Networking for Urban Mission; A case study of the UK in the 1980s.

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ABSTRACT:

Following more than a century of Christian commitment to ministry and mission in deprived inner city areas, the 1980s was a crucial period for urban mission in Britain. The Thatcher decade saw growing polarisation and impoverishment of urban communities, racialised conflicts around identity and resources, urban "riots", and market led urban regeneration on a massive scale. In 1985 the Church of England "Faith in the City Report" caused a political storm and inspired a wide range of new Christian initiatives in urban areas. This paper documents the emergence of an urban mission movement in the UK during the decade. The movement comprised a diverse range of para church organisations, denominational agencies, single issue campaigns, lay orders, and local church projects. The networks crossed denominational, theological and ethnic boundaries, and extended across the UK and internationally. Cross fertilisation of theological and practical ideas led to a convergence of Catholic, Evangelical and Radical thinking in new forms of urban theology and mission which focused on the notion of the Kingdom of God.

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Britain in the 1980s..

The 1980s in Britain were a time of profound social change and social conflict and ideological struggle personified for many in the works and person of Margaret Thatcher. She entered Downing Street in 1979 with the prayer of St. Francis "where there is hatred let me sow love, where there is discord let me sow peace etc." on her lips, incredibly ironic in the light of the social conflict and polarisation of rich and poor which followed. From that moment a radical revolution dominated by the ideas of the New Right was under way. Margaret Thatcher herself was avowedly Christian, brought up in a Methodist home, regular in attendance in the Church of England and frequently making use of Christian language and Biblical quotations in her political speeches. The quotations came with a unique Thatcher "spin" on them, for example the Good Samaritan was someone who had created enough wealth for himself to be able to be generous to the victim on the Jericho Road. Some of her concern for Victorian values, the traditional family, and "standards" resonated with the concerns of many middle class Christians throughout the land.

It was remarkable therefore that the Churches by the end of the Thatcher decade, and the established church of England in particular had moved from being widely seen as "the Tory party at prayer" to a role (in the absence of an effective left wing alternative) as the unofficial opposition. Controversies between church and government included the "commemoration" of the South Atlantic conflict of 1982 when Thatcher had wanted a celebration of victory in the Falklands, and the perceived support by the church (in the person of David Jenkins, Bishop of Durham) of the striking miners in the great struggle against "the enemy within" of 1984. But it is around the inner cities struggles and controversies of the decade that some of the most interesting confrontations took place.

The Inner Cities of Britain in the 1980s

The 1980's were a time of crisis and change for urban areas in the UK. The main force behind the changes and struggles was that of global economic restructuring. Old industries were dying out, faced with competition in manufacturing from the Pacific rim, and the relocation of inner city plants to greenfield sites in more easily accessible locations. For example in East London between 1960 and 1985 all the docks of the biggest port in Britain were closed to cargo shipping as containerisation led to relocation downstream at Tilbury, Felixstowe and Rotterdam. Steelmaking, shipbuilding, mining, textiles and motor engineering suffered a similar fate in other cities, the whole accelerated by political decisions to allow market forces free rein in order to produce a leaner fitter industry. Inner urban areas suffered a collapse of the economy, compounded by ageing of infrastructure, including transport, housing, schools, hospitals and other public buildings. Since the 1930's urban areas had suffered depopulation as more affluent residents were seduced by the suburban dream and less affluent ones exported to the new towns and peripheral Council estates. Incoming populations from the less developed he world, first the Commonwealth nations of South Asia and the Caribbean and more recently from almost every part of the world arrived to colonise the inner parts of London, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Bradford and other (mainly English) cities. Waves of invasion and succession familiar to Chicago sociologists hit Britain as "the Empire strikes back".

The changes led to tension and conflict over issues of Employment and unemployment, homelessness and poor housing, racism and the social exclusion of ethnic minorities, relationships between local and national government, taxation, public services and welfare, urban regeneration schemes such as London Docklands, and rising crime and social dislocation, countered with increasingly harsh policing.

The Riots.:

The urban crisis came to a head in public perception with a wave of street disturbances in several cities in the early 1980s. The Brixton riot of April 1981 (coincidentally on the day when the Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission was being launched in Birmingham.. phew we had an alibi) aroused much concern and were analysed in an official report by the "liberal" judge Lord Scarman (1). In July of 1981 Toxteth Liverpool erupted, followed in the same week by a wave of disturbances in London, Leeds and other cities.. For several years summer riots were the norm, as trouble flared in Bristol, Birmingham and Bradford culminating in the riot at Broadwater Farm, North London, in which a police officer was killed, and three youths were unjustly "framed" by the police and served several years of life sentences before winning their appeals. What was clear about all these incidents was that groups of young men from the local community had turned to violence and destruction against the symbols of wealth and authority in the neighbourhoods. The mass media emphasised the "riots" theme; lawlessness, looting, drugs crime, and above all the image of an alien and dangerous black underclass. More liberal voices including many in the churches portrayed violence as "the voice of the voiceless". The most radical voices spoke of "uprisings" against the state and stressed the role that oppressive policing played in goading the youth of urban areas into rebellion (2)

It was in this context that the church became a major player in the inner city debates, and one of the leading advocates of social justice for urban priority areas. To understand why and how we need to look briefly at the history of urban activity by the churches, and the role of the church in urban areas that had emerged by the 1980s.

The rise of urban mission..

Since the mid 19th century wave or urbanisation and industrialisation the British churches have had a long history of concern for the cities and their people, especially for the poor. The extensive church building and planting programme of the Church of England, the Methodist and Baptist Central Halls, the settlement movement, the Salvation Army and many evangelical City missions all offered salvation and welfare, and eventually uplift and escape to urban working class people. However with the possible exception of Roman Catholic Parishes and orders, who catered predominantly for the Irish immigrants to British cities, none of the churches captured the hearts and minds, and still less the Sunday attendance of the majority or urban people. Church attendance in 1904 in East London.... was a third the national average (3) and the figure continued to decline until about 1975 exacerbated by depopulation and secularisation. The urban church attendance rate was estimated variously at between 1% and 5% and the Faith in the City report of 1985 suggested 0.85% of the UPA population attended an Anglican church.

However, even in 1980 the churches were still present in the inner city. Many of the settlements and missions had survived. For example the Mayflower (Docklands Settlement) in Canning Town had renewed itself and flourished in the 1960's under the captaincy of a famous cricketer Rev. David Sheppard, who by 1980 had become Bishop of Liverpool (4). The Anglo Catholic tradition of radical slum priests was still represented. The radical Anglicans who under Bishops Stockwood and Robinson had invented "south Bank Christianity" with its many experimental forms of worship and social action were influential in the established church. Industrial Mission had also been pioneered in South London and Sheffield and many other cities, with the curious exception of East London (apart from a few examples in Dagenham). Methodists influenced by their working class origins and the Christian Socialism of Rev. Donald Soper remained committed to the city. Indeed their Mission Alongside the Poor Programme

which got under way in 1982 predated the Anglican contribution by an number of years (5). John Vincent's Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield had played a key role in raising Methodist consciousness about the urban world. Roman Catholics had found a measure of renewal following Vatican 2 and were being challenged to social action by the emerging liberation theologies of Latin America, Asia and Africa. The evangelicals were perhaps the major growing force, and were emerging from the pietist ghetto, with such global missionary congresses as Lausanne 1974, (6) and the growing awareness of British evangelical leaders such as John Stott of the Biblical mandate for social action. Finally the 1960's and 1970's had seen the emergence of many new black majority congregations in the inner cities of Britain. Mainly Pentecostal in doctrine and outside the mainline denominations these fellowships were increasingly hard to ignore, and increasingly articulate in their claims for social and racial justice for their communities. (7)

Throughout a century of urban mission work in East London had played a pivotal part and had certainly grabbed the lion's share of the headlines. Toynbee Hall, the Docklands Settlements, William Booth and the Salvation Army, Cardinal Manning, Lax of Poplar, Charingtons Assembly Hall, Dr Barnardo, the East London Tabernacle, Moody and Sankey, Fr. John Groser, even Billy Graham in the 1950s were among the names and projects which had played a significant part in local church history. By the Mid 1970s new groups were in formation. I came to work for the infant Newham Community Renewal Programme directed by Clifford Hill in 1975, and the same year In Contact ministries arrived on the scene. Colin Marchant speaks of Newham as a "fertile garden for urban mission".

Faith in the City

Significantly, the Church of England, unlike so many of the statutory agencies of welfare and control maintained a 24 hour seven day a week involvement in the inner city. However, weak the congregational life, every neighbourhood was part of a parish, and had at least one member of the clergy, sometimes the only local resident of social class I, living there. Faced with the evident crisis in the cities, and the messages rising from the grass roots of the church, Archbishop Runcie appointed a commission to report on the situation in Urban Priority Areas, and to make recommendations to church and nation.

The Commission included senior clergy such as Bishops David Sheppard and Wilfred Wood (the CofE's first black bishop), three professors, black and Asian priests, ecumenical representatives and leaders from the business community, local government and the trade unions. Michael Eastman of ECUM was one of the Resource advisers. It analysed the urban scene and the church's role within it, received submissions from numerous local and specialist groups, and discussed many issues such as employment, housing, health, education, order and law from a liberal welfarist perspective reflecting the post-war British consensus. There was an underlying but unstated theology rooted in the scriptures, but interpreted in traditional Anglican categories of presence in every community and pastoral care generously available to all. The report had 38 recommendations directed to the church and 23 to the government and nation.

The Commission seemed ill prepared for the storm that arose. Before publication a newspaper article revealed that a source close to Downing Street considered it to be full of "naive Marxism". As some commented at the time it may have been naive not to have recognised the conflictual ideological climate of the Thatcher era, but Marxist it certainly was not. Yet Faith in the City was a clear step in the rupture between the Church of England and the Conservative party. No longer could even the Archbishops be trusted as an integral part of the establishment. It

probably led to the famous picture of Maggie against an urban wasteland after the 1987 election and her programme to win back the inner cities. On the more positive side the report led to the establishment of the multi million pound church urban fund and a continuing development of urban mission initiatives in the CofE and ecumenically. A shower of subsequent reports and publications followed, Faith in our City (Liverpool), Faith in Leeds, Theology in the City, Light in the City, Signs in the City, City Vision.(8) Meanwhile polarisation, poverty and social exclusion continued to grow at an alarming rate. (9)

Emerging Coalitions

Around the context, process and outcomes of the Faith in the City report developed something which can best be described as the "Urban mission movement in Britain". In using the terminology of social movement, I am implying that there are parallels to the women's' movement, the green movement and other counter cultural phenomena of the late 20th Century. Movements tend to be built around coalitions and networks of organisations, groups and individuals, to have a loose, provisional and flexible organisational structure, and to concentrate on a "single issue" which is the focus of political campaigning and/or social action. There are many possible ways of analysing and accounting for such movements but social network analysis coupled with an examination of the discourse and rhetoric of the movement seems to me the most profitable.

The urban mission movement in Britain in the late 1980s was characterised by a proliferation of usually small and specialised organisations which came together in emerging coalitions. These organisations operated both within, across and outside denominational structures at times influencing and at times ignoring the churches as such. They operated by means of personal networks and informal exchanges, of information, services, voluntary labour etc. Their main medium was personal contact, through meetings, one to one, in small groups, in conferences and sometimes in celebration gatherings, backed up by telephone contact, and in the age of word processors and databases on PCs, by newsletters and mailshots. They were financed (on a shoestring) by grants, gifts in money and in kind, and sometimes by membership fees. They depended to a large extent on a small number of key individuals who had a vision for networking and coalition building. Increasingly as time went on lay rather than ordained people played a leading role, and there was concern for "equal opportunities" however hard it proved to be in practice to build an organisation with balanced representation of women and black people.

The Evangelical Coalition For Urban Mission

One of the most significant strands in the movement was ECUM. The Evangelical tradition at least from the middle of the 19th century has had a tendency to express its salvation by organisations, as missions, charities and faith based voluntary associations proliferated. In this tradition groups such as Frontier Youth Trust (an associated ministry of Scripture Union) (founded 1964 (Fearon 1989)) Evangelical Urban Training Project (1974) Evangelical Christians for Racial Justice (founded as Evangelical race relations Group in 1972) and Shaftesbury Project (Inner City Group 1977) had come into being. In addition there had been informal networks of Evangelical Clergy, coalescing as a sub group in the Keele Assembly of Anglican evangelicals 1977, and an informal study/action group of ministers in and lay people in East London as well as a newsletter "Christians in Industrial Areas". The Keele conference, following on the work of the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism of 1974 marked the rebirth of the Evangelical concern for social justice, and through key leaders such as John Stott made holistic mission a legitimate concern for the previously "spiritual" evangelicals. Out of these networks and the

context of the growing urban crisis the vision for an Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission emerged and in 1981 with the four named groups as founder members it was launched with the CIA newsletter revamped and relaunched as a journal, "City Cries". (A suggestion to call it the Standing Conference on Urban Mission was rejected on account of the unfortunate acronym despite St Paul referring to Christians as scum of the earth!). ..

Among the key people in the early days of ECUM were FYT's HQ staff Michael Eastman and Jim Punton. The latter until his untimely death in 1986 became the leading ideologue/ Bible Teacher of the movement, with the mantle of amanuensis and development of the teaching falling on Roger Dowley, an elderly Baptist solicitor who had moved by God's calling into East London before World War II (Dowley's "Lost Bequest" was published 1983 and remains one of the most valuable theological resource books available(10)). In East London several members of the clergy were heavily involved, notably Baptist Colin Marchant, who persuaded the Baptist Union to fund the development of ECUMs networks in the capital, and Roger Sainsbury (until 1982 at the Mayflower Centre, then in the West Midlands for six years before returning to London to become Bishop of Barking). In Liverpool, Birmingham and other cities important local church leaders joined the coalition. However the strength of the networks came through the membership of the constituent organisations, and the influence of young lay people, many of them white middle class urban incomers committed to church and community work was paramount.

The networks linked down to grassroots congregations and projects and upwards to international urban networks. In Newham some of the key participants, myself, Colin Marchant, John Oliver, Roger Sainsbury were also key people in the local ecumenical networks. Internationally ECUM developed networks throughout the English speaking world using channels provided by the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelisation, the WCC, the mission societies and NGOs. There were links with and visits to the UK from, Ray Bakke, Bob Linthicum, Jim Wallis, Harvie Conn, John Perkins and Bill Pannell form the USA, Raymond Fung and Vinay Samuel from Asia, Pete Kaldor and others from Australia. Important links developed with Latin America via Andrew Kirk, Samuel Escobar, Rene Padilla, and Guillemo Cook from evangelical backgrounds and later with the Catholic Liberation Theologians and Base communities. Some ECUM network members made visits to Central America and Brazil. Also significant were the links with South Africa in the midst of the anti-apartheid struggle. Desmond Tutu's visit to Birmingham involved many ECUM people, and ECRJ and Scripture Union in particular engaged in a series of exchange visits.

In 1985 I personally moved from a volunteer to a paid role in ECUM first as London Networker and then from 1987 as National Development Officer. This was made possible by the generous charitable, personal, church and Trust giving to the cause of urban mission which followed in the wake of the Faith in the City Report. My role as a proactive networker was to discover what was happening and who was doing it, to share information, good practice and encouragement with urban Christians and to bring together local and/or specialist groups of urban Christians for study, prayer and action. It became obvious from an earlier stage that many Evangelicals in the urban setting, while maintaining a distinctive theology and spirituality had much in common in their context and practice with many other sections of the church, and were often able to work in alliances with other Christians and secular bodies.

NETWORK ANALYSIS OF ECUM's DATABASE

The empirical data now to be presented comes from a network analysis of affiliation data recorded on the ECUM database which I built up from nothing in 1985 to about 1200 entries in 1991. All of the contacts on the database were people or organisations who had been in contact with ECUM, most of them personally through a visit or attendance at a meeting, or had requested to receive mailings from the organisation. Whenever a new entry was added or an updating took place contacts' affiliations, to denominations, partner organisations, local or specialist ECUM groups and networks were recorded. In order to analyse the data set by computer it was reduced at first to 245 key individuals (defined according to my own judgement of their position as "significant others in MY network"). Because of software limitations this set needed to be further reduced to 126, this time using a criterion of having less than 4 affiliations listed in the data set.. This gave a rectangular spreadsheet matrix of 126 individuals and 88 organisations, or networks to which they could be affiliated. The affiliations could be divided into denominational allegiances, membership of organisations or networks groups, and local city wide networks.

The nature of the data and the organisations involved in the network can best be appreciated by examining the list of agencies in Table 1. Denominationally Anglicans and Baptists are dominant. The Salvation Army is notable for its absence (indeed as far as I can remember Ecum had no significant contact with them or their officers) as are the evangelical City Missions. However Birmingham and London City Mission were involved at least on the periphery and the names of their respective superintendents do appear on the list of the 245 individuals in the wider network.

Table 1 number and range of organisations..

CATEGORY 1 Denominations

		Nos Affiliated	
		Core network (126)	of 245 contacts
	CHURCH OF ENGLAND	51	94
	BAPTIST	26	38
	Methodist	9	14
	Roman Catholic	8	14
	United Reformed Church	6	11
	Pentecostal (unspecified)	5	5
	New Testament Assemblies	3	3
	Ichthus Fellowship (Charismatic)	3	7
	Elim Pentecostal	2	2
	New Testament Church of God	2	2
	Church of Scotland	1	3
	Congregational Federation	1	3
	Society of Friends	1	2

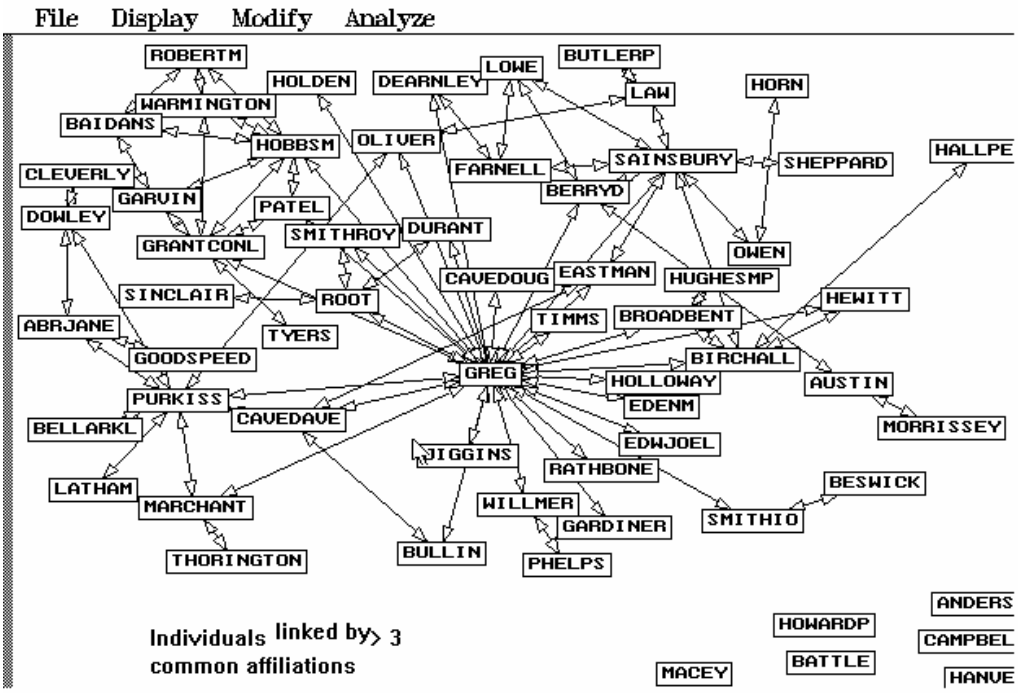
Category 2 : Organisations and Networks a) Independent Organisations

AAC	Alliance of Asian Christians	3	3
ACEA	Afro-Caribbean Evangelical Alliance	7	7
BARNARD	Barnardos (Childrens Charity)	3	3
BCGA	British Church Growth Association	2	3
BUG	Baptist Urban Group	10	14
BYFC	British Youth For Christ	3	4
CA	Church Army	3	4
CAP	Church Action On Poverty	14	20
CAWTU	Church Action With The Unemployed	1	3
CHILDSOC	Children's Society (CofE)	1	4
COF	Community Organising Foundation	6	8
CSM	Christian Socialist Movement	10	11
CURU	Christian Urban Resources Unit (Bradford)	5	6
CWA	Churches Community Work Alliance	17	22
ECRJ *	Evangelical Christians for Racial Justice	36	44
ELCHAHA	East London Churches Homelessness Alliance	4	7
EUTP	Evangelical Urban Training Project	16	22
FYT *	Frontier Youth Trust	24	41
ILK	Ilkley Group of Christian Sociologists	3	8
JUBILEE	Jubilee Group (Anglo-Catholic)	3	3
MAB	Ministry among Asians in Britain	1	2
MENNON	Mennonite Centre	1	3
OCMS	Oxford Centre for Mission Studdies	2	4
SHAFT	Shaftesbury Society	4	5
SPCI	Shaftesbury Project/Christian Impact	19	23
SU	Scripture Union	9	12
TEAMWORK	Teamwork (Charismatic House Church Ministry)	3	4
UTU	Urban Theology Unit (Methodist)	7	7
WILLTEM	William Temple Foundation	2	3
WV	World Vision	2	2
ZEBRA	Zebra Project (Black & White Churches)	7	7

Category 3 Local Churches/communities

BRAND	Brandon Baptist Church South London	6	6
MAYFL	Mayflower Family Centre East London	7	8
ROTT	Rotton Park Road Birmingham	5	5

Category 4 Denominational and Ecumenical Networks			
SYNBISH	CofE General Synod or bishops	9	9
URBFOR	Ecumenical Urban Officers Forum	3	5
ACUPA	Faith In the City Commission Structures	8	12
BSR	CofE Board of Social Responsibility	8	9
CRRU	Community and Race Unit of BCC/CCBI	10	11
EAURBF	Evangelical Alliance Urban Forum	11	14
EE	Evangelical Enterprise (EA employment Proj	9	9
INTFTH	Christians in Inter Faith situations group	2	4
PARLGOV	MPs and others in Whitehall	4	4
Category 5 ECUM Network Groups and sub committees			
BASCOMM	Study Group on Base Communities	5	8
CCEDIT	City Cries Editorial Group	6	7
ECRJCOM	ECRJ Committee	17	18
FORGOT	Forgotten in City Planning Group	13	18
HOUSING	Network Group on Housing	8	16
LECUM	London ECUM Council	14	25
LIT	Evangelism and Non-book Culture Group	6	7
NATECUM	National ECUM Committee	30	36
NORECUM	ECUM Northern Network	3	3
POLIT	Christian Politicians Group	12	16
UDCS	Conference on Urban Development Corporations	8	8
Category 6 CITY NETWORKS			
SLOND	South London	20	30
NEWHAM	LB Newham (E.London)	19	32
WMIDS	West Mids(Birmingham, Wolverhampton Coventry	19	23
TOWHAM	Tower Hamlets (E.London)	10	13
HACKNEY	Hackney (E.London)	8	9
LIVPOOL	Liverpool / Merseyside	8	12
SHEFF	Sheffield	6	7
MANCH	Manchester	5	11
LEEDS	Leeds (Faith in Leeds)	4	6
NLOND	North London	3	8
WFOR	Waltham Forest (E.London)	4	5
WLOND	West London	4	5
NEWCASTLE	Newcastle On Tyne	3	5
BRADF	Bradford	2	6
NOTTING	Nottingham	2	4
GLASGOW	Glasgow (Scotland)	2	4
HULL	Hull	2	2
LEICS	Leicester	2	4
BELFAST	Belfast	1	3
AYLESBURY	Aylesbury	1	2
Bristol	Bristol	1	2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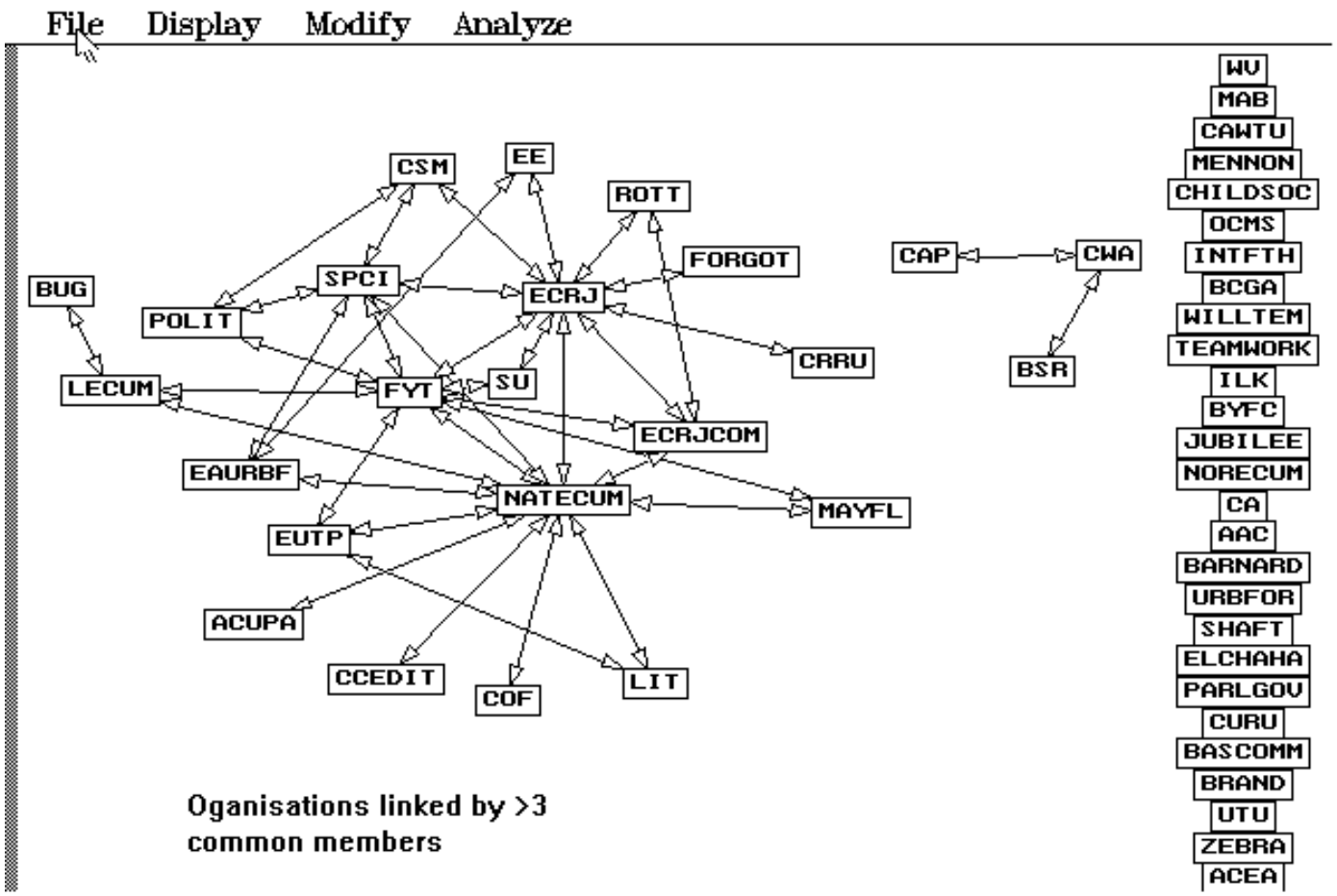
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The network diagram shows the core of the network of organisations strongly linked by numerous overlapping personal memberships. Clearly if not surprisingly ECUM and its coalition partners are near the centre of the diagram and have many linkages. There is one other clique apparent in the diagram, representing a broader establishment rather than evangelical network linking the Churches Community Work Alliance, the Anglican Boards of Social Responsibility and Church Action on Poverty. However it needs to be pointed out that this diagram portrays only the strongest relationships and that ECUM and myself in particular were regularly doing business with this cluster in the network and with the block of organisations on the right of the diagram who appear to have only weak mutual interconnections.

The detailed network analysis also allows us to identify the individuals who played a key role in networking for ECUM. There are two methods of measuring importance of actors in a network. Firstly the degree measure simply counts the number of affiliations each person has. In the ECUM database it can be shown that the top two in the degree rankings are the development Officer (me) and the Chair (Roger Sainsbury) of ECUM while the top twelve contain no less than nine members of the National ECUM Committee. The second measure (betweenness centrality) does not correlate well with the degree measures but measures the importance of an individual as bridge builder or gatekeeper in the network. Although I come top of the league by a long way and Dave Cave and Dave Berry (two of my close friends who are also inveterate networkers) score well there are at least two high scorers who were not formally part of the ECUM network. They are Hilary Wilmer and Pat Logan. Theire function in the network was very much as bridge people; Hilary, was a key link for me into Leeds, into Church Action On Poverty, the BCCs Community work Alliance, Barnardos (she was also a member of ECRJ and the Baptists). Pat was a key bridge to the homelessness and poverty networks in London and as a Catholic employed by the CofE a good bridge into both Roman Catholic and Anglican networks.

One other significant feature of the people involved deserves comment. Despite best efforts in keeping with the equal opportunities climate of the 1980s only 19 women (+ 4 couples) and 20 ethnic minority persons are found among the 126 names at the centre of the network. Clearly both women and black people remained underrepresented in comparison with their proportions in the urban churches and the inner city population. And only two or three of each appeared in the top 20 of the league tables for degree, or centrality . Ordained people made up less than half of the core network; 57 were clergy/ ordained (including 8 bishops or denominational equivalents).

The network analysis clearly shows that there was by about 1991 a well linked information network and broad based coalition for urban mission with tentacles extending into most of the cities, most of the denominations and theological parties in the UK. It would be misleading to claim that this network had ideological or social coherence, or that there was a unified understanding of the elements of urban mission. While it could never hope to act in any representative fashion, or exercise political influence in the church or nation in a direct way, it was to say the least interesting that some of its key people had by 1990 become denominational

leaders, bishops, archdeacons, or Presidents of Free Church denominations. Furthermore a number of Labour and Liberal MPs and councillors were involved.

Values of the Movement

On political issues most of the people within the network would support the notion of social justice as a Christian imperative, and in broad terms would be supportive of the left of centre political line found in the Faith in The City Report. (Many would describe themselves as much more radical or to the left of that position). The theology of the movement was by no means uniform but did appear to have some common threads. There were Biblical sources for campaigns for social justice, most clearly in the OT prophets and Gospels. There was a definite stream of evangelical urban theology clearly expressed in the writings of Ray Bakke and Stuart Murray (11). Slightly more to the margins of evangelicalism was a growing interest in black theology and liberation theologies (12). Perhaps the central and unifying theme in the movement was the notion of the Kingdom, or the rule of God. In Jesus this was seen as the future breaking into the present, God's rule being established if not yet complete. In this view the kingdom was definitely amongst rather than within us, spiritualised readings of the Scripture were not favoured. Ken Leech was one of the first to comment that a new division was appearing in the British churches, between those who saw the Kingdom as making a real difference to life in the here and now, and those who reserved the impact of the kingdom for the soul or the afterlife. Charismatics or “House Church” Christians came in many varieties and those most distant from the urban mission theology tended to identify the Kingdom with the church (or rather "body of Christ" since they didn't like the traditional church). Those most involved in ECUM were the Ichthus fellowship in South London and the Teamwork network of Dave Tomlinson (in the 1990s notable as a leading Post-evangelical!). Thus Charismatics, Evangelicals, Catholics, Liberals and Pentecostals could be found in both camps. Significantly it was usually the context of life in the inner city or the other tough places of the earth that pushed people into the former. Those who were not afraid of a contextualised gospel were at the heart of the urban mission movement, and the leaders in this partial convergence of theologies.

The analysis of the networks given above show that ECUM was in a key position as a bridge builder. I and my colleagues had privileged access and genuine fellowship with a remarkably diverse section of the Christian Church in Britain. However in building alliances on this broad base tensions with certain sections of the Evangelical world developed. A famous article in the Evangelical Times proclaimed "Scripture Union embraces Liberation Theology" and the arguments that followed became known as the “Tingle tangle”, after its author Rachel Tingle. Similar heated exchanges took place in the Evangelical Alliance's Salt and Light Conferences in 1989? and 1990.. Agreement to differ was the outcome. However it was significant that ECUM was able to retain the fellowship and trust of Care Trust/Campaigns (the leading pro life family values Christian organisation in the UK) while the more extreme Conservative Family Campaign clearly distanced itself from and cut of communication. Another ideological struggle took place within the Evangelical Enterprise project in which EA took on a role of managing job creation projects in Black Majority Churches funded by the Department of Trade and Industry in areas "invaded" by government "Task Forces".

Achievement Or Failure?

It is obviously very hard to assess the achievement of these networks over time, especially from the position of an insider. My impression is that there has been a shift "to the left" in the churches in Britain including many of the evangelical ones, to an acceptance that social action and campaigns for social justice are an important aspect of the gospel. In particular I would argue that one of the most important contributions of ECUM and its allies has been to establish beyond

doubt the legitimacy of concern for social justice within the Evangelical constituency of the British churches, particularly that represented by the EA. The details remain contested but it is hard for the conservative pietist evangelicals to write off socially concerned evangelicals as a contradiction in terms, or simply as “not Christian” as they once did. And it is more difficult too for radicals and Catholics to dismiss all evangelicals as "fundamentalist reactionaries" or "too heavenly minded to be no earthly use".

In church politics, especially in the Church of England, increasing numbers of the ECUM generation are now in positions of authority and influence, in the synod, as bishops and archdeacons etc. Equally interesting is the growth of the Christian Socialist Movement and its influence in the Labour party, with Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Jack Straw among its paid up members and with its vice chair Stephen Timms MP for an East London constituency an active participant in ECUM networks. If the story outlined above shows anything at all it suggests that networking can be a useful strategy in the road to power.

The Urban Mission movement has also produced lots of grass roots action. There have been hundreds of good projects established by the churches in urban priority areas (and not a few disastrous ones) and some indication that in an increasingly polarised society that some members of the "underclass" are coming to trust and even belong to the churches. It is not so clear however, given the globalisation of the economy, increasing social polarisation and the general rightwards drift of politics whether it can do anything significant about the powerlessness that besets the majority of the population of urban priority areas. Maybe our destiny is that of prophets who announce and denounce, and like Jesus to remain at work on the margins of society, in an inexorable pilgrimage towards weeping for the city and our own little Calvaries.

NOTES/ **Bibliography**

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(2) See the academic treatment in Solomos J. and Benyon J.(eds.), (1987), "The Roots of Urban Unrest", Oxford, Pergamon Press. and a more popular account in Murphy D. "Tales From Two Cities" (1989) London, Penguin

(3) The statistics and descriptions from a century ago are in Hart J. (1988) "The Religious Life of London 1903" from EUTP, PO Box 83, Liverpool L69 8AN. East London church history is covered in the writings of Colin Marchant e.g. Marchant C. (1985) "Signs in the City" London, Hodder and Marchant C., (1986), "Religion", in A Marsh and a Gas Works; One hundred years of Life in West Ham, W.E.A. / Newham Parents Centre Publications, 745 Barking Road London E13 9ER. A more encouraging up to date assessment can be found in my own work e.g. Smith G., (1996a), "The Unsecular City, The Revival Of Religion in East London" in Rustin M., Butler T and Chamberlayne P. (eds.) (1996) Rising in the East, London, Lawrence and Wishart

4) The work of the Mayflower Centre and the role of David Sheppard are covered in Sheppard D. (1975) Built as a City (2nd edition) London Hodder, Sheppard D. (1981) Bias to the Poor Hodder and in Watherston, P (1994) "A Different kind of church: the Mayflower Family Centre Story Basingstoke, Marshall Pickering ISBN 0551028998

5) Holden T. (1985) "People, Churches and Multiracial Projects" Methodist DSR, 1 Central Buildings London SW1 9NH

6)ECUM people contributed to reports from the LCWE Pattaya Conference of 1980 which produced booklets published by the Lausanne Committee "Christian Witness to Large Cities" and "Christian Witness to the Urban Poor"

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9) Green A., (1994), The Geography Of Poverty and Wealth, Warwick University,

10) The Biblical source book for ECUMs approach is Dowley R. (1983) "Towards the Recovery of a Lost Bequest" London, ECUM *

11) Evangelical Urban Mission Theology is well set out in Bakke R. With Hart J. (1987) "The Urban Christian" London, MARC Europe/ECUM. and in Stuart Murray's "City Vision" (1990) London, Darton Longman & Todd

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