resentments. It gives us a vision that it’s only in loving our enemies that we can truly be free. Our enemies really do hold the key to our salvation, which is why we love them and pray for them. It’s only then that we become “children of our Father in heaven,” as Jesus says and reclaim our cities as playgrounds of God’s grace.

**DIGGING DEEPER**

**READ**

Dave Hillis’ dissertation “God’s Playground: Seeing the City Through the Eyes of Leadership Foundations” provides a short introduction to the theological constructs behind the idea of seeing cities as playgrounds explores the role of charism, monks and scotch.

**LISTEN**

Episode 1 of the City as Playground podcast, entitled “Seeing Matters” details the compelling case of the Leadership Foundation movement for the need to reframe work in the city around the idea of it being seen as a playground rather than a battleground. (33:50)

**WATCH**

In this 15-minute video, Dr. Larry Lloyd, President of the Memphis Leadership Foundation, gives a lecture at Fuller Theological Seminary entitled, “The City as God’s Playground, Not Battlefield.” (15:14)

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. If we can “only act within the world we see” what does that mean for our work as trainers who develop incarnational leaders?

2. Which of the three pathways to practice most affirm or challenge your own way of seeing the city?
Appendix A

PRAYER OF VOCATION
The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. (Is. 50:4)

CENTERING PRAYER
Gracious God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of Life, have mercy on us. Reveal yourself in all things, to all things, and through all things. Grant us the gift of becoming a community of the Incarnation—the mystery of the Word made flesh who sees and celebrates Good News in hard places. Give us the tongue of a teacher to sustain the weary with a word, and mobilize leaders from all walks of life to love their city and seek its peace with the Gospel of Jesus.

PROPHETIC VISION
Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The crooked shall be made straight and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

INVOCATION OF THE SPIRIT
Come, Holy Spirit. Show us the way of the Lord that we might see your salvation at work in hard places. Quiet our troubled souls and teach us how to pray. Be our guide, our counselor, our advocate, and our defender.

RENEWAL OF BAPTISM
Lord of Life, baptize us again in the sea of your love where we release our useless fears and relax into your mercy. Inside this new love we die to all that is false. By your power made perfect in weakness, awaken us to the mystery of life. Speak to us again the truth of our deepest identity hidden in you: “You are my child whom I love, with you I am well pleased.”

CALL TO CREATION
YHWH, in the beginning you formed us from the dust of the ground and breathed into us the breath of life. Breathe on us, in us and through us now that we might embody our most sacred vocation—to become fully human and be one with you.

Breathe God’s Name—YHWH.
CALL TO PEACEMAKING

Lord Jesus, make us instruments of your peace and a sign of your unity in the world that we might act, reflect and discern like you. May our wounds and the wounds of this world become wombs of new creation, bearing seeds of new life. Free us, O Lord, to be midwives to the holy in all things.

Where there is blindness, call forth the gift of sight.

Where there is voicelessness, call forth the gift of voice.

Where there is despair, call forth the gift of joy.

Where there is isolation, call forth the gift of community.

Where there is fear and violence of any kind, call forth the gift of peace born of your love, and make us a community of the Incarnation who sees and celebrates you in all things, even here, even now.

OUR LORD’S PRAYER

Our Father who is in heaven, holy is your name. May your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

BENEDICTION

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us because She has anointed us to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

We pray all of this in the name of the Father who is for us, the Son who is with us, and the Spirit who unites us all in the never-ending dance of Love. Amen.
Appendix B

REFLECTIONS ON GIRARD’S ANTHROPOLOGY FOR URBAN TRANSFORMATION

BY DAVE HILLIS

MIMETIC CASE STUDY: URBAN GANGS

One of the most intractable issues in cities is urban gangs. Unfortunately, the primary model of engaging gangs is often the legal response where a juridical strategy is generated to include police, court and incarceration. Problem solved! While there is no denying that the juridical model has its place, it is incomplete. It fails to address the underlying reason that drives the young person to join the gang in the first place—the desire for community. The criminal behavior of gangs is subsidiary to the primary draw of becoming a member of a group. In short, gangs answer the question raised by the desire for community: Where is my place to belong?

The future is an urban world. Currently 3.9 billion of a total population of 7.4 billion is living in cities. By the year 2050, 75% of the world's people will be living in cities. The city has become the dominant social reality of the 21st Century. One billion people currently live in overcrowded urban slums, without basic services, clean water, or sanitation. “Poverty in all its forms is the greatest single threat to peace, security, democracy, human rights and the environment.” (Michael Moore, Former Director-General, World Trade Organization).

For any program or city-serving agency to claim relevance moving forward, it must be measured in light of how it is strategically responding to the urban reality of our collective future. There are four urban realities that sit at the root of the dizzying array of issues that must be addressed if a city is to flourish.

- People who share common geography but who lack authentic community.
- Activity-rich responses in vulnerable communities that are systems poor.
- Ideologies without a vision for the common good.
- The growing disparity between rich and poor.

These four realities cloak every city throughout the world and are at the source of the more obvious and basic issues associated with urban life. Moreover, because these realities are not addressed at the depth required, the more basic and obvious needs become increasingly intractable and calcified. One of the primary reasons these underlying issues often go unexamined is the lack of a well-developed anthropology that has been integrated into an organization’s response to a city. This deficiency will invariably lead to overly simplistic concentration on the symptoms rather than root causes that prohibit cities from flourishing. And while there are a variety of anthropologies that could be adopted to help, it is
my argument and conviction that the anthropology that holds the best answer to engage the urban reality of the 21st Century is the memetic theory of Rene Girard.

The strength and the power of Girard’s anthropology for urban transformation is that it allows leaders to engage the urban reality of the 21st Century. Regardless of the presenting issue—food, housing, healthcare, etc.—Girard’s anthropology addresses the deeper issues that drive them and allows urban leaders to address the issues at the level that people actually exercise agency. Girard’s mimetic theory empowers urban leaders to address the challenges our cities present for the following reasons:

**A RELATIONAL FRAMEWORK**
First, is the Girardian understanding that desire sits at the base of all human development and growth and, most importantly, is fashioned as a result of our desire for another’s desire. In short, we are who we are because we imitate. Girard provides the relational framework that ensures any urban challenge is dealt with at the level they are fashioned: people making choices about desire in light of other people. For example, take the all too common reality in cities—people who share common geography do not often enjoy the fruits of authentic community. We can only transform geography into community if we understand the importance of relationships and how they are formed. Mimetic theory provides the understanding we need.

**INTERDEPENDENCE**
Second, and this is an outcome of the first, is the Girardian argument that through mimesis we are all interdependent and tied together in common mutuality, for better or worse. Because we constitute ourselves by imitating another’s desire, we are by definition dependent on each other. Girard thus helps shape any response toward the city as one that needs to be viewing the parts in light of the whole, looking for ways of inclusion rather than exclusion, working together rather than separately. Girardian anthropology directly confronts any stratagem to divide and conquer, which is a common temptation among urban leaders. For example, Girard’s anthropology addresses the second urban reality listed above—that many vulnerable urban communities are increasingly operating as activity rich and systems poor. This can only be addressed with Girard’s insights into our interdependence upon one another.

**SCAPEGOATS**
Third, the Girardian idea that is uniquely calibrated for the 21st Century urban reality is that violence occurs not as a result of differences, but because of things we hold in common. We fight because we want the same things but, for a host of reasons, can’t acquire them. When these things are not shared, “the other” (to use the Girardian term, a scapegoat) is found—whether it be the poor, the immigrant, an ethnic group, an LGBTQ person, etc. Many of our cities are wracked and wrenched by violence, and scapegoats
abound. Unfortunately, the analysis of the problem is often at the level of the inherent differences between races, gender and class when in fact it is just the opposite. We fight because we hold these things in common. Girard’s anthropology helps us address the third urban reality listed above—ideologies without the vision of the common good. This exists precisely because we overlook Girard’s insight that our tensions are a result of what we hold in common, thereby creating scapegoat after scapegoat to appease our misdiagnosis.

NEW MODELS
Fourth, is the idea of Girard’s societal understanding that the best way of preventing violence is not in forbidding an object or even a model that fosters desire, but rather in offering people new models who can redirect desire in healthy ways, thus protecting people from being pulled into mimetic rivalries. As a result Girard does away with strategies that call for suppression and replaces them with strategies of permission that create equitable access to desired resources. Girard’s anthropology addresses the fourth reality listed above—the growing disparity between rich and poor. It is not enough to simply redistribute wealth. This would not only fail to solve the problem, in many ways it would exasperate the reality into new forms of violence. What’s needed are models who demonstrate how wealth can be shared in equitable ways. Stated another way, what ultimately is needed is for women and men who, regardless of the program they administer, to become models that can redirect desires toward the common good.
Endnotes

Here you will find a list with many of the sources we’ve mentioned in the ITF. They have been placed in order of usage in their respective chapters. We hope this proves useful if you would like to read further.

CHAPTER 5: MESSAGE: A WAY OF SEEING


