

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

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#### 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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?

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<sup>1</sup> Commission on Urban Life and Faith, *Faithful Cities: A Call for Celebration, Vision and Justice* (London: Methodist Publishing House, 2006)

<sup>2</sup> Robert Furbey et al, *Faith as Social Capital: Connecting or Dividing?* Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2006)

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

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

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<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>5</sup> 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](http://www.culturalpolicy.arts.gla.ac.uk/research/press_content_analysis_may03.pdf) [accessed 27/11/06]

<sup>6</sup> 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]

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).<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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.<sup>9</sup> This could result either from attracting new industries lured by the promise of a vibrant 'boho' city, or by shifting from traditional

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<sup>7</sup> Andy Westwood and Max Nathan, *Manchester: Ideopolis? Developing a Knowledge Capital* (The Work Foundation, 2002), available at: [www.theworkfoundation.com](http://www.theworkfoundation.com) [accessed 28/01/04]

<sup>8</sup> Manchester City Council, *Manchester's Cultural Strategy: Introduction* [online], available at: <http://www.manchester.gov.uk/regen/culture/strategy/> [accessed 07/09/06]

<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.manchester.gov.uk/health/jhu/intelligence/city.htm> [accessed 25/11/06]

<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

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".<sup>13</sup> 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'.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Faithful Cities*, 2006, paragraph 3.16

<sup>13</sup> 'Liverpool named European Capital of Culture', *Guardian*, 4 June 2003

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.liverpool08.com/>

<sup>15</sup> 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](http://www.victoriabaths.org.uk)

<sup>16</sup> 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'.<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup>

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,

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<sup>17</sup> 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

<sup>18</sup> *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.<sup>19</sup>

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

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<sup>19</sup> [www.thechurchstmarys.co.uk](http://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.<sup>20</sup>

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?<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> 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]

<sup>21</sup> *Faithful Cities*, Chapter 4, ‘Prosperity: In Pursuit of Well-Being’

<sup>22</sup> *Faithful Cities*, para. 1.26, p. 4