

Urban Ministry in a Global Setting

In this address I'd like to offer a taste of one or two of the themes of my new book. This should save you having to read it! Although my publisher is here, and tells me it should not save you buying a copy. But actually I'll only have time to touch on a couple of points, so she's quite safe.

Most of you will know that I lived the first fifty years of my life in deeply urban environments – born in East London, then living in New York and Birmingham and then back to the East End until I became Bishop some eleven years ago when I moved out to Essex. And from there, I saw for the first time just how inter-dependent cities are. How the people of the suburbs rely on the city, however much they may hate to live there. And how countless people in the city have their lives – their education, health, incomes – largely controlled by people who live in the suburbs and beyond. It's a mutual interdependence – if not always a benign one.

My new location has also made me realise that wherever people live, their mind-sets are dominated by the urban. Even in the countryside, the TV they watch is urban controlled. The newspapers they read, the food they eat, the music they hear – it's all largely controlled from the urban centres. The great 'global cities', of which London is one, relate to one another around the clock, across vast distances, and begin to dominate the mind-sets of our smaller cities which, in turn, act as what we call "Core Cities" to their suburban and rural hinterlands. So global-city thinking infects everywhere. Which makes this subject of how to address the global city very important for us all, wherever we live. As they say, "We are all urban now." 50% of the world's people are now urban dwellers; and 90% of UK folk are, and have been since the industrial revolution.

The earliest cities we know of were built some 5000 years ago in Sumer – where writing was simultaneously beginning to develop – indicating that just as writing is an aspect of symbolic human expression, so are cities. The earliest Hebraic texts see cities as symbolic edifices. In the Book of Genesis, it is 'Cain the brother-killer' who builds the first city. That just speaks volumes. And then comes the story of the Tower of Babel, pointing to the fear that cities think they are grander than God. In the story, the city flaunts its wealth and power – so the tower is brought to dust. Each city name summons up a whole realm of thought and emotion. 'Babylon', 'Rome', 'Jerusalem' And today? Berlin? London? Dallas? The city has never been just a place. It has a symbolic nature. Walk around a city and see if you can 'read' it. Just recently a Baptist minister in London said "urbanology is a mystical exercise in which you intuit the spirit of the place." You can learn to read the symbolism of cities. Think of the great trading cities of Venice, Antwerp and Lisbon. Symbolic of that old mercantile period of history. Remember how the mercantile slave trade then created the vast reservoir of investment capital upon which the great European industrialised cities could rise. So names like Manchester or Detroit are symbolic of the industrial age. The symbolic nature of cities.

And now another point. Cities have been used as the power-centres of imperial control and expansion. Alexander the Great, and the Roman Empire which followed him, founded cities and linked them together with long, straight roads – what today we might call a super-highway. Now, globalisation has come and gone through the ages witness the Roman Empire's super-highway, & the British Empire's global reach – but this time globalisation has come with such a vengeance! and with such velocity! So let's ask, 'just what is this globalisation?'

I see globalisation as the dynamic interplay of three drivers, or motors. We could picture them as three swirling, interacting spheres of influence. The first motor of globalisation is Technology. In 1837 the telegraph was invented, solving the problem of distance in human communication. Ten years earlier, the first steam ship crossed the Atlantic, and in 1927 Lindbergh flew non-stop over it – the Ocean had become 'the Pond'. And now, electronic technology. By 1993, the year William Clinton came to the White House, there were still only 50 websites. And now? 400 million and rising. And the effects of all this speeding technology? It makes the world smaller and markets bigger. The labour market is divided now across continents, with research and management largely in the northern hemisphere and heavy production in the south. Technology sends goods and human beings travelling across the globe and that travel & migration means that the nodal cities of this network are more full of difference now than ever before. Different cultures, different languages, and different religions. Met together. Handle that well and we have a rainbow culture, Handle it badly and we have the makings of civil war! For most people, 'technology' means the World Wide Web. But be careful not to believe all the hype. For example: Did I say 'World Wide'? 80% of the world's population has never made a phone-call. World Wide Web? If you are connected, it is possible for you to by-pass the local, and reach out as never before to like-minded entrepreneurs, and markets across the globe. If you are not connected, your nation could be on its way out. Now put that together with the next motor of globalisation: Politics.

In 1989 the Berlin Wall fell – the world was no longer divided East and West. A good friend of mine, working for western military intelligence, said to me that with the Soviet Union gone, "we'll just have to find a new enemy if we're going to hold together." Prophetic words. As well as this ratchetting up of the global influence of the First World there's another aspect of this political sphere. I refer to the political alliance of Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Kohl and Ronald Reagan. Together they helped to construct a Neo-Liberal politics of market-forces. They turned politics into economics, and introduced Thatcher's battle cry TINA, there is not alternative, to the power of the market. 'Such and such an action may hurt the poor, but the market requires it if we are to prosper.' TINA. The UK press today may want to call her, "the Wicked Witch of the West", but the thrust of her market-led politics is still to the fore.

But now, the third motor to globalisation, alongside Technology and Politics. And it is of course Economics. In the 1760s the Stock Exchange was developed in a London coffee shop. Starbucks eat your heart out. But in October 1987, the London Stock Exchange was de-regulated. The so-called 'Big Bang'. And when coupled with the newly available technology, it sent the markets into overdrive – 'Turbo-capitalism' had now suddenly arrived. In milliseconds, at the click of a computer button, investment capital could now chase cheap labour markets, investing and dis-investing at the wink of an eye. Capital now stays in one location only while profit is to be made. Then it just as suddenly moves on. Very unsettling for the local community. I recently heard an adviser on the BBC telling us to move our savings around. He said, "whatever you do, forget loyalty." (and , by the way, look what that economically-led thinking is doing to the family... 'forget loyalty')

Now all this talk of 'globalisation' may sound very abstract. But I like to think of these three motors, technology, politics and economics as globalisation's software programme. And software needs hardware to run it. And that's where cities comes in. Cities are the hardware of globalisation. Many of our cities have become the command centres of global capitalism each one linked, in a great network, to other cities across the globe. Telecommunication aids the manipulation of the system through a global bureaucracy of

banking and currency transaction, insurance, advertising, law and corporate drive. Some contain the headquarters of transnational corporations and finance services, and this of course gives those World Cities a distinct social style – offering their elites access to the world's power-points. Our cities then, are the crucial lynch-pins of the system. And, let me say immediately, that this interplay of urbanisation and globalisation has proved to be wonderfully creative. We see scientific advance as never before. An explosion in democracy. Millions have been lifted out of poverty. Knowledge has spread. Our global cities sustain a great array of sub-cultures, producing a rich urban pluriformity – a kaleidoscope of cultural colour, sounds and tastes. Cosmopolitanism! There are many exciting benefits of global urbanisation.

But, as we all know only too well, this is only one side of the picture. These advantages, as wonderful as they are, are only for the few. On the 11th of July 2000, in Payatas, in the city of Manila, a rubbish dump collapsed in the middle of the night. Homes that had perched upon that dump just vanished. 218 people perished. 300 more were lost forever under the garbage. Lost under the trash of the global city. The daily plight of the new global urban poor is that they are at the mercy of pollution, the breakdown of urban infrastructure, the lack of tenure rights, exclusion from the benefits of the market, spatial segregation, poor health services, disease-ridden water and above all, sheer poverty. And all this whilst living within sight of flaunted affluence and power. We might say, "Expand the global market to include them and these catastrophes never need happen." But the problem with that is that if we look at those cities which are included, we see the same polarisation there. A black man in the Bronx of New York City has a life expectancy lower than that of a peasant living in Bangladesh. In Britain, still at least the fifth biggest economy in the world, we all know poor white communities which move us to tears. Globalisation seems to polarise rich and poor, not make them one. So where is this global market system going wrong?

First. The Market is brilliant at creating wealth. But to count in the market-place you've got to have money. And without purchasing power, market forces cannot translate poor people's need into effective economic 'demand'. We need the market, but also caring politics, or else they won't have a voice. Second, A good market relies upon competition. So if a city is to flourish it must *compete* for global investment. Some cities have been prepared to undergo what amounts to plastic surgery in order to compete and attract investors. Canary Wharf, the Green Gherkin, the dreaded Dome. Those things may entice money & investment if they're successful, but what do they do to communities which are pushed aside to make way for them? It often means the wholesale bulldozing of the homes of the poor, and their churches. Those old communities, having taken generations to build, are demolished at a stroke. 'Social cleansing' – going on all around the world in cities which have to compete for a chance to prosper. And should we blame the local politicians? To succeed for their city at large, city and town leaders feel they have to find ways to attract enterprise capital. That means competition, and competition means that some win and some lose. But whilst competition has its undoubted benefits. If unfettered it polarises populations, produces pollution and alienation and risks urban breakdown. In the USA, the single largest cause of death for black men is homicide. That's where polarisation leads. In our cities violence and crime are so blatant that across the globe people cite them as the most pressing problem of all. Yet, even more insidious and unseen is the violence against the planet Three quarters of the world's commercial resources are consumed in cities (OECD 1995) And those resources are finite – and burning them produces toxins. Are you worried about the increase in urban water-borne disease and the loss of massive amounts of flood-plane sea defences? Now is the time to ask if our global cities and expanding towns

are sustainable. We could go on. There are just so many global urban problems. So why is it that we aren't attending to them more readily?

I suspect it's because those who have the power to make real changes are largely shielded from the facts. One of the ways this happens is by separating people one from another in what has become known as the 'segregated' or 'Dual' City. The really wealthy live in separated, gated citadels. Edge Cities begin to proliferate. There are 'ethnic enclaves' where those most at the mercy of global migration cling to one another for support and cultural identity. Gentrified quarters denude the inner-cities of their old cultures. There are the abandoned quarters where reside the permanently un-employed. The 'no-go' areas of the city. And cities of the Southern hemisphere have their squatter slums. (90% Addis Ababa is squatter slum) We don't see the problems because we're all leading separated, segregated lives. But the problems are there. Kofi Anan referred to them as "Squalor amid Splendour". But he brought a positive shine to the problem by remarking, "*The global dilemma of squalor amid splendour is a creature of human agency, and ... it can be reversed by human agency.*" So what is there that we can do? How can we major on the Splendour and minimise or even eradicate the Squalor of our global cities? And this, I firmly believe, is where our Christian faith can and must play its important part. And that's why I now want to talk about culture.

The word 'globalisation' originated in the 1970s in an advertisement for American Express Cards – so it's provenance is economic. But the word soon came to mean more than economics. That iconic wall poster which appeared on so many a student wall in the 60s and 70s, 'Earthrise', demonstrates how this term 'globalisation' came to refer also to the fact that the world is becoming one. With just one global culture. We are all one. A Global 'culture'? A culture is an amalgam of all those markers that make for a society – our dress, language, architecture, our institutions, systems of production, values – all markers of belonging and meaning, which help frame our mind-sets, our sense of identity, and our decision-making. What we count as our reason for living, what we do with our lives. That is why a culture not critiqued is the most dangerous thing on earth. And that is why a Godly culture is the most beautiful society on earth. Christians call that Godly culture – the "Kingdom of God." And in case we think Jesus was meaning something whimsical when he called it that, let us remember that he was living in a society overwhelmed by the urbanised, global culture of the Roman Empire. Jesus travelled through the farms and vineyards of Galilee where the Romans had developed a suffocating international agri-business. Small farmers went into debt. On the Sea of the Galilee, the Romans utilised salt-packing factories in Magdala, and opened that trade to the empire's global market. Dispossessed farmers flocked to the town factories or became day labourers in the vineyards. The fish-price slumped of course, and fishermen became revolutionary. Jesus himself had been schooled in a carpentry and masonry shop in Nazareth one hour's walk from Sepphoris City, which Herod was re -constructing after it had been destroyed during an anti-globalisation uprising. Carpenters would also have found work at nearby Tiberias – a new city built simply to integrate Herod's Galilee into global trade-structures. All roads led to Rome, the global city *par excellence*.

Jesus lived in a Galilee where local culture was in conflict with global Graeco-Roman forces. A cultural battle was raging. And that realisation helps us see why Jesus spent his ministry engaging with the pivotal *cultural* issues of his day. Sabbath law, Purity Codes, Taxation structures, absentee landlords, labourers in vineyards, Family and Community norms, the definition of 'Kingdom'. Cultural Issues. His Parables based on local conditions, addressed global forces. His Sacraments: shook the city to its foundations. His every *local* action has

global significance – or better, universal significance. But when issues are this big – can our local ministries make a difference? In these circumstances, Jesus agrees with our predicament, but offers a solution. He agrees that the problems are overwhelming: “the poor will always be with you,” but having once accepted the limitations of human incarnation, he then shows how local teaching and actions can have universal significance. He engages in sacramental action. And a sacrament does not just point to something beyond itself, it participates in that something. So our projects and programmes – our lives – as small and local as they must be, must point beyond themselves, and participate in the larger issues. So that we can live out this new way of being Jesus offers a brand new culture, which he calls the Kingdom of God in which local actions are sacramental of that wholeness. Kingdom of God culture critiques the contemporary culture and teaches us to live lives from an alternative motive. So my intention now must be to sketch out briefly what I mean by this Kingdom of God culture and what its consequences are for urban living and ministry.

Just as the Kingdom Prayer, the Our Father, begins with a sense of awe – “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,” so also ‘Kingdom of God’ living starts with a sense of awe. And that’s our first key word. Being in awe of God makes us wonder at new possibilities were never thought possible. And second, it gives us an awareness of that holiness which drives us to repentance. And there’s my second key word: ‘Repentance.’ “Forgive us our trespasses... Thy will be done...” “Repentance” translates the Greek, *metanoia* – which really means a “new mindedness”, a complete turning around of our lives towards a new mind-set. Cultural re-orientation. But the drivers of globalisation, technology, politics and economics are themselves ‘culture-carriers’. They drive the dominant cultural values of our society,- the values which beset us all. But Kingdom Repentance demands a critique of these cultural values. Let’s take three brief examples of this Kingdom critique.

First global value, Commodification. More and more, we are becoming market driven, and in a market everything must be given a price. Health, education, infrastructure must be costed. But today commodification dominates us so much, that people get costed too. Costed in and costed out In the Book of Revelation chapter 13, the mark 666 was placed upon the forehead for only one reason and I quote – it “*made it illegal for anyone to buy or sell anything unless he had been branded with the name of the beast or with its number.*” That’s verse 17. The New Testament clearly states that 666 is about being branded with the market-place. Where everyone is given their price, but not necessarily their value.

If I had time, I could say a lot more about ‘brands’ and ‘logos’ in our market-place world. It’s therefore very interesting that the New Testament word for ‘Church’, *ecclesia*, was the word for an assembly in the market-place, at which the whole community decided issues together. The Church *ecclesia* was to be an alternative, non-commodifying way of being in the market-place. The Kingdom of God culture demythologises the Market place. Second cultural value worth critiquing – worth repenting of: ‘Efficiency’. Be efficient or collapse. Now, that tough approach has its place, but in the global city it’s every place. The bible however speaks of the ‘value’ of weakness. Do you know people who cannot recognise their own weakness? They’re not too good to know. Do you know societies that don’t recognise their weakest citizens? They’re not nice to live in.

After efficiency, my last dominant value of the global culture: ‘Information’. We have information over-load! Perhaps our globalisation prayer should be, “Thank God for the delete button!” The ‘information culture’ pretends that truth is a statement. Truth is Know

this, believe that and you've got it. But the Christian Gospel says that truth is not a statement – that's the heresy of Gnosticism. Truth is not Information – it's a relationship. In the bible, the word "to know", means loving intimacy, not a load of information – as helpful as statistics can be. The God of Truth is a relationship – the Holy Trinity. So Truth is not a statement, it's a relationship. So three examples of the Kingdom of God culture critiquing today's cultural norms. That's Repentance.

My third Kingdom of God key word is 'Creation'. God creates matter. So matter matters. As in...."Give us this day our daily bread." Wealth creation is, in this way of seeing things, a spiritual matter. But notice that Jesus teaches that God's economy is not like ours. Our economy is predicated on scarcity – remember those supply and demand diagrams? Whereas God's economy, says Jesus, is predicated not on scarcity, but on abundance and extraordinary generosity and sharing, Even 'seventy times seven." So when God is so liberally generous, why should people who live in the same town or make the same city go round, get such uneven shares? In the USA just 1% of the population owns more personal wealth than another 95%. It is totally destabilising. There is abundance in God's creation, and wealth creation is beautiful, but not at the expense of people or the pollution of the planet.

Our next Kingdom of God key word is: 'Otherness'. They say Globalisation is conforming the world to one dominant culture. Go to any town or city around the world and see the same logos – IBM, Microsoft, Shell. The queues outside McDonald's in Moscow must be seen to be believed. Starbucks has a prominent place in the forbidden city of Beijing. The bus company Stagecoach is everywhere from London to Nairobi. Years ago we began to call this, the McDonaldisation of the World. But it's not that simple. Because local people and cultures do not always like being conformed to a foreign culture. Douglas Daft is the Australian Chairman of Coca-Cola. "During the eighties," he said, " we were riding the wave of globalisation with extraordinary success. But then a very real backlash developed. Local governments and individuals responded with a renewed zeal for keeping control over their local politics, local culture and local produces....[so from now on]..... we must expand from global to local." So globalisation creates conformity, yes But that in turn gives rise to a strong anti-movement – a localisation. And when globalisation responds to that localisation capitalists call that, glocalisation'. It's a global mix of Convergence and Divergence. In our global world, especially in the cities, you will find conformity, but you will also find amazing diversity! You will find Otherness. Our cosmopolitan cities are therefore more than just exciting! The mix of Ethnicity, class, gender, language, dress, cuisine!. The city is the place to learn about differences – about otherness. Ride the London Underground and feel the otherness in your face. But the ultimate 'other' is God himself. God is Holy Trinity – a society of differences. The Father is not the Son, nor the Son the Spirit. So if you love God then you've got to love your Neighbour because God is three neighbours. God is Otherness. That's why the 'City of God' delights in Otherness. And for some, that cosmopolitanism is scary! In describing the 'Kingdom of God' culture I've highlighted four key words: Awe, Repentance, Creation, Otherness and now finally 'Righteousness' and its fight against Evil. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from Evil."

There is built into the aggressive market mentality the temptation to be ruthless and heartless. A business deal can advance the rich against the poor and still look good in the order book. Urban regeneration can put money into the pockets of the developers without very much enhancing the lives of those who live there. Crime can run fast and loose at all levels of the city. And it all has a global dimension. A local child dealing drugs, but it's a global drug network. The prostitute in the doorway, brought in from Eastern Europe

without a passport and enslaved. The sound of the hand-gun on the street – and the sophisticated international trade in micro-arms by organised crime.

Compare those evils with the crucifixion. On the cross we see global evil being funnelled down to a particular localised place – Golgotha. And God, nailed in that bad place, confronts evil global forces through it. And that means that when evil is addressed in a local place, – when a Church runs a drop-in centre, or a shop-front ministry – then the global forces of evil are confronted. Or, as the old Jewish proverb has it, quoted so eloquently in Schindler's List, "to save one life is to save the world entire." That one life becomes the sacrament of the whole. So, in our daily parochial ministry, when we're working at the local, we have to make it clear that we're also addressing global issues. Then our local ministries become sacraments of the Kingdom. So we are called to a mission of engagement. Engagement with global powers through local connected ministry. Jesus 'sets his face to the city' – Luke 9 – Jerusalem, that local symbol of dominating cultures . – and engages with it, in Righteousness. In 'critical solidarity' with the city. That's the Engagement which is our task. For if the town or city is a cultural text – a cultural symbol – Then our task is to analyse the text, hold it up to scrutiny in the light of the Kingdom and respond accordingly. We see Jesus doing this, even in his taking a word like 'Kingdom' which is full of harsh notions of power and domination, sexism and elitism – it was hardly a good word when you think of what the Herods were doing with it – but Jesus takes that word and deconstructs and subverts it, and instead witnesses to an alternative way of being Kingdom. In his Kingdom we deconstruct, demythologise the 666 mark of the Beast and substitute instead, on the forehead of the elect, the Mark of the Lamb, the mark of Baptism. Jesus spends thirty years listening and experiencing the real issues of his people. He can tell their story. And that's what every minister should learn to do. Then after careful analysis he cares for the fallen, blind and lame and every time he does so , it is in such a way that it speaks volumes about sight for all the blind, and liberation for all captives.

Jesus lived in a Galilee where a cultural battle was raging, and he chose to engage in that conflict in order to see God's loving will prevail. You'll remember how Liberation Theology majored on Exodus. But Jesus doesn't 'Exodus' – he doesn't escape to find the pure, safe place – as some of our Churches do. Instead, he engages critically with the dominating cultural mores. He invites people to live out a new way of being in community – the Kingdom of God way – even in the face of the local dominating kingdoms of hatred and greed. In Luke's words, he courageously 'set his face to go to Jerusalem', the city which had become the local lynch-pin of the Roman imperial hegemony of globalisation. It was the city which was the very seat of a culture of oppression. And Jesus goes there to confront it. Making sure that his every local action had global, and universal, significance. Some have said there is no alternative to this dominating, globalisation culture of market, competition and polarisation. Christians don't believe that. They know there is a 'Kingdom of God' alternative because they experience it every Sunday.

The letter to the Hebrews, Chapter 13, verse 13. "*There is no permanent city for us here; we are looking for the one which is yet to be. Through him, [Jesus] let us offer God an unending sacrifice of praise, Keep doing good works and sharing your resources, for these are the kinds of sacrifice that please God.*"

Let's say 'Amen' to that.

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