

Ruddick, Anna.

Reimagining Mission from Urban Places—Missional Pastoral Care.

London: SCM Press, 2020.

ISBN: 9780334058656

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THE BOOK *REIMAGINING MISSION from Urban Places* is an outline of Anna Ruddick's doctoral thesis, in which she depicts the results of her qualitative ethnographic research as a practical theologian: She interviewed team members of the Eden Network and community members who live alongside each other in marginalized urban areas¹ in the UK. The question that motivated her research is, "What does it take to change a life?" (189). The main result is a blend of missional aspects and pastoral care, called "missional pastoral care" (chapter 3), which is shaped by seven elements: "being among people who are different, living locally, being available, taking practical action, long-term commitment, consistency, and love" (1).

1. For marginalized urban areas in Germany, see Eiffler, Felix. *Kirche für die Stadt*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020, 179–202.

Anna Ruddick criticizes the excessive use of the term “transformation” without clarifying what it really means and what the potential pitfalls are. In her opinion, the term is mostly used in a too-narrow sense that does not take into account the time that is needed for change (e.g. conversion as a process²). To describe how people change (chapter 2) she refers to the “meaning system” that every human being has. Change occurs “through the re-evaluation and re-making of their personal meaning system” (27). To describe the process for life change, she introduces the method of “hermeneutical play,” which combines a challenge to perspective with an affirmation of personhood.

This research points out to the discrepancy between expectations about mission and the daily reality that the interviewed team members experience so that “many struggle to accept their mission for what it is” (5). They find it difficult to reconcile “reality with their expectations” (13). She states that “Reality is good enough” (chapter 1) and that mission is more than often “messy, slow, and complicated” (chapter 4).

Ruddick questions the dominant evangelical missional narrative as unfitting for the challenges of urban ministry (chapter 6). Rather than abandoning it, she tries to rethink and enrich the evangelical missional narrative by a *missio Dei* theology (and linked to it the theology of *imago Dei*), the expectation of the incoming kingdom of God and a search for a foretaste of God’s *shalom* (chapter 5). This adjustment is a result of the experiences the interviewees made in their urban context. They discovered that God was already at work at those marginalized places through the people living there, even though they don’t consider themselves Christians. This experience changed the perspective on mission for many interviewed team members, who mostly have an evangelical background. In the course of their mission in marginalized urban areas, their working (or operant) theology changed,

2. This matches with a Greifswald study made in 2010 about the conversion of adults to the Christian faith. See Zimmermann, Johannes, and Anna-Konstanze Schröder. *Wie finden Erwachsene zum Glauben? Einführung und Ergebnisse der Greifswalder Studie*. 2nd ed. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2011.

“allowing cultural and theological assumptions to color their attitudes” (169).

Anna Ruddick summarizes, “Mission doesn’t work the way we think it does. In reality, it works through making and remaking meaning, happening in shared life. It is not something we do to others for God but something God is doing in the world, including us” (7).

The book is a well-made combination of empirical data and thorough theological reflection. From a Lutheran perspective I would emphasize some aspects a bit differently (e.g. the relationship between Bible and tradition) and appreciate a more critical approach to charismatic evangelicalism, but overall the work is persuasive. Her conclusions and suggestions for the practice of mission (chapter 7) are as useful as they are inspiring. It would be promising to combine Anna Ruddick’s approach with the four dimensions of contextualization (transcultural, countercultural, contextual, culturally reciprocal) described by the German theologian Christian Grethlein.³

A critical point could be whether Anna Ruddick may be biased in her research, due to her membership in the Eden Network. Regardless, this does not reduce the quality of her insights.

3. Grethlein, Christian. *Kirchentheorie: Kommunikation des Evangeliums im Kontext*. De Gruyter: Berlin/Boston, 2018, 41–45.