

Building Utopia?

Seeking the authentic Church for New Communities

Edited by Laurie Green and Christopher R. Baker

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Review by The Right Reverend John Gladwin, Bishop of Chelmsford

This book was written before the banking crisis and the subsequent start of what may prove to be a deep recession. That has made it all the more pertinent because it is raising critical questions about the developments going on all around us. The collapse in house building might just give us some space to have these questions addressed in the public forum.

Essex and East London are on the front line of plans for huge development. Bishop Laurie, supported by Michael Fox and others have used their huge experience of ministry and theological thinking in the midst of all of this to challenge what is going on. Not that they have any fixed blue-prints. They do have real concerns rooted in their Christian faith and experience of ministry on the borders of emerging communities.

Readers in this diocese will know of the voices and contexts spoken here. The Thames Gateway, North Harlow, Colchester and Chelmsford are all in the midst of the demand for substantial new housing. The church is struggling to know how to be present in such places and what to say about the shaping of new community life and the needs of the people. This book gives those people voice and then enables us the readers to think from our faith into their experience.

Governments talk easily of 'sustainable communities'. Political and economic orthodoxy believes in the infallibility of the liberal market economy. Christians are drawn into accepting these norms. But do they work? For whom do they work?

What sort of future community life are we shaping? Will people flourish and grow in these contexts? Will they be good for human life and will they be able to speak of the mystery of God and of Divine Love?

The present crisis is cracking our confidence in the orthodoxies and even idolatries of the past decades. Our friends have given us a book to make us think again. Read it and join in the search for a genuinely Christian vision to shape communities of tomorrow.