

## **A Rough Guide to Urban Theology: Forty Years In the Wilderness?**

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It is almost forty years now since that hot summer day in 1975 when I first went to the Borough of Newham, on an interview for a job as a trainee community worker with the [Newham Community Renewal Programme](#). I enjoyed the interview so much that they had some difficulty getting me to leave, and as I got back on the District Line train at Upton Park I had an overwhelming sense, which I still think was from God, that I would be coming back to live and work, at least for a year or two. As it turned out I was offered the post, I stayed in Newham 27 years, and in the dozen years since I left continue to be involved in urban ministry and mission in Preston and the surrounding parts of Lancashire.

Significantly on that day in 1975 I was clutching and reading on the train, a groundbreaking book for urban theology, [David Sheppard's "Built as a City"](#). Here for perhaps the first time, a leading evangelical figure in the Church of England was asking the question as to why the gospel and the church, which had started off as an urban movement in the Roman Empire had found it so difficult to make an impact among the urban industrialised working classes in East London and Britain as a whole. Drawing on historical analysis, much of it gathered by Colin Marchant in his doctoral study of the [history of the church in Newham \(the Baptist bits are now available here\)](#), Sheppard concluded that it was largely a class issue; a middle class, formally organised, highly literate church, did not resonate well with the informal style and culture of the labouring masses, in households where books might be limited to the rent book and the mail order catalogue. Within a few months I had met Colin Marchant, and heard from him in no uncertain terms that short term incomers with a Messiah complex were not the answer to the evangelisation of the East End. I'm thankful that I believed him enough that I stayed long enough for him to become one of my most valued colleagues, mentors and friends.

Within a year I had encountered Terry Drummond, who in those days was also young, and a Church Army officer working with homeless people at St. Botolphs Aldgate. The significance of this is that this paper is a response to something Terry has recently written, a paper entitled **"Whatever happened to urban theology?" and presented at Tackling Poverty Together, The Church Urban Fund Conference, held at Stratford E15, on November 15<sup>th</sup> 2013.** Terry then and now belongs to the Radical Anglo-Catholic tradition, while I was then and remain to this day firmly in the Evangelical camp. Significantly we met at a course in Urban Theology, organised by the Urban Theology Unit under the leadership of a radical Methodist, John Vincent. Indeed it is those three traditions that shape my own understanding of urban theology, and which will help structure this paper. I want first of all to consider the contribution of three "schools of the prophets" who to my mind are headed by John Vincent and UTU, by Kenneth Leach and the Anglo-Catholic Jubilee Group, and by the sadly missed evangelical preacher and youth worker, Jim Punton. From these roots, and with the intermingling of rhizomes spreading from beyond the UK, have grown the range of urban, contextual and liberation theologies that flourished in the 1980s following the [Faith in the City Report](#) and at least in the memories of my generation, still exist today. Naturally there have been developments and adaptations as political, social, economic and technological change has transformed the urban environment. However, I suspect that most of the younger generation or urban ministry practitioners, and many theologians in the academy are unfamiliar with these traditions, and are having to reinvent for themselves ways of thinking theologically about their everyday practice of mission and ministry. Indeed I agree with Terry Drummond that the current urgency for the church to reinvent its role as a welfare provide has crowded out theology in *that practical initiatives such as 'Food Banks' and 'Winter Shelters' for the homeless are a response to perceived need and do not necessary make use of social or theological analysis* .

*I hope this paper will serve as a quarry for younger practitioners and urban theologians can mine wisdom and experience, and will inspire them to produce new thinking and writing. This is intended very much as an online paper so instead of extensive formal bibliography it is peppered with hyperlinks which allow access to information about, or in some cases the original publications themselves.*

## **Common emphases**

**Most urban theology regardless of the stream in which originates shares some common features, and as the Catholic, Evangelical and Radical streams intermingle and cross fertilise theologies become hard to label and categorize. See how this happens in Andrew Davey's collection [Crossover City: Resources for Urban Mission and Transformation](#). I would highlight five key features of urban theology :**

- 1. It is a reflective practice... that is rather than taking a systematic theology from off the shelf and applying it to an urban setting, there is a provisionality as materials from the local setting, the experience of the local congregation or community project, the scriptures or the Christian tradition interplay with each other and shape and reshape the thinking of the participants. See – judge – act is the watchword... and when actions have changed the situation and are seen to have had an impact, another turn of the cycle, or spiral begins.**
- 2. It is contextual... there is a careful listening to the world, to the social realities and interpretations of people in communities and to social analysis that draws on statistics and social science. In consequence such theology is diverse, plural and post-modern, the good news of the Kingdom (or at least the application of that good news) for a group of Somali asylum seekers in Sheffield is not likely to be the same as for a group of street homeless guys in Blackpool. In a multicultural, multi-faith society where identities and subcultures are constructed and jostle alongside each other, it must listen to and amplify the myriad voices of those who live on the margins.**
- 3. Urban theology usually in some way or other follows a preferential option for the poor. Strictly speaking this is not essential, as one can envisage a theology of the City that speaks from and to merchant bankers, or property developers who have power to shape whole city regions. Since with God nothing is impossible, even for the heavily loaded camel to go through the eye of a needle, the prospect should not be dismissed. However, it is unlikely to be the most congenial or priority task for those Christians who have chosen, or been compelled to live in communities of the urban poor.**
- 4. Urban theology delights in stories. Sometimes these narratives are testimonies of blessing, sometimes anecdotes of everyday urban life, sometimes parables of Jesus and sometimes the grand narrative of salvation history in Scripture. But it is stories rather than statements of doctrine or proof texts that animate the urban church.**
- 5. At it's best urban theology is a collaborative enterprise, and while the power of information, knowledge and learning of the scholar is not to be discounted, it is in communities of enquiry, in church home groups, and community project staff meetings that the process best takes flight.**

## **HISTORICAL STAGES.**

Urban mission practice is ancient, and flourished in the post industrial revolution, post evangelical revival period in Britain with the slum missions, [the settlements](#) and the Salvation Army as document in [General Booth's "Darkest England"](#). However, urban theology, at least as considered here began as Larkin had it "Between the end of the "Chatterley" ban and the Beatles' first LP." The cultural revolution of the 1960s is remembered for its impact on theology in the ["Honest to God"](#) controversy which led to the "south bank theology" but also influenced some experiments in urban

mission in the diocese of Southwark. Sheppard's "Built as a City" 1974 and [Urban Ghetto \(Anselm\)](#) by David Sheppard, Douglas Bartles-Smith and David Gerrad (Oct 1976) are reflections from this period. At the same period transatlantic influences were important as the ferment of the Civil Rights movement and Lyndon Johnson's "war on Poverty" shaped American urban ministry and the stirrings of the Liberation Theologians and [Paolo Freire's educational methods](#) filtered out of Latin America. In the UK there was a growing realisation that despite the welfare state, poverty was persistent and that the inner cities multiple deprivation combined with growing ethnic diversity and racism were a crisis waiting to explode. Christians in these areas were beginning to think and write, and organise into groups and networks such as the Shaftesbury Project, the Jubilee Group, the Evangelical Urban Training Project (now [Unlock](#)), [the Urban Theology Unit](#), Evangelical Christians for Racial Justice and [Frontier Youth Trust](#).

The 1980s were the decade of Thatcherism, the deindustrialisation of Britain and sharp social and political conflict, culminating in waves of urban "riots" in 1981 and 1985 and in the miners' strike of 1984-85. On the very day of the first Brixton riots in April 1981 the evangelical tribes of urban mission were meeting in Birmingham for the launch of the Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission. The Brixton events and the subsequent report by Lord Scarman were the stimulus for Archbishop Runcie to launch his Commission for Urban Priority Areas which produced the Faith in the City Report published in December 1985. Dismissed by one government source as "naïve Marxism" (naïve it may have been in some of the recommendations – but Marxist it never was) the report seemed to elevate the Church of England to the status of official opposition at a time when the Labour party was in disarray and incapable of winning an election. Following FITC there was a flourishing of urban theology in the UK, from almost all quarters of the church at academic and popular levels.

The 1990s and first years of the new millennium in contrast were a more consensual period and the urban church was more likely to be engaged in urban regeneration partnerships than in radical criticism of the state. In urban areas with large BME communities churches grew and flourished, in mainline denominations as much as among Pentecostals. A theology of urban transformation, enterprise and community empowerment was more frequently heard. The New Labour government was reluctant to "do God" but certainly wanted to engage with the faith communities to renew the economic and social life of the inner cities. However, in 2001 the scene rapidly changed; in the summer there were urban disturbances in several towns in Northern England, and in September Al Quaida attacked New York. National security and managing relationships with Muslim communities became central to government policy were high on the agenda. Urban theology it was to have much social utility, needed to grapple with issues of community cohesion and inter-faith relationships. But in 2008 another shock was to come, this time economic. The neo-liberal eggs laid in the Thatcher years, were now chickens coming home to roost. The new role for the churches (especially but not only in urban areas), as the safety net of the welfare state was systematically shredded was to be a charitable one of providing emergency aid, through food banks and soup kitchens for the destitute. In reality the mainline churches scarcely have the resources to undertake the task, given the huge decline in attendance and influence since the 1980s, while the evangelical congregations which have grown and flourished in that period, may have more energy and volunteers on tap, yet insofar as they have focused on and individual gospel and worship as performance are ill equipped theologically to reflect on the realities of the new poverty of the second decade of the millennium.

In the hope of uncovering some resources for the present age the rest of this paper will seek to revisit some of the thinking of urban theology of the 1980s. I will concentrate on the evangelical stream which is the area I know best, though I will also touch on the Anglo Catholic and Radical contributions.

## **The Evangelical Stream:**

It is not surprising if the Evangelical stream of urban theology retains a distinctive focus on both loyalty to Scripture and the call to conversion and discipleship but it also holds to the tradition of social justice found in the OT prophets and in the Wilberforce – Shaftesbury heritage of activism for social reform. David Sheppard took this up in his 1983 book [Bias to the Poor](#), at a time when as Bishop of Liverpool he was heavily involved in the life of the troubled city and open to Roman Catholic influences, including Liberation Theology.

More influential perhaps for a generation of Evangelicals was **Jim Punton**. <http://jimpunton.org.uk/> Though Jim wrote little before his death in 1986 his Biblical expositions at conferences, youth camps, and from pulpits around the world inspired many of us to read the Bible and engage in the urban world with fresh eyes. There are stories still circulating of conversations between Jim and John Stott which confirmed the great evangelical statesman's move to endorse and promote a socially engaged evangelical faith which engaged with the great global issues world poverty and the environment. Jim's catchphrase "Shalom" and his enumeration of the Biblical references to the poor and the oppressed was expounded in print at the popular level in Colin Marchant's 1988 volume "[Shalom my Friends.](#)" The same thinking was meticulously documented as only a trained solicitor could by Roger Dowley, in "[Towards the recovery of a lost bequest: A layman's work-notes on the biblical pattern for a just community](#)" and various other unpublished documents. Roger and his wife Ruth were some of the earliest missional incomers to East London before the war and lived the rest of their lives in Bow and Camberwell, serving in Baptist churches, mentoring the next generation of incomers, and founding the Victoria Park Housing Association. Indeed a google search for his name will reveal little other than flats to rent in Roger Dowley court, a block named in his honour in Bethnal Green. Marchant and Dowley as Baptists in ecumenical evangelical networks, were instrumental in promoting Urban Ministry initiatives and urban theology in numerous networks such as Evangelical Urban Training Project which became "Unlock", in the [CURBs project \(Children in Urban Situations\)](#) which like Frontier Youth Trust was originally based in Scripture Union and through ministerial training courses at Spurgeons College, and other Baptist Colleges. This developed into The London Urban Theology Project <http://www.urbantheology.org/> in which Steve Latham was a key player in developing a valuable online resource. Some of my own work – though more sociological than theological fits into this evangelical tradition and can be found listed here <http://gregsmith.synthasite.com/my-publications.php>

There were important international links with evangelical urban mission theology in the 1980s. [Harvey Conn and the US journal Urban Mission](#) represented a Presbyterian / Reformed perspective. The Mennonites, with [Alan Kreider based at the London Mennonite](#) centre introduced an Anabaptist perspective. [Andrew Kirk](#) returning to the London Bible College after years in Latin America brought an evangelical perspective to liberation theology. [Jim Wallis](#) first toured the UK in the mid 1980s and brought the radical evangelical emphasis of the Sojourners community, and a time when US evangelicalism was normally perceived as the politics of the "moral majority" and Reagan's war on the Nicaraguans. Perhaps most significant was the visit of Ray Bakke in 1987, a Chicago Baptist, but speaking as the global ambassador of the [Lausanne Movement on World Evangelisation](#). His sharing of stories and sociological and theological insights from the urban churches across the world were written up by Jim Hart in the volume "[the Urban Christian](#)"

The insights from Ray Bakke steered at least one stream of urban theology towards Urbanology and Missiology, a quest for a theology as big as the city. His 1997 offering developed [A Theology as Big as the City](#) Among earlier work Ellul's 1970 treatment of the biblical material on urbanism in "[the Meaning of the City](#)" has been read, perhaps a bit unfairly as profoundly pessimistic, given that his thinking also stressed the possibilities of redemption of the city. However, Ellul was clearly in counterpoint to Harvey Cox's celebratory approach to [The Secular City](#) (1966).. Stuart Murray a Baptist church planter in East London in [City Vision](#) 1989 summarised the biblical sources in a

relatively upbeat way. Most recently David Smith has offered "[Seeking a City with Foundations](#)" (2011) focussing on the worldwide growth of megacities and the implications for holistic mission. Andrew Davey, from a less evangelical perspective, in 2002 also drew together global urban theology in "[Urban Christianity and Global Order: Theological Resources for an Urban Future](#)". Also in this genre is some of the writings of Chris Baker.. notably [The Hybrid Church in the City: Third Space Thinking](#) (2007) here Baker suggests "*The Church is struggling to connect with the significant economic, political and cultural changes impacting on all types of urban context but especially city centres, inner rings and outer estates and the new ex-urban communities being developed beyond the suburbs. This book argues that theology and the church need to engage more seriously with post-modern reality and thought if points of connection (both theologically and pastorally) are going to be created.*"

Evangelical urban Christianity in comparison with other forms appears to thrive, in many metropolitan urban environments, even in the UK. There are Pentecostal mega-churches, hives of charismatic activism, reformed preaching centres and even in run down estates in the North of England it is evangelical parishes, and mission halls that tend to survive against the odds. Diversity of perspectives, and the importance of practice over theology often emerges as for example in Eastman M. & Latham S. (2004) "[Urban Church: a Practitioners Resource Book](#)" London, SPCK, ISBN 0-281-05603- X . There are church plants and fresh expressions, movements such as the [Baptist Urban Expression](#) teams, the charismatic [Eden Network](#), [Oasis](#) with their network of Academy schools and social enterprises, and the more conservative reformed urban evangelists of the [Reaching the Unreached Network](#). Inevitably all of them find themselves involved in social action, engaging with local politics, hearing stories from the margins and in doing urban theology. Relatively little has yet been published, there are calls to mission such as [Matt Wilson's Concrete Faith](#), [Tim Chester's Unreached](#), Juliet Kilpin's "[Urban To The Core: motives for incarnational mission](#)" and from the USA [Tim Keller's "Generous Justice"](#). One also detects the influence of popular theological radicals such as Rob Bell and Brian Maclaren, while for those who engage rigorously with Biblical studies the scholarship of [NT Wright](#) provides much inspiration.

## **Black Theologies**

Most of the urban theology mentioned so far has been done, or at least been written up by white males, simply reflecting the reality of power distribution in the churches and society. From the 1960 onwards the inspiration from Martin Luther King and the black churches of the USA began to resonate with the struggles of Black Christians in urban Britain. By the 1980s Black Majority Churches had articulate leaders, such as Io Smith, Philip Mohabir and Joel Edwards who were finding a voice, developing a public profile and producing books, documenting their struggle and reflecting theologically upon it. Organisations such as [Evangelical Christians for Racial Justice](#), the Zebra Project, the Community and Race Relations Unit at the BCC and the Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership at Selly Oak produced a corpus of literature that began to form a distinctive British theology for black liberation. In the 1980s inspiration was drawn from the anti-apartheid movement and the Kairos theology which emerged in South Africa. Desmond Tutu's visits to Britain were inspirational to many. In later years Black theologies gained some entrée to the academic world. According to Wikipedia "*In the [United Kingdom](#), [Dr Robert Beckford](#) is a prominent black theology practitioner. He was the first in the UK to develop and teach a course on Black Theology at an academic level. [Black Theology: An International Journal](#)<sup>[2]</sup> is published in the UK. It is edited by [Anthony Reddie](#), who has written over 40 journal articles, essays and books and is the most prolific black theology author in the UK today.*"

## **The Anglo Catholic Stream**

Anti Racism is a significant bridge to the work of [Kenneth Leech](#), who with the Jubilee Group he co-ordinated, represent the contribution of the [Anglo Catholic Christian Socialist tradition](#) in contemporary urban theology. Ken spent most of his long ministry as a priest and community theologian in Tower Hamlets, where he was active in street level political activism to counter the extreme right wing National Front and BNP. He served for several years as the director of [Runnymede Trust](#), a leading anti-racist think tank, and as an intellectual giant and polymath could draw on the writings of post-modern philosophers or the early church fathers and put them alongside personal anecdotes he had gathered from Jewish East-Enders who had been involved in the battle of Cable Street. Numerous writings in urban theology included books which should still be required reading such as [The Social God](#), [Struggle in Babylon](#), [The Sky is Red](#) and [Through our Long Exile](#). He was a valued mentor and friend to many clergy and urban mission activists from various theological background in East London over three decades, (including to Terry Drummond and myself.)

It was from Ken Leech that the term “contextual theology” first came to prominence, and it is out of that tradition that the Contextual Theology Centre has been established at The Royal Foundation of St Katharine in Limehouse. It draws together the insights of a range of theologians and practitioners, see <http://www.theology-centre.org.uk/about-us/our-team/fellows/> a significant number of them from the Anglo Catholic tradition and exponents of radical orthodoxy. But the concerns and involvements are wide, including broad based community organising and inter faith relationships.

Clearly urban theology needs to grapple with the phenomenon of religious diversity and the Christian response to other faith communities. Many British urban areas such as East London are as evidently religious as any place on earth, judging from the religious architecture, street signs and daily spiritual practices of their citizens. Much Christian theology of religions has been academic and theoretical, and can be accessed by online search or in academic libraries... for example there is a useful documentation and reading list (from an evangelical perspective) here <http://www.theologynetwork.org/world-religions/christian-uniqueness-pluralism-and-the-theology-of-religions.htm>

For some thinking which is grounded in urban experience Richard Sudworth’s “[Distinctly Welcoming - Christian presence in a multi-faith society](#)” is essential reading and perhaps the only book on the subject that fits within the genre of Urban Theology. Also recommended are various books written or edited by, Steve Bell see <http://graceformuslims.org/> and the book ... [Between Naivety and Hostility: Uncovering the Best Christian Responses to Islam in Britain](#).

## **John Vincent and UTU....**

Radical Methodist minister [John Vincent](#) moved to Pitsmoor in Sheffield in the early 1970s and is still there, involved for many years in the Sheffield Inner City Ecumenical Mission and in founding the Urban Theology Unit. Of his projects and writings there is no end. His recent “[Christ in the City](#)” 2013 summarises his work over 40 years during which time he served as President of the Methodist conference and was a constant advocate for the people of inner city Britain.. At the UTU course I attended with Terry Drummond and others in 1976 John introduced us to the idea of situational analysis, gathering data and mapping the neighbourhoods which were our “mission field”, and irritated me by dipping in and out of a biblical theology which never strayed beyond Mark’s gospel. Over those 40 years John Vincent has encouraged and empowered hundreds of us urban mission people to reflect and write about their ministry practice and theological reflections. The collection of essays (2003), [J.Vincent \(ed\) "Faithfulness in the City "](#) published by Monad press, St. Deiniols Library, Hawarden, CH5 3D.is one of the outputs from this collective effort and

includes my own piece. Smith G. ["The Christ of the Barking Road"](#)

One of UTUs star collaborators has been Bishop **Laurie Green** who has developed the method of practice urban liberation theology as a vicar in Birmingham and as a bishop in Essex and now as co-ordinator of the National Estates Churches Network. His many books are listed on his web site <http://www.lauriegreen.org/3.html> and one ["Let's Do Theology"](#) is now also published in Chinese.

Also writing and working within this tradition, with an academic base in the University of Birmingham is Chris Shanahan. <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/profiles/tr/shannahan-chris.aspx> In Birmingham his work links with that of [Professor Martin Stringer](#) Worship in Birmingham Project... which looks at the urban ecology of religion. Shanahan's 2010 book <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Voices-Borderland-Re-imagining-Cross-cultural-Twenty-first/dp/1845537033> is excellent as a critical introduction to the main writers in British urban and liberation theology of recent decades. My own review of this book is [here](#).

If you have read this "rough guide" thus far you will have probably noticed that almost no mention has been made of any female writers of urban theology. This should surprise people familiar with inner city churches where women usually outnumber men in congregations and increasingly in church leadership, where they are responsible for some of the most effective ministries. If female authors have been overlooked I am not alone in doing so, as in Shanahan's comprehensive review of the genre only one of the writers he deals with at length is a woman. Ann Morisy is a community theologian with urban ministry experience, and was the Director of the [Commission on Urban Life and Faith](#) which tried to rekindle the flames that Faith in the City had ignited twenty years earlier. [Her books and talks](#) have helped many of us think through new approaches to community ministry..

Fran Beckett, formerly CEO of Church Urban Fund has also made a significant contribution to thinking about urban mission and ministry though she has published little in print. [Many of her talks are available](#).

It is also impossible to ignore the contribution of the Iona Community in inspiring radical Christians through worship and theological reflection. Some of their members such as John Harvey, Ian M Fraser, Kathy Galloway and Jim Robertson have made significant contributions to urban and liberation theology in Scotland and beyond. See their website for a full list of titles. <http://www.ionabooks.com/books.html?cat=14>

### **Political and Public theology....**

As a final aside some recent developments in political and public theology need to be covered. Luke Bretherton is an academic theologian and his prize-winning book [Christianity and Contemporary Politics](#) is grounded in the urban realities of the [London Citizens](#) movement. Professor Elaine Graham was also involved with the Commission on urban life and Faith and with Stephen Lowe wrote [What Makes a Good City?: Public Theology and the Urban Church](#). More recently her [Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Theology in a Post-secular Age](#) is a comprehensive coverage of the role of Christians speaking into a post-secular society. Justin Beaumont & Chris Baker's edited book, ['Postsecular Cities'](#), contains some articles criticising the notion of public theology, in favour of a more anabaptist approach to alternative community, as well as useful stuff on the place of religion in the postmodern city.

Many of these issues are taken up in recent theological discussions about the concept of the common good, and the conference [Together for the Common Good](#) has generated a lively online discussion about urban, political and theological issues. Ken Leech had some trenchant criticisms of the idea of the common good, which he sees as an ideological construct, that overlooks how the notion of the common masks divisions and conflicts, which resonate with my own contribution to the online debate [The Common Good - who and what is it good for?](#)

## What next for Urban Theology?

The best way I can sum up the genius of urban theology is in one of my own recent Facebook postings:

*Wonderful evening at the Methodist drop in last night when in a crazy upside down way, one of the guests (evidently mentally ill) gave me an in depth and highly knowledgeable Bible study - highlighting how most churches fail to live up to the teachings of Jesus about welcoming and accepting the poor and working class people they encounter. Followed by four of us volunteer / staff team members including the Methodist minister, being prayed for and blessed by one of the homeless guests who was rather maudlin and totally inebriated, but showing a deep simplicity of faith and brokenness... Not sure they teach you this sort of thing in theological college...but maybe it's how church is meant to be.... 9.4.2013*

So if one of the messages of this paper is that anyone who is serious about theological reflection in the context of the urban church is to return to and re-read some of the classics of the genre I have listed, the second message is to get a group of urban Christians together and to start doing your own urban theology. There will always be a tension between doing theology and writing about it for publication, but it is my conviction that the Holy Spirit speaks most clearly when groups of ordinary believers read the Scriptures together and reflect prayerfully on them in the real life context of their own everyday experience.

I suspect most urban groups will find themselves dealing with the following key issues among others.

- 1... **the politics of the new poverty.** With the ongoing dismantling of the welfare state most inner city Christians will be finding themselves involved in such ministries as emergency food banks, soup kitchens, debt counselling and job clubs. What does the Bible have to say to us about injustice, destitution and rulers and societies which fail to care for their weakest and poorest citizens?
- 2 ... **The multi faith agenda** We cannot ignore the fact that we live in a diverse, globally connected urban world, where a huge variety of religions and lifestyles jostle with each other for attention. What does the claim (if it can indeed be sustained) that Jesus Christ is unique as a revelation of God, and that his offer of eternal life is the only hope for all the nations mean in our multi-faith cities today?
- 3) **The gospel, the church and the white working class.../ not working class.** This paper began by noting that forty years ago David Sheppard asked why the gospel and the church, had found it so difficult to make an impact among the urban industrialised working classes. Despite our wanderings through the wilderness of urban theologies, and despite efforts of evangelism, incarnational team ministries and fresh expressions of missional church, the situation is no better, probably even worse. Tim Chester's "Unreached" and Derek Purnell's recent book *Speaking the Unspeakable* (contact <http://www.urbanpresence.org.uk/index.html> ) which is inspired by his many years of work in East Manchester and his connections with UTU, both come back to this basic question. And the church in its leadership, and its concerns and its culture still remains dominated by the middle and upper classes, conservative traditions and suburban culture and focuses on its own internal issues around worship and the ordering of ministry.

There are a range of other issues which continue to need some attention, or to be revisited such as



- globalisation and global cities, and the link to international finance capital alongside a low wage service economy
- urban theory / geographies and whether they are useful or otherwise to urban theology, especially in the context of the digitised social networking which dominates our lives
- evangelism and church planting, fresh expressions of urban church – especially in the light of continued decline of mainstream congregations
- still – the connection or disconnection between social action and evangelism/mission, between community projects and urban congregations
- the role of migrant churches, which have mainly been studied in terms of social sciences rather than theologically
- the place of the larger, international, techno-churches – in but not of the city?
- the dilemma of London versus the rest – the capital is untypical of the rest of the country, which mirrors in the religious sphere London's distinctive incorporation into global economy

**Urban theology is all its vibrancy and fragmentation is needed as never before. As the title of the 2013 Jesus in the City congress put it our task is “making sense of the fragments”. And the unfinished task we are facing should drive us to our knees.**