

Cities of Culture: whose Vision, which Agenda?

A Conference organised by the Core Cities Theology Network



Scargill House

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Cities of Culture: whose Vision, which Agenda?

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Foreword

In September 2006 we hosted a two day residential conference at Scargill, Yorkshire on the theme *Cities of Culture*. It proved a spirited and good humoured forty eight hours that generated a searching conversation between speakers and participants. Our sense was that people went home feeling that the event had been worthwhile: experiences had been shared and understanding advanced. We promised a written follow up and this is it. It has taken us longer than we anticipated but we felt there was no point in rushing something out that added little to the original deliberations. The report is by no means the last word on what took place but it is a considered piece of work and as such we hope you will take time over its contents. Essentially we have tried to keep faith with four main concerns: in the first instance, to provide an overview of the Scargill presentations and discussions and the practical wisdom that emerged from them. Secondly, we wanted delegates to have a tangible record of what transpired: if you were there this is your *aide-mémoire*! Thirdly, we see this modest piece of work as a contribution to the important debate within the wider Church regarding the role of culture in the emerging urban order. Finally, it represents a small but significant step in the process of setting up a Core Cities Theology Network that will extend and deepen the conversation we have already begun as a means of moving our cities a little closer to the civilisation of love that is the kingdom of God.

We trust that you will find this an informative and helpful read. Comments are welcome and can be sent to Peter Robinson at the address below. Please visit the new Core Cities Theology Network website at www.cctn.org.uk for more details about the network.

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I. Introduction and Background to the *Cities of Culture* Conference

The Core Cities Theology Network is an embryonic organisation that has come together through practitioners in Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield and Newcastle upon Tyne wanting to share experiences in predominantly northern English cities and explore themes of theological reflection on the church and its practices. The purpose of the network was stated early on and suggests that it would:

create an environment of solidarity and support for those engaged in urban mission and public policy so that more effective ways of being the church in the core cities context might be enabled.

Lunchtime conferences were held in each of the four cities represented to which around one hundred persons, lay and ordained, and of all denominations, attended to identify common experiences and themes. Provisional aims were formulated that gave a steer to the format the network might take:

1. to reflect theologically on the experience of being the church in different English Core Cities, each of which is experiencing huge changes in physical space, political and cultural identity and in social and economic arenas;
2. to share good practice with regard to the mission and identity of the church in new contexts of urban plurality and restructuring.

Out of the lunchtime meetings in the four Core Cities it was identified that a residential conference to explore the renaissance of culture in northern Core Cities as a means of regeneration of both city centres and local communities would be a means of both taking issues raised forward and also catalysing the growth of the network at an early stage in its development.

The conference had four aims, which were to:

1. understand the power of 'culture' as a force that is shaping the regeneration of urban areas and which faith communities now need to address;
2. respond and reflect upon the CULF document published in May 2006 in the light of the 'culture' agenda;
3. attract both grassroots users of cities and urban spaces as well as those engaged in reflecting and shaping them;
4. inaugurate a UK-based Core Cities Theological Network, starting with those northern English cities that attended the conference.

The conference was to have three processes evident within it:

1. letting stories emerge from the grassroots about engagement with an attitude towards culture;
2. listening to alternative visions for the city and culture;
3. setting an agenda for future work on this topic.

Thirty-five delegates gathered at Scargill House in the Yorkshire Dales on 12th September for a forty eight hour residential conference with the title *Cities of Culture: whose Vision, which Agenda?* The opening session of the conference was entitled *Voices from the Cities*, and the stories of Liverpool and Newcastle upon Tyne were told alongside some reflections from London and Glasgow. A keynote address from Professor Elaine Graham set the overall picture, rooted in the understanding of cities found in the recently published *Faithful Cities*.

The second part of the conference focused on *Visions of the City* and an 'official' view from Paul Collard was set alongside a grassroots perspective given by Barbara Glasson and John Bradbury. A keynote address by Professor Timothy Gorringer offered some theological reflections on culture. During the final morning delegates identified motifs and issues that could be carried forward from the conference to assist practitioners in Core Cities.

This conference report aims to make the proceedings of the conference available to a wider audience than simply the participants. In part it provides the full texts of speakers, at other points it contains summaries written by participants. It ends with a summary of the motifs and issues that the conference identified as being worthy of further reflection, and then a personal reflection by one of the delegates. It is hoped that the contents of the report will be valuable in itself as a reference to what was articulated but also as a way of creating an agenda for future pieces of work.

2. Voices from the Cities

2.1 Voices from Liverpool

Representatives from Liverpool contributed reflections from their own experience of engaging with culture in the city of Liverpool. First of all John Fielding, of the United Reformed Church writes:

Liverpool, 'the pool of life', has always been an exciting place, but it is particularly exciting at the moment – our winning the title European Capital of Culture has had an energizing effect on the life of the city. The city centre is described as one of the most rapidly regenerating in Europe. Building and refurbishment of former warehouses as living accommodation is growing rapidly. Businesses are moving to Liverpool: the Liverpool Daily Post reported that in the first year of becoming 'City of Culture' the number of super-rich in Merseyside increased by 44% bringing the total number of millionaires to 3,257 and investment in the city was increasing. The café and club culture has spawned a host of new restaurants, bars and coffee shops throughout the city centre and into the more affluent suburbs.

We've got two football teams, we've got two cathedrals - are there two cities? A city of the wealthy, a city of the poor? I recently drove from my home in Mossley Hill to the north part of our city. It was like driving through three different worlds: from leafy suburbia through a glitzy city centre to an area of blight and dereliction just off the Scotland Road.

Much of the City of Culture promotion is comprised of 'spin' and is 'cosmetic' with a kind of 'theme park' image. What we see in our city is the commodification and commercialisation of culture and the packaging and rebranding of the city. People in the inner city and the outer estates feel that there is a concentration of activity and regeneration in the city centre while levels of poverty in the streets and inner city neighbourhoods show little or no signs of improvement. Unemployment is still more than twice the national average. An estimated 43% of households live in poverty or on its margins. The standard mortality rate is 44% above the national figure. Someone complained to me recently that his local pub had recently become a funeral parlour! A recent article in Liverpool Daily Post announced that the gap between rich and poor in our city is the highest in the UK.

Regeneration often displaces poverty, crime and exclusion to other parts of the city and fails to address underlying causes. Short term schemes proliferate.

The vision for Liverpool appears to have become focused on attracting high income outsiders to visit exclusive shops, attend conferences, theatres and art galleries and live in expensive apartments. Many local people naturally feel excluded from all this. How can being Capital of Culture change things? Can culture regenerate us?

Another perspective on Liverpool came from John Davies, a Church of England priest, who contributed under the title 'Reading Everyday Culture':

I live and work among the people of Norris Green and Croxteth, large outer city housing estates built in the middle years of the 20th century. Currently our area's most famous cultural exports are Wayne Rooney and Colleen McLoughlin, who remain, with their families, very rooted in and committed to their home despite their new-found celebrity and their mansion in Cheshire.

Local people here, five miles out of the centre, tend to regard Liverpool's Capital of Culture status as having little relevance to them. While the Duke of Westminster's lauded 'Big Dig' transforms the city centre, Norris Green contains the Boot Estate, consisting of substandard ex-council stock being too slowly cleared for long-promised but as yet undelivered better

houses, the subject of long-running Council Chamber scandals. And while the inner area of Liverpool is (creatively) repopulated, the city as a whole continues to shrink, demonstrated most clearly by the ever-widening spaces in areas like ours.

Norris Green has nurtured other popular celebrities, among them Coronation Street actors Jean Alexander (Hilda Ogden) and Geoffrey Hughes (Eddie Yates). In their time these characters were either sniffed at for their 'commonness', or warmly accepted and loved for their everyday appeal, which illustrates to me the shape which the cultural agenda must take in a very 'ordinary' place like this.

When I arrived here I was struck by the place's ordinariness – nothing apparently special or particular about these estates. But I was also struck by the cultural blindness which that revealed in me. I began to follow an instinct that 'ordinariness' is not a bad word, that mundane things must also have cultural meaning and relevance and that richness and complexity must lie beneath the surface of everyday life. And to explore that I began to embark on a series of walks around the parish: slow deliberate walks, with notebook and camera, which I journalled online and to which I invited comments, additions and critiques from local people. Over time, a rich picture of life here did indeed begin to develop.¹

In our place a large proportion of men work – in transportation or construction – out of white vans, and many women walk to and from bus stops in the uniform of their cleaning companies or supermarkets. As Christians, concerned with justice we ought to use our *prophetic* voices in the arenas of regeneration and employment, where, from a Norris Green perspective, inequalities are very evident. It strikes me that the work of the church here should also involve affirming and celebrating the cultures of our local people's lives, often marginalised, or worse, *derided* by mainstream media culture. And finding the *wisdom* words to express the spirituality latent – sometimes vibrant – here.

That was the rationale behind my recent series of *Thoughts for the Day* on BBC Radio Merseyside, in which I read a series of 'common prayers' around everyday culture and its icons: wheelie bins, bus stops, mobile phone masts, traffic lights and shopping trollies, and which were very well received:

*We give thanks for the bus stop:
Place of waiting and encounter*

A sign which guides us towards our destination, a bench on which we meet, a shelter from the wind and rain, a place of light in the darkness.

A blessing on those who wait quietly for the early buses to carry them into work; silent companions in the regular routine;

A blessing on those who stand chatting in the off-peak times; twirlies, shoppers, those carrying babes in arms, excitable toddlers;*

A blessing on those who stand alone, watched by the faces of passing car riders, feeling a little beside themselves;

*We give thanks for the bus stop:
Place of waiting and encounter*

Help us to understand the anxiety of others which causes some to jump the queue;

¹ See <http://www.johndavies.org/> for more information

Help us to understand the zestfulness of others – especially when the buses are suddenly packed with shouting, laughing, wriggling schoolchildren;

Help us to understand the needs of others – giving up our seat for those struggling on their feet.

Praise for the fellowship of our fellow- travellers, enquiring about the timing of the buses, sharing today's news and views;

Praise for the patience of the drivers, putting up with slow ones, arrogant ones, non-payers, those who get on without any change.

We salute the advertisers who brighten up the bus stops with colourful posters – and forgive them their intention to part us from our money;

We salute the youngsters who turn bus stops into gathering places in the evening – and forgive them their noise, disturbing others around.

*We give thanks for the bus stop:
Place of waiting and encounter*

*A twirly is a pensioner asking a bus driver if they can get on a bus free of charge before their 9.30 bus pass start time: 'am I too early?'

2.2 Voices from Newcastle

The presentation from Newcastle was given by seven members of the Newcastle Diocesan Urban Task Group: Chris Knights from Scotswood, Julia Bebbington from Cowgate, Meg Fisher from West Denton, Helen Gill from Percy Main in North Tyneside, Peter Robinson from the east end, Jenny Lancaster from Walker and Allison Fenton from Newcastle Cathedral. They were joined by Ray Angelsea, a Planning specialist and a non-stipendiary minister from the United Reformed Church working in Newcastle. In summary, Peter Robinson writes.

Newcastle upon Tyne has a population of around 270,000 a figure now stabilised after recent years of decline. In 2003 the city, working with Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council, eagerly submitted a bid for the European Capital of Culture bid, as one of a range of initiatives designed to re-invent the city. Although the bid was unsuccessful, culture has remained a key driver for regeneration. The emphasis is on large projects in the Quayside area in both Newcastle and Gateshead. Landmark projects such as Baltic, the international centre for contemporary art, the Sage Music Centre and the Millennium Bridge now compete for attention along a half mile stretch of the River Tyne with Quayside apartments that market 24/7 living for those who can afford the investment.

During the development of the bid of the European Capital of Culture 2008 a number of clergy were in conversation with the Bid Team and the Faith Leaders Group supported a project proposal that would have been developed had the overall bid been successful and the promised resources released. A central concern was always the 'doughnut effect', or in other words, the realisation that increasing investment on the Quayside was producing a ring of inner-city communities that at best experienced exclusion or, at worst, was either demolished or colonised by creeping gentrification. The voices that the Newcastle presentation brought to the foreground were largely from this ring of excluded communities. However, they also included a perspective from the city centre and from a

community in the middle of North Tyneside representing the impact of culture not on the city but on the city-region.

For the presenters, the lament of Jimmy Nail's song *Big River* articulated the nostalgia of many local communities and the sense that culture in its post-industrial setting was not yet capturing the imagination.

*This was a big river
I want you all to know
That I was proud
This was a big river
But that was long ago
That's not now, that's not now.*²

Hosting major international conferences does not seem to make up for the anticipation of the latest ship launch, the presence of the Millennium Bridge does not match the majesty of the cranes at Swan Hunters, sold off to the highest bidder and due to reassembled in an Indian shipyard.

Each community that contributed to the presentation demonstrated culture's far-reaching nature. The post-industrial community of Scotswood has recently been demolished and lies desolate, something that began as the bid for European Capital of Culture 2008 gained momentum. The central north west community of Cowgate has many families who have roots in the Newcastle Quayside as it was in the early part of the 20th century; it is a place where memories still exist of displacement to make way for something else. Byker is barely a mile from the city centre but increasingly riverside apartments are obscuring the view into its well-known Byker Wall estate and the contrast between multimillion pound investment on the Quayside and Byker's multiple deprivation is stark. Like Byker, Walker on the outer eastern edge of the city boundary is becoming a multi-ethnic community as asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants settle; but alongside the many positive stories of integration there are also problems to do with racism and violence, and the BNP is active in local communities. Percy Main stands just north of the River Tyne in North Tyneside, but the reach of cultural regeneration is felt even here as the employment market is re-shaped and further across, on the North Sea coast, Whitley Bay appears to want to cash in on the perceived opportunities of the cultural agenda. The city centre itself is now renowned as being one of the 'party city' capitals of Europe but the clash of understandings of what culture actually is, is all too evident on Friday nights in the Bigg Market, as revellers rub shoulders with those who have spent the evening at the Theatre Royal. Ray Angelsea, who currently works with the charity *Planning Aid*, encouraged a positive view of the cultural life of the city centre and challenged local communities to take a perspective that engaged with change in the north east, much of which is not only inevitable but also potentially life-giving.

The Newcastle presentation ended with some questions about the impact of culture on local communities and the city-region.

1. Does culture equate with 'the Arts'?
2. Architecture and urban design: are they part of 'culture'?
3. How do we stop ourselves from sinking into caricaturing 'cultures'?
4. How would gaining European Capital of Culture 2008 have affected Scotswood/Cowgate/Byker? If only Newcastle-Gateshead had won!
5. Can you sell culture?
6. What do we mean by 'culture' and 'cultures'?

² Jimmy Nail, *Big River*, East West, Audio CD, 1995

7. What is Geordie 'culture'?
8. Are there bad cultures as well as good ones - and who decides which is which?
9. Who evaluates what 'culture' is, and how?
10. Can culture change people? (for the better?)

2.3 A Response from London

Andrew Davey is the Urban Affairs Adviser to the Church of England and also the author of Urban Christianity and Global Order (London: SPCK, 2001). He was asked to give a response to cultural issues from a London perspective.

2.3.1 Culture, Identity and Inclusivity

We need to ask some basic questions about cities of culture: what is the culture that creates the drive for cities of culture? What is culture in an era when the lives and economy of our cities are driven by real estate? Is culture becoming a commodity or is it (social) capital in some way?

Culture is now tied up closely with identity. A Core City is now a 'city of

We have talked about 'trickle down' or 'trickle out' for too long. The reality is that cities are experiencing 'urban diabetes', as the present Bishop of Liverpool, the Rt Rev'd James Jones has said, and questions need to be asked about the mechanisms that are now needed to overcome this effect.

There is an increasing ambiguity or ambivalence about the impact that regeneration will have beyond the city core. Where is support given to the culture of informal spaces or the events of everyday life? Who are big ticket events dependant on? Are we now assuming a new servant (migrant) class? Is an ethical Olympics (in terms of living wage, fair employment and so on) the same as an inclusive Olympic games? We need to pay more attention to the recent experiences of the Olympics in Seoul, Barcelona and Athens. In particular, we need to address the male labour crisis (the *Full Monty* syndrome) and recognise that there are no quick fit solutions.

A way forward might be for the conference to ask, 'who are the key players?' in the emerging cities of culture? Recently three social groups have been identified, each of which plays a key part in determining the shape of such cities: ³

1. new urban citizens – young, single (or older) child-free moving back to the cities with high consumption life styles;
2. day visitors and tourists who are accessing specialised retail and entertainment quarters;
3. the creative class (Florida's *bohós*) - city living entrepreneurs.

Another resource for the conference might well be the work of the historian Tristram Hunt whose book *Building Jerusalem*⁴ can help us gain a perspective on early 21st century Core Cities. Hunt comments on the difference between the Victorian 'city of culture' and the city of today:

³ Graeme Evans and Jo Foord, 'Small Cities for a Small Country' in David Bell and Mark Jayne, eds., *Small Cities: Urban Experience beyond the Metropolis* (London: Routledge, 2006)

⁴ Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2003)

....it is again suggested that culture is the pillar of an urban civilisation. But there is a difference. Whereas nineteenth-century middle-class civic culture was more often than not the product of a Nonconformist conscience, the culture of today's cities appears more of a branding and marketing tool than a reflection of civic identity. It is frequently the work of quangos and urban regeneration consultants rather than the organic outcome of any home-grown civic sentiment.⁵

Hunt cites Jonathan Glancey, the Architecture Correspondent of the Guardian, on the way that the Victorian city had created urban culture out of its industrial enterprise. Now however, 'instead of culture springing from the inner workings of our cities, we see it as the way to make our cities work'. Hunt goes on to say:

....the culture of Victorian cities was just as carefully manufactured as the 2003 bids. The difference then was that it was an indigenous circle of middle-class civic patriots who co-ordinated the function, whereas all too frequently today culture is generated by metropolitan professionals, characterized by one newspaper as 'men in rectangular glasses with business cards', with only the loosest of ties to the civic environment. Cultural policy is essential to regenerating post-industrial cities, but urban culture will only emerge with local talent and local patronage. And for that to happen people need to move back to the cities and stay there.⁶

2.3.2 Regeneration and Competition

What actually is culture in the global arena? Who are the global players driving this agenda? When you are walking past a building site look at the hoardings *Lend Lease*, *Bovis*, *AEG* – and when you get home look at their websites and find out where their other interests are to be found.

The regeneration industry attempts to identify economic drivers that will bring new investment into the city through making it an attractive environment for locating the command functions of global corporations and the new knowledge and information-based industries. This is part of the competitive world in which cities now operate. Culture, built environment, environmental and infrastructure improvements are the vanguard of the changes. This is the role of culture, in the broadest sense, because this can include a wide range of tourist attractions, higher education and arts venues, designed by what Leonie Sandercock calls *STARcitects*. The assumption is that new identities might give cities a competitive advantage, attracting new resources and businesses in an environment where sports-obsessed executives can thrive alongside their arts-orientated spouses.

Intervention and planning in cities is becoming increasingly complex and often ineffective. Competitiveness between cities has increased as they seek elusive status as the bases of globalised services or command centres for production. Economic forecasting becomes increasingly difficult as capital, resources and personnel flow across borders, and production is dispersed. Commodification and the market are increasingly apparent in the competitive drive for the renewal of urban economies, castes of global regeneration gurus and architects, and the introduction of market forces into third sector involvement in urban communities.

The Core City agenda is significant in its view of competitiveness in a European framework. Ministers talk of league table for cities and regions. Cities are desperate to be global. The

⁵ Hunt, *Building Jerusalem*, p.246

⁶ Hunt, *Building Jerusalem*, p.350

metropolitan areas we are concerned with in the Cities of Culture conference are not those in the higher tiers of the Saskia Sassen hierarchies of cities.⁷

John Rennie Short uses the designation 'globalizing' to capture this dynamic. *Globalising cities* captures 'that sense of becoming and longing. Globalising cities are both global cities seeking to maintain their position and non-global cities seeking to become global cities. The terms are not permanent unchanging verities, but relational, spectral, temporal, shifting and unstable'.⁸

The Core City attraction must be that they are *not* London: they must not be pale imitators of the capital, and yet paradoxically hard branding of the Core City has led to a certain amount of cloning and imitation of each other. This shift has often sapped 'local' capacity and creativity. If the search for 'big events' and new facilities now dominate metropolitan strategies then bidding for sports events, cultural years, casinos and so on can divert a city's agenda for a significant period. We need also to note that there is often no 'Plan B'.

A sense of place can decline as uniformity is imposed as an asset in terms of facilities, while the culture of competition wastes or diverts substantial resources. We can see changes in the type of culture that thrives in the global world of corporate philanthropy. Local institutions lose out to national and regional facilities, or global touring exhibitions or productions. A key question is whether a real estate orientated city can produce playfulness?

We also see the privatisation of previously public culture and spaces: the imposition of cultural strategies that often marginalize or strangle those people and projects which emerge 'from below'.

2.3.3 Emerging from Below

So what signs of resistance are there? Who is producing an alternative narrative? It could well be that the following are doing just this:

- the urban expressive cultures of the black British communities
- the football leagues of Hispanic communities
- the cycling assemblies inspired by Critical Mass
- the new takes on urban street life or literary imaginations (*Mis-guides*, *Smoke* etc)
- *artmongers* - visualising community in hoardings
- *The Hackney Exploratory* and other projects making planning people's work and child's play.

And the church? How do we locate ourselves in all this? What is the culture, what are the rumours we are called to keep alive in the shadows of urban life? How do we support and inform the vocations of Christians involved in shaping our cities?

An answer needs to recognise the church's local and global presence in our urban areas, amidst the rich and poor, amidst ethnic diversity, often disputed or in need of negotiation. With access to a number of levels in political and social life the church finds itself confronted by many demands and seductions in relation to prevailing geopolitical realities. An awareness of location is vital to our task of discernment, placing our bodies and minds at the critical places in our societies, or discovering the implications of the places (and flexible alternative networks) where we are already called to be Christian disciples.

⁷ Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, 2nd Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001)

⁸ John Rennie Short, *Global Metropolitan: Globalizing Cities in a Capitalist World* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.2

Hilary Russell recently drew my attention to some words of Tony Dyson. He says the Church needs to be:

searching for, holding to, living and struggling, and dying in, the creative centre of culture...not an artistic conception, nor is it a geographical location. It is found at those critical points in society where God's creativity and redemptive acts are contending with forces of meaninglessness, dispersion, disorder and despair...To be and to persist, to bear portions of the world's sufferings, to fall and be picked up, to seek to be 'salt' and 'light' at these points, in the day to day fabric of our human lives, is the common Christian calling.⁹

Hopefully in the next 48 hours we will catch glimpses and some clues as to the possible forms for our presence and participation in the life of the city, whether those forms are coalitions of place-based communities, pan-city alliances and networks, or innovative struggle-focused movements. Prophetic spatial struggles become a critical embodiment of God's new order breaking in and confronting the failure of our human institutions and structures. Our participation in cycles of struggle is the critical core of our urban mission: it is in the midst of the urban throng that worship and the sacraments can be offered, as acts of proclamation and solidarity.

We may glimpse new possibilities of churches and communities bound through an alternative urban praxis that refuses to be content with the crumbs that fall from the lean city. In particular we must ask, how do we use our footholds in education, community and the civic imagination?

This is a struggle for grace to flourish.....

⁹ Anthony Dyson, 'Clericalism, Church and Laity' in *All are called: Towards a Theology of Laity* (London: CIO, 1985), p.16

3. Cities of Culture: Reflections from the Commission on Urban Life and Faith

Elaine Graham is Samuel Ferguson Professor of Social and Pastoral Theology at the University of Manchester. She was a member of the Commission on Urban Life and Faith which produced Faithful Cities in 2006.

3.1 Introduction

I've been asked to address the theme of Cities of Culture from the perspective of the recent churches' Commission on Urban Life and Faith.¹⁰ In particular, to consider how debates about the role of 'culture' in urban regeneration relate to the analysis we have advanced about the state of our towns and cities and the contribution faith-based organizations make to the life of their communities.

The Commission on Urban Life and Faith was very concerned to address the question of what values and whose interests informed urban regeneration programmes. Much of the criticism we advanced of government-driven urban regeneration projects focused on the way it is often a series of top-down 'initiatives' imposed on local people and neighbourhoods, that emphasises high-profile and prestigious developments at the expense of long-term sustainability or provision for the many. In many ways, that matches with the criticisms made of the thinking behind using the performing arts and other cultural activities to revive declining local urban economies; and the call is, like in other strategies for urban regeneration more generally, for a more inclusive, 'bottom-up' model of wealth creation and neighbourhood renewal.

Another key idea in the Commission's report was that of 'faithful capital' – put briefly, the contribution that can be made by faith-based organizations to the enhancement of social networks which contribute to a healthy civil society.¹¹ The discussion of faithful capital derives, of course, from the wider debates in sociology and political theory about the value of 'social capital' or the processes by which social bonds, transactions and institutions are strengthened.¹² What is the relationship therefore between 'social capital', 'faithful capital' and 'cultural capital'?

Again, we were mindful that these resources and the energy of faith communities could often be 'co-opted' by the authorities or the capacities and skills of local people undervalued in the process of regeneration. We argued that faith is often misunderstood by policy-makers and those steering regeneration projects, arguing for a grass-roots approach to decision-making and community participation that places values of human flourishing and a rounded sense of what makes a good city at the centre, as opposed to narrowly economic criteria, as well as models of wealth creation that pay attention to matters of equity and fair distribution.

- What kind of regeneration strategies are implied by the Cities of Culture initiatives – what vision of 'what makes a good city' do such programmes represent?
- What opportunities and what challenges are presented by Cities of Culture for faith-based organizations seeking to realise (in the sense of exercise) 'faithful capital' in their neighbourhoods?

¹⁰ Commission on Urban Life and Faith, *Faithful Cities: A Call for Celebration, Vision and Justice* (London: Methodist Publishing House, 2006)

¹¹ Robert Furbey et al, *Faith as Social Capital: Connecting or Dividing?* Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2006)

¹² John Field, *Social Capital* (London: Routledge, 2003)

3.2 Regeneration and Cities of Culture

When I think of the links between culture and urban regeneration I realise I have been thinking about these things for quite a long time. I remember visiting an exhibition in Glasgow in 1990, entitled "Glasgow's Glasgow" to celebrate that city's nomination as European City of Culture for that year. Successive bids by other UK cities for City of Culture status reflect that agenda.

More recently, following a paper by the Culture Secretary, Tessa Jowell, on *Government and the Value of Culture*, in May 2004 the debate has reopened on the role of the arts in society and in particular, for stimulating economic growth. It is interesting to note that Jowell's paper actually argues strongly for quite an intrinsic understanding of culture in society:

Complex cultural activity is not just a pleasurable hinterland for the public, a fall back after the important things – work and paying tax – are done. It is at the heart of what it means to be a fully developed human being. Government should be concerned that so few aspire to it, and has a responsibility to do what it reasonably can to raise the quantity and quality of that aspiration.¹³

Notwithstanding these comments, Jowell's paper has given rise to a view of the arts and culture in largely instrumental terms, related to their effectiveness in generating urban renewal and community development. The mainstream view is that the arts (as widely conceived) is, or should be, an integral part of the urban regeneration process and can also be an important element in promoting community development. These views are strongly in evidence in the debate about Liverpool becoming European Capital of Culture in 2008. Liverpool City Council hopes that the status of European Capital of Culture in 2008 will encourage a similar 'make-over' of public image as occurred when Glasgow won in 1990.¹⁴ It is that all-important public image that is seen as central to enhancing a city's profile, and therefore its attractiveness to new business, new residents, tourists and a city's own population.

This is also consistent with current thinking within think-tanks and parts of the regeneration 'industry'. In May 2003, Demos and the British Urban Regeneration Association (BURA) organized a conference entitled 'Boho Britain', and invited Richard Florida, Professor of Public Policy at George Mason University, Washington DC as a keynote speaker. In works such as *The Creative Class* (2002) Florida has argued that successful urban regeneration depends on a critical mass of 'creative' professionals in areas such as the arts, IT and education. Investment in attracting such 'creatives' pays more dividends than other strategies such as transport infrastructure, and cities should attend to attracting and retaining such high-octane talent if they are to succeed economically. If a city is vibrant culturally, then this will serve as a magnet to business and industry, resulting in an upturn in economic fortunes.¹⁵

¹³ Department of Media, Culture and Sport, *Government and the Value of Culture*, 2004, [online], available at: <http://www.culture.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/DE2ECA49-7F3D-46BF-9D11-A3AD80BF54D6/0/valueofculture.pdf> [accessed 10/09/06], p.7

¹⁴ For an evaluation, see Centre for Cultural Policy Research, University of Glasgow, *The Cities Project: The long-term legacies of Glasgow 1990 European City of Culture*, 2003 [online], available at: http://www.culturalpolicy.arts.gla.ac.uk/research/press_content_analysis_may03.pdf [accessed 27/11/06]

¹⁵ Demos, 'Manchester is favourite with 'new bohemians' [online], available at: <http://www.demos.co.uk/media/pressreleases/bohobritain> [accessed 26/05/03]; Helen Carter, 'Gritty City wins the Boho Crown', *Guardian*, May 26 2003 [online], available at: <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/print/0,,4676828-110427.00.html> [accessed 26/05/03]

Incidentally, Manchester topped the league of 'boho' cities in the UK, and perhaps epitomises the ambition of Cities of Culture with its attempts to deploy its undoubted cultural assets in industrial heritage, sporting achievement and artistic achievement to spearhead an extended period of post-industrial economic and social recovery that is now well into its second decade. (It's also the logic that helped to spur the merger of the Victoria University of Manchester and UMIST two years ago, as part of a conscious effort to consolidate the 'knowledge capital' which a city such as Manchester is reputed to possess by virtue of its history of innovation in science, technology, medicine and the arts).¹⁶ But I think we are concentrating more on 'culture' in Florida's terms, to mean the creative and performing arts, and a noted heritage of built environment, sport and tourism for now, although perhaps it is important to realise they are connected with education, research and development.

3. 3 Manchester's Cultural Strategy

Exploiting the 'boho' culture and its reputation for 'creativity' has indeed been an integral part of Manchester's regeneration strategy, as an arm of economic growth but also as a way of benefiting the local population:

Manchester's Cultural Strategy ... places culture at the heart of the city's Community Strategy and Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. It is a vision led by the Council and offers a framework through which public, private and voluntary sector partners can work together towards common objectives. It covers a wide range of activities including arts, sports, tourism, heritage and media.¹⁷

But it seems to me that this also signals a new era in the scope and objectives of local governance. The days are gone when the provision of social services, housing, education, transport, environmental health and civic amenities such as libraries and swimming pools were considered to be the limit of city councils' intervention in the lives of their citizens, and that raising revenue was purely to fund such services. Today, councils are at the forefront of efforts to regenerate their local economies, brokering partnerships between the business, public and voluntary and community sectors. And economic regeneration is more than simply getting manufacturing industry, or even light industry such as retailing, to relocate to your city: now, city authorities wax lyrical about the 'new knowledge economy', the importance of 'quality of life', and the capacity-building potential of creative and cultural industries.

Similarly, as we noted in *Faithful Cities*, we talk of the growth of a regeneration 'industry' which involves the blurring of public and private: so city councils are engaged in the marketing of cities to win the contests for public (or EU money) such as City of Culture competitions, whilst private management companies are contracted to consult with local communities on schemes of local redevelopment; or of the use of parts of the community and voluntary sector to deliver public sector services. That gives rise to issues of accountability which we may wish to explore later.

So, Liverpool and Manchester alike are hoping that attention to the cultural assets of their respective cities will help the economic regeneration of the city. Estimates suggest this could be worth up to £1.7bn for the region as a whole.¹⁸ This could result either from attracting new industries lured by the promise of a vibrant 'boho' city, or by shifting from traditional

¹⁶ Andy Westwood and Max Nathan, *Manchester: Ideopolis? Developing a Knowledge Capital* (The Work Foundation, 2002), available at: www.theworkfoundation.com [accessed 28/01/04]

¹⁷ Manchester City Council, *Manchester's Cultural Strategy: Introduction* [online], available at: <http://www.manchester.gov.uk/regen/culture/strategy/> [accessed 07/09/06]

¹⁸ Northwest Regional Development Agency, *Faith in England's Northwest* (Warrington: Northwest Development Agency, 2003). North West Development Agency, *Faith in England's Northwest: Economic Impact Assessment* (2005) (see <http://www.faithnorthwest.org.uk>)

manufacturing industry towards heritage, sport and tourism which then themselves generate substantial income.

But the attempt to use culture as a tool for economic growth is open to criticism on a number of fronts: the main question facing us is whether the arts, and culture more generally, can make a sufficiently lasting impact on local economies ravaged by urban decay, de-industrialisation, poverty and crime; a process of decline that may have been taking place over half a century or more. Certainly the public image of a city can be changed for the better, with places such as Glasgow, Manchester and Liverpool as examples. But to what extent is that success a marketing tool, all the better to promote the city as a likely option for further inward investment, rather than any intrinsic strategy about culture as a generator of substantial new economic activity in its own right? And are the fruits of any resulting wealth-creation equitably distributed? Do local communities living in the reinvented city benefit from living and working in a Capital of Culture?

Quantitative socio-economic statistics do not paint a particularly encouraging picture of such organic or integrated social regeneration. On the one hand, in Manchester, there have been thousands of jobs generated in the culture sector, and the undoubted proliferation of cultural choices for the consumer, plus the undoubted buoyancy of the city following the Commonwealth Games in 2002, both in public perception amongst its residents as well as further afield. Yet these have to be placed alongside the fact that Manchester still has very high morbidity and mortality rates, with one of the youngest average male mortality rates in England.¹⁹ Similarly, in terms of widening participation and greater access to cultural industries, the jury is still out, with many still talking about the 'elitism' of cultural events. The evidence is indeed ambivalent, with costs and benefits equally balanced.

Clearly, therefore, cultural regeneration strategies have not been without their critics. There is concern that prestigious landmark projects, whilst attracting the lion's share of resources, are often merely pieces of 'window-dressing' that do little to transform the everyday lives of local residents. There is scepticism that landmark buildings and creative activity necessarily deliver a more successful or sustainable local economy. When it comes to high-profile 'signature' building developments, some cultural commentators have added to the controversy by attacking the quality of the developments on offer, arguing that the buildings are more valued for their appearance than their substance. The prime example here is the Millennium Dome, which was attacked for its over-blown ambitions for the regeneration of Docklands.

Similarly, much of the regeneration money in Liverpool and Newcastle came from external sources, such as the European Union's (EU) Regeneration Fund, and had little to do with new businesses or artists actually generating new wealth organically as a result of new economic activity, in the shape of increased investment or consumer expenditure. Although Glasgow is regarded by many as the exemplar of creative and sustainable urban renaissance, following its year in the City of Culture spotlight in 1990, much of the funding that revitalised the area arrived long before the city even decided to make a bid for the title; and there is evidence that many of the projects, such as the "Glasgow's Glasgow" exhibition, far from having a long-term economic impact on resident's lives, actually left the city council with substantial debts.²⁰

¹⁹ <http://www.manchester.gov.uk/health/jhu/intelligence/city.htm> [accessed 25/11/06]

²⁰ See Franco Bianchini and Michael Parkinson, *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration: the West European Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); Alex Richards, 'Culture as Circus' [online], available at: <http://www.spunk.org/texts/pubs/hn/sp000025.txt> [accessed 10/09/06]; Pat Lally, 'Glasgow's Glasgow', *New York Review of Books*, September 26, 1991 [online], available at: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/3165> [accessed 27/11/06]

Regeneration schemes have also proved divisive within local neighbourhoods, with negative effects on social cohesion, since the processes of 'gentrification' they trigger often price long-standing residents out of the area. This is something we analysed in *Faithful Cities*, particularly in the disruption that can be caused by the creation of so-called 'gated' communities out of former public sector housing.²¹

From this perspective, therefore, judging the value of culture according to economic and political criteria does little to aid the development of a genuinely high-quality cultural life. And when it comes to boosting growth, can a few new art galleries or nightclubs match serious economic reform and investment as a driver for growth? Is it the case that 'culture' has been used as a pawn in a wider political game, but has little value as a means of genuinely improving the quality of life for anyone but a small wealthy minority?

So there is a tension at the heart of Britain's regeneration strategy. While everyone agrees that culture is a good thing intrinsically, there is little firm evidence that it has caused a significant upturn in economic growth, social change or community involvement. Yet some would argue that if culture isn't delivering the anticipated urban renaissance, the problem lies with the kind of culture on offer.

Many commentators would argue that regeneration through cultural enterprises needs to come from the grassroots, rather than being centrally controlled by 'top-down' processes co-ordinated by quangos and other official bodies. Indeed, Sir Jeremy Isaacs, chairman of the expert panel who determined the winner of the City of Culture bid, has stated that one of the reasons Liverpool was named as the winner for 2008 was precisely because "there was a greater sense there that the whole city is involved in the bid and behind the bid".²² Only if this is the case, runs the argument, will any particular initiatives translate into long-term, broad-based sustainable programmes of regeneration.

In the Executive Summary of its original bid, Liverpool boasted that its cultural map 'is grounded in the experiences of traditionally under-represented groups and individuals'.²³ So an interesting recognition here is that firstly, culture is a contested term, that it never comes from nowhere and that secondly, issues of participation and ownership are crucial matters to consider. The argument is that culture is not just about landmark buildings, but also about consultation and participation in order to connect with local people's aspirations. A community arts regeneration project 'from below', as it were, might have a very different complexion than the large flagship cultural enterprises that capture media attention.

Speaking from my own experience of the Victoria Baths renovation project in South Manchester – this is the Edwardian swimming pool and Turkish Baths that won the first BBC TV Restoration programme in 2003 – it appears that it has been very successful in capturing public support because it has always been regarded as 'the people's palace', a place that people remember visiting, and so it continues to occupy a prime place in people's affections.²⁴ Eric Antones, head of Antwerp as City of Culture in 1993, has been reported as telling those responsible for Liverpool 2008 not to feel pressurised into pursuing an agenda of 'high culture' at the expense of fostering its local popular artistic heritage – such as the Beatles – in putting together its programme of artists and events.²⁵

²¹ *Faithful Cities*, 2006, paragraph 3.16

²² 'Liverpool named European Capital of Culture', *Guardian*, 4 June 2003

²³ <http://www.liverpool08.com/>

²⁴ Prue Williams, *Victoria Baths: Manchester's Water Palace* (Reading: Spire Books, 2004). Liz Lock and Mishka Henner, *One Hundred Years: One Hundred Faces* (Manchester: Common Eye Books, 2006). See also www.victoriabaths.org.uk

²⁵ Jason Teasdale, 'Former culture director warns Liverpool not to forget its roots', *The Enquirer*, September 7-13, 2006, p.4

But this only works, probably, if you have something as internationally lucrative and attractive – and so identifiable with the city – as the Beatles. But official promotion of small-scale, local culture doesn't necessarily deliver the goods of regeneration as local authorities and business interests would like. While the authorities are in a position to fulfil ambitious projects and actually create impressive landmark projects, centralized attempts to promote neighbourhood initiatives – be it oral history projects, photography exhibitions or poetry readings – could backfire and be seen as a cynical attempt to cash in on the remnants of a city's spontaneous cultural life. Neither will such a strategy attract outsiders or encourage inward investment.

3. 4 Commission on Urban Life and Faith

Faithful Cities also picks up on this idea of valuing the experiences and aspirations of ordinary people, but recognising that often the agenda of urban regeneration is not driven with those interests at its heart. It's evident in what we say about the importance of 'theologies from below' and of listening to the stories, hopes and achievements of local communities of faith; and it's also there in our analysis of the way often the 'regeneration industry' is driven by considerations that don't reflect long-term grass-roots interest, but that projects would often be more sustainable if they did. And this is linked to this question of harnessing and valuing the 'social capital' or 'faithful capital' of such communities, because social/faithful capital is an effective means of capacity-building.

Social capital is generally understood as the quality of social networks based on trust and shared values. It's about people's ability to connect and work together towards common objectives. It's the 'social glue' that enables people to 'make things happen'.²⁶

From there, we move to the notion of religion as a vital source of social capital – of religion as a wellspring of shared values and corporate participation. But we've coined the term 'faithful capital' as denoting the values, networks, skills, physical resources and structures through which faith-based organizations build social networks. But later in the Report we actually argue for the distinctive qualities of faithful capital: it cannot be reduced simply to the level of 'service delivery' because the values and long-term commitments enshrined in the foundations of faith (derived from the theological convictions) are indivisible from the actions and practical involvement of faith-communities.²⁷

Faith-based organizations may contribute positively to their neighbourhood in a number of ways:

- values that propel them towards forms of social service or community involvement;
- physical assets that provide resources for themselves and others to get mobilised;
- structures, contacts and organizational skills that oil the wheels of the infrastructure of social networks;
- people on the ground with shared memory and a long-term commitment to local space and place.

Faithful Cities offers dozens of local case studies which tell of congregations intimately involved with the affairs of their local community. The report has deliberately interwoven analysis and narrative in its format, in order that the voices and experiences of people 'on the ground' will shine through. (And of course, this also has something to do with a commitment to contextual theology, too). But these case-studies tell of countless initiatives,

²⁶ Christopher R Baker and Elaine L Graham (eds.), *Religious Capital in a Regenerating Community* (Manchester: William Temple Foundation, 2004); Rob Furbey and Marie Macey, 'Religion and Urban Regeneration: A Place for Faith?' *Policy and Politics*, 2005, Vol. 33, No.1, pp.95-116

²⁷ *Faithful Cities*, 2006, esp. Chapter 6: 'Involved and Committed'

ranging from service provision for families, young people and the elderly, to ambitious programmes of community capacity-building and neighbourhood regeneration. What unites these stories is the way in which the values of faith provide a vital well-spring which motivates believers to work actively for the well-being of their communities.

When we talk about the characteristics of faithful capital – its fruits or visible signs, we talk about the following kinds of qualities: presence – as in incarnational commitment to a place, a neighbourhood, a community; hospitality – as in a positive quality that goes beyond mere tolerance, deeply enshrined in Biblical tradition, of welcoming the stranger or sojourner, of entertaining Christ in one's care for the prisoner, the homeless, the dispossessed; of being 'host' to the newcomer, but being prepared to be changed by that encounter, that engagement with the stranger.

But we argue that faithful capital also finds expression in critical partnership: not just acquiescing with the requirements of the regeneration industry, but retaining an autonomy and independence founded on those independent values of creation, human dignity and right relation. Faith communities are highly effective at mobilizing skilled and highly-committed volunteers, promoting good organization and leadership, furnished by strong core values of partnership, inclusion, stability and continuity – not to mention the physical capital of basic resources such as buildings.

In terms of linking with the cultural agenda, faith-based organizations are often quite invisible when it comes to 'marketing' a city: Manchester's information on its cultural strategy speaks of diversity but there's little if nothing about FAITH or RELIGION. But there is, of course one obvious way in which the physical assets of faith-based organizations have been harnessed as a significant cultural asset – but it is to do with the 'gentrification' of urban housing, and the vision of regeneration it presents may not be quite what those faith-communities have in mind.

One regeneration strategy in parts of inner-city Manchester has been to buy up redundant church buildings to convert into state-of-the art 'executive apartments'. The language of faith is deployed to create a sense of distinctiveness and desirability in the minds of prospective purchasers: religious heritage becomes a distinctive selling-point, creating an attractive ambience for the customer. For example, the estate agents Bridgfords have marketed the apartments created from the renovation of St Mary's Church, Hulme, as follows:

A SENSE OF ENLIGHTENMENT - Moving away from today's 'usual' building conversions: residents of the church will be enveloped in the sense of history that emanates from every brick and beam ... The result is a living space that will touch your soul with its ambience, elegance and style.

BE INSPIRED – The Church at St Mary's has inspired those who have lovingly refurbished it ... Let it be your inspiration for life ... Find your Sanctuary in the City.²⁸

So does faithful capital mean little more than 'sanctuary' for the stressed-out middle classes? Most local faith-based organizations would regard their 'faithful capital' as influencing their neighbourhoods in rather different ways. For example, *Faithful Cities* stresses the strongly local nature of most faith-based organizations, which is often very longstanding, encourages a commitment to people and places that is tolerant of slow progress and assigns importance to building relationships and meeting the needs of specific people and groups. As the

²⁸ www.thechurchstmarys.co.uk

Archbishop of Canterbury put it in a House of Lords debate on the state of our cities and towns shortly before the publication of *Faithful Cities*:

[Communities of faith] speak of a commitment and availability of social capital that is not likely to be withdrawn when things get difficult. In a world of time-limited grants and often desperate scrambling to create leadership and management structures that will survive the somewhat breathless rhythms of funding regimes, they allow a longer view.²⁹

So religious congregations are places where the skills and capacities for social renewal are nurtured; and *Faithful Cities* calls on local and national government to acknowledge that faith-based organizations are well-placed to help many of our urban neighbourhoods to flourish, materially and spiritually.

Another theme is to challenge very economically-driven models of wealth creation, to ask questions about happiness and well-being: at what cost to our health, our environments, our public life, is the pursuit of economic growth or consumerism?³⁰ Similarly, faithful capital draws on visions of an equitable society – to ask how government policies benefit the poor and marginalized; and to seek ways of empowering people. Those are themes that continue through into later parts of the Report.

So we come to the question of the connections between ‘faithful capital’ and the cultural agenda as part of urban regeneration. Many of the same issues are there: of whose ‘agenda’ drives such programmes, and whether prestigious property-driven initiatives, however successful in boosting the local economy, often prove less effective in delivering long-term material improvement in the quality of life (however that is assessed) for its local inhabitants?

But there could still be some constructive points of engagement: can a focus on the cultural assets of a city or neighbourhood – or even a particular ethnic or religious community – help to release and forge social capital – a means by which through shared cultural activities, common bonds can be strengthened – whether it’s local music, sport or an iconic building? Equally, can strong social or faithful capital be a vehicle for enabling local communities to bring forth cultural expressions that articulate questions about what makes a good city, give spaces and opportunities for people to tell their stories, to improve the quality of life in their area? This kind of cultural activity is all a part of the process of building the good city, which is always in progress:

... if the dominant idea of much urban regeneration is one of ‘delivering a good city to the people’, then faith traditions offer alternative understandings ... Cities, as human dwelling places which somehow prefigure and point to the presence of God within them, are always ‘under construction’, and need the active and continuing participation of all parts of the community to fulfil their potential.³¹

²⁹ Archbishop of Canterbury, *Cities and Towns* Lords debate, May 19 2006 *Hansard*, 19/05/06:53 [online], available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld/199900/ldhansrd/pdvn/lds06/text/60519-01.htm> [accessed 20/05/06]

³⁰ *Faithful Cities*, Chapter 4, ‘Prosperity: In Pursuit of Well-Being’

³¹ *Faithful Cities*, para. 1.26, p. 4

4. Visions of the City

4.1 An 'Official' View of Culture and its Place within Urban Renewal

Paul Collard led the Newcastle-Gateshead bid for the European Capital of Culture 2008. He is now National Director of Creative Partnerships which builds relationships between schools, arts and the cultural sector to raise aspirations and skills amongst children preparing for a future in an economy increasingly driven by culture and rooted in creativity.

Paul Collard started his keynote address by referring to the year 1996, which was the Year of Visual Arts in Newcastle. In the 1980s, he had written a paper on the role of arts in regeneration, which stressed that arts-led regeneration would only work if it was deeply rooted and owned by local communities. In 1987 UDCs (Urban Development Corporations) were introduced as instruments of urban regeneration – a tier of market-dominated governance that disempowered local people. One of the outcomes of his earlier paper was to say to people in Newcastle in 1996, 'It's your year – you're going to do it'.

4.1.1 Angel of the North

Out of the programme of local communal gatherings during the early 1990s to discuss what might be an appropriate public arts programme, the vision for The Angel of the North emerged. This proved to be a controversial commission for Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council. The surface arguments were about costs and whether or not public money for arts projects would be better spent on hospitals and schools. However, in his opinion, the underlying argument was really about 'do we in the North East have the capacity to change in the twenty first century?' Local papers ran headlines such as 'Nazi but Nice' and 'Stop the Angel'. But despite the history of the area, local people stayed calm. The Angel of the North was built in a shipyard in Hartlepool and was driven through to Gateshead, cheered by thousands as it made its way to its final destination on a cold February night, because the people thought that change was possible.

Paul stressed that cultural regeneration should bring about changes to the spirit – if you forget that it's about the people you miss the point. Yes, there is the need for external manipulation of the environment in which people live, but it is the inside change that is significant.

4.1.2 Case Study – International Festival of New Haven, USA 1998

Paul was the Director of the New Haven Festival which ran from 1998 – 2002. The Festival had to demonstrate impact on the way that people thought about New Haven, especially in relation to issues of crime. It had to change people's impression against their instincts. This it did, but at the price of a caveat: successful economic regeneration has tended to perpetuate the false conception that things are better for all.

4.1.3 Richard Florida and the Creative Economy

Paul then went on to discuss the implications of American sociologist Richard Florida's thesis about the creative economy and the creative class. What is the creative economy? It is 'an economy based on creativity, innovation, intellectual property and uniqueness of place'. It seeks to create a close correlation between a sense of space, place and culture; e.g. art, digital media, sciences (technology and manufacturing) and the sectors that resource these innovations.

Richard Florida has described the link between a strong economy and the rise of the creative class and their impact on city environments. What Florida did was to look at creative cities and identify common factors. Typically creative cities have:

- better cultural infrastructure, theatres etc. more artists, musicians and writers
- better nightlife
- higher concentrations of gay people
- immigration
- ethnic diversity.

Florida suggests that creative people are a bit 'odd' – they don't like to be challenged, therefore they congregate in places where they will be tolerated in an atmosphere that makes people comfortable (e.g. early twentieth century Paris). Cities of the 'golden ages' appear to combine these elements; they were cities of High Culture (Athens, New York, Florence throughout the ages) - cosmopolitan, home to recent immigrations and creative outsider-groups, bases for creative and cultural industries, new expressions of art and technology, multi-media and a magnet for the immigration of talent.

4.1.4 Government and Education

However, the creative energy identified above has not always reached down to local communities. Paul was recently at a conference on the role of culture in education. In 1998, a similar conference he attended took it for granted that continuous learning was the key to community development. Continuous learning is the kind of learning that is most suited to the most difficult communities, because creativity is the most relevant resource that they have. However (at this most recent conference) the issue of creativity was not based at the heart of the education process. Why don't these two agendas come together?

Government used to be 'omnipresent' – it had a huge portfolio of diverse responsibilities. Now all that is left to its responsibility is health and education, both of which agendas have the most impact on the poorest communities. The current structure of education is rooted in the eighteenth century Rationalist and Enlightenment tradition, which was the same era as the nation state:

Curriculum 2005:

- English
- Maths
- History
- Geography
- Science
- Foreign Language
- Art and Design
- Music

1902

- English
- Maths
- History
- Geography
- Science
- Foreign Languages
- Drawing

1750

- English
- Maths
- Geography
- Science
- Latin

- Greek
- Drawing and Fortification

All the above represent a mindset based on testing and ‘filling you up’. We have pursued the same education strategy for 200 years, yet 60% of school leavers in this generation will do jobs that have not yet been invented within a more diverse and multicultural society. In Paul’s opinion, the immediate repercussion of this trend is we must learn other people’s languages: 90% learn French, but will this make us more tolerant and capable of adapting to diversity and tapping into the importance of creative learning for the development of strong local cultures?

4.2 Liverpool: The Lived Experience of Culture

Barbara Glasson and John Bradbury, both urban practitioners in the centre of Liverpool take a walk through the city centre and give a grassroots perspective on the impact of cultural change.

JOHN: Our interest is the people of the city as they are in the city centre. We are practitioners – ‘local theologians’, maybe one could put it. Our interest is not in culture *per se*, but rather in the lived experience of Liverpool, a place others have named as Capital of Culture, and its experiences of people, places and stories. Culture is not, believe it or not, a word that most Scousers might use, other than in the context of the term ‘Capital of Culture’. Our culture is not one in which we tend to talk about culture – so to speak. We are ordained Methodist and United Reformed Church ministers, who have been sent and called to work together in the city centre. The city centre is Barbara’s primary place of being. For me, my ministry roots itself both in the city centre, and within the inner-city. Barbara’s ministry expresses itself within the context of an emerging church that gathers around the baking of bread, an ecclesial community that draws to itself the range of people that the city centre itself attracts. I have joined this community more recently, as a wandering minister within the city centre with no congregation or building and in need of a home. My other home being a church with a building in the Edge Hill area, an area set for massive demolition and so-called regeneration, in which we wait to see whether or not the compulsory purchase order on our building will be enacted. Somewhat to my embarrassment, the home in which I live, is a little further out, as the inner-city just begins to give way to the suburbs, in a place where they build houses that meet manse requirements....

As we are wont to do, and particularly in preparation for this talk, Barbara and I have spent a considerable time wandering the streets of Liverpool, musing on the relationship between culture and the life of the city. It is the result of some of those musings we would like to share with you today as we invite you to join us in our wanderings around the city. As such, we have left aside some of our academic tendencies to draw neat conclusions, and rather wish to share impressions, and questions. As priestly ministers, not social workers or developers or anthropologists, we reflect theologically, and as we do so, we have taken two biblical texts that are close to our hearts, and seek to allow them to converse with us and enlighten our context.

Pier Head

BARBARA: Over the past 6 years of wandering and listening to the city I have been struck by the analogy between the city centre and a well. And the passage of scripture that resonates most with me as I muse on a life of wandering and encounter is the meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well.

Why do I think of the city as a well? First, because I see the city centre as a place to which people come for what they need, for refreshment, for company, for new life. And a place from which they leave with expectation and trepidation. It is fluid – people come and go, it is not a place of capture, it is a place of movement. I am reminded of this as I stand at what Liverpool people call, 'The Pier Head'. To the outsider it is an empty expanse of land between the Liver buildings and the river estuary. But in the history of Liverpool it is the emotive point of arrivals and departures that has marked the history of immigration and emigration; from the slave ships arriving with human, textile and sugar cargoes to the Cunarders setting sail on world tours, the Pier Head has been a place of new lives beginning. A place of abject poverty as the hungry fled the potato blights of Ireland and a place of riches as the ship owners dispatched their cargoes. Our history is about migration. Diaspora in, and out again. The city is an organic thing. We meet the conjunction of people, place and story – and the Pier Head embodies something particular only to Liverpool's people, place and story.

Let me illustrate this in the life of my immediate family. My husband's grandparents arrived at the Pier Head from Ireland at the end of the last century to set up in trade in Mossley Hill. In turn David and his brother set sail as radio officers from the Canada Dock to take the Queen Mary on a world cruise, a banana boat up the coast of South America and a Shell oil tanker to and from the Middle East. My son, now 18, has just started his first job on the Dock Road, no longer in shipping but in a graphics firm that finds the buildings cheap to rent but accessible to the city centre. Along the road that used to carry the overhead railway, he flits to and from town on a road that still has no traffic lights.

So, for generations the Pier Head has been a landmark for those who arrive and leave Liverpool. And because our city is a semicircle with the other 'half' of a conventional city being across the water on Wirral, the city centre is peculiar in its proximity to the river and to the edge. This geography is a physical dimension to the life of the city – the ebb and flow of the river and the influx and outflow of the human population.

At the Pier Head we first see the dynamic of person, place and story by which we begin to understand the cultures of Liverpool. Just like in the story of the woman at the well, the physical environment shapes the places of encounter. The Jews and the Samaritans were literally mountains apart and yet, in the human ebb and flow, in their need for water, nourishment, survival, they found the well, as we find the city, the place to meet, talk, engage, learn and leave.

JOHN: 'The world in one city' the banners proclaim. The European Capital of Culture might project the image of the world in a city – but Liverpool is not, according to the urban theorists, a global city.³² Rather, it is but a mere regional one. Perhaps it once was – controlling as it did one-third of the export trade and one fourth of the import trade of the whole of the UK and owning one seventh of all of the shipping in the world.³³ Liverpool finds itself, perhaps, lodged between the global, and the local. Liverpool 'culture' – and perhaps we might take the definition that Timothy Gorringer offers us³⁴: 'the web of significance we spin for ourselves' is indeed caught between the global and the local – in, at times, a tense fashion, and at times an undifferentiable one.

³² Ronaldo Munck, 'Introduction: The City, Globalisation and Social Transformation', in Ronaldo Munck, ed., *Reinventing the City: Liverpool in Comparative Perspective* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), p. 1

³³ John Belchem, *Merseypride: Essays in Liverpool Exceptionalism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), p. 15

³⁴ Timothy J Gorringer, *Furthering Humanity: A Theology of Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 1

The story of the tower of Babel offers us perhaps some sort of insight into this predicament. If we take the view that language and culture are essentially related, we begin to see a divine decision for a plurality of cultures. Language and culture become particularly enmeshed in Liverpool, where the Scouse accent betokens a sense of identity and belonging. Here at the Pier Head we see something of the origins of that – as Liverpool has been a classic melting pot – the Irish and Welsh inflections, capped with a slight transatlantic tone bring us what we know today as Scouse. John Belchem points out the relative late development of the accent, not until the late 1880's do phonetic studies point out the differences between the general South Lancashire speech and that of Liverpool.³⁵ 'As an accent (and much more), Scouse is a recently invented tradition, a cultural response to the city's decline', Belchem states, drawing on various reasons for this, including the rise of the famous self-denigrating Scouse comedian.³⁶

The Pier Head has seen the arrival of those who have made the Scouse accent what it is. It has also seen the arrival of those settled cultures that have ended up thrown together in Liverpool, having some of the oldest and best-established Black communities, Chinese Communities and Jewish communities. These folk, their art and architecture make great pictures on hoardings hiding the building sites – and are rich and fertile ground for the Culture Company to draw on..... images of the city's culture hiding the destruction and re-embodiment of the same. God's choice for diversity of language and culture Liverpool knows well. It might even be fair to say, that as a city, it has survived its constant life of change by drawing so heavily on those diverse cultures: be it Chinese, Irish Catholic, Welsh Presbyterian, Jewish or black African, most (well, perhaps not the Welsh!) have arrived through the docks we can still see. What place, though, does that diversity have in the new global order – seen in the new developments emerging across the city centre?

MetQuarter

BARBARA: The old post office in the middle of town has been a building site for at least the last ten years. In fact there are few people who can even remember it ever having been a post office. The successful City of Culture bid has caused a rush of redevelopment that is not really related to City of Culture status. It has signalled that the time is right for the developers who have held onto derelict property for years to make a move. Within the last year the MetQuarter has appeared on the site of the Old Post Office. The development has brought glitz and designer wear to an enclosed shopping precinct. John and I were particularly struck by some large, long red couches that flank the entrance to the Met Quarter. We wonder who dare sit on them!

Earlier in the week we have had long conversations with a member of the bread making community, Jack, who has been arrested – again – for dosing under the heat ventilation outlet of a Chinese restaurant. He had been chased away by the restaurant owner and became aggressive. His court appearance looms at the end of the week.

In the MetQuarter there is a war memorial. It is a monument to those named who have died in various wars and who were postal workers. In this no longer post office we find a memorial to no-longer postal workers, and a bed which is a designer statement whilst Jack has nowhere to sleep. We feel enraged.

In the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman there is both an acknowledgment of shared history and the story of exclusion. It is the well that offers a liminal space between the

³⁵ Belchem, *Merseypride*, p.33

³⁶ Belchem, *Merseypride*, p.33

Temple of the Jews and the Mountain of the Samaritans: the well of their common ancestor Jacob. Yet what we see in a MetQuarter is a privatisation of history and consequently the story becomes that of exclusion. Jack will never rest on the long leather couch. This area is policed by private security guards; even the city's history has been privatised, shut away behind automatic doors that close shut at 6pm.

This fracture between people, place and story as the consequence of a dominant narrative of re-generation is a corruption of the Gospel message in which encounter is encouraged within difference and a new and inclusive story can emerge. As in the story of the Samaritan woman at the well – both the story of the Jews and the story of the Samaritans is transformed by the Gospel spirit of grace and truth.

The excluded are those who are displaced from the story and the place – therefore they are displaced from the culture and I believe the gospel imperative for a new way of being is disfigured by the false temples of image and desire.

JOHN: God's decision is for particularity. Universality – in its human dimension is, for whatever reason, not God's decision: 'They are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.' Is it significant that it is the Old Post Office that has become the new designer brand shopping centre? One form of communication giving way to another? I want, I need, I have – the advertisement goes. 'Located in the heart of the city, offering you the very latest styles and coolest labels. The majority of brands available can ONLY be found exclusively in MetQuarter. The perfect place to shop, meet friends, relax and have fun.'³⁷

And then there are the brands: Armani, Hugo Boss, Timberland..... names that in New York, or Paris, or London, or Tokyo will be named and recognised. There is in reality, no 'only found in the MetQuarter'. Has perhaps the human desire to seek one common language for the sake of achieving the impossible morphed into the globalised language of the brand? The carefully construed cross-cultural advert that speaks whatever its audience? Does Armani in a Scouse accent make much difference to Armani in Parisian? Is this, perhaps, a Babel of signs – a Babel of Names – a seeking of uniformity in the face of God's decision for the particular? Is this 'our' culture? If we are global citizens, then perhaps yes. And perhaps there is something of Liverpool here. 'The Future Supremacy of Liverpool', *Tit-Bits*, quoted in *The Liverpool Magazine*, May 1890 stated:

This vast city will be the greatest and richest ever known to the world ... London, compared to it, is out of the way ... London will be our historic city – the city of culture and fashion and intellect. But whoever lives long enough will find the great city on the banks of the Mersey will be the commercial city of the future.³⁸

Is there something of Liverpool that is simply the global 'culture' and always has been? Does our situation, looking out onto the world, sending and receiving to the world, lead inexorably to a Babel of Brands?

We might not have been predicted to be the Cultural Capital of Europe, but here we are. And opposite the MetQuarter lies the Capital of Culture shop, the *08 place*. Where you can buy the labelled American Baseball cap – where screens pump out the images of the sleek – and in the back corner a set of stained-glass panels painted by local primary children depict scenes of Anfield, and football, and yellow submarines.

³⁷ Found at: www.metquarter.com

³⁸ Quoted in Belchem, *Merseybride*, p.4

We cannot simply write off this global trend. Liverpool was at this game long before most others, as we sent and received the designer goods of other times to and from the Empire. Liverpool's culture is to be, in its way, caught between a localism that mean six streets down the road is 'them' as far as my congregation in the inner-city are concerned, and the globalism of the MetQuater. We have to ask, however, whether the balance is to be tipped – has the global simply moved the local out? Most of my congregation have never been to the MetQuater. Certainly – they, like their minister, will never earn enough to shop there!

Paradise Street

BARBARA: The middle of town, the crossroads with McDonalds on one corner and a shoe shop on the other, is known as 'God's Meeting Place'. At the moment it is the meeting point of the developments that aim to swivel the orientation of the city through 90 degrees. Instead of the orientation by which all roads led to the commercial end of town and ultimately to the Pier Head, the orientation of the city centre will now be turned literally towards retail and tourism. The bus station has been moved to give easier access to the Albert Dock, a once forlorn piece of Victorian history and now an aspiring tourist attraction with the possibility to sample the cultures of 'The Slave Trade' and 'The Beatles Experience'. Liverpool city centre is now officially the largest building site in Europe. John and I climb the steps of the deserted Friends Meeting House and peer down into the foundations of a huge development that includes a fourteen screen cinema, a privately policed retail development and a roof level park. And we are led to ask, as Jews and Samaritans did centuries ago: Where and what do we worship? Who is included in the temple? What is cleanliness?

Some trainee guard dogs walk past us with the security guards who are training them to meet the public. It is a sign maybe that this supposed temple of retail will remain a place subject to a laws of exclusion. The non-acceptable, from skateboarders to drifters, will be shifted and the penniless will be confined to window shopping. Across the city we are aware of the squeeze put upon local people by redevelopment. The YMCA is moving out of town with the old building being used as a hostel for tourists during the City of Culture year. The new YMCA building on the edge of town had 160 objections to its planning application and the staff had to be escorted from the council meeting that discussed its application under police escort. The St John's Market, known for its bargains and as a gathering place for asylum seekers is under threat of closure and Bold Street shops have had their rents trebled in the last five years.

As nonconformists, John and I have already fallen victim to this economic squeeze. Our city centre buildings have closed. What is the 'narrative' that forms 'culture'? Is it a dominant story of success at the expense of the silenced or do we believe in what Philip Sheldrake refers to as a messy text where there is the possibility of an interweaving of stories, where the subversive and the dominant stories are able to converse as in the story of Jesus and the woman at the well?

JOHN: What possessed those building Babel? The desire to build up and reach the heavens, the desire to not be scattered. The desire for power. And the site of the Old Quaker Meeting House provides perhaps the best view of Paradise – the project which moves rapidly from hole in the ground to tower in the sky. Whose culture is this? Where does it come from? Is this Liverpool? Is this the more common folks' version of the MetQuater? One cannot but see the theological parallel - it is a kind of a secular version of Pelagianism. We will build ourselves to the heavens – we will build ourselves to Paradise. The multi-national, and the national, will call all shoppers to heaven – as Liverpool once again seeks its

status in retail rapture. Salvation through town-planning. Deliverance by regeneration (but not quite as Calvin knew it!).

And yet, whose space is this? Is this really Liverpool, we wonder? It is no longer ours, in reality, as the city Council leases the site to Grovesnor for 250 years – rather, a recent report by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors states that:

while many in Liverpool have welcomed the injection of £750 million into the city, the development has also been accompanied by negative publicity from the start over plans to replace traditional rights of way with ‘public realm arrangements’ policed by private security guards known as ‘quartermasters’ or ‘sheriffs’. Begging, skateboarding and rollerblading will be banned, alcohol and food are only to be consumed in certain designated areas and any form of demonstration will require police permission. Consequently, alongside the negative publicity, organisations ranging from human rights group Liberty to the Open Spaces Society have voiced serious concern about the restrictions on public access and behaviour.³⁹

Whose Babel is this? Whose place is this? Whose story is this? The global and the multinational tell the story, own the place and determine which people will be in it. Within the thought patterns we are inhabiting here – within the understanding of the Divine choice for particularity, this is not our space, story or people. This is not ‘our’ culture. This is not our web of meaning – and yet of course, it is. For we will shop. I shop, therefore I am! Just as the Housing Renewal Initiative Team cannot give me any demographic or social information about the massive housing initiative that threatens our church building in Edge Hill, “because our remit is only to renew the buildings” – so one fears this is the case city-wide – and in the city centre. Renewing the buildings is perhaps code for hoping those already there will move on somewhere else, so they won’t inconvenience ‘us’. Regeneration becomes the quest for the global over the local – a hegemonic culture that squeezes out the divine initiative for diversity, seeking once again, to build its way to paradise.

Quiggins

BARBARA: It is particularly poignant for me to wander around Quiggins. It is a fistful of kiosks selling everything from mobile phone leads to ancient runes. There has been an almighty struggle involving petitions and protests to stop the compulsory purchase order on the city centre warehouse that has owned it for 40 years or so. A place for geriatric hippies and Goths to gather in equal number. Quiggins has lost its fight for territory but is now re-housed in a large redbrick building on one side of Renshaw Street – the old Methodist Central Hall. Who has the power of regeneration? Who has the power of subversion?

I think of the displacement of people, place and story that this represents. The struggle of the Methodists to change along with the city centre. The demise of the building and the congregation that had fallen to about 14 in number at closure. The lifting of the covenants on the building to turn it first into a nightclub and casino and now into Quiggins. The disruption of the story of Quiggins, the brothers who had owned it as a flea market and then alternative shopping venue. The fight against compulsory purchase and now the construction of a virtual reality – the ‘new Quiggins’ painted with authentic scruffy paint in keeping with the old!

³⁹ Anna Milton, *The Privatisation of Public Space*, (London: Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, 2006), p.15

Anne Spalding writing in *Feminist Theology*⁴⁰, points us to the understanding that ‘The ideal framework is a community in right relation, both satisfying the urge for community in forming and maintaining right relation and giving expression to right relation through working towards justice;’

Forming ‘right relation’ and ‘working toward justice’ are propelled into a sense of urgency in the processes of speedy redevelopment. The long term building of communities over time is transformed into either a quiet and resentful acquiescence to the dominant power structures or, in the case of Quiggins, a noisy revolt.

It is not just that Jesus spoke to an isolated woman at a well in a friendly but unremarkable encounter. The woman became motivated to tell everyone of the man who had told her everything she had ever done. True transformation will rally the crowd and is deeply political. The upheaval brought about by the enforced search for ‘Culture’ will unleash alternative expressions of power. Power intended to silence is not culture-enhancing but a means of plunging a community into what Leonie Sandercock describes as a ‘multiplicity of fear’.

Such enforcement of change is fear-ridden. It leads to resentment and anger. At worst it will lead to civil disobedience – how else can subversive voices be raised loud enough to be heard?

JOHN: And of course, Paradise swallows up that which is not heavenly. By whose definition though? The popular feeling that has been demonstrated concerning the future of Quiggins has been considerable. The posters pronounce the fact that this is indeed Liverpool’s culture. This warren of alternative shops and stalls – the grand pianos and odd pieces of furniture, the odder T-shirts with their provocative, humorous messages. There are no big-brands here. This is particular. This is of its place and time. And yet it is to be demolished, to make way for the privatisation of public space. The kids with their hoodies on, who stand making this place their own, will not be welcomed in Paradise. Not the privately policed paradise of Grovesnor, anyhow. Is this, perhaps, the voice of the many different, competing languages? Is there something of the preferential option for the poor that is so central to discussions of power and culture? Is this, perhaps, where a secular liberationist agenda speaks its name...as it moves temporarily to the Old Methodist Central Hall?

The particular languages of alternative cultures, and generations that I suspect I never belonged to – is there something there of God’s choice for the particular? Is there actually something of the incarnation here that the universalist concrete and glass of Paradise misses? Could we actually suggest that God’s decision for a multiplicity of languages and cultures in Babel was actually because ultimately it was not good for humanity to have so much power? Could one suggest that God realised that too much possibility in human hands was a risk that could not be taken? The power does not lie with this localised, popular appeal to the particular – rather to the globalised language of the brand. As the sociologists Steven and Malcolm Miles put it in the final sentence of their work on *Consuming Cities*:

Has the time come for a more self-consciously critical agenda that puts the needs of the future rather than the needs of the present at its heart? If not, perhaps we can feast while the city implodes, and see counter-culture in chewing gum, until voices other than those of affluence intervene to silence us.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Anne Spalding, “Being Part of ‘Right Relation’”, *Feminist Theology* 22 (1999), pp.43–65

⁴¹ Steven Miles & Malcolm Miles, *Consuming Cities* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p.184

I fear that is what we see. The silencing of Quggins to make way for the affluence of Paradise.

Bandstand

BARBARA: The disappearance of the podium came as a surprise. A landmark at the top of Church Street, it was a place of encounter, 'Meet you at the podium at 11' was a sure way to meet someone from the train without too much explanation. Populated by the voluble of every variety from the politically-driven to the musically manic, it has always been a place for free expression. One of the better 'pitches' for the Big Issue vendors as it marked the crossing of two paths as well as a place to hang around during a lunch break or shopping expedition. It is from the steps of the podium that the sight of the Good Friday walk of witness caused one man to literally spit abuse at the silent passing clergy.

An understanding of culture as 'the meeting point between people, place and story' is exemplified by a podium on which and around which unlikely people can meet, maybe the modern day equivalent of a well, a place of encounter, conversation and participation. Gorringe asks us, 'to what freedom do we aspire?' and in the middle of the destruction that is the reality of the city at the moment, the answer seems to be the irony that we desire 'the freedom of conformity'.

The encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well is not such an encounter. It is a meeting of risk, at a gathering point where there becomes a possible mix of the ordinary and the unacceptable, the empowered and the struggling, the religious and the outcast from religion. The subversive voices of the city rise to the surface in such risky places. Gorringe may encourage us into the middle class prerogative that 'education proceeds through encounter with the other' but the gospel pushes us deeper. It is not simply education but transformation that is possible in such an encounter with the dangerous and offensive other.

Alberto Magnaghi in his book *Urban Village*⁴² sees this transformative process to be realised as the city opens up 'practical spaces for social action and imagination'. His vision for a diverse and locally sustainable city environment pushes us towards a reversal of this process of silencing and conformity. This transformative discourse requires space of connection and energy which reach out for what is suppressed, unheard, unarticulated: 'Cracking open the restrictive discourse of separation and disengaged, individualism creates space for the slow emergence of new speech.'⁴³

The loss of places of encounter, for the stories that are subversive or counter-cultural, is a loss of the transformative possibility of the city exemplified for us so aptly in the strange encounter between a thirsty Jewish man and a struggling bucket-carrying Samaritan woman.

So we have come to ask questions about the silenced and the silencing. The way in which we meet – the importance of encounter between the dangerous and the offensive. And we begin to search for spaces for imagination in which true encounter can be engendered between diverse individuals and groups. We see diversity, not as an optional extra once the quest for individual satisfaction has been achieved, but rather the key to our community and our ecological survival.

⁴² Alberto Magnaghi, translated by David Kerr, *The Urban Village: A Charter for Democracy and Local Self-sustainable Development* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2005)

⁴³ Mary Grey, *The Wisdom of Fools: Seeking Revelation for Today* (London: SPCK, 1993)

JOHN: A bandstand is a public realm – a gathering place. A place for communication. A place where a deaf choir gathers, to communicate through sign to the city as it goes on by. The public square and an alien language collide as the local children sign in an alien language. That clash of communicative medium is perhaps the theme that runs through our reflection on Liverpool, culture and the Tower of Babel. Local culture, as opposed to culture more generally, is perhaps the union of people and place and story in such a way that a particular place and time bound web of significance can emerge. But just whose culture is it?

And so, these two non-conformist ministers, wander back up Bold Street towards the upper-rooms that have become home-from-home in the city centre to consider matters. What is our story that we bring as people in this place? Do we, as catholic Christians seek to universalise in the fashion of the global corporation and brand? Or do we represent something of the gathering of particulars that come to make a whole as the image of the body and the ecclesiology of the gathered community suggests? Do we not bring into the midst of this a story which is universal? Are we but mere representatives of the dying breed of cultural-colonisers of a by-gone era? Or are we perhaps called, sent and set-apart to bring another particular story of a particular person in a particular place and time, to add to a transformative mix of the people and stories, eclectic and contradictory as they are, in this place? What is 'our' culture – we are not born and bred of the place, we will pass on by and out sooner or later? Do we not seek to colonise culturally with the promise of the Christian gospel, or is that gospel, in its incarnational particularity, in God's choice for the multiplicity of languages and cultures, something empowering in the midst of Liverpool's historical and contemporary clash between the global and the local?

We pick up a copy of the Liverpool Echo. A man has been stabbed by his father, a child injured in a road accident. The symbol of the Capital of Culture, the Superlambanana is to be moved...possibly to Garston, while rows over the appointment of a new chief executive continue. There are jobs in park battles and adverts for TJ Hughes – the local long-established big bargain store on the page next to one for Lidl – the German bargain supermarket. There are no adverts for Armani here. Go a little further up this hill and you will come to Earle Road, where my congregation are. There, they read the Echo, but rarely venture to the city centre anymore. The inner-city becomes ever more distant from the realities of the city centre – the people pass through – and maybe drop in and see us. Maybe we chat with them passing by the MetQuater on their way to Poundland. Whose culture is this – what is this culture we've been chosen to celebrate? Who takes those decisions – the reality of the churches co-ordinating group for the Capital of Culture seems to be that no-one does? But life goes on.

And so we are left wondering – where the local and the universal collide what happens? When Quiggins meets Paradise – and the Echo meets the texts of scripture – will a divine pattern of choice for the particulars over the superimposed generalities really win? Will the encounter be transformative, as at the well? Whose culture is it? Who can ultimately say? But armed with peculiar tales of unlikely cities and towers, and women turning the world upside down – perhaps we have the beginnings of a lens through which the questions will become clearer.

Bold Street

BARBARA: Behind a non-descript door towards the top of Bold Street you will find a small group of people who have come to make bread. David the Big Issue vendor will ring the bell for you and after you have scaled four flights of stairs you will enter a room at the centre of

which is a large table. Around the table you may find a group of people busy pummelling dough and talking together. They are an unlikely bunch. Kit has learning difficulties and dances, Peter is lonely and in need of company, Dave has just popped out of a local solicitor's office in his lunch hour and Carole is a store chaplain. A conversation about 'Culture' with a capital 'C' is a million miles away from this diverse group of individuals as they convene in their common task of breadmaking. John and I believe that this meeting around a common task, a meeting of extreme diversity yet common humanity, is a counter-sign to a city where the agenda of Culture seeks to bring a monochrome narrative. We are learning that the task of living with deep and nuanced individuals, with a multiplicity of stories, and valuing and honouring this diversity as a gift, is a way to discover the depth and possibility of cultures that enrich city life.

And as these cultures meet in their diversity and struggle, we see a transformation, not only of individuals but of the city. Just as the woman at the well and the Jewish rabbi were to discover a greater depth through an encounter at the well – an encounter of spirit and of truth – so we see that this small thing has the possibility to bring a new way of being to a city that is being dealt the dominant propaganda of growth equalling success. We do believe in the possibility of transformation but sometimes it seems as if it is against all the odds. We are determined to resist short-termism and to look at ways of sustaining the vulnerable beyond 2008. We believe that cultures don't need to collide but can enhance and embolden our city – but it is a fragile and subversive story to tell in the light of the urban upheaval that digs away at the very foundations of our city.

5. Cities and Culture: A Theological Perspective

Tim Gorrige has recently authored *Furthering Humanity: A Theology of Culture* published in 2005. He is St Luke's Professor of Theological Studies at Exeter University. His keynote address has been summarized by Chris Baker.

Tim Gorrige started a wide-ranging discussion by linking an understanding of faithful capital (see *Faithful Cities* report) with those platoons of faith-based affiliation (in the 'social capital' sense) who punch above their weight. In his opinion, 'faithful capital' is a slippery and elusive, but not entirely vacuous concept.

5.1 What is culture?

Terry Eagleton once said there are 116 definitions of culture, ranging from *identity* through to the *art pages* of a newspaper. Therefore on the question of identity – what is the difference between living in India, China, Exeter? To find out the answer, you need to ask the question, 'What is different about these places?' Ask that question and you begin to get at the idea of culture as identity. Identity is linked to spirituality – places have spiritualities, for example Dundee, Exeter, Devon. Arts pages of a newspaper – if you look in the arts pages of the newspaper you'll have high culture, pop culture, and folk culture. But if you go back to identity, then identity is 'that most complex whole'.

5.2 High culture and popular culture

High culture tends to be equated with theatre, opera, classical music, arthouse cinemas. 'Be ye perfect ... Human beings need to be pushed and educated' is a resume of the thesis put forward by Matthew Arnold in his book *Culture and Anarchy*, which critiqued the money culture of 1860s Victorian society. Capitalists were going to chapel/church and thus allowing for a moral reading of Christianity whereby the work ethic was interpreted as using time profitably. Arnold argued for an opposite stance - what culture is about is the pursuit of the best that human beings are capable of, what he called 'sweetness and light'.

High culture was also part of the Reithian revolution at the BBC, and the evolution of the Third Programme. Lord Reith, the first chairman of the BBC said, 'I want people to come and be able to listen to philosophers'. (See also the role of the Workers Education Association). However, the persistent problem with high culture is that it is elitist: 'In any period it is upon a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends'.⁴⁴

The cultural dominant, however, is now *popular* culture: Radios 1 and 2, not Radio 3. Popular culture is addicted to the body and its pleasures and is egalitarian and relativistic in its perspectives. For example, a popular culture approach would say that Bob Dylan is as good a poet as Keats.

But questionable comparisons like this aside, it is important that we don't lose sight of the theological importance of the multitude or the *ochlos*. Jesus preached compassion on the multitude. The multitude has energy and vigour and contributes to city life. For example, the people of Leipzig paid Bach to compose music for them. Similarly, the people of Birmingham have paid for a new symphony hall and attracted Simon Rattle to their city, thus helping to consolidate the rebranding of Birmingham.

However, there is also a problem that culture is too caught up in the promotion and manipulation of the media. Neil Postman (New York University) identifies two dystopias of the twentieth century: George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.

⁴⁴ Frank R Leavis, *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (Cambridge: Minority Press, 1930), pp.1-2

Huxley's is more congruent for this discussion in its discussion of the impact of advanced technology when deployed in the service of popular culture – i.e. 'Spiritual devastation comes from the smiling face'. Is this all that popular culture has to offer? Ironically, we now watch Big Brother rather than the other way round.

5.3 Folk Culture

(German origin – das Volk = the people). Other cultures don't distinguish between folk and popular culture but in England we do - something to do with losing its peasantry and the way of life associated with it, therefore the word 'folk' relates to that lost rural past, perhaps.

Folk culture and multiculturalism – do we abandon this and go back to the Tebbit test? Humans are nomads, always moving, but their rates of movement have varied during the course of human history. In England from 400 to 1000AD the main flow of immigration was from Angles, due to the activities of the Danes. See also the role of Vikings before the Norman conquest of 1066. Between 1100 – 1600AD, there was less movement, therefore culture became more stable and you see the emergence of dialects and cuisines.

At the present moment we live in a period of intense renewed migration. In the light of the Human Rights Act we ought to respect difference. Culturally, populations assimilate. Muslim communities in the South East and North of England for example are different because of the impact of local populations on their lives. Every cultural expression is an expression of value. It implicitly represents a set of values. What are good values to live by?

5.4 What makes a good city?

Cities have always played a major role in a way that is different from villages and towns. Tim quoted Lewis Mumford to the effect that, 'the mission of the city is to further our progression in the cosmic experience' by providing a sense of purpose, colour, love of life and dramatic representation. What are the reasons for cities' continued existence? From a theological perspective, Irenaeus of Lyons 180AD referred to the economy of redemption. Cities in particular have a vital role in the economy of redemption because, by and large, cities are the contexts in which first human advancements have been realised – synergy, networking, human interaction etc. Cities are hugely productive of culture: for example 15th century Florence, late 19th century Vienna, pre-World War I Paris. What makes cities culturally creative? No magic formula, but two things appear to be common factors:

1. all culturally creative cities have large numbers of immigrants.
2. however, not all culturally creative cities are nice places to live in. One line of argument suggests that in order to achieve cultural creativity we need to be able to 'stand the heat in the kitchen'. To be fully human is to acknowledge the downside of human behaviour – it has to be able to give free reign to aggressive instincts – does 'good' culture need to reflect these aggressive instincts in some way?

This line of argument critiques the 'namby pamby' welfare state. Societies dominated by the welfare state are effete and drained of cultural life blood. Tim raised the question of whether we need the 'macho spaces' before arguing that cultural creativity takes place not in the face of injustice but in cities where there is a real attempt at justice.

5.5 Cuisine as expression of culture and local identity

Cities have always lived in symbiotic relationships with hinterland and the farmland around them, but the growth of Empire saw (amongst other things) the development of the refrigerated ship in 1874. That event marked the beginning of the loss of the symbiotic relationship between cities and hinterlands, and began to replace it with the supermarket society and its attendant globalisation (for example, the ingredients that go to make a pot of yoghurt travel 6600 kilometres). It is through this stretching of space and condensing of time

that 'the distinctiveness of place is lost' - for example, the ubiquity of Tesco and its impact on the role of community-supported agriculture. However, there is some evidence to suggest that people are fed up with supermarket culture and are trying to put the local connection back into their food.

5.6 Cities and global warming

We can't talk about the culture of cities without thinking about global warming. Things are changing faster than predicted thirty years ago – it will have a massive impact on the culture of cities. At the moment cities are totally oil-dependent therefore everything will stop if the oil stops. Cities are very energy dependent, and therefore they are at the heart of any ecological crisis. The bigger they are the more impact they have on global hinterlands. We need to return to the concept of *compact city*, that is an urban environment where one can walk and cycle to work and where your energy needs and food are obtained locally, therefore going back to a local distinctiveness/identity. This idea is given further credibility by a recent New Economics Foundation survey on towns, which found that Exeter was the most 'cloned' town in Britain. We need to act fast if we are going to arrest the decline of distinctiveness in our local culture.

5.7 Culture

As a Christian, Tim expressed concern when culture is unduly predicated on the pursuit of power, pleasure and profit. We live in a hedonistic culture. But what is wrong with pleasure? Well, one response to that question is, 'if we get it based on systems of injustice'. But Tim does raise the question of himself being a cultural pessimist. After all, the city of Exeter where he lives is a city of 110,000 people and has 670 clubs and associations – that's one for every 150 people. We have a vision of ourselves as a nation of couch potatoes but this is not true to the way life is lived by many people. Tim believes that the contemporary version of folk culture is alive and well – we are perhaps not as interested in 'stars' and the celebrity system that supports them as the media hype would have us believe. One definition of folk culture is that culture which is completely amateur – for example Heavitree versus Clyst St Mary Football Clubs – Tim is a keen supporter of the latter as his local football team. There is no big money involved in football at this level. The Church's view on culture should be influenced by the perspective from John's Gospel (St John 10:10), namely life in all its fullness.

5.8 Education

Education under the current political regime is politically equated with simply 'going to University' for its own sake – a functionalist understanding and an example of 'Blair fatuousness'. For a different 'take' on education, Tim cited the example of the late Alan Ecclestone's ministry in the context of inner city Sheffield, where he established the model of the Parish Meeting: every Wednesday, members of the church met to discuss the wider implications of the culture that they had engaged with as a group or as individuals e.g. films, art, exhibitions, theatre and so on. This was done on the basis of the assumption that the gospel both reflects on and engages with the whole of human life.

5.9 Liturgy

Worship is at the heart of life. We are also engaging in culture within liturgy (but not as a pious group). In worship, we encounter the God revealed in Jesus – we respond in a catholic spirit and incarnate the following principles:

- when we worship on Sunday we are committing ourselves to a vision of the ultimate – other things may be richly rewarding but they are not ultimate – worship gives us a 'detox' by defining what is ultimate;
- we exist to worship God – but we also use a set of texts that call us also into resistance against every hegemony because only Christ is Lord;
- 'be still and know that I am God'.

6. Reflections on the Themes from *Cities of Culture*: Setting the Agenda

6.1 Motifs

Throughout the discussions and plenary session, it was possible to discern a number of related and recurring themes. Among these, and not surprisingly in view of the conference title, culture featured as a major concern. Without making sharp distinctions between traditional notions of high vs. popular culture, there was general agreement that culture should be life-giving, reflecting our human capacity and desire for creativity, transcendence and playfulness. In a similar way, there was a strong affirmation of the need for inter-personal and professional relationships that celebrate the diversity of the city, offering genuine hospitality rather than mere tolerance of difference. Openness to the other in its varied forms, combined with a readiness to learn, constitute the best ways of understanding how things really are in the urban. We are also called to affirm the built environment in all its complexity. This requires a capacity for hard thought, the discipline to resist easy or ill-judged conclusions and a principled pragmatism concerning the readiness to work in partnership with others. The religion of the Incarnation challenges us to see structures of grace operating outside religious institutions and to paraphrase one plenary contribution, 'not all urban planners are evil and not all local communities are wonderful.'

The local church should aim to retain a faithful and creative presence, alert to the wider issues that are shaping the cultural agenda without compromising its own distinctive or prophetic voice. This requires us to recognise that culture can never be understood simply in terms of pleasure, profit or power – entertainment, lots of laughs and a vibrant local economy – and should never be divorced from the deeper question of how culture promotes social capital, justice and forms of regeneration that go beyond bricks and mortar.

The task of how we minister in the urban and the integrity we bring to this role will have much to do with our willingness to remain *embedded* – staying and serving, bearing burdens and, whenever possible, building bridges that promote human well-being. To do all this, a robust theology is called for: *practical* in the best sense of discerning what 'life in all its fullness' (St John 10:10) might mean at street level and *public* insofar as its concerns reflect the basic *kingdom* conviction that the gospel embraces the whole of creation. Such a broad canvas requires prayerful reflection and a readiness 'to discern the Spirit' in the shaping of priorities. It also calls for the humility and resilience which recognise that the urban agenda, rather like the scriptural mandate to 'read the signs of the times', is never finished. Such a theological/philosophical world view draws confidence from a future hope and the belief that God 'works in all sorts of people'. Risk therefore can be embraced positively along with the inevitability of change and the duty to resist the safe and predictable. Practical outcomes and agreed targets to promote the cultural agenda remain important but nothing matters so much as the shared task of keeping local communities human, civil and hopeful. These values are integral to the notion of faithful capital and what local churches *are for* in the urban. They also raise the bar concerning what culture *is for* and the extent to which it reflects and encourages the best in human aspirations.

6.2 Issues

Within the Issues section of the *Setting the Agenda* discussion the following five themes emerged within a creative dialogue:

The theme of **the City** not surprisingly became the platform upon which much dialogue was built. The 'City' with a capital 'C' was that part of urban change that reflected the dynamic entrepreneurial city which we all recognised as a template for cultural regeneration – the 'buzz' synonymous with the energy and creativity of a city 'on the up'. However, alongside the 'City' lies the city with the small 'c' – those areas waiting to be regenerated and which

exhibit the characteristics of a 'wasteland' – both in the physical and emotional sense – 'groups of dysfunctional people dumped together' as one delegate puts it. Whilst recognising the importance of economic regeneration and human creativity that cities can achieve, the conference reaffirmed the equal significance of a justice-based and people-focused approach to the culture agenda. Regeneration of a city includes the regeneration of all its people - and is epitomised in long-term relationships based on trust and commitment, and a more equal sharing of power. We recognised the need to develop a definition of what we meant by the city – in geographical, socio-economic as well as theological terms.

Engaging with the structures of urban regeneration was a persistent issue that covered many layers: first was the importance of engaging with professional regenerators in ways that did not demonise them, but moved away from 'them and us' terminology to create safe places for strategic decision-makers to reflect on what they are doing. Second, was the commitment to develop a common understanding of what 'culture' means and take time to understand the mindsets that govern the work of decision makers? The third layer allowed us as churches to identify the values that underpin the culture/regeneration agenda, promoting the spiritual dimension of regeneration and affirming the value of the culture that already exists in urban communities. Fourth, recognising the times when we are called to give an account of how and when power is used in an oppressive or exploitative way under the auspices of 'culture'. Fifth, building credible local structures within communities (including faith groups) capable of undertaking the roles identified above. Overall, the verb to cultivate was offered as a clue to how we as churches should engage with those who influence the cultural agenda.

A third theme was **the role and identity of church within the cultural agenda debate**. At a **political level**, many saw the church as a resource to support, educate and resource faith-based representatives in strategic partnerships; playing the role of critical friend in partnership forums; creating spaces for dialogue but also places where the vulnerable and powerful actually meet. How do we 'capitalise' on our faithful capital to create the right sort of glue to hold communities and political processes together? At an **educational level**, potential city ministers (both lay and ordained) should be trained in ways that are narrative, contextual, scriptural and collaborative. At an **ecumenical level** to promote more meaningful inter- and intra-faith dialogue to forge common goals and develop common strategies, whilst at the same time maintaining a positive sense of Christian identity. These responses however, depend on the church being able to change and adapt its own way of working – for example, how might 'high', 'popular' and 'folk' categories of culture impact on our ways of being church?

Local church was seen by many as the place where these principles are already being put into practice – for example, the role of worship in creating spaces of dialogue, diversity and shaping a moral and practical vision of the common good by bringing together the different 'stories' of the community. Local churches are spaces where prayers are said for the city, where local congregations model good practice of civil society, and where a congregation's practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is being applied for the greater good. Local Christians will walk the city/parish with a 'tutored' eye and create the space to reflect on what they have seen.

A fourth theme focused on the **impact the City of Culture agenda** on community space. Many poor communities are struggling to cope physically and intellectually with powerful influxes of global populations seeking work or asylum, whilst being simultaneously labelled as inadequate and stigmatised. In respect of the much-used concept of 'capacity-building' delegates wanted a dynamic understanding of the term to be adopted (rather than the current overtone of being 'done unto') but also to ask what sort of capacity within communities is being addressed by regeneration?

Finally, various **theological** themes emerged. It was proposed that we articulate a theology that recognises that power, wealth and knowledge are not bad in themselves; a theology that is both incarnational (i.e. embedded and valorising of local communities) and eschatological (i.e. looking forward to what might be salvific within emerging patterns of culture, city and society); the recognition that regeneration is a common word between faiths and a useful foundation for interfaith dialogue about its theological impact when applied to new urban space; a suggestion that Paul Collard and Tim Gorringe had modelled different theological stances in relation to the culture agenda – Paul was more positive about the beneficial impact of the creative agenda on both city centres and local communities, whereas Tim was more committed to honouring the local ‘folk’ culture that already exists; there was a call to rediscover ‘creative pneumatology’ - seeing the work of the Spirit within the cultural fabric of cities and its potential to bring new insights and transformations. Finally, the concept of ‘added value’ was interpreted theologically as the distinctive gift that churches bring as an ‘output’ to the cultural and regeneration debate – namely ‘life in all its fullness’ (John 10: 10).

6.3 Personal Reflections from Alison Micklem

When the Core Cities Theological Network started over two years ago, I attended a lunchtime meeting in Liverpool but never followed it up.

However, when I received the details of the Conference ‘Cities of Culture: Whose Vision, Which Agenda?’ I thought it would be very valuable to attend. For one thing, with Liverpool being the European Capital of Culture for 2008, the theme was very relevant, and for another, we were going to spend some time looking at the report *Faithful Cities*. Having attended a couple of events linked to the research that went into compiling the report and received regular internet mailings while the work has been in progress, I was interested to have the opportunity to discuss the end result with some of those involved. I have also read some of Tim Gorringe’s work and did not want to miss the opportunity to hear him speak.

The event itself did not disappoint. All the guest speakers were excellent, and in some of the less formal sessions it was fascinating to hear how Glasgow, a former European Capital of Culture, and Newcastle, who were hotly tipped to win the 2008 nomination, tackle many of the issues facing Liverpool. Having representatives from other cities for whom the ‘Capital of Culture’ topic is of little or no interest, but who still face the same issues of physical and economic regeneration, helped keep things in perspective. We heard many stories of how local congregations and projects have tried to engage (with varying degrees of success) with the processes influencing their immediate environment, and how some clergy and other church ‘professionals’ have become involved at more strategic levels.

It was a slight pity that the event was dominated by the Church of England, because their perspective and experience is not necessarily shared by the smaller denominations, and particularly not by solely ‘gathered’ congregations. However many stories one hears, none of them exactly reflect one’s own experience, but it is good to get as diverse a range as possible. I hope that the Core Cities Theological Network will develop and broaden over the next few years.

The material presented and discussed at the conference covered a broad sweep of issues and approaches. Personally, I felt that the scope was possibly a bit too broad, and we didn’t have time to go into anything in enough detail. However, I think that was because it was the first residential gathering of the network, and the organisers wanted to test the waters and see what people found most useful, to help shape future events. In any case, it is always good to be left wanting more! I came away with a whole range of new contacts, a lot of ideas to ponder, some new books to read, and a firm (though as yet unfulfilled!) resolution to revisit some old ones. I think it is all too easy for practitioners to get so caught up in activity that

reflection gets pushed to the side, so I valued the opportunity to do some serious theological reflection, and the expert help in doing it.

Altogether, I would rate the conference as very worthwhile. I was reminded of many things I already know, challenged by the realisation of large areas of ignorance, and encouraged to learn more.

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