

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

School of Religious Education

Critique of
City of God, City of Satan

by

Robert C. Linthicum

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Synopsis of Each Chapter

Linthicum's first chapter reminds that the city is God's creation. The city has its challenges too, namely population problems. Cities are in crisis throughout the world and it is incumbent upon Christians to recognize and enter into the challenge of the new world. He continues this chapter by positing that the Bible is an urban book, then explores how Scripture views the city, Yahweh and Baal. At this point he embarks upon his primary thrust of establishing a biblical basis for the city as God's creation.

Chapter two addresses the city as the abode of personal and systemic evil, summoning passages from Isaiah and Jeremiah to express the nature of sin's in the city. The roots of a city's evil derive from personal aggrandizement, self-indulgence, social

injustice, and idolatry; and, since evil is both individual and corporate, so is salvation. This calls for a religion of relationship openly demonstrated in a politics of justice and an economics of stewardship.

In chapter three the author discusses the city as the abode of Satanic principalities and powers, offering synopsis definitions and applications for key words such as throne, dominion, principality, and power. He also discusses the spirituality of the city, the brooding angel, the city's inner spirituality, and cautions his readers that God still holds individuals and structures accountable for the sin each entity commits.

Chapter four addresses God's intention for the city as operating under an economic, religious, and political system ruled by God. Linthicum posits that God desires to liberate the oppressed, bring about peace and transformation, and equally distribute to the poor. He further explores kingdom parables, and references to the poor, arguing that Jesus was the first person in Scripture to perceive that the poor are not only those who have little money, but also those (wealthy or not) having impoverished human spirits.

Chapter five explores what Jesus did for the city, namely, he died to save it; yet, repentance is a precondition of God's redemption and transformation.

Chapter six argues toward the vocation of the urban church. Linthicum believes it is to seek that city's spiritual transformation. He says the church's vocation is to be the people who were blind but now see, and thus invite the blind city to see.

Chapter seven discusses the presence and prayer of the church in the city. He implores Christians to pray for the city's economic health, safety, political order, people, and to pray with importunity. He urges the people of the Lord to be God's presence (salt and light) in the city.

Chapter eight addresses the practice and proclamation of the church in the city. This includes discovering the city's joy, working for its health and longevity, improving its housing conditions, developing its economics, improving its relationship with God, establishing shalom with neighbors, becoming advocates for the poor, empowering others through self-determination, and recognizing that Christians are stewards of the city. He further argues that the entire church is sent to proclaim, not clergy only.

Chapter nine describes godly ways for community ministries to emerge. Linthicum says they begin with the self being broken over things which break God's heart; then, he says networks need to be built, the community needs to be organized, and workers need to deal creatively with conflict (external resistance and

internal injustice). All this is aimed at seeking the community's transformation through Christian action. Finally, the community must be surrendered to the people.

Chapter ten addresses spiritual power and spiritual formation. In this chapter Linthicum focuses upon exposing the lies the city's systems tell to keep the city in bondage, and advocating that the city be given over to the kingdom of God. He emphasizes the need for Christian leaders to get into the rhythm of the Christian life, working out their own salvation (working on personal spiritual formation), and developing spiritual disciplines (spiritual autobiography, silence, personally relating to Scripture and journaling, prayer, and spiritual direction). He further discusses contexts for spiritual exercises and the end of spiritual formation, which results in the journey outward.

Chapter eleven discusses life in community as orderly existence being brought together under Christ in terms of the church. He also addresses community with reference to the precondition of reconciliation, which is the redeeming power of Christ. He then offers some insights from Paul regarding determining importance, money and Christian obligation, how to feel about church, demands made by life in community, and being family to each other.

Chapter twelve discusses what Linthicum believes God's

vision for the city to be. Using the Revelation of John, the author describes the city of Satan and the city of God, closing by affirming the purpose of John's vision as enabling God's people to see what the city wholly given to Satan and what the city given to God both become, so that Christians might understand the eventual and inevitable outcome for both cities.

Chapter thirteen, the final one, discusses what Christians, having done all, are to do. Linthicum says they are to stand, which is the faithful response to the faithful God. He reminds that the church is not called to be successful but to be faithful, especially faithful in the practice of the Gospel. The author then sets out to explore Jesus' words to the seven churches (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea). He closes with a final reference to his theme, city of God city of Satan, challenging his readers toward personal spiritual formation, life in community, and maintenance of a vision of what God is doing to culminate reality in their city, urging all to stand their ground.

Evaluation and Applicability: Strengths and Weaknesses

Does God love cities or people (p. 34)? Linthicum's assertion that anything created good is not beyond redemption (p. 68) is quite unCalvinistic for a Presbyterian, as is his statement that God will exclude no one from the kingdom, for it

is each individual who is responsible for choosing to exclude himself or herself (p. 96). The invitation is for all people (p. 97), states the author, and the new world order is entered into through personal repentance. These are necessary elements of biblical theology and welcome additions in a Presbyterian text!

Regarding weaknesses, split infinitives (pp. ix, 37 [2], 89, 285, 311) occur somewhat infrequently, but are still noticeable. Also, was it not optional for Jesus to go to Jerusalem and die? This writer would argue that he could have chosen not to do anything God willed, but he chose to submit. Further, Linthicum's expressions with reference to Romans 8:20-21 are too close to animism (p. 118), as are his words for the city. Moreover, his insistence that demonic powers will be reconciled (p. 120) is unbelievable, and his stress on the primary purpose of the church as being a training ground makes one wonder where worship stands in his ecclesiology; and, his use of the word "sacrament" (p. 255) raises questions about his soteriology.

In terms of strengths, Linthicum seems to stress a general atonement (p. 115, 120, 139, 258, 262), and choice (p. 131, 147, 246), which is odd for a Presbyterian, but, once again, a welcome perspective. Lastly, his book is deeply rooted in Scripture. In fact, nearly every chapter provides a brief exegetical analysis of some relevant passage of Scripture, a strength by any standard.