



Recent Directions in Urban Church Literature

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IN THIS ARTICLE I SEEK, FIRST, TO IDENTIFY RECENT DIRECTIONS IN WRITINGS ABOUT the urban church and, second, to describe the Lutheran contribution to that evolving discussion. The second part draws heavily on my essay, "Urban Church Literature: A Retrospection," forthcoming in Clifford Green, ed., *Seek the Peace of the City* (Eerdmans). The raw data for both this article and the one in Green's book are listed in my *Cities and Churches: An International Bibliography* (Scarecrow, 1992), a compilation of some 20,000 books, articles, pamphlets, and reports on city-church relations.

Until recent times, especially in the 1960s, the word "urban" used or implied in the title of a book about churches boosted that book's sale. Not so in the 1990s. The "urban" designation actually retards sales. Not only do contemporary writers who have something to say about the church avoid discussing the importance of the city, but denominations have closed their urban-oriented agencies and the audience for books and articles about urban church affairs seems to have evaporated. Yet H. Paul Douglass's claim that urbanization and the industrial city have provided the greatest internal revolution the church has ever known remains as true in the 1990s as in earlier times. Douglass made this assertion in an essay titled "Religion—The Protestant Faiths," in Harold E. Stearns, ed., *America Now* (Scribner's, 1938). His life-long inquiry into the affairs of city churches justifies such a sweeping generalization: see his *The Suburban Trend* (1925), *Springfield Church Survey* (1926), *1000 City Churches* (1926), *The Church in the Changing City* (1927), *The*

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City's Church (1929), and *Protestant Cooperation in American Cities* (1930), among many others.

Because of the similarities of urban life in the 1920s and 1930s with the 1980s and 1990s—boom-bust economics, uncertain futures for businesses, staggering numbers of urban poor, large populations of immigrants—the urban church literature of the former era can serve as a not-too-distant mirror for the latter. This essay discusses only the more recent writings. Yet, comparison of the cities and city churches known to H. Paul Douglass with those of the 1990s helps interpret recent urban church literature. Four illustrations follow.

I. THE CITY CHURCH IN THE POST-MANUFACTURING ECONOMY

Uncertainty about urban economics is reflected in new developments in literature about urban churches, as it was in the 1930s. However, in the earlier part of this century the economy of North American cities derived principally from manufacturing and, as a result, funds for new church buildings, operational costs, and urban missionary work can be traced to this industrial economy. The same cities in the 1990s, in most cases, derive an ever smaller proportion of their economies from manufacturing, and in some of these cities manufacturing has disappeared altogether. Offerings given in urban churches, formerly representing parts of pay checks or capital gains from industry, now more often derive from social-security checks or salaries from service occupations. At least three areas of urban and urban church studies reflect the changing economic base of cities: recent histories of urban churches which link their development to economic history, descriptions of new forms of cities and their implications for churches, and moral and theological perspectives on economics. Also, the pastoral issues identified below in part IV have obvious economic implications.

Illustrative of works which link religion and urban economics are: Jürgen Moltmann, ed., *Versöhnung mit der Natur* (Kaiser, 1986); Thomas Fuechtmann, *Steeple and Stacks: Religion and Steel Crisis in Youngstown [OH]* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), which places the crisis of plant closings in the 1970s in historical perspective; Philip Wogaman, *Economics and Ethics* (Fortress, 1986); James Stewart, *The Black Church as a Religio-Economic Institution* (Duke University, 1986); Alan Storkey, *Transforming Economics: A Christian Way to Employment* (SPCK, 1986), which offers a radical Christian interpretation of capitalism, wealth, unemployment, and the welfare state; Herman Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment and a Sustainable Future* (Beacon, 1989), a collaboration between an economist and a theologian offering a model of a reformed economic system; and Alice Frazer Evans, et al., *Pedagogies for the Non-Poor* (Orbis, 1987), which provides eight illustrations of how wealthy North Americans have tried to become involved in peacemaking, fighting injustice, stopping plant closings, ameliorating hunger, and eradicating sexism and racism without making things worse than they already are. See also the volume compiled by the Alban Institute, *Faith Goes to Work: Reflections from the Marketplace* (1993).

Several religious bodies have made pronouncements on the economy: notably, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the US Economy* (National Catholic Conference, 1986), which is interpreted in Bruce Douglas, ed., *The Deeper Meaning of Economic Life: Critical Essays on the US Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter on the Economy* (Georgetown University Press, 1986) and in Thomas Gannon, ed., *The Catholic Challenge to the American Economy* (Macmillan, 1987). See also the Presbyterian Church (USA) Committee on a Just Political Economy, *Toward a Just, Caring and Dynamic Political Economy: Report of the Committee on a Just Political Economy* (1985).

Historical studies which trace the importance of economics on city churches include James W. Lewis, *The Protestant Experience in Gary, Indiana, 1906-1975* (University of Tennessee Press, 1992) and Kenneth Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel: Christianity and Labor in Industrial Philadelphia, 1865-1915* (Temple University Press, 1989). Fones-Wolf challenges the widely held view that evangelical protestantism consistently served to help employers maintain control over workers.

Joel Garreua, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (Doubleday, 1991), describes the emergence of burgeoning new cities and suburbs that function as cities. Churches can exist in Edge City, claims Garreua, a writer for the *Washington Post*, if and only if they find ways to pay for the high development costs.

II. THE CITY CHURCH BEYOND THE DREAM OF INTEGRATION

In the earlier part of this century, protestants dreamed of a culturally unified city life where, in spite of denominational differences, the cities of North America would melt into Anglo-Saxon protestant character, values, and religious affiliation. That dream, dying slowly, still guides some missionary-oriented city ministries, although by the 1950s the notion of a triple melting-pot—protestant, Catholic, Jew—became the more popular view. Now urban Anglo protestantism, to the extent that it remains in cities at all, is coming to terms with multiculturalism and an increasingly diverse religious pluralism. As the result, urban churches of the 1990s are less “captive” to suburban churches than their earlier counterparts were; cf. Gibson Winter, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches* (Doubleday, 1961).

African Americans’ affirming and telling the stories of their urban church history has been the single most important corrective for the narrowness of the earlier Anglo views, although the recent writings of American ethnic Hispanics, Koreans, and Haitians, among others, have also contributed. Ethnic religious leaders of the 1990s are more likely than their earlier counterparts to write about their views of urban churches and more likely to write in English. Many recent immigrants to North American cities were in fact protestants before they emigrated, tracing their history in Christianity to the nineteenth-century missionary movements and now providing the most notable examples of growing urban churches for their denominations.

Harold Recinos, *Hear the Cry! A Latino Pastor Challenges the Church* (Westminster, 1989), recounts a Hispanic minister’s spiritual pilgrimage and his experience in a New York City Methodist parish. Jean-Bertrand Aristide, *In the Parish of the*

Poor: Writings from Haiti (Orbis, 1990), reprints sermons on Catholic church work among the Haitian poor, highlighting conflict with the conservative church hierarchy and repressive government.

Nicholas Leman, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (Knopf, 1991), points out consequences of the northward migration of African Americans in the twentieth century. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Duke University, 1990), offers an excellent summation. James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or Nightmare?* (Orbis, 1991), contends that Martin Luther King and Malcolm X complemented and corrected each other. Vincent Harding, *Hope and History: Why We Must Share the Story of the Movement* (Orbis, 1990), calls to remembrance the civil rights movement. Jon Spencer, ed., *Sacred Music of the Secular City: From Blues to Rap*, a special issue of the journal *Black Sacred Music* (6/1 [1992]) traces the aesthetics of the Black urban church.

III. THE CITY CHURCH AS CITIZEN, SURVIVOR, MISSIONARY, AND PILGRIM

Individual city churches have always held widely divergent understandings of their identities and missions, even within denominations and even within the membership of a single church. The literature generated about and by city churches suggests at least four types of identities for urban congregations—citizen, survivor, missionary, and pilgrim. These types are discussed more fully in the introduction to my *Cities and Churches* (16-20).

A church which thinks of itself as citizen or public church is a cultural insider, prominent in the affairs of the city, often electing political leaders from its membership, regularly speaking out on matters of public interest and seeking to influence the cultural and social life of the city on which it depends for its own well-being. A church thinking of itself as a survivor also is a cultural insider and similarly depends on the city for its well-being, although it has little political power and rarely tries to influence city affairs. Missionary churches have their base of power outside the city—denominations or groups of wealthy churches which support their programs—and much of the literature generated for these congregations is aimed at cementing ties with funding sources. Churches with missionary identities sometimes seek to influence city affairs, but often lack a political base in the city. Churches with a pilgrim identity are in the city, but not of it. They remain largely outsiders, holding to heritages brought with their members to the city, although at the same time they may be helping their members to adjust to city life and to fulfill their hopes for a better life. As a church of migrants, immigrants, and other outsiders seeking a better way or a new start in the city, the pilgrim church often appears to lack political involvement, but its activities may portend future political importance.

All four types of city church identities may be found both in the writings of Douglass's day and in the 1980s and 1990s. The difference lies in how congregations have moved from one type to another over the interim. African American congregations, largely of the pilgrim type in the 1930s, are now the urban citizen

type. Anglo churches, formerly of the citizen type, now tend to be small enclaves surviving, if at all, on wealth and memories of past eras. African American churches have largely filled the vacuum, with such leaders as William Gray (Baptist minister, U.S. House of Representatives Majority Whip, special liaison for Haiti for the Clinton administration, etc.) and Andrew Young (UCC minister, ambassador to the United Nations, mayor of Atlanta, GA, etc.). Missionary churches, notwithstanding efforts of mainline denominations in the 1960s and 1970s to encourage missionary congregations as well as altogether new forms of urban ministry, are increasingly tied to evangelical and independent church bodies. Changes in U.S. immigration laws in the mid-1960s have led to a new sprouting of pilgrim churches, filled with members who want both to venture into a new life and to hold onto their heritages (especially South and Central America and Korea). Many of these new churches exist without denominational subsidies. Anglos, refugees from suburbs seeking the spiritual depth and health afforded by cities, also constitute a population of potential urban pilgrims.

The following citations show how some contemporary writers deal with the churches' changing identities and urban fortunes. Studies of mainline protestant churches include: James D. Davidson, *Mobilizing Social Movement Organizations: The Formation, Institutionalization, and Effectiveness of Ecumenical Urban Ministries* (Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1985), which provides an illustration of ecumenically-sponsored inner-city programs that were established in the 1960s and 1970s; Wayne Stumme, ed., *The Experience of Hope: Mission and Ministry in Changing Urban Communities* (Augsburg, 1991; see further below); Eleanor Scott Meyers, ed., *Envisioning the City: A Reader on Urban Ministry* (Westminster/John Knox, 1992), an assortment of articles, principally from mainline perspectives; Milton J. Coalter, et al., *The Diversity of Discipleship: Presbyterians and Twentieth-Century Christian Witness* (Westminster/John Knox, 1991), part of a series of studies on Presbyterianism, an evaluation of Presbyterian ethnic ministries; Milton J. Coalter, et al., *The Mainline Protestant Decline: The Presbyterian Pattern* (Westminster/John Knox, 1990); Harvey Cox, *Religion in the Secular City: Towards a Post-modern Theology* (Simon and Schuster, 1984), which provides an interesting retrospective of twentieth-century theological views of the city; Robert Bellah, et al., *The Good Society* (Knopf, 1991), pro-society and pro-democracy and anti-privatism, seeking to recover aspects of the public church; Nicholas Jay Demerath, *A Bridging of Faiths: Religion and Politics in a New England City* (Princeton University Press, 1992), which revisits Springfield, MA, a city studied by Douglass in the 1920s, noting the changing understanding of mission and ministry among that city's churches.

Some important evangelical protestant views of city ministry include Harvie Conn, *A Clarified Vision for Urban Mission: Dispelling the Urban Stereotypes* (Zondervan, 1987), which shows how rural and suburban people have a misinformed conception of the city, one that extends even to some people who live in cities, and challenges seven mythic assumptions about the city: (1) the rural/urban myth, (2) the depersonalization misunderstanding, (3) the crime generalization, (4) the secularization myth, (5) the privatization myth, (6) the power misunderstanding, and

(7) the monoclass (i.e., the poor are omnipresent) generalization; a journal titled *Urban Mission* (Westminster Theological Seminary, beginning in 1983) that regularly reviews the rapidly growing evangelical urban ministry literature; Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church* (Zondervan, 1991), the author being an executive of World Vision International.

A Roman Catholic perspective is offered in Jay P. Dolan, et al., *Transforming Parish Ministry: The Changing Roles of Catholic Clergy, Laity and Women Religious* (Crossroads, 1990). *Sister Act* and *Nunsense* continue the film industry's interest in urban Catholic churches, which extends back at least to early Bing Crosby films. See also such popular press articles as Isabel Wilkerson, "Catholic Parish Closings Bring Tears in Chicago," *New York Times* (9 July 1990, A10).

IV. CITY CHURCHES AND PASTORAL ISSUES

As in the 1920s and 1930s, recent years have seen the publication of many books and articles regarding specific pastoral issues which, while not exclusively urban in nature, speak poignantly to urban churches because of the intensity of those issues in cities. The list of issues in both eras includes: riots, unemployment, unfair wages and business practices, hunger, poverty, illness, race conflict, migrant's and immigrant's problems, children's and youth's problems, crime, poor housing and homelessness, family degeneration, drug and alcohol abuse, inhuman prison conditions, changing neighborhoods. Although some of the rhetoric surrounding these issues has changed, the issues themselves have remained remarkably constant. Writers about cities have consistently urged city churches to do something about these issues: speak-out, develop specialized ministries, intervene in crises. Some notable recent contributions include:

Carl Resener and Judy Hall, *Kids on the Street* (Broadman, 1992); Cecil Williams, *No Hiding Place: Empowerment and Recovery for Our Troubled Communities* (Harper, 1992), especially regarding ministry with narcotic addicts; Lori Miller, "Methodist Bishop [Felton E. May] Confronts Drug Abuse in the Region," *Washington Post* (2 June 1990, B7); John Kavanaugh and Mev Puleo, *Faces of Poverty, Faces of Christ* (Orbis, 1991); Ignacio Castuera, ed., *Dreams of Fire, Embers of Hope: From the Pulpits of Los Angeles after the Riots* (Chalice Press, 1992), reproducing sixteen sermons preached from Los Angeles pulpits following the 1992 riots, in addition to a "Confession of Conscience"; Gayraud Wilmore, "LA: Peace or Pacification," *Christianity and Crisis* 52/8 (May 25, 1992) 163-164, comments on conditions underlying recent riots and speculations about their aftermath.

Beyond the distressing works on the religious aspects of AIDS touting miracle healings and quackery, several books on AIDS ministry can be recommended. Among them: William E. Amos, Jr., *When AIDS Comes to Church* (Westminster, 1988); Letty Russell, ed., *The Church with AIDS: Renewal in the Midst of Crisis* (Westminster, John Knox, 1990); Michael Christensen, *The Samaritan's Imperative* (Abingdon, 1990), and his *City Streets, City People: A Call for Compassion* (Abingdon, 1988), both of which draw on a conservative Wesleyan theology; Wendell Hoffman and Stanley Grenz, *AIDS: Ministry in the Midst of an Epidemic* (Baker, 1990); and

Robert Perelli, *Ministry to Persons with AIDS: A Family Systems Approach* (Augsburg, 1990).

Recent years have seen a rapid growth in the number of books related to persons with health (other than AIDS) and financial problems. Granger Westberg, *Parish Nurse: Providing a Minister of Health for Your Congregation* (Augsburg, 1990), shows the relevancy of the local church for medical health. Harry Murray, *Do Not Neglect Hospitality: The Catholic Worker and the Homeless* (Temple University Press, 1990), offers a general history of hospitality practices, myths, and ideas, with particular attention to the Catholic Worker movement's philosophy in contrast to the views of professional workers with the poor.

Many popularly written volumes have been produced regarding homelessness. A more academic approach is taken in James Henslin, *Homelessness: An Annotated Bibliography* (Garland, 1991), which covers both scholarly and popular press materials, including the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*. S. L. Goldberg, "Gimme Shelter: Religious Provision of Shelter to the Homeless as a Protected Use under Zoning Law," *Washington University Journal of Urban and Contemporary Law* 30 (1986) 75-114, argues that, in most states, zoning laws are inapplicable to churches using their facilities for housing homeless people and that housing the homeless is a traditional religious activity; as a result, it ought to be exempt under First Amendment protection. Southern California Interfaith Hunger Coalition, *Temporary Directory of Emergency Food Providers by Zip Codes in Affected Portions of Los Angeles County* (1992), is an example of a practical cooperative effort to address the hunger needs of a major metropolitan population.

V. A RETROSPECTIVE OF LUTHERAN URBAN CHURCH PUBLICATIONS SINCE 1960

The trends identified above apply to Lutheran urban church literature as well as to that of other protestant denominations. A brief summary of those trends follows this decade-by-decade review of Lutheran contributions to the ongoing city church debates.

Lutherans produced a large literature about urban concerns in the 1960s. Walter Kloetzli defended traditional Lutheran planning approaches to urban issues and sharply criticized the community organization theories of Saul Alinsky. See Kloetzli's *Urban Church Planning* (with Arthur Hillman; Muhlenberg, 1958), *Eight City Churches* (National Lutheran Council, 1960), *Lutheran Central Areas Study* (National Lutheran Council, 1960), *The Church and the Urban Challenge* (Muhlenberg, 1961), *Challenge and Response in the City* (Augustana, 1962), and *Chicago Lutheran Planning Study* (National Lutheran Council, 1965). Planning models, especially those involving ecumenical cooperation, were the subject of H. Conrad Hoyer's writings: *The Lutheran Church in Metropolitan Areas* (National Lutheran Council, 1959), *Consultation on Cooperative Church Planning* (Massachusetts Council of Churches, 1965), and *Ecumenopolis, USA* (Augsburg, 1971). Edgar Trexler wrote a series of articles for *The Lutheran*, a periodical, citing examples of city church renewal, an interest eventually resulting in books titled *Ways to Wake Up Your Church* (Fortress, 1969) and *Creative Congregations* (Abingdon, 1972). Similarly,

Wallace Fisher, a pastor in Lancaster, PA, advanced the church renewal approach to urban church problems in *From Tradition to Mission: An Old Church Discovers the Secret to New Life* (Abingdon, 1965), *Preaching and Parish Renewal* (1966), and *Preface to Parish Renewal* (1968). Roy Blumhorst's *Faithful Rebels* (Concordia, 1967) describes innovative approaches to apartment house ministries. Political aspects of urban development are discussed in Karl Hertz's *Politics as a Way of Helping People* (Augsburg, 1974), based on his experience of church and city planning in the 1960s. David Schuller's essay, in a similar vein, stresses the importance of politics in the task of restoring a sense of community to cities: see Schuller's *The New Urban Society* (Concordia, 1966), *Emerging Shapes of the Church* (1967), and *Power Structures of the Church* (1969). James Manz's *The Church in an Urbanized World* (Concordia, 1964) provides an overview of city church issues and controversies, based on case studies in the Missouri Synod. Arthur Simon's *Faces of Poverty* (Concordia, 1966) calls for Lutheran responsiveness to the poor, as does Henry Whiting's *The Church and the Relief Client* (Board of Social Ministries, LCA, 1968). Under ecumenical auspices, Lutheran pastor John Wagner, Jr., produced several reports related to the experimental Los Angeles Goals Project in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Many Lutheran urban church experts of the 1960s, for example Wagner and Fisher, trace their interest in the subject to the teaching of Bertha Paulssen, a professor at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, PA. Her urban studies library, collected during the 1940s and 1950s, is integrated into the library of that school.

Throughout the 1970s, Lutherans produced curriculum materials for urban churches which tended to stress the city not as problem, but as resource. See, for example: Rolf Aaseng, ed., *The City: Viewpoints, Christian Perspectives on Social Concerns* (Augsburg, 1979); Joseph Barndt, *Liberating Our White Ghetto* (1972); *Hey, God, Hooray!* (and others of this series, Lutheran Church Press, 1970, 1972); *The Big Idea* (Board of Parish Education, LCA, 1972); and *Educaid, Educational Resources for the Urban Church* (1973). The growing importance of non-Germanic ethnic Lutherans is reflected in the National Hispanic Lutheran Assembly's *Directory of Hispanic Lutheran Ministries in the USA and Puerto Rico* (1977). In 1972, Richard Luecke wrote *Perchings: Reflections on Society and Ministry* (Urban Training Center), in which he describes various approaches to urban theological education.

Richard Diehl wrote in the 1980s about "Plant Closings" (Division for Mission in North America, LCA, 1985) and the church's role in corporate responsibility: "The Church as Shareholder" (same). Granger Westberg's ministry with churches operating health clinics gained national recognition (see citation above). In the late 1980s, inner-city stories by Walter Wangerin gained an appreciative audience: *The Ragman and Other Cries of Faith* (Harper and Row, 1984) and *The Manger Is Empty* (Harper, 1989). Wayne Stumme edited a volume about different models of Lutheran urban ministries titled *The Experience of Hope* (Augsburg, 1991), a collection of articles about Lutheran urban ministries and goals. It includes "The Parish as Place: Principles of Parish Ministry," a document adopted by LCA, ALC, and ELCA. Stumme is director of The Institute for Mission in the USA, an organiza-

tion in partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. A general historical overview is provided by Richard Luecke's chapter in Clifford Green, ed., *Seek the Peace of the City* (Eerdman's, forthcoming).

Several Lutheran sociologists have been interested in urban church issues: Nicholas Demerath's thesis at the University of California was titled "Social Stratification and Church Involvement among Urban Lutheran Parishioners" (1962). Peter Berger's discourses deal broadly with urbanization and secularization: *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies* (Doubleday, 1961), *The Sacred Canopy* (1967), *The Social Construction of Reality* (with Thomas Luckmann, 1967), and *A Rumor of Angels* (1969). Several articles by Samuel Mueller in sociological journals deal with urban Lutherans; see his "Changes in the Social Status of Lutheranism in Ninety Chicago Suburbs, 1950-1960," *Sociological Analysis* 27 (1966) 138-145. In 1980, Russell Hale produced *The Unchurched: Who They Are and Why They Stay Away* (Harper and Row).

Lutherans have issued several formal statements about cities and urban issues. Among the resources for studying these are: "The Church Speaks on Labor" (United Lutheran Church of America, Board of Social Missions, 1946); Harold C. Letts, *Christian Social Responsibility* (Muhlenberg, 1957); "Social Statements of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1918-1962" (United Lutheran Church of America, Board of Social Missions, nd, 1962?); Henry J. Whiting "The Churches Speak: A Bibliography of Official Statements and Study Reports" (Lutheran Council in the USA, 1969); "Social Criteria for Investment" (Board of Social Ministry, 1972); "LCA Ministry in the City: A Position Paper" (LCA, Division for Mission in North America, 1977); "A Statement on Immigration Policies: Undocumented Persons" (Lutheran Council in the USA, 1981); Charles Lutz, "Public Voice: Social Policy Development in the ALC, 1960-1987" (Office of Church and Society, LCA, 1987); Christa Klein and Christian Dehsen, *Politics and Policy: The Genesis and Theology of Social Statements in the LCA* (Fortress, 1989).

Some major trends are reflected in these writings and, by and large, the writings of other denominations reflect the same trends: (1) The word "urban" is used less often in recent writings. (2) An Anglo urban church is now less often assumed to be the urban norm than in the 1960s, and greater attention is given to other ethnicities and recent immigrants. (3) Writers of the 1960s advocated "new forms" for city ministries and debated the continuing significance of the local church; now other identities and understandings of ministry are advocated, too, and increased importance is attached to local churches. (4) Ahistorical activism was typical in the earlier era, while now more historical introspection is characteristic of urban church writings. (5) Earlier writers tended to assume that place of residence was the centrally important social variable; now greater emphasis is given to urban economics and politics.