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**The Church and the
Undocumented in
New York: Toward a
Theology of Care**

**By
Russell McLeod
DMin**

*The Rev. Dr.
McLeod is the
Pastor of Olivet
Gospel Church, the
Bronx, and Assistant
Professor of
Pastoral Ministries
at Nyack College*

It is not by chance that the Churches are perched in the city on the border of Westchester. This makes them city churches. Now that the church has found its place, an important question is how will social decline in the community be addressed? The church was placed by God to address this very need as well. Crisis in community is God's way of calling the church to ministry. Linthicum says that God has created three systems in society to order the function of society¹. These systems are political, economic, and religious. Of the religious system he says God has created the religious system in order to enable people to know and love Him.

The church then must approach ministry in the community as light and salt and its job is to ensure, preserve or

even establish *Shalom* making it a safe community even for the undocumented alien.² Preaching the gospel and demonstrating acts of social kindness accomplish this. For the church to become indifferent and quit are unacceptable approaches. Also, ministry is not to be performed with an intimidated attitude. Jesus said while entrusting responsibility to one of his servants that He was to build His church; and the gates of hell

¹ Linthicum Robert, *Empowering the Poor*, (California: MARC, 1991), 6ff.

² Bruce Bradshaw, *Bridging the Gap. Evangelism, Development and Shalom*, (Monrovia: MARC 1993), 17ff.

would not prevail against it. (Matt. 16:18 KJV) This makes the church a militant group that is not only able to withstand the onslaught of its enemies, but is also able to uncompromisingly pursue the establishing of righteousness by breaking down the citadels of sin and turning the hearts of people to God. This is a momentous challenge for any city church because city ministry requires a unique approach, which is an arduous undertaking.

NEW COMPOSITE IN THE CITY

What makes up the city? As a boy growing up in the Caribbean the city was made up of financial and commercial entities doing business. In biblical times the city was the walled area with gates for protection, although mainly of the rich. Today the concept of the city has changed. It is now the center of the population larger than the rural area, which is much diversified in ethnicity and race.³ In New York, one of the major components of the city is the dynamic of illegal immigrants.⁴ These illegal immigrants identify with the city as the place where God is giving them a new beginning. This fresh start is perceived as God's doing, in making a way for them. The government sees their overstaying the visas or crossing the borders without documentation as acts in violation of the laws of the land. However, many undocumented aliens view their action as an act of civil disobedience.⁵ Greater still, they view their action as God's

³ Harvie Conn, *The American City*, (Grand Rapids: Baker 1994), 61 – 62.

⁴ October 20, 1997 The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRAIRA) established a new term in immigration law, "unlawful presence". Severe penalties, including bars to future admission into the United States, are imposed on those aliens, except lawful permanent residents, who are unlawfully present for more than 180 continuous days as of April 1, 1997. <http://www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/8/1378.html>.

⁵ Civil disobedience is a symbolic, but nevertheless real, violation of what is considered an unjust law. Proponents of this behavior see it fit to break specific laws.

intervention in their affairs. With this in mind many subsist at poverty level,⁶ being dependent on relatives and friends for food raiment and shelter. This reliance on others often gives rise to significant decline in domestic relationships, and often these undocumented go friendless, hungry, penniless. From my research these people often live at poverty level.

HOW ARE THE POOR PERCEIVED?

First of all what is done for the poor is contingent upon how the church perceives them. There are different Christian views about the poor. Richard Mouw⁷ describes a four-part typology of how the church thinks of the poor. In the first case the poor person is made in the image of God. As recorded in the book of Genesis chapters one and two, they are provided with a garden endowed with all manner of resources, such as food, companionship, pleasure and recreation, for the procurement of life. Without these provisions, they would be in abject poverty, unable to subsist. However, God made them proud beneficiaries of the endowment of a garden wherein they were able to subsist. Using this profile of the poor, they are deemed to lack skills and in need of opportunities in order to pull themselves out of an unproductive life. In the case of the undocumented alien it would be the responsibility of the church to reach out to them and create opportunities where they could become useful. Some churches have gone beyond the law and have generated systems where the undocumented alien can apply for Green Cards, even misrepresenting information on the application. Some of these organizations have been justly prosecuted.

⁶ Tetsunao Yamamori, Bryant L Myers, and Kenneth L. Luscombe, *Serving with the urban poor*. (Monrovia: MARC, 1998), 7ff.

⁷ Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor* (New York: Maryknoll 1999), 59.

Another Christian view of the poor is that they are in rebellion against God; hence the calamity in which they find themselves is deserved. This view is hinged to the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden where wrong choices were made, which plunged the race into a subnormal state of being. Therefore, wherever poverty is identified it is attributed to a wrong choice and blamed on laziness. In this scenario, the undocumented alien is thought to have made the wrong choice to remain in a country where it is virtually impossible to subsist. Such people are encouraged to go back to their country of origin. However, many would not go back, hoping that God would make a way.

The Liberation Theology school of thought reckons that the poor are in their poverty because the rich want to keep them poor. This rationale is drawn from the book of Exodus and the Prophets where God constantly calls the oppressors to "Let My people go" Ex. 7:16. (NKJV).⁸ The role of the church in this approach would be to represent the poor to the authorities seeking to open door for the release of resources and benefits to the people who are in need.

There is yet another view, which is associated with the Gospels where Christ is identified with the poor as He indicted some religious people for their neglect of the disenfranchised in society. Jesus in this pericope identifies with the poor. The undocumented in this context is perceived as a victim and therefore represents Christ. The church in this view of the poor is expected to assist in relieving the sufferings of the poor undocumented aliens by helping them to access the available resources.⁹ These efforts are seen as Christian service.

Our approach should be to borrow from these approaches to formulate a theology of help for the undocumented alien. We must recognize that God acts decisively on the behalf of the poor as noted in

⁸ Jayakumar Christian, *God of the Empty-handed*, (Monrovia: MARC, 1999) 47.

⁹ Jayakumar Christian, believes that poverty is structural, institutional and socio-historic.

Mary's Magnificat.¹⁰ Therefore the church must seek to create a garden where there are resources to help them pull themselves out of a life of unproductiveness, to address laziness with motivation where it is discovered, and to represent them to the authorities in seeking to unlock and make available the benefits in store for them. This is a compelling call to ministry and must not be entered into lightly and unadvisedly.

While the Church has always done some form of outreach, the formidable task now is how does the church effectively honor the theological mandate for impacting the undocumented community around? One of the many scriptural injunctions which stands as a beacon is Jeremiah 29:7 where God call His people to seek the peace of the city in which they were carried away captives, and to pray to the Lord for that city because they would have peace in that city only if there is peace in the city.¹¹

A hostile enemy was taking off Israel into exile. To be exiled was to be victimized which naturally led to resentment, bitterness and retaliation. It was easy for Israel to become subversive, indifferent, and pro Israelite while in captivity. God forestalls this response promptly by giving direction as to proper conduct for city dwellers. They were to seek the peace of the city. This does not mean building ramparts and mounting a formidable defense. Rather, peace has to do with preventing and removing corruption, deterioration, and disgrace from the city, and ensuring safety, dignity, and preservation of life for the community. It would imply that even their captors would have to be treated with respect. So this command for the Israelites cuts across all racial and gender lines, as well as social, moral, and even spiritual lines. One thing is certain and it is that being in the city even away from home still obligated them to regard a community of people and their property with dignity. This is a

¹⁰ John Gillman, *Possessions and the life of Faith*, (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1991), 38ff.

¹¹ George Webber, *Today's Church "A community of Exiles and Pilgrims"* (Nashville: Abington, 1979), 87.

vital principle for city ministry.¹² The church must understand that they are sojourners here and just passing through. If however, they wish to have a significant sojourn, redeeming the time with fruitful labors, they must ensure that there is *shalom* in the community where the church finds habitat.

Roger Greenway outlines ten paradigms for city ministry,¹³ and four of these paradigms are particularly helpful to the City Church's program.

CALL TO MINISTRY

One of the first applicable principles is the "Call of the church." What has God called this church to do? It would appear that different churches have specific callings and responsibilities contingent upon their location, ethnic, racial, educational and economic composition. Peter and Paul had different ministries (Gal 2:7 – 9).¹⁴

In determining a sense of call a number of factors should be considered and they are as follows:

1. What is the church's predominant ethnicity?
2. Where in the city is the church located?
3. What is the predominant area of giftedness in the church?

In the community district efforts are being made by the community board to curb the heavy accessing of the healthcare facilities by the undocumented people since it overly burdens the financial resources of the system.

¹² Ibid., 82.

¹³ Roger Greenway – Urban Evangelism, Tape UE 102 1986, West Minster Theological Seminary.

¹⁴ Greenway says that people can be called to either rural or urban mission or both.

In reality this is the “Life Setting” of the community in which many of the churches are placed and the need of community begs the church for attention. Theologically the church cannot turn a deaf ear or a blind eye in this context, (Jer. 29:7)¹⁵ but it must seek the peace of the city. When these factors are taken into consideration it begins to give some character to the particular call for the church. One of two compelling factors is that there are churches with a significant population of health care workers who are members of the congregation. The other is that there is a need for preventative healthcare for undocumented people in the community. The nature of these compelling health needs in relation to the ability of the church to offer a solution augurs well for a rather distinct sense of obligation. The city church has a solemn moral and spiritual obligation to attend to this call to service.

DEALING WITH SCRUPLES

The second principle that would assist the church in gaining perspective in its unique call to ministry is that urban ministry must be “sensitive to religious and cultural scruples”¹⁶. This principle can be seen in St Paul’s approach to addressing the matter of circumcision. What would appear to be inconsistency is rather being sensitive to scruples as exemplified by Paul as he argued against circumcision to the Galatians as a requirement for salvation. Yet, sometime later when the socio-cultural need arose he was willing to have Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3). Paul demonstrates the need to have a grasp of both the theological component, and the social dynamics and their implications¹⁷. It is clear that one cannot

¹⁵ “And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace”. Jer. 29:7 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Greenway contends that in the New Testament there were conflicts with missions, as Peter and Paul struggles with issues of ethnicity and practice.

¹⁷ Greenway argues for Jews and Muslims to maintain their ethnicity after conversion. (Tape Greenway- WTS - UE 102. 1986).

use a cookbook formula approach to ministry in the urban setting, but must be aware that the unique local thrust of ministry requires sensitivity to cultural and amoral scruples.

One of the scruples in ministering to the illegal alien is bound up with the notion that many Christians are of the distinct opinion that evangelism is an act of preaching and witnessing. Any effort besides the proclamation of the gospel is denounced as outside the pail of the great commission. Walter Rauschenbusch in addressing the social need as a growing component to orthodox theology is extremely helpful to many evangelicals. According to Rauschenbusch:

Social workers are in the direct line of apostolic succession. Like the Son of Man they seek and save the lost. Their work is redemptive work. When they loosen the clutch of greed from the thin arm of the child-worker; when they guide the immigrant safely past the grasping hands to a place where he can work and establish his home in cleanliness and hope; when they put eyes in the finger-tips of the blind; when they lead the deaf out of the prison house of loneliness and give them speech with their kind; when they save the demoniac of alcoholism; when they seek to turn our prisons into institutions of social healing and education instead of being steam-rollers and stone crushers of humanity; when they try to change the cold stare of respectability with which we Pharisees have always regarded the fallen woman into a Christlike look of sympathy and understanding; they are treading step by step in the footprints of Jesus of Nazareth. They are doing with modern scientific methods and with the large resources of modern organization what he did in Galilee, and they have a right to feel the nearness and love of their Heavenly Father in doing it, just as he felt it.¹⁸

So then the call to ministry must be ready to adopt not only the message of Jesus but also the methods of Jesus. In Luke 4:16 –

¹⁸ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Unto Me* (New York: Pilgrim Press 1912), 14.

21, Jesus made it plain that His ministry was more than verbal proclamation; it went beyond to acts of deliverance. The methodology employed by Jesus has a significant social component, which exemplified itself in kindness and physically addressing felt needs in a distinct, tangible and memorable way. The church need not have any moral and theological scruples about the social component of the gospel. Many evangelicals have great difficulty in appreciating that social action and the proclamation of the gospel were tightly interwoven even as Jesus did not separate them. According to Luke 4:16–21, Jesus' ministry had a social component. Christensen notes "Jesus called all sinners to repent, but he also called the rich to serve the poor, the strong to be advocates of the weak"¹⁹.

Another scruple is enshrined in the case that many undocumented aliens are men and/or women who, having left their own children and families in the West Indies and elsewhere, are in the U.S. in search of employment in order to provide for these very children and families back home. Should the church engage in ministry that helps people who are breaking the law of the land and are neglecting their families? Would this not be morally questionable? If the people are illegally in the country wouldn't the church be violating the law of the land to encourage them with any or whatever form of support service?

This is certainly a scruple. Legally the undocumented persons are guilty of an act of violating the law since they have overstayed their allotted visas. Others chalk up criminal offences by either forging documents or arriving in the USA. without documents (such as crossing the border without going through the immigration and customs check). Most of the aliens in the church's community are visitors who have come

¹⁹ Michael J Christensen, *City Streets City People*, (Nashville: Abington, 1988), 33.

to the USA on a visitor's visa and for different reasons have overstayed their time. Should the church help these people?

The above questions require a compelling response. Well, many of these women find employment in the domestic field, either providing child or geriatric care. They work for little or nothing in terms of wages and are generally unable to pay a doctor's bill for a medical check up. Disease for many of them silently develops and becomes chronic before detection. Should the church sit idly by in worship, avoiding and evading this most conspicuous need in the community? Micah warns his church that God was displeased with a worship, which was loud in song and celebration, but justice was not rolling down (Micah 2). Saint James in writing to the church of the Diaspora contended that mercy triumphs over justice. He addressed this matter in the context where he firmly discouraged favoritism by believers since it is not only an act of indignity but it breaks the royal law of love before God. He notes that God will show no mercy to those who disrespect the poor, but that acceptance and kindness to the poor will cause God's mercy to triumph over His judgment even of His people²⁰ (James 2:1-13).

Legally reaching out to the undocumented is acceptable since the Welfare Act of 1996²¹ allows the Health-Care facilities in the community to address emergency needs of the undocumented. They are able to receive a measured amount of medical care. With this governmental backing it is proper and not a violation, nor is it an act of civil disobedience for the church to minister to the undocumented alien.

²⁰ It is in this same chapter 2 that James goes on to deal with faith without works as dead in the context of reaching out to someone without clothes and food. Mercy and justice should be demonstrated to the poor as true religion.

²¹ HCFA state Medicaid Manual (February 1997) Section 3211.11. To be eligible for emergency Medicaid, an alien must meet all eligibility requirements for Medicaid established by the state with one important exception. An alien, seeking emergency Medicaid is not required to comply with provisions concerning the declaration of satisfactory immigration status and verification of that status. This means that hospitals and other providers are not required to and indeed, should not attempt to verify an alien's immigration status as a condition of receipt of emergency services or for any other reason.

THE CALL OF THE SPIRIT

The third principle notes that the Sovereignty of the Spirit is a significant factor in city ministry. Greenway cites the Macedonian call in Acts 16²², calling attention to the fact that the missionary group had come to a standstill at Troas and the Spirit led them to Macedonia. This pericope points out that the group had gone to Phrygia, Galatia, the province of Asia, Mysia, and Bithynia, but was not allowed by the Holy Spirit to engage in ministry. However, in a vision, the beckoning of one desiring help stirred the Apostle to embark upon ministry.

The mission team was zealously seeking to engage in some area of service in connection with missions and a door opened to them. This is a case where the call of the Spirit became evident by the call of people in need. The voice of the Holy Spirit could be clearly discerned in the voice of one in desperate need.

It should cause no great alarm to note that undocumented people are people in great need asking for help. Many have come to the church seeking assistance, in the form of counsel, money, or recommendation for employment. Others have asked for prayer for healing from certain ailments. It seems that the church's ministry is motivated by a combination of factors, which are the command of the word of God; the evident need of which the church is made aware; and last but not least, the Holy Spirit's call which is clearly articulated in the needs of people, which are sometimes evinced in their beseeching and even reaching out for help.

²² Acts 16:6-7: Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to (NIV).

PARENTING THE ALIEN

The fourth principle is that city ministries must be personal and parental. Greenway cites the case of the Thessalonian church where Paul spoke of himself as a mother and father in ministry.²³

The concept of parental ministry requires the church to become an overseeing and responsible community for those in need of care. But, according to Greenway, not only is it to be parental ministry but also personal ministry,²⁴ which indicates the task of getting involved in intricate details in the lives of those whom one serves.

When this is applied to the context of the undocumented alien, it will be noted that these people are in search of a caring community, where they establish friends from whom they would find trust, support and counsel. The City Church ministry should certainly provide a sense of family and a sense of oversight, without being judgmental, for people who have left home and loved ones to take risk in the city.

One of the most definite areas requiring oversight is the area of health care. An undocumented person cannot walk off the street into the hospital and expect a medical examination. The price at a private practitioner for healthcare, along with lab tests and screenings, is prohibitive for many undocumented people. Many who do not present with any significant pain or obvious indication of health danger opt to visit a doctor only when there is palpable reason to do so. In many cases it is too late. The church can certainly take on this posture of parental oversight in looking after the basic health needs of people in the community who are not able to afford healthcare. The church may not be able to provide the services of a hospital or clinic, but could certainly be a resource center, whereby those in need may access the information and preventative care needed. In this way the church becomes a parent figure

²³ 1Thess 2: 7: but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children (NIV).

²⁴ Roger Greenway, Tape - UE - 102. W.T.S 1986.

in the community to whom the dependent will look for preventative care. The social image of the church as a caring agency becomes evangelistic.

This is the very principle behind Rauschenbusch's theology for the social gospel. His point is the need for the church to become socially concerned and active. In fact Rauschenbusch noticed that many ministerial students of his day were refusing to go into the ministry because they were uncertain as to whether they would be able to realize their social conviction as ministers to the people²⁵. He sees this concept of the social gospel as an expansion and intensification of the old salvation message. Probably this is where many evangelicals part ways with Rauschenbusch. Indeed many churches grew to the point of lacking interest in the social side of humanity. In a sense the church became too heavenly minded in dealing with the salvation of the soul that they had become little earthly good in their attempts to address the social needs of the church community. The church is hence invited to grow into a wider appreciation of what salvation is all about.

The church has done fairly well in undertaking social responsibility yet growth and expansion is needed if the church is to continue to be a viable light of the goodness of God to the present makeup of the community.

Robert E. Webber also sees the church as a nurturing and mothering community. He notes that evangelism in the early church was where conversion into Christ took place through the church. The church was the mother in whose womb God's children were born. Webber notes Isaiah 61-62 and Jeremiah 25, 33 reflect a relationship between God and Israel, which is further demonstrated in the relationship between Christ and the Church. Christ is the bridegroom and the church is the bride. It is from this concept that the church as mother originates and so offers a wealth of direction to the believing community regarding the function of the church.²⁶

²⁵ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Theology of Social Gospel*, (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 3.

²⁶ Webber, Robert E., *Liturgical Evangelism: Worship as Outreach and Nurture* (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1986), 6.

Being a mothering community bearing a womb for the birth of God's children redefines the role of the church as one of nurture and provider, even for the undocumented alien. In the first testament the alien was offered kindness under the law and was not to be discriminated against because of her status. In the second testament the matter of entertaining angels unawares is likened to welcoming strangers. The writer to the Hebrews (Heb 13:2) says we ought not to forget to entertain strangers because in the past some have been a host to angels and unaware of it.

It is sobering to note that even aliens may bring the blessing of God to a community. The injunction calls for God's believing community of people not to forget to be hospitable to such people. Why? Because some of them are messengers bringing gifts, blessings and messages from God. While caution is to be exercised in dealing with strangers, this biblical philosophy that God can use even an alien must cushion it. This does contribute significantly in abating excessive suspicion and formulating a balance ethic for ministry towards the undocumented alien.

Jesus goes beyond this and actually identifies with the stranger or alien (Matt 25:35, 36). This stranger takes a place as a stranger among humanity. Certainly the Lord came with the message of truth and with the disposition of a suffering servant and found a mixed reaction. As a stranger the commendation expressed to the caring host is "and you invited me in" (Matt. 25:35). Jesus esteemed this response highly as a mark of acceptance deserving a heavenly reward. Secondly Jesus found healing for His spirit since acceptance presupposes trust and respect in allowing Him to become part of the community. The ministry of entertaining or showing hospitality even to an undocumented alien is one of healing for the inner person. These are factors which affect the standing of the church in the community.

UNDERSTANDING THE ALIEN BIBLICALLY

Throughout Scripture different words are used for people who belong to another country or region. Such words as alien, stranger, foreigner, visitor, sojourner, are used generally to depict people who are unfamiliar with the custom or language, or cultural patterns of a local

people. Though in the period of the writing of the Scripture the term “undocumented alien” was not coined; yet the pattern of people moving from region to region is very replete in God’s word. It was so habitual that considerable reference and direction is commended to the Hebrew people regarding how the alien is esteemed. Some of the directive given them is predicated upon the fact that they themselves were also aliens. In summarizing the instructions given in Scripture to the believing community regarding the alien, it is to be noted that the alien was required to meet the acceptable standard for the celebration of Passover of the Lord, and, as a result, the alien was allowed to worship, hence their spiritual needs were met. (Ex. 12:48-49). They were not to be mistreated or oppressed. In fact the alien was to be loved and esteemed as one would a native born. The former oppressive experiences of the people of God should influence their conduct positively towards an alien. (Lev. 19:33, Ex. 22: 21). A tender conscience was to be exercised rather than acts of revenge or retaliation. The indignities of a poor work ethic were also outlawed. God required that legislation enshrine certain guidelines so that the alien was not exploited, but regarded as social equals, and rewarded in such a way so as to be able to provide for their needs. Protection in the Torah also was matter of justice. No alien was to be judged with lesser standards nor shown partiality. Such abuses were to be regarded as unconscionable (Ex 23:9, Deut. 18:17-18, 24:17-18).

MODELS FOR MINISTRY

There are two significant models, which exemplify approaches for ministering to strangers who are poor, and these should embody the church’s approach to attend to the undocumented aliens. These modules could be called (1) The Redemptive Model and (2) The Caring Model.

THE REDEMPTIVE MODEL

Care for the undocumented alien is typified in the story of Ruth, the Old Testament character and immigrant girl, who became a significant theological figure to any immigrant community. The book of Ruth depicts

an account of immigrant people beginning with a family of four -- husband, wife, and two sons immigrating from their hometown of Bethlehem to another country, Moab. The book revolves around the minority immigrant girl, Ruth, and ends with her finding accommodation and care.

In the first movement, the immigrant sons acquired native wives, which is indicative of the fact that they became settled and acculturated. However, as time went by, as is the case with numerous migrant families, great tragedy struck, leaving only the one member, Naomi, alive. Being a widow, she also acquired two widowed daughters-in-law as a result of the tragedy. Bitterness and anger dominated her emotional life.

Upon hearing that the Lord's blessings had returned to her hometown, Naomi opted to dispense with life in Moab that had dealt her such calamity. She even sought to free herself of her daughters-in-law, posing arguments about their future and economic dependence, hoping that they would remain in their homeland, Moab. However, Ruth does not buy into Naomi's reasoning and insisted that she would return to Bethlehem with Naomi. Having prevailed upon Naomi, Ruth had become, among other things, an extremely devoted and loyal immigrant.

The writer portrays how an immigrant who has good intentions is exploited, and is even oblivious to that fact. Sugirtharajah in his book *The Post Colonial Bible* calls for the Bible to be read from one's specific location²⁷. In the first place Ruth is a Moabite, which is highlighted consistently in the story²⁸. When Ruth turned up on Israelite soil she entered a socio-cultural setting, which viewed her with tremendous

²⁷ "Indeed the assimilative narrative position, which usually undergirds the reading of Ruth, is to be rejected for a more postcolonial reading" (R. S. Sugirtharajah, p. 13 ff). In this same text we see, for example, the "Danger of ignoring one's own cultural bias" (p. 66ff).

²⁸ Deut 23:3, 4: No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you.

suspicion and placed her at social distance. Ruth fits the category of an undocumented woman or an illegal alien in the city seeking to make a living. She probably was sensitive to the fact that she would not be willingly offered friendship in her new country. Many minorities and immigrants are friendless in the country of new beginnings.

Ruth was in need and willing to do anything for a living, even taking risks such as to work in the barley fields among men. Fewell and Gunn argue that Ruth was a victim of two injustices.²⁹ On the one hand she was sent to work in a dangerous context. The men on the field had only one use for a young, attractive alien woman. There is no record, however, that Ruth was advised explicitly about this danger by her mother-in-law. On the other hand she was used to entrap an inebriated man for the sole purpose of meeting the economic needs of her mother-in-law. This was an act of exposing her to sexual abuse. What risk! How dehumanizing! How low is the alien woman made to stoop for success?³⁰ She was set up as a target for sexual abuse and neglect. Naomi actually admitted to Ruth, sometime later (Ruth 2:22) that it was good that Ruth had not gone to another field because in another field she may have met with grave hostilities.

Undocumented aliens are exploited like Ruth, being put at great risk and great danger. Others risk their lives sacrificially to make ends meet with no workers compensation, and no Health Insurance. Some even work eighteen to twenty hours a day with one day off per week. These are the women who are raising children, and caring for elderly in the city. All these women find a model figure in Ruth with whom they can identify.

This notwithstanding, it was Boaz who helped to create self-worth for Ruth as he summed up her situation and offered her protection, safety, kindness and an opportunity to address her economic needs. He was dignified in his conduct towards her. In Ruth 2:15, Boaz's field workers are warned against being hostile to this stranger. Protection of her

²⁹ Danna Fewell & David Miller Gunn, *Compromised Redemption*, (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox, 1990), 76 ff.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 78 ff.

dignity and self worth in allowing her to work, was high on his priority list. Beyond this he would not stand idly by and allow any form of injustice toward her, so he advised his men regarding their conduct toward her. Boaz is a fine example as he exemplified respect for someone who by virtue of her race, gender and status did not earn respect and was denied many courtesies.

Boaz's example offers the church a fine posture to adopt in dealing with illegal aliens. Kindness, preservation of dignity, opportunity to meet their basic needs are virtues for which the undocumented person is searching. The urban church can take the Redemptive Model and offer to these illegal aliens in the city dignity, kindness and an opportunity to keep in good health, or to keep monitoring their health in order to prevent the onslaught of major illness. This would mean that the church could face its moral and legal scruples and arrive at a design to provide formidable programs for meeting the needs of these people, especially since the undocumented aliens often have made an unwritten commitment to remain in the city and not return to their homeland. The model as depicted by Boaz is quite helpful in dealing with an undocumented person. From this model one can borrow seven helpful indicators; they are as follows:

ATTENTION -- The undocumented aliens need someone to pay attention to their story, which is a unique one. Listening to their story involves both sympathizing and empathizing with them. When Boaz asked about the young woman, not only was he informed of her background and present connection, he was moved to action. Knowing makes the church obligated to act in grace. Once God was informed of humanity's calamity in the garden, God responded with mercy. Upon discovering the stories of the undocumented, the church must reach out to them with compassion (Jesus' condemnation in Matt. 25 was because they did not come to visit, nor were they receptive to a stranger).

COUNSEL -- Boaz immediately recognized that this new person was an alien who was in need. He promptly offered wise counsel regarding her conduct and safety in the land of new beginnings. Many aliens need counsel regarding how to access the resources available to them. In caring for the undocumented alien the church can develop a facility where free information is given regarding the laws of the land, as well as medical advice so as to put these people on good footing

concerning their well-being.

SELF-WORTH -- Being thrust into a new culture, one quickly becomes aware of one's unfamiliarity to accepted customs which tends to lead to devaluing of self. Strange women in a given culture often become objects for some men's curious exploits. Boaz tells Ruth that she was safe among the men. Then he gives her freedom to access basic necessities without being placed at the mercy of anyone (Ruth 2: 8-9). Any facility designed for ministry must ensure the dignity and self-worth of the undocumented alien. They must not be made to feel like they are less than human because they lack legal status.

OPPORTUNITY - The main purpose people come into this country illegally, or overstay their allotted visas is because they wish to find opportunity to better themselves. Many have come out of hardship in their country of origin. Boaz offered Ruth the prospect of providing for her economic well being--the very request she made of the servant in charge (Ruth 2:7-8). The church can consider offering the prospect of preventative medical care. Though limited, this will go a long way in addressing a great need. This care will extend to check ups with a view to detection of any developing disease. At a public or private clinic the undocumented alien would not get this benefit free of charge.

RECOGNITION - One of the painful experiences of the undocumented alien is their lack of acknowledgement and appreciation they receive for their achievements in life. Their value as people is often overlooked and unnoticed. Boaz was able to compliment Ruth on her kindness to her mother in law (Ruth 2:11). The endeavor to address the medical needs of an undocumented person is one way of acknowledging and valuing these people.

ACCEPTANCE - Trust is certainly an appropriate way to show acceptance to someone seeking refuge as Ruth did. This trust was expressed in welcoming her into the company of reapers both to work and eat with them (Ruth 2:11 - 16). Such action of caring for people is a handsome expression of acceptance. The church can reach out to attend to the health care needs of the undocumented alien, which is a Christ like pattern of valuing people. These people have to be invited to participate, made to feel welcome and become the recipients of genuine love and respect. Certainly this is a positive manner of showing acceptance to people who think they are unacceptable.

HELP - Offering people in need the help that is in one's power to give is an expression of godly virtue. In the Biblical context Boaz was able to help and he certainly did by allowing Ruth to glean in his field. Beyond this there was need for help that required legal processing. Boaz did not circumvent the law to help this young, virtuous woman, but rather sought to deal within the confines of the law of the land (Ruth 3:10 - 13). This is a sound principle in helping an undocumented alien. The church in reaching out to undocumented people must work within the restrictions of the law.

This model is quite instructive in caring for undocumented aliens. These people are valuable, and the church, while operating within the boundaries of the legal system, can be a sanctuary to these people. Undocumented people do not declare they are such. In fact, they may indicate otherwise. The church has to be proactive, like Boaz, in seeking out these people and gentle in offering them this opportunity for such needed care.

THE CARING AND COMPASSIONATE MODEL

Another significant model for caring is exemplified in the story of the Good Samaritan of Luke 10:25 - 37. This is a story of a victim in need of healthcare, who was unable to secure such, because some wicked people unjustly and aggressively denied this benefit. The victim is an unidentified person. There is no ethnicity, nationality, color of skin, speech community, religious affiliation, nor connection to any interest groups, revealed about this person, except that he was a victim in need of health care. The lack of identity puts the victim in the category of an undocumented person since the illegal alien has no documents for identification. The story reveals that the victim was stripped of raiment, wounded and left half dead. Two religious figures became aware of the dire need of this victim but did nothing about it. Then a Samaritan who was least expected to offer assistance did actually get involved and provided means whereby life and hope could be sustained in the victim's life.

The story yields interesting factors that help in understanding what aliens deal with in the pursuit of economic betterment. This victim was

stripped of clothing. Clothing for many is a covering, which provides a sense of dignity and earns some respect. Victimization here is by stripping away personal property ruthlessly and violently. Many aliens become victims by being stripped of their dignity, respect and limited finances.

The victim in this story was also left wounded. Undoubtedly there was grievous bodily harm inflicted. Undocumented aliens say they are often wounded in their feelings. One such person tells of arriving at her house-cleaning job late one morning as a result of heavy rains and traffic jams. Being confronted by a most unhappy employer who reasoned that as a result of the late arrival it was time to end her working relationship. The undocumented employee's response was "After three and a half years are you going to get rid of me for such a small issue". The employer's response was as a matter of fact, "you must leave now". The employee wept as cops were called in. The employer called the cops who came and escorted this undocumented alien and her belongings to the sidewalk-- in the rain! This account speaks of the hurt from the deep wound received from this incident.

The Samaritan story goes on to show the role the religious factor plays in the matter. Both a priest and a Levite passed by, but they passed on the other side. The priest represents the responsibility of connecting people to God, bringing the message of healing of the Spirit to wounded and broken victims³¹. But this religious figure neglected to do this. Beyond this, the victim was left half dead, which means the victim was helpless and could do nothing to sustain life. To pass on the other side of the walkway from where the victim was, having seen the calamity of the victim, meant that the religious figure was disinterested, disengaged, unconcerned, detached, unmoved and self absorbed. The fact that this priest represented God³² indirectly conveyed that this was God's posture to the victim in crisis.

³¹ Lester L. Grabbe, *Priests: A Socio-Historic Study*. (Trinity Press : Valley Forge, 1995), 41ff .

³² *Ibid.* 64 -65.

Moltmann reminds us that “the self - respect of anyone who is shut out and rejected is profoundly injured”³³. The church being the body of Christ is the religious representation of God to victims seeking survival to care for their needs. The church cannot afford to be detached, disengaged, self absorbed and unmoved by the needs in the community. If the church would turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to these needs in the community, it is tantamount to saying God has rejected the poor and nameless undocumented alien and nothing can be done to save them. But with the church there is hope for the victims of the city.

The other religious figure in the Good Samaritan story was the Levite who came by the near tragic scene, took time out to look but crossed over and went on his way. He was curious but uncaring, inquiring but unfeeling, probing but distant, questioning but unsympathetic. This is another heart-rending model to be avoided. In a sense it gives a false hope. It gives the notion that something could be done to help, but in fact nothing is done. This is instructive, calling attention to the fact that the church cannot be indifferent, nor can the church process information and neglect to act upon it³⁴. God’s shining face is indicative of life, love and blessing. This is what the religious community should offer to victims. Someone stripped of dignity, respect, hope and love desperately looks into the face of the onlooker with expectation, hoping that the face would shine some hope, healing and love. The church is indeed a beacon of light to a community. But then came along the Good Samaritan. This is another stranger who did the opposite to what the religious people did. This stranger rather than crossing over to get away from addressing the need, crossed over to meet the need. This is the proper attitude toward a victim, one of compassion. Compassion was expressed in identifying with the victim and offering the victim hope. Then the Samaritan proceeded to offer healthcare by bounding up the victims wounds and by administering agents of healing. Measures were taken to bring about healing.

³³ Jurgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today’s world* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 16.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 93.

The model of the Good Samaritan offers a fine paradigm to the city church in meeting the needs of the undocumented people in the community. In the first place, these people have no identity and many are victims of poverty, and even government economic neglect in their homeland, and they have come to New York with one prayer on their hearts: "O God Make thy face shine upon us and be gracious unto us". They are not looking to the government to do anything for them, with some remote thought of an amnesty. They are looking to God to provide for them. But the system is of such that they are unable to seek gainful employment since they do not have documents. In fact they have found themselves to be victims, exploited, cheated and are left wounded and unable to defend or protect themselves. The city church must step in and offer compassion in binding up the hearts of these victims. Wine and oil are agents to bring about healing. The city church must begin to pour the wisdom and care into the wounded hearts of these people.

There is a poignant lesson from this narrative which should influence any program of ministry to assist these undocumented victims. For the church to be effective in community it must be engaged in a ministry of "knowing and being". The setting of the Good Samaritan parable is a young lawyer seeking to justify himself by highly regarding his own righteousness, and as a result asked Jesus "who is my neighbor?". Jesus gave him two answers to his one question. First He showed him how to spot a neighbor. They are people in the community including any person in need, such as unnamed victims. Secondly, in asking the lawyer the question "who was neighbor to him, Jesus obligates the lawyer to acknowledge that the real focus in life's process is being a neighbor. The church is a community of concerned people and must make it a priority to know the demographics, mores, folkways and culture of the community, and to be neighborly to those in the community, even those who are in need. Effective ministry requires the church to avoid being evasive, disinterested, and detached, and to pay attention to even the marginalized, half dead victims of circumstances.

In summary, the city church must recognize that where it is placed for ministry, combined with its ethnicity and resources, along with the needs of the community, all convey significant indicators as to what is God's calling for that church.