

Robert Stewart Memorial United Reformed Church, Newcastle upon Tyne

“Regeneration” - Challenges to Urban Mission
Some biblical and theological reflections



Robert Stewart Memorial United Reformed Church

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INTRODUCTION:

Ray Anglesea is a self supporting minister (unpaid) within the United Reformed Church (URC) and a community regeneration officer working with Planning Aid North (PAN).

Robert Stewart Memorial United Reformed Church

Robert Stewart Memorial United Reformed Church (RSM) is part of the United Reformed Church Northern Synod. Although one of the smaller mainstream denominations, the United Reformed Church plays a dynamic and challenging part in the British Christian community. It has brought together English Presbyterians, English, Welsh and Scottish Congregationalists, and members of the Churches of Christ, through unions in 1972, 1981 and 2000. One hundred thousand people make up 1600 congregations, with nearly 800 ministers, paid and unpaid.

Planning Aid North

PAN is the Royal Town Planning Institute's (RTPI) Regional Planning Aid Service in the North of England. It is an independent charitable organisation and winner of the 2007 prestigious RTPI Regional Award for Planning Achievement. PAN provides free professional help, advice and support on town planning matters to people and communities who cannot afford to hire a planning consultant.

Context

As well as working for PAN, Ray held the position of interim moderator of RSM during the period 2006/7. The church situated in the West End of Newcastle is located on the doorstep of Benwell and Scotswood, inner city neighbourhoods renowned for their poor housing choices, high unemployment, poor environment and inadequate community infrastructure. The role of the community regeneration officer has been to support the communities of Benwell and Scotswood during the preparation of the Benwell and Scotswood Area Action Plan (AAP), particularly faith groups, elderly, children and young people to ensure that their voices are heard during the various stages of plan preparation.

Emerging City Life – Survival and Adaptation

If Christianity is to remain vital to a new emerging city life and a society at the margins¹ then it is vital that the church understands patterns of urban change: for an organism to show signs of life it must show that it can respond to the environment, and for the church to retain a vibrancy about its faith it must adapt and survive.² Archbishop Rowan Williams said at an after-dinner speech in Chatham³ that "it is not a matter of how we create something that never has to change; it's to do with how we cope with change in a way that has integrity and continuity, that secures for us a background of trustworthiness which encourages creativity." As the prophet said "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it."⁴

¹Hall P. *Cities in Civilisation*, Weindenfeld & Nicholson 1998, p 944

²Brewin K. *The Complex Christ: Signs of emergence in the urban church*, SPCK, 2004, p 1

³BURA (British Urban Regeneration Association) and Church in Society Conference, Bridgewood Manor, Chatham, Kent, 16 March 2005. Address entitled "Sustainable Communities."

⁴Marx, K. *Collected Works*. Volume 5, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976, page 5

New Mission Strategy

Any new church mission strategy hoping to exert a positive influence on the shifting and dynamic context of city life in such a “strange and unprecedented environment.”⁵ will need to reflect theologically on the secular and spiritual events that form part of the “texture of our lives.”⁶ This painstaking task of interpretation may be seen as a faithful response to the scriptural mandate to read the sign of the times.⁷

The Paper

This paper is a result of a period of time (20 months) spent working and worshipping with friends at RSM and with my own colleagues in the regeneration industry. It is an attempt to understand and flesh out the many conversations and sermons which took place with elders and church members during that time as well as discussions with regeneration colleagues (who provided the raw materials for this paper). I offer some relevant biblical and theological resources that might assist the minister/urban practitioner in the task of understanding the church’s mission in a complex, cosmopolitan, multi-racial city where often the emerging reality of urban life in disadvantaged communities is set against a city core of new, global economy of interests and expectations that define urban life and work.

After some explanation of the biblical word “city” and some background information about the word “regeneration” (from a faith perspective) I have chosen 3 theologies to look at, namely:- creation, mission, and wealth theologies – offering a critique where appropriate interspersed with some biblical reflections. I hope this paper will provide some challenging pointers and new directions in urban city mission.

Of particular interest to the church may be the ministerial outcomes which are set out at the end of the paper – some thoughts on what the church can learn from the regeneration industry and what the regeneration industry can learn from the church.

For those wishing to pursue further reading, a bibliography is appended to this paper.

⁵Davey A. *Urban Christianity and Global Order*, London: SPCK, 2001, p7

⁶Hobsbawn E. *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914 – 1991*, Michael Joseph, 1994, p4

⁷Christians are called by Christ to read the signs of the times. He rebukes the Pharisees and Sadducees who desired that he would show them a sign from heaven, saying, “O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye discern the sign of the times?” (Matt. 16.3)

Biblical and Theological Reflections

1.1 One of my favourite pieces of music is Aaron Copeland's "The Quiet City"⁸ The hauntingly beautiful and melancholic trumpet solo strikes discordant notes as it tries to portray the tensions that exist in the modern city. The nervousness and restless of the music reflects in some way the extremes and contradictions of today's complex modern city life.

Cities and the Bible

1.2 The bible too is uneasy, inconclusive and ambivalent towards cities, a view shared by many secular theorists.⁹ On the one hand Christian tradition has it that the city is understood as a focus of violence and human hubris. On the other, the city is the model of what will finally be redeemed, the paradigm of the human home and the focus of human creativity. The city, according to the bible, is both Babylon - the place of alienation, exile, estrangement and violence, and Jerusalem - the place where God dwells, where God's sign is set, a place where humankind is invited to peace. This twofold imaging of the city calls for a dialectic.¹⁰ Any city is always at any one time both Babylon and Jerusalem, as we are reminded by Jesus' description of Jerusalem, the city of peace is also the one who stones the prophets (Luke 19: 4-10). The Christian pilgrimage is often seen as a journey towards that final city not to be found among the cities of the world. For God "hath prepared for them another city" (Hebrews 11.16).

Cities and Theology

1.3 Theology begins with location.¹¹ It is within a particular context, for me, Newcastle¹² that my theological reflection takes place. The struggles and the restlessness of the city, reflected in Copeland's music and so evident in Benwell and Scotswood neighbourhoods and the shining glass and chrome of the new Eldon Square Emporium and the swish, up-and-coming Quayside, exhibit powerful forces that shape contemporary society,¹³ and its divergent features often reflects differences in theological thinking. Such an assessment of theological thinking would, I surmise, include the city as a focus for commerce, retail and employment; a city as a locus of power; as a meeting point for cultures and faiths; as a place of intersection for cultures and people on the move; as a magnet for socially excluded persons and deprived neighbourhoods; as a place of hidden injustice; as a social centre and entertainment venue; as a place of anonymity; as a place of continual change and transformation.

1.4 But before looking at my 3 chosen theological themes I thought it might be worth looking at some of the theories and concepts that lie behind the rhetoric of regeneration, that word that slips so easily off the tongue!

Cities and that word Regeneration

⁸ Quiet City (1990) by composer Aaron Copeland is one of Copeland's incidental scores. According to the composer, the piece was to express "the nostalgia and inner distress of a society that is profoundly aware of it's own insecurity."

⁹Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Lewis Mumford and Peter Hall all express this ambivalence - especially Mumford.

¹⁰Gorringe, T. J. *A Theology of the Built Environment*, Cambridge University Press 2002, p140

¹¹Duffield, I K. *Urban Theology: Location, Vocation, Action* from *Faithfulness in the City*, ed John Vincent, Monad Press, 2003, page 266

¹² Newcastle was voted *one of the world's most creative cities* by *Newsweek* magazine in 2002 while *more recently*, *Guardian* and *Observer* readers voted it the best city to visit in England

¹³Davies, N. E. "Developing a Theology of the City," from "God in the Centre" a report of the Cardiff Centre Research Project, based with the Dept of Religious and Theological Studies, Cardiff University of Wales, 2001.

1.5 Since 1945 British urban planning has been punctuated by a series of keywords with a common prefix - “*Renewal*” in the 1960’s and “*redevelopment*” in 1970’s before the ascendancy of “*redevelopment*” in the 1980’s and “*renaissance*” projects in the late 1990’s. These initiatives followed the “*reconstruction*” of the immediate post-war years. Recently British urban planning has pursued the concept of *regeneration*. Of late there has been a technical shift, to some degree at least, in the understanding contained in the word regeneration, drawing on such concepts as *people-centred* (in terms of consultation and empowerment), *economically flexible* (i.e. private/public partnership), *joined-up government* (including regional and local authority levels) and *sustainability* (i.e. 10-20 years time frame). The official line is that regeneration is now a multi-faceted, interdisciplinary activity attacking social exclusion (rather than poverty) on many simultaneous fronts (e.g. the NDC agenda of health, education and skills; housing and physical environment; crime and work and enterprise).¹⁴

1.6 The current vogue for the word regeneration for people of faith, has deeper resonances. Furbey¹⁵ writing as a Christian commentator, reflects that “it is a typically post modern word which under the present government’s commitment to “third way” policies is helpful in that it can contain a variety of different connotations.”

1.7 Regeneration is a signifier of profound change in many religious traditions and political ideologies, both radical and conservative. Regeneration is a word fused with religious hope and has a central place in religions as conventionally understood. It is present too in much more recent developments in spirituality often associated with the New Age, which in turn shade into post-modern secular psychological expressions.

1.8 In Latin regeneration means rebirth and in Greek it refers to becoming new again or reconstitution. The idea is implicit in Judaeo Christian scripture and explicit in the Christian New Testament where it is one of several metaphors used to convey a drastic, radical transformation wrought by the Spirit of Christ. In the New Testament the Greek noun *palingenesia* occurs only twice (Matthew 19:28 “new world,” AV “regeneration” Titus 3:5 “regeneration”).¹⁶ In the Matthew passage it is used eschatologically to refer to the restoration of all things; the renewal of the individual is part of the wider cosmic renewal. In Titus the word is used with an individual reference. Other ideas of regeneration are found in the Hindu belief in rebirth; the new birth of Jewish proselytes; Stoic doctrines of cosmic restoration following world conflagration and Hellenistic pagan mystery religions which connected regeneration with various sacramental rites which assured victory over death, personal transformation and immortality.

1.9 Even within Christianity the word is stretched to cover diverse and conflicting understandings. For some regeneration is strongly social and ecological, requiring commitment to social justice and liberation and the hope of a new earth as well as a new heaven. For others regeneration is spiritualized referring predominantly to the born again individual.

1.10 Regeneration then is an ancient term, with echoes in established religious traditions and a century’s sociological and social policy debate. The word also draws its power from its association with the much more modern quest for personal transformation and empowerment and from the unprecedented status of biological

¹⁴ *National Strategy Action Plan*, Social Exclusion Unit, January 2001

¹⁵ *Critical Social Policy*, Volume 19 November 1999, pps 419 - 445

¹⁶ *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* part 3, Inter Varsity Press 1988, page 1324

science. Regeneration is, therefore, recognised in a number of disciplines as a distinctive idea.

1.11 In planning terms, regeneration presents itself as a more powerful and particularly encompassing metaphor. It offers more than revitalization of old structures and processes by promising a more radical urban rebirth and sustainable self-renewal set within a policy regime, which remains wedded to specific time limited interventions and quantifiable outputs.

1.12 Perhaps the Bishop of Durham, Tom Wright¹⁷ writing in Easington Colliery during Holy Week 2007 sums up the word, from the Christian tradition, as simply.....

“And that is why we need to leave behind, on the cross, all the bits and pieces of the old creation that have made us sad, that have depressed us and our communities, and start to pray for vision and wisdom to know where God can and will make new creation happen in our lives, in our hearts, in our homes and not least in our communities. That’s what “regeneration” is all about!”

¹⁷ *The Cross and the Colliery*, SPCK, 2007, page 77

CREATION THEOLOGY

2.0 In the earlier Jewish tradition, creation formed a minor theme in comparison with the choosing of the people of God; in classical Christianity, the theme of creation often serves to introduce that of the Fall. By contrast, contemporary theology speaks of a continuing engagement between the Holy Spirit and the created order. The city is clearly one significant place where that process is seen at its most dynamic and challenging.

God the worker

2.1 The opening verses of the bible see God at work, creating the heavens and the earth. Urban practitioners share in God's ongoing work of creation. The human vocation is one of stewardship; human beings are guardians or trustees of creation of which they are apart. As such, they are answerable to God, for whom creation ultimately exists. This insight - that human beings are to care for God's creation and that urban practitioners help to reveal his glory,¹⁸ provides the basis for a truly theocentric theology. The mission of God as creator, therefore, is to bring into being, to sustain and perfect the whole creation.¹⁹ Perhaps Newcastle's quayside and the proposed new housing Expo site in Scotswood might, arguably, reflect the vibrancy of an emerging, artistic, inventive city life with its new dynamic businesses and vivacious, colourful architectural designed buildings.

2.2 The Old Testament book of Genesis also portrays human beings as made in God's image. This God conveyed through scripture is, as we say in the religious profession, a "trinity of persons-in-relationship." Human beings find their true identify in relationships, relationships characterised by intimacy and self-giving. This might bring into questions the way human beings are perceived in the process of economic globalisation, could they be perceived in terms of autonomous individuals free from obligation and serving their own self-interest? The competitive struggle for power that is part of the process is an expression of this.

A new world

2.3 The remaking of this new earth (which includes the regeneration of our cities) is bound up in the Easter proclamation. Christ is Risen! Easter is about the beginning of God's new world.²⁰ This new world dawns when the Risen Lord Jesus, dressed as a gardener in the old garden, the second Adam, meets Mary Magdelene in a new garden. The Christian hope²¹ is that because Christ has been raised we too will be raised; in the meantime we are the first fruits of his new creation,²² working with men and women in paradise.²³ The outcome of this is that urban practitioners not only share in Gods creative world, in the redevelopment and renewal of cities, they also live and work in the power of the resurrection, in that new world which the Easter story talks about. Because of the resurrection the work of urban practitioners and planners is not in vain but is potentially of eternal value.²⁴

A new plan for Jerusalem

¹⁸ *Isaiah 6*: "The train of his robe filled the temple" (verse 1) but "the whole earth is full of his glory" (verse 3).

¹⁹ *Mission-shaped church*, Church House Publishing, 2004, page 85

²⁰ "Arguments for Easter," from *The Independent*, Tom Wright, Bishop of Durham, April 10, 2004

²¹ 1 Corinthians 15:20-22

²² *Morning Prayer*, from *Celebrating Common Prayer*, The Daily Office SSF, Mowbray 1992, Page 13

²³ *Common Worship* - extended preface for use with Eucharistic Prayers A, B and E, from Easter Day until the Eve of Ascension, Common Worship, Church House Publishing, 2000.

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:58

2.4 Like Ebenezer Howard (1850 – 1928), the father of modern day town planning and pioneer of the quiet romanticised Garden City movement, and later the strategic economic plans for the regeneration of Newcastle, the physical reconstruction of a specific community was very much in the mind of an old Testament visionary, Nehemiah, in the 5-6th century BC when he set about overseeing the rebuilding of the Jerusalem's city's walls and temple (Nehemiah 4:1-2; 5:1-11). Nehemiah's master plan was to reconstruct the walls and the city for the glorification of the God of Israel, the restoration of the worship of God, the recovery of social justice and the liberation of the community from debt-slavery and hunger. What Nehemiah hadn't bargained for was the criticism and objection from groups within his own community and people of his new master plan – it did not resemble in any way, shape or form, Solomon's original walls or temple. No change there then!

2.5 Like Nehemiah, urban practitioners are continually changing and redeveloping their physical and social environment. The logical outcome of remaking and renewing the earth means that God has not created his world once and for all. It implies that creation is continually evolving: it is in process. We do not live in a static, dead and abstract world. We live in a temporal world; the past influences the future. We live in a state of flux.²⁵ This is what is known as process theology. In process theology urban practitioners are seen as co-workers with God.

Sacred space

2.5 The Bishop of Liverpool, James Jones in his latest book *Jesus and the Earth* puts forward the view that not only is humanity redeemed by Christ's death on the cross but also the earth is too. He suggests the proposition that the earth, and thereby the footprint of the city, becomes a sanctified, holy space. This idea is imaginatively confirmed by a little verse from the Old Testament, Isaiah 66 v1 that tells us that the earth is the "footstool of God." In other words a space occupied by God, a sacred space? Tim Gorrige in his book *A Theology of the Built Environment*, page 36, reinforces this proposition and suggests that "there can be no division between secular and sacred space. God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer is to be found in all space and all space is grounded and has its origins in God."

2.6 Take for example the well known story of Moses at the burning bush. God invited Moses to take off his sandals, for the place where they both were was holy ground. In making himself known to Moses, God did not obliterate the earth, the natural world, or float above it, or transport Moses to another place to meet him, God met Moses at the burning bush, in the here and now, in ordinary time. True, the *kairos moment* or 'appointed time' which the Archbishop of Canterbury spoke about at the launch of the book *Mission Shaped Church*²⁶ are, like the Annunciation, Nativity and Resurrection, unique occasions of revelatory grace. But such events, however unique, should not allow us to dismiss the *chronos* or 'ordinary time' that we inhabit in the secular, banal, tick-tock events of life as we live them in Newcastle and Benwell and Scotswood. It is these places where God's presence may be experienced. Everywhere, the Spirit is superabundant, kindling willing hearts "to renew the face of the earth." By encounter

²⁵ *Process theology* challenges the traditional view of God often presented in Christianity. The traditional belief is that God is perfect, static and that human activity tends not to influence God or change God. Process theology is grounded in the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947). In the modern era John Cobb Jr. has been a significant developer of Whitehead's philosophy within the context of Christian theology. Process theology is also pantheistic believing that everything is *in* God rather than pantheistic which is the idea that everything *is* God.

²⁶ In 2004 the General Synod of the Church of England commended the report "Mission-shaped church" to the whole of the Church of England.

and connection, the *chronos* becomes *kairos* and the secular becomes sacred.²⁷ As the Welsh poet and priest R S Thomas from his poem “*Emerging*” (*In Frequencies*, Macmillan 1978) put it:-

*We are beginning to see
now it is matter is the scaffolding
of spirit; that the poet emerges
from morphemes and phonemes: that
as form in sculpture is the prisoner
of the hard rock, so in every day life
it is the plain facts and natural happenings
that conceals God and reveals him to us
little by little under the mind's tooling.*

2.7 Although this poem says something about Christian mission it also tells us where Christ may be found. This is where our transcendent, ascended God may be encountered, for this is where he has revealed his glory – on the hallowed ground where Moses must remove his shoes.

The city gone wrong

2.8 Yet Tom Wright, Bishop of Durham mentioned in his enthronement sermon²⁸ that the biblical symbol for evil is the “garden gone wrong” - thorns and briars where there should be fruitful shrubs and trees, or derelict, despoiled and degraded inner city areas where there should be fine houses, gardens and green spaces. Markets which cease to be vehicles of service become arenas of selfish activity, deception, distortion and domination come to characterise the relationship of human beings, and where the desire for growth, often at the expense of others, becomes obsessive and idolatrous. In the prophetic denunciation of Jerusalem the city as a whole is condemned for having a political and economic system that devours people like wolves and seizes their wealth (Ezek 22.23-27).

2.9 One of the great Christian themes is that something has gone badly wrong as cities have developed, changed and grown, a view shared by Muslim and Jewish theologians, regeneration colleagues as well as countless environmentalists, pressure groups and lobbyists. Christians would argue that the wholeness of the earth, the future of the planet depends upon the repentance and restoration to wholeness of the human family. Christians believe that the only way that the earth can be relieved of its “curse” is through the forgiveness, healing and restoration of Adam’s successor, namely Jesus Christ, through his death and resurrection.

2.10 Jacques Ellul, (1912 –1994) French philosopher, sociologist, theologian, and Christian anarchist, would be profoundly pessimistic towards an urban order that leaves no room for hope or action. The city – like technology – he suggest, contradicts the divine nature of creation and can never become a vehicle for goodness and salvation, something which might be inferred from viewing the Wachowski brothers film “*The Matrix*” (1999). Here as elsewhere in the Bible the prophets castigate the waywardness of the city, which many preachers in the pulpit do! But Ellul fails to acknowledge that prophets also, on other occasions, speak more positively and view the urban order with all its moral shortcomings as home to the

²⁷ From the Editorial, *The Pastoral Review*, July 2005

²⁸ *Pilgrims of Hope* (Isaiah 55.1-13; Mark 8.34-9.1) N T Wright, Bishop of Durham on the occasion of his enthronement in Durham Cathedral, October 12, 2003

exile, sanctuary for the stranger²⁹ and a place of justice for the persecuted. Taken the prophetic word of judgment and promise together provides a more theologically nuanced interpretation than Ellul and perhaps reflects a hero of mine, Archbishop's William Temple, who once stated "notwithstanding a tendency to sinfulness, human institutions are still worthy of endorsement because they are integral to creation and as such, part of God's own providential order."

²⁹ Philip Sheldrake writing in *City of God/Human City*, *Borderlands*, Summer 2005, suggests that God is often powerfully experienced in place that are "strange" to us. There, people who are alien challenge our sense of familiarity. New Testament scholars note that Jesus regularly pushed his disciples way from familiar places towards places that were threatening because the people were marginal or Gentiles – strangers.

A THEOLOGY OF MISSION

3.0 If theology is to do with location, theology is also to do with thinking about mission and thinking about mission has to do about thinking about God.³⁰ As we read in the last chapter, having created the world God's mission is now to reveal himself to his people. That is what the church is for – to further God's mission.

3.1 All too often the model of mission presupposes that mission is about passing on a message or about recruiting to an organisation. I understand mission to be about something very different. Archbishop Rowan Williams asserts that God made the world as somewhere where God's life can be given and received, so that there can be an overflow of joy. We look to the world and to the city because God's life is there. The mission of the church flows out from that. Of course God is a missionary God, already active, living and working in the city. Mission, therefore, must always be to do with a vision of the church as something that happens when Christ meets people ...with transforming affect.

Encounters and changes in a coastal city

3.2 One of the more exciting aspect of mission is to be found in the Acts of the Apostles. Luke reports the visions of Peter (Acts 10: 9b - 16, 24 - 29, 34 - 36, 44 - 48) in the Mediterranean coastal town of Joppa. Although Peter's visions, unlike Nehemiah's master plan, did not portray the physical reconstruction of a city they did point to how members of a city were to live in it following the coming of the Spirit of Christ. Luke was writing at a time when it was not only Jews who were joining the new movement, Gentiles too were responding to the Christian message. The decision of Peter to baptise a gentile household into the Christian faith was nothing less that revolutionary. It had a dramatic effect. The Apostles were to discover that God does new things in new cultural contexts. The Christian faith teaches that things need not always be as they are – that transformation of individuals, communities and of society are always possible.³¹ When the people of God seriously engage in mission with other people, those others are sometimes changed; the people of God always need to be aware that they will be too.

The church is mission

3.3 God is still doing new things in new cultural contexts. Strategies for urban mission contained in recent reports such as *Mission Shaped Church*, *Catch the Vision*, *Fresh Expressions* and the work of *The Commission on Urban Life and Faith* (set up to promote a vision of urban life which addresses and analyses the realities of its glories, injustices and its needs) are an acknowledgement and a response to the fact that the world and society has changed.

3.4 Urban mission has to reckon with a wider cultural context – highly mobile and affluent relatively young people who live and work in the city, in a society increasingly dominated by consumerism and "pick-and-mix" spiritualities. The challenge for the churches is to rediscover a gospel faithfulness to present God's word of selfless love to those outside the church. By inference this might involve an ecclesial revolution as the demands of the hour require a change of ethos: from churches being inwardly looking and largely self-serving organisations to their becoming part of a movement whose very purpose is to reform individuals and reshape society; to engage in a society in which they are called to be a sacrament of God's love. *The fundamental*

³⁰ Williams R. *Sharing God, being God*, Thinking Mission, Vol 1 No 1 USPG, Spring 2003

³¹ *Coalfields Regeneration in the North East*. The contribution of Faith Communities, 1998 page 6

point here is that the *raison d'être* of the church is mission. That fact is central to New Testament witness and the bible provides helpful metaphors to understand Christian mission.

Salt, light and yeast

3.5 By living as salt, light and yeast, Christians are called to live as a real presence in their communities to strengthen and give integrity to those living and working within the city. The imperative of mission forces the church to a radical reshaping of what is involved in being the church. David Bosch outlines no fewer than 13 ways in which contemporary Christians have approached mission. He advises “mission has to be multi-dimensional in order to be credible and faithful to its origins and character” (Bosch 1991: 512). Recent ecumenical work has produced a helpful expression of the 5 essential marks of Christian mission.³²

3.6 Ann Morisy in her latest book *Journeying Out* argues that Christians are required to see themselves as kingdom people, not church people, and supports Bosch’s view that mission which serves the Gospel has to manifest itself in action. But for the church to attempt to “preach the gospel” amongst the new architecture and economies of our regenerated cities it must develop a dialectical view, one which holds in interactive tension the requirement to pay attention to “tradition” as well as “context,” “theory” but also “practise”. A huge part of Christian mission essentially is humanitarian and, hence, *not* overtly Christian, so the way is open for the church to engage with those of other faiths and all people of goodwill who live in the city. Nevertheless, the church too needs to relearn the importance of evangelism in a holistic view of mission. It has an obligation to give a clear account of what it believes and why we do things, through its statements and activities.

³² In 1984 the *Anglican Consultative Council* (www.anglicancommunion.org) began to develop a “mission statement” for the worldwide Anglican communion, and the bishops of the Lambeth Conference adopted these “Five Marks Of Mission” in 1988. They were then adopted by the General Synod of the Church of England in 1996.

THE THEOLOGY OF WEALTH

4.0 As the economic progress of Newcastle has shown globalisation and economic growth driven by the relentless engine of technological advance is here to stay and cannot be wished away. It is in the nature of things that biotechnology and robotics will drive new technological tendencies further and further, aided and abetted by globalisation processes, information and communication technologies.³³ Wealth theology therefore provides an unusual and stimulating challenge for the church in Newcastle, living amongst the city's ever growing financial, entertainment and retail life.

The paradigm shift

4.1 Any theological and ethical reflection on prosperity³⁴ has to begin with the inalienable dignity and value of the individual human person, who, as Augustine stated "only thrives in community." Philip Sheldrake writing in *City of God/Human City Borderlands*, Summer 2005, states that "Christian theology, following Augustine, affirms that there is no absolutely private identity. To be human embodies a common life and task. Being public is "part of identity." It follows that in this "public" community every man and woman has the right to prosper but also the responsibility to recognize that others have that same right. A well ordered community - local, national and global - will be one in which individual and social rights and responsibilities are in balance, serving the common wealth. While national governments are vital links in the chain of decision-making, humanity and indeed the Christian church, must from now on think globally. That is a conscious paradigm shift of vast significance.

Social justice

4.2 One rapid consequence of globalisation as can be seen in Newcastle, is for the city to become focal points or nodes of enterprise, creating a new enriched class who enjoy unaccustomed prosperity while attracting large numbers of the poor seeking "crumbs from the rich man's table." Newcastle like many of the nation's core cities displays the extremes of wealth and poverty side by side. The more prosperous a society becomes, however, the more important it is for social justice and community cohesion that nobody is left behind.

4.3 The regeneration industry covers a great breadth of activities and provides huge salaries. For some, it is an ironic sign of how poverty can become big business. "But" said the Rt. Revd James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool, "we are in danger in some of our cities of suffering from urban diabetes where you get the blood pumping around prestigious projects which everybody shows off and says how wonderful they are, but the blood does not get to the extremities of the body. So you have to ensure the valves are open so that the prestigious projects - the blood, the wealth of them - are actually channelled to the whole of the community." The regeneration communities that I am passionately involved with in Newcastle, are like those that the Bishop has mentionedcommunities on the edge, and without support and investment are in danger of atrophying.

4.4 Such conditions present not only new challenges for the churches' understanding of wealth theology but also social justice. Social justice is not just a matter of

³³Atherton, J. *Public Theology for Changing Times*, SPCK 2000, p 99

³⁴ By prosperity is meant simply the absence of poverty, defined in raw terms. However the term has gradually come to mean the progressive rising of living standards, and includes participation in community, sufficiency of wealth, pleasure and happiness, civilization and culture, and longevity including good health.

economic activity. A purely negative appraisal of economic activity is insupportable and an injustice to those engaged in it. Economic activity is instead something to celebrate. When it raises the standard of living of the population while relieving the lot of the poor, it is part of God's will for humanity. Clifford Longley writing in *Prosperity with a Purpose: Christians and the Ethics of Affluence*³⁵ advises that there is a need to redress a perceived imbalance in the way Christians have regarded the creation of wealth by economic activity. They should, he suggests, "recognize that it is one of the chief engines of progress and greater well-being in the modern age, both directly and indirectly."

Economic laws

4.5 Economic laws are not sovereign, however, and market forces must stand under God's judgement. City centre entrepreneurs, regeneration managers and finance dealers who engage in economic enterprise have obligations to the common good which include commitment to honest and equitable trading practises and to fair remuneration for their present and past employees. Good business practise can never ignore the impact of economic enterprise on the wider community.

4.6 One school of thought suggests that prosperity means not only having a rich variety of choices as exemplified in the retail outlets in the city such as Eldon Square, but also having the means to make such choices. Herein lies one of the great contradictions of today's society, a society which, as the urban sociologist Featherstone points out, is mainly geared towards consumerism, because consumerism can become an all-consuming ideology. Consumerism values only what can be consumed. Consumerism emphasizes passivity, thus isolating individuals from their communities. Consumerism measures people by what they possess rather than by their talents and achievements. Those who are unable to afford what they consider their share of consumer goods are liable to feel resentment. While wealth brings expansion of choice, it can also bring over attachment to material goods and physical benefits; and the consumerism the market economy relies on can degrade moral, social and cultural values.

The rich young man

4.7 Christian thinking concerning wealth has to take seriously the example of the "rich young man" in the gospels, who was too attached to his possessions to take up the offer of eternal life. He was prepared to serve God but not if he could no longer serve Mammon too. In a framework of social justice, wealth creation is no longer the pursuit of Mammon, a rival to the true God, but a service to humanity and a way out of poverty into true prospering. Jesus' reply to the young man makes it clear that his obsessive attachment to possessions was the enemy of his true freedom and therefore of his true happiness, in this life as well as the next. In any full sense he did not prosper. As others have discovered, once a certain level of material success has been achieved, further affluence does not lead automatically to happiness, it often leads away from it.

4.8 The church and particularly the city centre churches, therefore, have to be aware of the complexity and interdependence of the many economic factors involved in creating a wealthy economy. Moral principles applied simplistically and without due respect for economic analysis can easily lead to erroneous solutions.

³⁵ Prosperity with a Purpose: Christians and the Ethics of Affluence, published by CTBI, 2005, page 16

In the coming chapter I will offer some suggestions, based on the foregoing theological and biblical critique, of how new approaches to urban mission might engage the skills of the minister in the emerging post modern city.

PRACTICAL OUTCOMES

THE CHURCH CAN LEARN TWO LESSONS FROM REGENERATION INDUSTRY

VISION

5.0 Vision, embracing change and transformation are seen as central to all that the regeneration industry stands for. As the well-known saying 'there is nothing permanent except change' reminds us, change is both inevitable and continuous. From time to time events so significant occur that they alter the world around us. I referred to the phrase "thinking globally" and the momentous paradigm shift that has occurred in the last twenty years e.g. inventions such as computers, mobile phones and the internet have revolutionised our world.

5.1 The message is simple and painfully clear. It is so obvious. My car dealer tells me that product development organizations not taking steps in the direction of new product development will eventually fall behind. In economic terms, embracing change, the big ideas for tomorrow's world are the key to a successful business. Yet the church has often been at its most obscurantist when reacting to change, to scientific and technological developments, often preferring to stay in the tomb rather than move out with visioning exercises and "blue sky thinking" to the uncertainties and challenges of Galilee.....he is going ahead of you.....into Galilee (Mark 8 v 6).

5.2 As the reflections have revealed God has created an evolving cosmos within which God's purposes are fleshed out. God is endlessly finding new ways in which to relate to our cities and world. God's love is unchanging, but the way in which that love is expressed at different times and places is relative to what is appropriate to those times and places. God is a God who challenges us to do new things in obedience to him and a God who is forever surprising us with fresh possibilities. The future is bright not because it belongs to *Orange* but because it belongs to God. Our faith engages us in developing and sustaining hope and vision that things can be different. There is also a calling to critique the structure, policies and programmes we encounter, by the "renewing of our minds" Romans 12 v2.

5.3 The church inspired by the physical transformation of the city must dream and plan and look to the future as the Spirit of God blows the church in new directions, as it overturns old boundary markers and removes the debris as it did in earlier years when it made Peter sit down to eat with the impure gentile Cornelius. Seeking to actualise a vision for the church as "outward looking, united and confident" embracing all who live and work in the city, in terms of ministry in urban areas, finance and resources, is one of the biggest challenges that faces the church now and in the years ahead. We may need to rethink our idea that *the church has a mission* and choose to work instead with a better dynamic *the mission of God has a church*.³⁶ City centre development processes and ways of doing things and making things happen may help the local church realise its dream to preach and embody the gospel, like the apostles in Jerusalem, in ways appropriate to the city and prevailing culture. There is much to be learned from the notion, as Oscar Wilde said that "to live is to change and to live well is to change often."

PARTNERSHIPS/NETWORKS

5.4 One of the guiding principles in the redevelopment in the city centre is that of partnership – non-departmental public bodies and quangos, people and voluntary

³⁶ *Mission-shaped church*, Church House Publishing, 2004, page 87

organisations, working together to achieve more than they would in isolation. Over the last 10 years a wide and growing range of systems and structures have been brought into being so that policies and services are “joined up.” Local Strategic partnerships” and “Inter Faith Forums” are current examples of such attempts to establish co-ordinating “networks” and “partnerships” at the local level. Political scientists today use the word *governance* to refer to the interlocking networks and organisations which exist at local, regional, and nation levels of the country and which constitute increasingly the means through which public policy is implemented and public services are delivered.

5.5 Partnerships challenge the church to look at its own strategies for mission, its engagement in relation to the social, economic and demographic context of the city, to examine what resources the church has to enable participation, in order to find sustainable ministry, presence and witness in the city that includes “all”.

5.6 Looking through the lens of the church, partnership is an aspect of the dynamic mutuality (*koinonia*) that should be apparent in its own life and mission as it supports all and seeks the justice of God’s reign and celebrates the contribution of every part of the body. If this is an aspect of our participation in God’s renewing and regenerative activity, we should not be surprised to find others engaged in the same (Mark 9 v 40).

5.7 Twenty years ago *Faith in the City* endorsed this partnership approach and recommended that it should be developed by central and local government “to promote greater consultation with and participation by, local people at neighbourhood level.” The recommendation indicates the need to move beyond the language of servanthood that has been such a prominent feature of incarnational theology in order to affirm new forms of relationships within the city. Drawing on his ecumenical experience Raymond Fung suggests:-

*“The concept of the church as servant to the world no longer communicates today. The new language proposed in the ecumenical strategy for Christian witness is **partnership**. The local congregation sees itself as a partner with the people in the community, and offers it publicly as such. The concept of partnership is a distinct and unmistakable echo of Jesus’ way of dealing with his fumbling followers.”*

5.8 The church may wish to commit itself to the principle of partnership in order to confront the issue of city centre church decline and, at another, to engage with organisations within the city centre that have no religious affiliations and other non-Christian faith communities. This stance recognises that no one agency – voluntary, business, religious or state can satisfactorily address or explain the economic and social fortunes of the city. Partnerships are a vital sign of a common humanity and involve mutual commitment of vision, authority and interest. The involvement of the church also means that the church is a natural sign of the commitment of people of faith in their endeavour to improve the city and empower its people.

5.9 The relevance of this way of partnership also alerts the church to new ways of understanding the civic environment of the local church. It also offers a new way of thinking about how things are run in churches. We become aware that “authority” relationships within churches are not necessarily best understood as lineal or hierarchical. They are often exercised through networks of systems or forums. In the case of local churches, their governance may occur in practice through the web of church based and non-church based organisations meeting together or collaborating in a variety of different ways.

THE REGENERATION INDUSTRY CAN LEARN TWO LESSONS FROM THE CHURCH

SOCIAL CAPITAL

6.0 'Social capital' isn't a new concept³⁷, but there has been an explosion of academic and political interest in this subject over the last decade. Social capital refers to the sets of relationships people have with each other (be that through family, friends, clubs, churches etc) and the ways they use these sets of relationships to do things for each other and the wider community. Three main types of social capital can be distinguished: *bonding* social capital (e.g. among family members or ethnic groups); *bridging* social capital (e.g. across ethnic groups); and *linking* social capital (e.g. between different social classes).³⁸ Social capital can be measured using a range of indicators but the most commonly used measure is trust in other people. Another way of looking at social capital is through seeing it as a *gift* – what is given to individuals and the community through the links between groups of people.

6.1 Social capital may constitute a range of beneficial economic and social outcomes within the city and may be determined by a range of factors. Churches too are potential providers of social welfare within the city, they provide ready-made social networks and systems of support. Churches, albeit with declining congregations are usually good at establishing social capital, not least because religion is a powerful motivator and much religious teaching is concerned with social and moral responsibility. People in churches with a high degree of social capital are often prepared to help one another without looking for immediate reward and they are likely to benefit from reciprocal help later on.

6.2 Churches can challenge and offer a distinctive gift to their communities through their own brand of social capital. This gift, referred to as *religious capital*, offers the same benefits to individuals and the wider community as the more general social capital, but the underlying beliefs and motivations are distinctively 'church' based. Religious capital is the churches' gift to the community based on Christian beliefs and can be expressed in a number of ways, such as language, ways of working (methodology), and theology. Taken together, these three elements create a picture of what the churches are doing in city areas. Religious capital is committed to changing individuals on a personal, spiritual level as well as improving their physical environment. It is committed to the belief that God is at work within the urban processes of the city and the building of civil society.

6.3 *Civil society* refers to groups of people trying to make things happen for the good of their community. Churchgoers, particularly in communal churches are also likely to look beyond their borders and engage with people in the local area. Being involved in local politics, local economic schemes or neighbourhood watch projects are all examples of participating in civil society. Churches too provide an important incubator for civic skills, civic norms, community interests and civic recruitment. Church members may befriend others who are in turn likely to recruit them into other forms of community activity.

PRESENCE/WORSHIP

³⁷ Among its advocates is Harvard University professor Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone*, the seminal study of the breakdown and revival of social networks in the United States.

³⁸ The Performance and Innovation Unit discussion paper on social capital is available at www.number-10.gov.uk/su/social%20capital/socialcapital.pdf

6.4 Church buildings are a presence in the community that connect the Christian faith and the needs of the community; they are a sign of God's kingdom and places that declare the Christian identity of the congregation. Not only are churches markers, signposts and anchors within the community, they also point beyond the immediate to the ultimate. David Martin, writing in "Believing without belonging: a commentary on religion in England," states "They provide frames and narratives and signs to live by, and offer persistent points of reference for all who live and work in the city."³⁹ Church buildings provide a focus for a wide range of activities expressing the worship, caring, educational and social life which members and adherents of the congregation share. At the heart of most church's activity is some form of worship, expressing the basis of Christian community in transcendent, metaphysical terms. "Worship" as William Temple observed "is the secret weapon of the church. It is the means whereby we try to save the world."

6.5 Within the city community of Newcastle there is a potent "localism" which stresses variety, difference and fragmentation, and this means the freedom of city dwellers to select lifestyle options from a vast spread of beliefs and tastes available to them. What has arisen within the city are an infinite variety of churches - it is easy to see that in a more network-based, more free floating society the parish church and the parish system could be seen as the husk of an outmoded way of life?

6.6 But in this fragmented and global city, local churches and congregations are a witness to the fact that there is something more to life than this present moment. The buildings and the congregations are a statement to the world that its inhabitants came from somewhere, are going somewhere and that the events in Palestine some 2000 years ago have a vital significance for shaping and disclosing the truth about the world and us. The local church acts as a navigational aid and a signpost. It seeks to imitate a God who is personal and will challenge its worshippers with an emphasis on a renewed and forgiven life. The church is simply a sign and disclosure that the kingdom of God within the local community has certain clear qualities - it's breaking of social boundaries, its hope for all city people and its message of God's welcome for all, focused on Christ. Churches can be pointers to God's promised future. They are to be sources of hope, of God's future world.

6.7 Churches celebrate their memories and offer small acts of love and care, both to each other and to their neighbours. It is in these small signs and fragments of memory and experience, often shared within the wider narrative of the Communion Service with its emphasis on remembering the story of Christ's passion and sharing love through the peace and the breaking of the bread, that the church offers a gospel of redemption and transformation to the wider world. Such transformation is reflected in the hospitality and welcome extended by some city churches. It is not simply the desire to show God's love practically but moves beyond into having a personal love and compassion for others which is inspired by the love of God and expressed practically through welcoming people into church, by whatever means, and attempting to meet people's needs. Such love might be described as unconditional and inclusive. The fact that the church is often seen as small and "of the remnant" is sustained by a kingdom theology that affirms smallness and vulnerability as highly significant in the eyes of God, and of value and potential way beyond immediate appearances. Implicit to the church is a corporate understanding of human community that through mutuality and solidarity the stronger parts of the body should care for and strengthen the weak.

³⁹ From an unpublished paper cited in Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945* Oxford, Blackwells, 1994, p 189

6.8 The church is seen by many as a bulwark of the locality, a place of significance where during the last ten years there has been rapid physical and social change. At best this narrative of the church implies stability and long-term sustainability. But the church also offers an alternative criteria by which to measure progress and achievement; it offers an often quiet, but insistent voice that will often be there for the young, affluent and mobile. The church too may wish to deliver a critique of secularised and liberal notions of change and progress that is often deeply prophetic in relation to the issues of widening poverty and wealth. The local church should continue to offer examples that demonstrate that the goal of city development is not good buildings, good government, good services, good jobs or good incomes – important as each of these are – but good people, pouring out their lives in the service of one another.

6.9 Recovering the church's place in the city requires us turning not first to the latest trend and new idea, but to Christ. If we do that we may find with G. K. Chesterton that:

“There is good news yet to hear
And fine things to be seen
Before we go to paradise
By way of Bethnal Green.”

6.10 I offer the concepts of vision, partnerships, social capital and presence as a distinctive contribution to the ongoing debate of future urban mission.

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