

**CHURCH PLANTING IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN URBAN
CONTEXT – WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE ROLE OF
THE REFORMED CHURCH TSHIAWELO**

By

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EPIGRAPHY

After this, the Lord chose seventy-two others and sent them out in pairs ahead of Him into every town and place where He planned to go. He said to them,

“There are a great many people to harvest,
but there are only a few workers.

So pray to God, who owns the harvest,
that He will send more workers to help gather His harvest.
Go now, but listen! I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.

Don't carry a purse, a bag, or sandals,
and don't waste time talking with people on the road.

Before you go into a house, say, 'Peace be with this house.'
If peaceful people live there, your blessing of peace will stay with them,
but if not, then your blessing will come back to you.

Stay in the peaceful house, eating and drinking what the people there give you.

A worker should be given his pay. Don't move from house to house.

If you go into a town and the people welcome you,
eat what they give you. Heal the sick who live there, and tell them,

'The Kingdom of God is near you.'

But if you go into a town, and the people don't welcome you,
then go into the streets and say,

'Even the dirt from your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you.'

But remember that the Kingdom of God is near.'

I tell you, on the Judgment Day it will be better for the people of Sodom
than for the people of that town.

Luke 10:1-12 (NCV)

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis wholeheartedly and with great honour to the following people:

The leaders of Reformed Church Tshiawelo and of all the churches that constitute Synod Soutpansberg; urban church planting is an urgent work we must seriously engage ourselves in. This thesis indicates the basis of urban church planting and also the reasons why we should regard urban church planting as serious and urgent work to be done. In order to achieve this, we must support Heidelberg Theological Seminary so that it should continue to produce many Ministers who should engage themselves in the urban church planting programme.

To Professor TC Rabali, my mentor and spiritual father. I dedicate this thesis to him, in honour and appreciate his sincere work of leading Reformed Church Tshiawelo to her great success in urban church planting especially in Gauteng Province. I say so because his visionary leadership is clear to everybody who knows him and also to those who do not know him. At the time Professor TC Rabali started to work on this congregation (1995); the congregation was only located at Soweto Township, but now it has many fellowship centers in many, townships, cities and suburbs in Gauteng Province and also one in Mpumalanga Province. Through his leadership the church managed to call seven Ministers (Rev Muswubi TA [2001 - former Minister], Rev Makhuvha NP [2004], Rev Ramantswana H [2004], Rev Liphadzi AE [2004], Rev Rabali Thiofhitshithu [2005], Rev Budeli TM [2007] and Rev Nemutanzhela TS [2008]). With the cooperation and full support of the vision of the urban church planting, the Reformed Church Tshiawelo planted five (5) daughter churches simultaneously on the 16th of August 2008 during her 40th anniversary celebrated on the 15-17 of August 2008. Professor TC Rabali endured difficult circumstances and challenges, but he did not regret his vision of focusing seriously on urban mission. I became missionary minded by observing and being inspired by what Professor TC Rabali did to rebuild Reformed Church Tshiawelo, I cannot forget the church councils' conference led by him at Tshipise in 1998, where he was focusing mainly on urban mission. That conference played an important role in encouraging me to view urban areas as a fertile mission field where the Word of God should be planted instantly without delay.

Soli Deo Gloria

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SUMMARY

If urbanization is one of the most important social realities in Africa today, it goes without saying that Christian mission must take full account of it. The church has turned her attention to African towns and cities none too soon. Her own historical and theological inclinations have led the church in the past to favour the rural areas, where success has been widely achieved. Yet the Christian enterprise in Africa is threatened by urbanization, and a half-hearted approach to the towns will not save it.

The research rests upon the hypothesis that the younger churches on the African continent – especially in Southern Africa – are indeed awaking to their missionary obligation, of moving from the position of receiving churches to sending churches. Especially in the growing cities of Africa the churches need to be informed and empowered to play their part in this regard. With a proper understanding of the Biblical mandate for mission, as well as of the urban context in which the church has to function, a comprehensive strategy for mission in the cities of Africa may be developed. The congregation of the Reformed Church Tshiawelo in Soweto was used as a case study in the research.

The biblical theology of urban mission was firstly attended to. The focus was on the way both the Old and the New Testaments view urban mission. From the biblical point of view, it was clear that mission of the church always concern sending. The Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is the prime Subject of Mission (*Missio Dei*), sending His church into the world (*missio ecclesia*). The biblical theology of the city showed a negative and a positive image of the city – the city of Satan and the city of God.

Jesus Christ had a great concern for the repentance of the city dwellers. He preached in cities (Mt 9:35-36), cried for the city of Jerusalem for her repentance (Lk 13:34-35), sent His disciples to preach in cities (Mt 10:5, 7, 11, 14, 23). He instructed His disciples to witness to Him from the city of Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth

(Ac 1:8). He also showed His great concern to the seven churches resided at the seven cities of Asia Minor (Rv 2:1-3:22). Paul's life was mainly centered on preaching, and planting churches mainly in urban areas

Cities all over the globe are growing at an astonishing rate. People are forced to migrate from rural to urban areas because of push and pull factors. Natural growth in the cities is rocketing. A third cause of urban growth is immigration. The problems that immigrants are encountering in are xenophobia and unsettlement, as recent events in South Africa demonstrated. Other vexing problems to be faced in the cities are urban poverty, prostitution, street people, HIV/AIDS, unemployment, crime, etc.

The development of a comprehensive definition of mission in an urban setting is required. Christ called the church to be His witness (*martyria*) to the world (Ac 1:8) by proclaiming the Word of God (*kerygma*) to the people, by serving people (*diakonia*), and by entering into fellowship of love with people (*koinonia*). The main goal of witnessing Christ in urban areas should be the *glorificatio Dei*, "to glorify God", this is the *liturgical dimension*.

The ministry of the Reformed Church Tshiawelo (Soweto) was used to illustrate and test the above. With the co-operation of the Synod Soutpansberg, the congregation developed a comprehensive mission programme, sending and equipping their members to undertake mission campaigns, seminars and conferences. Leadership training, as well as proper budgeting form an important part of the programme.

The strategies can be utilized to plant churches in metropolitan cities outside Gauteng Province, e.g Bloemfontein, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Pietermaritzburg, East London, Durban, Kimberley, etc. The strategies for urban church planting were grouped into four phases which are: Visionary Phase (Step 1), Planning Phase (Step 2), Preparation Phase (Step 3), and Establishment Phase (Step 4).



KEY TERMS

Biblical theology

Dimensions of mission

Heidelberg Theological Seminary

Missio Dei and Missio Ecclesia

Partnership

Reformed Church Tshiawelo

Synod Soutpansberg

Urban Church planting

Urban mission

Urbanization

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ABBREVIATIONS

GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

AD	: Anno Domini
AIDS	: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BC	: Before Christ
B.C.E.	: Before Common Era
C.E.	: Common Era
Cf	: refers to
e.g.	: for example
ed	: edition
ed	: editor
eds	: editors
et al	: and others
etc	: et cetera
GKSA	: Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid Afrika
HIV	: Human immunodeficiency virus
i.e.	: that is
IMC	: International Mission Conference
CBD	: Central business district
Ltd	: Limited
NCV	: New Century Version
NRSV	: New Revised Standard Version
PWV	: Pretoria Witwatersrand Vereeniging



RCSA	: Reformed Churches in South Africa
RCT	: Reformed Church Tshiawelo
SA	: South Africa
Sv	: sub voce (under the word)
SS	: Synod Soutpansberg
RCSASSA	: Acts of the Synod Soutpansberg of the Reformed Churches in South Africa
UK	: United Kingdom
USA	: United State of America
rev ed	: Revised Edition
EC	: Eastern Cape
FS	: Free State
GT	: Gauteng
KJV	: King James Version
KZN	: Kwazulu Natal
LIM	: Limpopo
LXX	: the Septuagint
MP	: Mpumalanga
NC	: Northern Cape
NCV	: New Century Version
NIV	: New International Version
NRSV	: New Revised Standard Version
NW	: North West
WC	: Western Cape
RSA	: Republic of South Africa



ABBREVIATIONS OF THE BIBLE BOOKS

OLD TESTAMENT		NEW TESTAMENT	
Gn	Genesis	Mt	Matthews
Ex	Exodus	Mk	Mark
Lv	Leviticus	Lk	Luke
Nm	Numbers	Jn	John
Dt	Deuteronomy	Ac	Acts
Jos	Joshua	Rm	Romans
Jdg	Judges	1 Cor	1 Corinthians
Rt	Ruth	2 Cor	2 Corinthians
1 Sm	1 Samuel	Gl	Galatians
2 Sm	2 Samuel	Eph	Ephesians
1 Ki	1 Kings	Phlp	Philippians
2 Ki	2 Kings	Col	Colossians
1 Chr	1 Chronicles	1 Th	1 Thessalonians
2 Chr	2 Chronicles	2 Th	2 Thessalonians
Ezr	Ezra	1 Tm	1 Timothy
Neh	Nehemiah	2 Tm	2 Timothy
Es	Esther	Tt	Titus
Job	Job	Phlm	Philemon
Ps	Psalms	Heb	Hebrews
Pr	Proverbs	Ja	James
Ec	Ecclesiasts	1 Pt	1 Peter
Can	Song of Songs	2 Pt	2 Peter



Is	Isaiah	1 Jn	1 John
Jr	Jeremiah	2 Jn	2 John
Lm	Lamentations	3 Jn	3 John
Ezk	Ezekiel	Jude	Jude
Dn	Daniel	Rv	Revelation
Hs	Hosea		
Jl	Joel		
Am	Amos		
Ob	Obadiah		
Jnh	Jonah		
Mi	Micah		
Nah	Nahum		
Hab	Habakkuk		
Zph	Zephaniah		
Hg	Haggai		
Zch	Zechariah		
MI	Malachi		



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