
Following the table of contents and a foreword by Helmut Koester (vii–x), the late Dieter Georgi describes in the ‘Preface’ his personal development and various aspects of early Christianity (xi–xxviii). He sketches the emphases of this volume as follows:

… the chapters below, which are reworked essays of mine… all have in common a concern for urban theology. I start out with more exegetical studies, add reflections on themes from church history and theology relevant to the overarching themes of this collection, and end with discussions of more contemporary concern. … As far as the biblical side of the collection is concerned, I concentrate in the letters of Paul and the book of Revelation. In the latter part of the collection, streamlining is achieved by emphases on the more economic and educational aspects of social history and history of theology, aspects present to this very day (xxii).

Georgi then characterises and summarises the following essays (xxii–xxxviii). The first essay, ‘Personal Reflections on an American Theological Perspective’ (1–9) is Georgi’s farewell address to the Harvard Divinity School community (‘Here the reader will get an impression of the U.S.-American dimensions of my journeying as a theologian and how these experiences provided impetus to my heavy involvement and considerable engagement on both sides of the Atlantic, with a slight tilt to its Western shores. I could not conceive of my urban thinking and theologizing without the praxis of wandering’, xxii).

Then Georgi presents various contributions to New Testament studies which are related to urban theology: ‘Any redrafting of the formative past of church and Western culture has to make up for the neglect theology and the church have shown for the socioeconomic situation of the Hellenistic world, the cradle of Western civilization, an urban culture interested in achievement that is represented and traded on the market. This was the context that shaped the early church’ (xxii). The essay ‘Socioeconomic Reasons for the “Divine Man” as Propagandistic Pattern’ (11–23) describes the Mediterranean world as an increasingly urban culture that centred in the market. In ‘Who Is the True Prophet?’ (25–51), Georgi contrasts the attitude of Horace, an official poet and prophet of the Caesar religion… with the approach to concept, reality and future of the city as expressed in the book of Revelation (xxiii). ‘The Urban Adventure of the Early Church’ (53–68) traces the development from the rural beginnings of the Jesus movement to the churches in the cities of the Eastern Mediterranean, a move that greatly changed the social situation for most of the adherents of Jesus. In ‘The Hour of the Gospel: Jesus and Caesar’ (69–91) Georgi argues that Paul’s ministry was an attempt to preach and organize the new society in a spirit of critical challenge to the Caesar religion. The essay ‘On Paul’s Image of the Human’ (93–101) examines the anthropological challenge which Paul faced in view of the urban situation of his churches, while ‘Legal Dimensions of Money and Theological Consequences’ (103–34) ‘shows that the range of Paul’s theological reflections on the urban situations of the Christ communities encompassed legal and economic dimensions’ (xxiv). Georgi suggest that Paul’s theology and ethics which evolved in these urban and political encounters was visionary, not doctrinaire ‘it was surely experimental as it behoved the needs of urban people Paul was dealing with’ (xxiv; ‘Living with Chaos: Meditations on Paul’s Ethics’, 135–45, aiming at a deeper insight into the urban spirit of Paul and his communities). Finally Georgi raises the question ‘Why Was Paul Killed? The Epistle to the Romans as a Document of Resistance’ (147–60) and argues that

Contrary to a common interpretation of Paul and the early church, they were anything but quietist or apolitical, let alone subservient to the governing authorities. Everyone talks about the reasons for Jesus’ death, hardly anyone about the reasons for the execution of the author of Romans 13:1–7…. The fact that Paul was tried, convicted, and executed by
the highest court in the Roman Empire... is put into the perspective of the conscious encounter of Paul and Caesar. Apparently the urban theology Paul had developed brought about his demise. His advocacy of a healthy urban society was negatively answered by the governing urban powers (xxivf.).

Georgi argues that John of Patmos was likewise 'directed negatively at the Caesar religion but encouraged the congregations to give reality to the urban ideas and dreams of Hellenistic-Roman society. John... reflects the major trend of mission and activity of the early church, which started and maintained an urban concern (xxv; 'John's “Heavenly” Jerusalem', 161–86). 'John did not treat worldly issues in an escapist fashion but in a programmatic, constructive way' (xxv). 'The Wrath of the Dragon: Patriarchy's Last Stand' (187–93) studies Revelation 12 and 13 and applies the results to the modern ideology of nationalism.

Georgi next addresses historical and systematic topics. In 'Should Augustine Have the Last Word on Urban Theology?' (195–220), he traces the development from the early church to Augustine who took a distance from the city and despised any urban theology and whose influence in doing so still lingers on. In the essay 'The Interest in Life-of-Jesus Theology as a Paradigm for the Social History of Biblical Criticism' (221–54), Georgi suggests that the life-of-Jesus theology 'definitely has cities and towns as its basis, the bourgeoisie as its adherents and advocates. It is tragic that for this kind of theology the cities are nevertheless of no concern, even less a focus; instead, a romanticised countryside plays a leading role' (xxvi). 'The Religious Dimensions of the World Market: A Farewell to the Middle Ages' (255–82) briefly traces the development of modern capitalist economy and theory (which is, in fact, nothing modern but, instead, quite medieval', xxvi) and puts it in a contemporary theological perspective. In this context Georgi describes the challenge that Paul's collection for the saints in Jerusalem presents to us today: 'Paul's critical response to the urban society focused in particular on the market society of his days and on matters of economy and finance present in it. The strongest recognition of the socioeconomic dimensions of faith and church is found in the agreement between Jerusalem and Antioch churches concerning a collection for Jerusalem and its execution by Paul' (xxvi). The essay 'Is There Justification in Money? A Historical and Theological Meditation on the Financial Aspects of Justification by Christ' (283–307) tackles the economic aspects of urban theology. For Georgi, such theology takes a critical view with respect to obvious seduction and consequential tragedies of the buzz-word "globalisation", the fanfare of neoliberal ideology and practice... Church and theology rightly understood have been global, that is, ecumenically oriented, from their very start and have collected positive and negative experiences en masse in the last two thousand years, recognised and unused by the alleged realists of neoliberalism. The church's experiences of old are called upon to be used in critical as well as constructive response to the present pseudogospel of globalisation (xxvii).

Two essays are devoted to the history of scholarship: 'Bultmann Was Not First: Josiah Royce as Interpreter of Paul' (309–22) and 'Reason, Religion, Responsibility: Reflections on the Frankfurt Tillich' (323–36). In 'Praxis and Theory in Theological Education: Is Scholarship “Hot” or “Cold”?' (337–42) Georgi describes dimensions and goals of personal and intellectual development that grow out of praxis and into theory. 'En Route to an Urban Theology: Can Theology Help Us Understand Urban Society?' presents an example of this concrete theological enterprise (343–66, using Frankfurt as an example). 'On Sojourning' (367–70) is the printed version of a baccalaureate address presented at Harvard Divinity School.

While some claims seem overstated and one-sided, Georgi presents an interesting volume. Its combination of historical study and present day concerns is intriguing for those in the cities and those likewise affected by urbanisation. The methods used by Georgi are erudite historical analysis, theological reflection, personal involvement and sharp analysis of the spirits of the age. While I would not agree on all the emphases, exegetical sections and conclusions, Georgi has set high