



Long Distance
Christian

Shining in the sun

a biblical vision for city
transformation

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Introduction

At the heart of Jubilee Centre's mission is equipping Christians in public life with the theology, strategy and confidence to have a transforming influence on the world around them.

We were delighted therefore to accept an invitation from Movement Day UK to prepare some materials to help participants think through a long term (25-30 year) biblical strategy and vision for the transformation of their cities.

This booklet is the result, and it considers how individual Christians, local churches and Christian organisations can be guided by and grounded in a biblical vision for city transformation.

It is a short introduction to a large subject, so it's difficult to do justice to the wide range of literature available; much has been left out. We have chosen a few themes, however, which we consider particularly important, and pray that they will help strengthen and sharpen the resolve of many Christians to engage in the long term, costly work of changing their cities for good.

We have deliberately chosen not to give examples to illustrate the methods and approaches summarised in this booklet. We wanted to keep this short, and avoid the difficult task of choosing a few good initiatives and omitting many others. More importantly, we wanted to avoid giving the impression that transformation can be achieved simply by replicating 'good models' from other places. Every city context is unique.

Almost 30 years ago, Lesslie Newbigin laid down this challenge about the kind of movement that will be required to see our society transformed:

If the gospel is to challenge the public life of our society, if Christians are to occupy the 'high ground' which they vacated in the noon time of 'modernity,' it will not be by forming a Christian political party, or by aggressive propaganda campaigns.... It will only be by movements that begin with the local congregation in which the reality of the new creation is present, known, and experienced, and from which men and women will go into every sector of public life to claim it for Christ, to unmask the illusions which have remained hidden and to expose all areas of public life to the illumination of the gospel. But that will only happen as and when local congregations renounce an introverted concern for their own life, and recognize that they exist for the sake of those who are not

members, as sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's redeeming grace for the whole life of society.

God has entrusted this generation of people in our cities to this generation of Christians. The responsibility for mission and service in the coming years rests with us. If you are reading this, you are probably up for the task – so ‘Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess... and let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.’ (Hebrews 10:23-24)

Jonathan Tame and Josh Hemmings

Cambridge, September 2017

1 Cities in the Bible

*Woe! Woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon! In one hour your doom has come!*²

*I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."*³

The book of Revelation provides us with vignettes of two cities: Babylon and the New Jerusalem. The first city, Babylon, is condemned and destroyed. Although an actual city in the Ancient Near East, here the name is used symbolically, for the city of Rome. This city that promised peace and health 'became the "oppressing city", a city of bribery, idolatry, corruption, murder and vice.'⁴ However, Babylon symbolised more than just Rome; it represents what can happen to any city that ignores God and exalts 'humanity's self-deification.'⁵

By contrast, we find the New Jerusalem, which is a place of flourishing life and peace, with God at the centre. The Bible doesn't end with a return to Eden, but with a city. 'The trajectory in Scripture from the "garden" of Eden to a city reflects the role of the city as a symbol of God's intent and humankind's desire to develop the creation and to build places of culture and community.'⁶ In the New Jerusalem humans find their 'place' as they dwell with God.

Origins of cities

From Genesis onwards, we see two competing visions for the city being played out. Initial accounts of cities in the Bible do not seem positive. The first is built by Cain following his exile as a result of murdering Abel. Then we come across Nimrod, a violent warrior who makes songs about killing people, but who appears to be a serial city builder⁷. We then encounter Babel, Sodom, and Gomorrah, each of which is destroyed by God.

While it may appear that 'urbanisation was a challenge to divine authority',⁸ there is enough in the early chapters of Genesis to indicate that there's

more to the story. The building of cities from Cain to Nimrod forms part of the development of culture,⁹ which flows from the creation mandate to fill the earth and subdue it. While cities seem to be overshadowed by sin, it is surely not the case that building cities is inherently sinful. For example, Lamech's poem, the first poem in the Bible, is one of vengeance and violence. Does this mean that all poetry is wrong? Not at all – there is a whole book in the Bible devoted to poetry. Cities are an important part of the development of culture. But what the early chapters of Genesis show us is that cities, just like poetry, can be radically misdirected.¹⁰ The problem in Genesis, therefore, is not cities in and of themselves, but idolatry.¹¹

The early chapters of Genesis show us that cities can be radically misdirected.

God's destiny for cities

God has another purpose in mind for cities – as 'gifts of God's grace'.¹² For example, in the allocation of the land to the Israelite tribes, some of the Levitical towns were cities of refuge, where an individual who had committed manslaughter could flee to avoid vengeance from the family of the deceased. We also find store cities, where food and grain were kept for times of famine.

God has compassion on cities. In Jonah we read how his heart went out to 'that great city Nineveh'¹³ and Jesus weeps over Jerusalem.¹⁴ We also see God's desire for cities to flourish. In Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Babylon, God tells them to 'Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce... Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile.'¹⁵ They were to bless the very city which represented everything oppressive to them. Then God not only promises to rebuild the cities of Judah¹⁶, but even to rebuild the disgraced city of Sodom.¹⁷

Isaiah 58, a well-known passage about living according to God's standards of righteousness, also has an urban theme. If Israel responds to God's word, there is a promise that:

*Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.*¹⁸

Finally, it was in a city, Jerusalem, that God chose to dwell in his temple. From there he would rule his people, the city would be a light to the nations

and a place where peace and justice reign. However, this was but a foretaste of the New Jerusalem, the ultimate city of God, as we saw earlier. The full expression of God's salvation is described in the context of a city with God dwelling in its midst, representing his ultimate intention for human life and culture.

The full expression of God's salvation is described in the context of a city with God dwelling in its midst.

2 Approaches to Christian Social Engagement

In the 21st century, we are standing between the cities of the biblical era and the future promise of a New Jerusalem. What are God's intentions for cities in this age and in our time?

It's clear from the title of this booklet that we're convinced of the biblical basis for city transformation, but we need briefly to examine the legitimacy of the idea, for not every Christian would agree with this approach. Over the centuries various attempts have been made to articulate the relationship between the church and the culture or society to which it belongs. A number of approaches have been developed, of which the best known is perhaps by Richard Niebuhr in his classic *Christ and Culture*. He presents five distinct ways how Christ and the Church relates to culture (summarised here by Tim Keller¹⁹):

1. **Christ against culture:** a *withdrawal* model of removing oneself from the culture into the community of the church
2. **Christ of culture:** an *accommodationist* model that recognises that God at work in the culture and looks for ways to affirm this
3. **Christ above culture:** a *synthetic* model that advocates supplementing and building on the good in culture with Christ.
4. **Christ and culture in paradox:** a *dualistic* model that views Christians as citizens of two different realms, one sacred and one secular.
5. **Christ transforming culture:** a *conversionist* model that seeks to transform every part of culture with Christ.

Although it was first published over 60 years ago, *Christ and Culture* remains an influential work today. Indeed, most models that have been subsequently proposed largely overlap with Niebuhr's categories.

Tim Keller builds on Niebuhr's analysis and proposes four contemporary models: Transformationist, Relevance, Counter-cultural and Two Kingdoms.²⁰ He argues that each one helps us see the importance of a particular biblical theme or motif that is emphasised. Likewise the limitations of each model

Each one helps us see the importance of a particular biblical theme or motif that is emphasised.

should encourage Christians to 'avoid extremes and imbalances and to learn from all the motifs and categories...[Each approach] has running through it a motif or guiding biblical truth that helps Christians relate to culture'.²¹

This booklet broadly reflects the transformationist approach, having regard to the potential problems with it, which Keller points out. These are not recognising the dangers of power; overconfidence about knowing God's will for society and the potential of change; an over-cognitive understanding of worldview; and an under-appreciation of the church and of the importance of evangelism.

3 Theological Resources for City Transformation

If we are to embrace the challenge of city transformation with both faith and humility, it's vital to understand what God's calling and expectations are on his Church in this present age. To do this we need to delve into Scripture for biblical and theological resources suitable for the task. This section considers three concepts: the Kingdom of God, the worldview framework of Creation-Fall-Redemption, and Biblical Law with its emphasis on relationships – before concluding with some comments about the importance of place.

1. The kingdom of God

The language of the kingdom of God is often used by Christians working towards social justice and transformation. Jesus opened his public ministry by declaring: 'The time has come... The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!' (Mark 1:15). The gospel writers don't give us a neat definition of the kingdom; instead they set out for us Jesus' teaching and parables, and recount his healings and miracles. As Dallas Willard puts it, Jesus' message *was* the kingdom of God – he proclaimed it, he manifested it and he taught it.²²

Jews should have understood that Israel was supposed to demonstrate God's kingdom rule to the nations – but the popular view in the first century equated the kingdom of God with a political entity, which the Messiah would come and restore by defeating Israel's enemies in battle. Jesus taught that the kingdom begins with the human heart, the battle was with the forces of evil not political enemies, and that it was to extend far beyond the nation of Israel. The people of God were now those who believed and followed Jesus, not simply the descendants of Abraham. This was a radical redefinition of the kingdom – which even John the baptiser took some time to understand and accept (Matthew 11:2-6).

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Since then, down through church history and still today there are different ways of understanding the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God. At the one end of the spectrum is the view that the church and the kingdom are virtually synonymous, while at the other is the idea that the kingdom is wherever God's will is being done in society, whether by believers or not. The first view can lead to a narrow focus on the corporate life of the church at the expense of social engagement, while the second can result in an all-consuming mission to right injustices in society at the expense of building the local church. Both these views tend to be reductionist, and a careful study of the Bible's teaching is needed in order to avoid gravitating towards either extreme.

The following considerations help us nuance our understanding of the kingdom.

a) Now but not yet

Through Jesus' teaching it is clear that the kingdom is both a present reality, and also something still to come. Jesus' miracles of healing show the nature of God's kingdom, and are a sign that one day there will be complete healing, when suffering will be no more. 'The salvation of God's kingdom is really experienced in the Spirit's present work – its joy, shalom, righteousness, and knowledge of God – and he also carries the pledge of God that the fullness of God's gracious reign is yet to come.'²³

The world will always remain the place where other kingdoms stand in opposition to the kingdom of God.

Theologians have termed this reality the 'now but not yet' of the kingdom. So while we work and pray for significant change,

the world will always remain the place where other kingdoms stand in opposition to the kingdom of God. This is perhaps clearest in Matthew 13:24-30 through the parable of the wheat and the tares (or weeds) growing up to maturity together. Jesus indicates that we should expect both righteousness and evil to increase simultaneously right up to the end. This implies that we should be neither triumphalistic over our successes, nor too pessimistic about any battles that we lose: we should expect to experience both.

b) Rule vs reign

When it comes to thinking about the nature and extent of the kingdom, Schluter and Clements²⁴ argue that we use the same word 'kingdom' in English to describe two different things. We have failed to distinguish the *de jure* (established in law) and *de facto* (the actual reality regardless of law) dimensions of Christ's rule on earth. The word *basileia*, or kingdom, in the New Testament refers exclusively to the acknowledged rule of Christ – his *de facto* rule among those who regard him as Lord. In this sense the kingdom is limited, whereas the *de jure* rule of Christ, referring to his ultimate authority (*exousia* in Greek), is unlimited. Perhaps this could be called the reign of Christ. After his resurrection, Jesus said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me' (Matt 28:18). However, at this present time other gods are still holding sway on earth, and so Jesus is not the *de facto* king over every heart or institution or nation. That's why he said we should pray that his kingdom would come on earth – because it hasn't yet. So there is a

universal dimension to the kingdom – but we will only see it realised in the age to come.

c) Power and priorities

Jesus was constantly upsetting social norms. He went out of his way to eat with the excluded and relationally poor of his day – the tax collectors and prostitutes. We find him healing a woman with a haemorrhage, and laying his hands on lepers, the untouchables in that society. He engaged with people of high status in the culture, but allowed seemingly insignificant ones to interrupt his meetings with them (Mark 5:21-34). The poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind were rejected by society but welcomed by Christ. The social order is turned upside down because in God's estimation every person has equal worth, which is one of the defining features of the kingdom.

So the priority for the Church should always be those on the margins, which today include asylum seekers, the disabled, single mothers, the homeless, people struggling with mental health, the lonely and children in the care system. In God's kingdom, honour, kindness and respect are shown towards people who are considered small, unimportant and insignificant in society. However, the church must also engage with those in power – either in confrontation or in collaboration – to plead the cause of the weak and marginalised, and seek justice.

The social order is turned upside down because in God's estimation every person has equal worth, which is one of the defining features of the kingdom.

d) Building the kingdom?

It is instructive to study the verbs associated with the kingdom in the New Testament (see Appendix). 'Much of our language about the kingdom is a bit off. We often speak of "building the kingdom," "ushering in the kingdom," "establishing the kingdom," or "helping the kingdom grow." But is this really the way the New Testament talks about the kingdom?'²⁵ A careful reading shows us that human beings do not actually build or extend the kingdom. It is not something that depends on our endeavours. Instead it comes from God and invites human response.²⁶

It's perhaps not unlike our role in growing the church. We talk about church

planting and yet strictly speaking, the disciples were not sent out to start churches. Instead Jesus told them to preach the gospel and make disciples (Mark 16:15, Matt 28:19), while promising ‘I will build my church’ (Matthew 16:18). Jesus’ purpose and intent is to work in and through those who follow him to extend his kingdom and build his church.

The Church and the kingdom

So there remains something of a mystery about the kingdom of God; it has broken into this world and the Church exists because of it. It is like the seed that grows by itself (Mark 4:26-29), and yet the Church is given a leading role in that process.

Jesus is bringing his kingdom to earth, and ‘the church lives in the midst of history as a sign, instrument and foretaste of the reign of God.’²⁷ We

In our communities, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we demonstrate a new way of living, where God is King.

testify to the inbreaking of the kingdom through our words and deeds. In our communities, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we demonstrate a new way of living, where God is King, where we choose to serve, not to be served, and where we seek to live lives free from the power of sin and idolatry

that enslaves our world. We bear witness to the kingdom by announcing good news to the poor, loving our neighbours and participating in what God is doing in our cities. In our acts of compassion we are a sign to the now-but-not-yet kingdom. And we show our love to our neighbours by transforming our places, releasing the captives and thus proclaim God’s kingdom. ‘Following Jesus, we are called to make known God’s rule over all of human life, embodying it in our lives, demonstrating it in our actions, and announcing it with our words.’²⁸

The teaching about the kingdom thus provides a vision and mandate for the Church’s mission in the world today. However, there are two other biblical themes which can further inform and provide content to our engagement with cities and society as a whole.

2. Creation, Fall, Redemption

The Dutch Prime Minister and social reformer Abraham Kuyper wrote, ‘There is not a square inch of the entire domain of human life over which Christ the Sovereign does not say, “Mine!”’. His insights and teaching helped inspire the modern worldview movement, which gives us a second theological framework for thinking about city transformation: the scheme of Creation, Fall and Redemption. In one respect, this describes the broad arc of the biblical story, but it also gives us a powerful tool for understanding the world in which we live, and discerning how we are to engage in the world of arts, business, entertainment, sport, politics, education or healthcare – indeed any of the spheres of human culture.

Creation, Fall and Redemption gives us a powerful tool for understanding the world in which we live.

Creation

In the beginning God made the material universe and called it good. He created humans to live in perfect relationship with him and with each other and the rest of creation. God gives Adam and Eve a specific purpose to their lives, which has been called the ‘cultural mandate’: ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’ (Genesis 1.28)

The authority conferred on humans was not a licence to selfish exploitation of the earth, but through accountability to God it was intended to lead to the flourishing of the whole of creation. Eden was given to humans to cultivate and to care for. This garden stewardship ultimately represents all human work and cultural activity: ‘A gardener does not merely leave a plot of ground as it is but rearranges the raw material so it produces things necessary for human flourishing, whether food, other materials for goods, or simply beautiful foliage.’²⁹

John Mark Comer unpacks the meaning further: ‘Fill the earth. The idea here is for Adam and Eve to take their fledgling family and make it into something more – a society.’ Subdue means ‘harness the raw, uncut potential of the earth itself... You have a forest – do something with it. You have a river – make it work for you. You have metal deep in the earth’s crust – get it out... Plant crops, build houses, invent solar power, design

computers, make music, shape art, come up with technology – fill the earth and subdue it.³⁰

The implication is that every kind of work has a thread connecting it right back to the cultural mandate. There is a good, creational purpose in science, technology, design, music, the arts, manufacturing, engineering and so forth – and participating in these is part of our primary calling as human beings made in God's image. Mark Greene illustrates this by saying that God is not only interested in Adam's decision about what to call the elephant but also in how a perfumier names a new fragrance for L'Oreal today.

Fall

Tragically the *shalom* of God's good creation was broken through the unleashing of sin in the world. Sin is a powerful influence that has affected everything, leading to death, as God had warned – not primarily in physical terms but in relational ones. The relationship between God and humans was fatally ruptured, as was the relationship between the man and the woman. Humanity's connection with the rest of the created order was also broken.

Now sin has not warped God's creation so badly that nothing good of its original purpose remains. Instead it 'attaches itself to the creation, twisting, distorting, disrupting, and perverting it.'³¹ As a result human culture, which was a part of God's good creational intention, becomes distorted and misdirected. Work becomes 'painful toil'.³² The development of technology becomes twisted so that instead of being used in blessing, it is used in war. Business, rather than bringing benefit to others, enslaves and exploits.

Although sin has infected everything, the good intentions of creation are not wiped out.

However, although sin has infected everything, the good intentions of creation are not wiped out; the cultural mandate still stands – even though it's now much more difficult to carry out. One reason why sin has not been able to obliterate the goodness of creation is God's work in Providence

– which can be seen as his response to the Fall, preserving the original goodness of creation and preparing people, institutions and society for redemption.

Through these twin realities, we see that every aspect of human culture and

society carries simultaneously the two hallmarks of creational goodness *and* sinful brokenness.

Redemption

God's response to the defiling of his creation was not to destroy the world and start again, but to save and redeem it. Goheen and Bartholomew describe three characteristics of God's saving work: it is progressive, restorative and comprehensive. Salvation 'is the restoration of the whole of God's good creation,'³³ not an individualised project of personal blessing and a ticket to heaven out of a world doomed to destruction. Instead it's the renewal of all human life and culture, with the effects of sin done away with, and the world restored to its original glory. As we saw earlier, in the new heavens and new earth there will be a city, into which the cultural treasures of history will be brought (Revelation 21.24-26).

We might make a distinction here between restoration and redemption. Restoration is the work of mitigating the effects of the Fall, seeking to counter and reverse the distortion of sin. It is carried out by God through Providence and by his people who 'seek the welfare of the city'. Restoration is about scope: directing cities, institutions and cultures towards God's original intention

in creation. It affirms God's goodness and blessing in creation, but points further to redemption. Redemption is the mechanism of God's saving work. God himself is our Redeemer, who in Christ gets to the root cause of our alienation and brokenness, and opens the way to full and complete reconciliation between people and God. Ultimately the transformation of our cities depends on people being reconciled to God, becoming disciples of Jesus in his mission to restore the fallen creation, and participating in that wherever their work or calling lies.

Therefore, cities today are theatres of redemption, places where human beings continue to develop culture despite the destructive effects of the Fall, and where God is seeking, through his people, to restore the goodness of his creation and reconcile all things to himself in Christ.

Cities today are theatres of redemption, places where human beings continue to develop culture despite the destructive effects of the Fall.

The Creation-Fall-Redemption paradigm in practice

This worldview framework gives us valuable insights as we live and work in our cities today. When we are considering a Christian response to any specific aspect of human culture, we need to discern three things, in a process which Goheen and Bartholomew call 'faithful contextualisation'³⁴:

1. Creational design – what is God's intention or purpose for this area of life?
2. Cultural idolatry – how is sin distorting God's good creation here?
3. Healing potential – what redemptive actions can move this area back towards God's purposes?

Let's take an example of a Christian working for an international business.³⁵ She is troubled that the bottom line financially is all that matters in her company, especially as this contributes to exacerbating poverty in poorer countries and destroying the natural environment. What does faithful contextualisation look like? First she would try and articulate the creational design of her business. This might be expressed in terms of bringing benefit to others through providing useful goods and services in an ethically responsible way, which doesn't exploit other people or the environment. Then she recognises that markets are not amoral, they are distorted by sin. Cultural idolatry is affecting her business, she sees, because ethical standards and considerations are subordinated to the drive to maximise profits for shareholders. The weaker stakeholders – in her case suppliers of raw materials in a low income country – are not being paid a fair amount for their products, and the company is taking advantage of poor environmental laws there. Thirdly, in considering the potential for healing, the woman might start by affirming those aspects of her business that *are* positive from an ethical standpoint. Through research she could make her colleagues and managers aware of the injustices in their supply chain, and how they are affecting specific groups of people in the other country. This could lead to a proposal to visit the country perhaps, and look for ways to work more positively with the suppliers. Of course this would not be easy, and much tact and wisdom would be needed in calling people in her company to a more redemptive way of doing business.

Goheen and Bartholomew give several other examples of faithful contextualisation, showing how it can be applied to any area of society. Learning to use this method helps us to see the good, challenge what's wrong and bear witness to the holistic salvation that God seeks to bring.

3. Biblical law and the centrality of relationships

A third biblical framework which can direct our engagement in social transformation revolves around relationships. In Matthew 5:16, Jesus says we should let our light shine so that people will see our good deeds and praise our father in heaven. What kind of deeds might these be? Immediately following the verses about salt and light, Matthew places the statement by Jesus that he had not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets (v.17) and that anyone who practices and teaches the law would be called great in the kingdom of heaven (v.19). This implies that the kingdom of God and the Old Testament law are not at all antithetical, as some suppose, but that biblical law should inform the Church's engagement in society. Jesus links the two in the Lord's prayer, 'Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth', and Paul echoes this also in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 where he states that all scripture (meaning at the time just the Old Testament) was useful for teaching and training in righteousness, so that we may be equipped for every good work.

The kingdom of God and Old Testament law are not at all antithetical.

How was this to be? Let's go back to the original setting of biblical law (which we'll abbreviate to 'the Law'). God called Abraham and through his family established a nation with a unique calling and purpose: to demonstrate God's nature and character, and to light the way for his salvation to extend to other nations. God's primary instrument for shaping the corporate life of his people was the Law, which was given by Moses just after the Israelites' enforced detention in Egypt came to an end. They were a vast, unpromising crowd of refugees who had only known enslavement for generations; they had few assets, no institutions, no visible means of support, no economy, no criminal justice system, no schools, no military, and practically no leadership. The Law was God's chosen means to disciple the emerging nation of Israel in every area of its social, economic, political and religious life.

Now Jesus came to inaugurate a new covenant, one that was superior to the old in the sense of being more effective. But as noted above, he said he had not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. As the New Testament unfolds, it's clear that the laws which were primarily intended to maintain Israel's 'distinctiveness' from other nations (e.g. the food laws regarding what was clean or unclean) were abrogated when the invitation to God's kingdom was extended to Gentile nations (see Acts 10:9-15). Likewise, all the laws

concerning sacrifice for sin are made redundant through the one supreme sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins (Hebrews 10:18). However, we can expect the rest of the Law, concerning moral and civil life, to have continued relevance today. The question is, how?

One hermeneutical key to understanding how the Law can be applied in the 21st century is the realisation that biblical law is all about relationships. In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was – out of the 623 laws in the Torah. He replied that the greatest one is actually an inseparable pair of laws: to love God wholeheartedly and to love others sacrificially. Then in what might look like a throw-away line, he added, ‘On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets’. Every law given to Israel through Moses makes ultimate sense when considered as an expression of love – where love is a quality of relationship. In other words, through the Law, God is defining what a loving relationship looks like practically in a fallen world, as opposed to an abusive, corrupt or exploitative one. And this doesn’t just apply to our close personal

Biblical law is the design of a relational God for a relational society.

relationships – the Law talks about relations between borrowers and lenders, masters and servants, residents and foreigners, kings and citizens, offenders and victims. It also goes beyond the interpersonal level to include groups, such as relationships between

tribes, cities and nations. Biblical law is the design of a relational God for a relational society, and the way that was illustrated by ancient Israel, both as an example and as a warning, provides us with a paradigm for applying God’s purposes in other societies and at other times.³⁶

In fact all the great themes of the Christian faith are relational. God is revealed not as a solitary being, but as the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit – three persons who love and glorify one another. The implication of this is that relationships precede the physical creation, and so human beings made in God’s image are primarily relational. The Fall is relational – Jacques Ellul called it the rupture, because that word reflects the broken relationships caused by sin, rather than the change in status of Adam and Eve. The covenants are relational, as they are about God’s solemn promise to act in a certain way in relationship to his chosen people. Likewise the incarnation, the crucifixion and resurrection, the church and eternal life are all primarily relational in nature and purpose.

Relational Thinking

There are two great advantages of this approach – which has been called ‘Relational Thinking’³⁷ – when talking about social ethics today. First, it enables us to translate biblical law into the 21st century world, because although technology, political institutions and social structures have

changed beyond recognition since the Law was written, the importance of human relationships hasn’t. Secondly, we can talk about biblical social ethics without using religious terms, in a society which is increasingly sceptical or even hostile to the Christian message in public life. However, the language of relationships is open and accessible, and almost everyone will be interested in making relationships better.

In our culture, we live as if personal fulfilment and material gain are the ultimate goals, and everything else revolves around them. Yet it is relationships which are the most important things in life³⁸. As human beings we derive our identity, develop our values and character, build families and organisations, and form wider societies – all through overlapping networks of relationships. Relational Thinking proposes an agenda at the personal, institutional and public policy levels: to change priorities in order to put relationships first. This amounts to a ‘Copernican revolution’³⁹ or a new way of seeing the world. At the personal level, it means we no longer take decisions about careers, where we live or retire, holidays, or the use of our time and money to seek personal fulfilment and material gain; for when we do, we often neglect or even sacrifice relationships along the way. Instead, as we become convinced that the quality of our lives is ultimately determined by our relationships, we learn to put these in the centre of our ‘thought universe’, and make other factors support them. In Part 4 we will see how this can be applied at the organisational level in some detail.

As we become convinced that the quality of our lives is ultimately determined by our relationships, we learn to put these in the centre of our ‘thought universe’.

The importance of place

The three theological frameworks which we have looked at in this section may seem somewhat generalised and abstract. There is another biblical theme which will help ground them, and take into account more fully the physical dimension of cities and their transformation. It is the importance of place.

Stewarding and cultivating places is part of God's creational intention and purpose.

Place is a good gift of God; he placed Adam and Eve in a garden that they were to tend and cultivate. We are necessarily placed as embodied creatures (not disembodied spirits) and the material world has intrinsic goodness. Stewarding and cultivating places is part of God's creational intention and

purpose. Humans were to continue God's work of developing place to bring blessing to the whole of creation. Our work in 'placemaking', therefore, is part of God's design. God chose a place where he would meet his people – and instructed Moses to build a tabernacle for that purpose, and David a temple. Both these places were exceedingly beautiful, made at God's instruction with the finest materials by the most skilful of craftsmen. Jesus prayed that his kingdom would come on earth – a specific place – as in heaven; he named particular places and commissioned his disciples to go to specific cities and nations.

However, the Fall has twisted all this. The central motif of the Garden of Eden was that God dwelt with humanity. Craig Bartholomew says, 'Place is never fully place without God as co-inhabitant'.⁴⁰ But after they rebelled against God, humans were cast out of the garden and away from his presence. Yet God promised his people a new place, to settle them in a land of their own. There they remained for a long time, but they were exiled again because of disobedience. Since then, 'dis-placement' has become an ever-present problem. Through natural and man-made disasters, floods, famine and war, people have been forced to leave their homes and communities. Migration has been a feature of human history since the dawn of time, but more recently, revolutions in transportation and globalisation have loosened more and more people from their places of origin as they choose to migrate for work, opportunity, or adventure.

The Law sought to mitigate the effects of dis-placement, especially the Jubilee provisions in Leviticus 25. They were designed to ensure that families and kinship groups would be rooted in one place, and once in each generation (i.e. every 50 years) be guaranteed to return. Through the sabbath provisions, debts were cancelled every 7 years, and people who had sold themselves into bonded labour were set free. The land could never be sold permanently, only leased until the next year of Jubilee, when the people could return to their God-given place. And the Law also promised a way back to God relationally by offering sacrifices for sin, in order to restore fellowship.

The places where we live shape us also. We are not unchanged by the physical and social geography of where we dwell. Place is fundamental to shaping people's lives and the patterns of living for every community. If we want to think about how we can serve God where we are, we need to pray for the specific community or city where we live, seeking God for his unique purposes for our place – not just his general purposes for the world or for the Church.

God is renewing the world and our places – and when Jesus comes again our places will be fully redeemed. Meanwhile we bear witness to this redemption by recognising the intrinsic importance of this created world and the beauty in it. We look after natural resources, we protect the environment and we cultivate its beauty. We also design our places – where we live and work, our parks, shops, gardens and streets – with regard to beauty and aesthetics, and seek to make our cities places of human flourishing and thriving relationships.

We bear witness to this redemption by recognising the intrinsic importance of this created world and the beauty in it.

4 Strategies for Engagement

The three frameworks of the kingdom of God, the biblical worldview, and the centrality of relationships in the light of biblical law, provide a valuable set of resources for understanding God's intentions for our cities and to imagine what transformation might look like in the 21st century. This section sets out a range of strategies which, if pursued together by the Church in the city (including individual believers, Christian organisations and local congregations), could contribute to that transformation.

In any one city right now, there are likely to be a broad array of projects, ministries, initiatives and campaigns which Christians are pursuing to bless and serve their community, in addition to a wide range of evangelism initiatives. A recent audit estimated that the value of all the social action projects run by churches in UK was £3 billion in 2015⁴¹.

This is encouraging, but when we think of a strategy for the transformation

Is there a more holistic strategy to encompass all the different strands of transformational mission?

of a city in the long run, is there more to it than just aggregating all the disparate evangelism and social action initiatives? Is there a more holistic strategy to encompass all the different strands of transformational mission which we looked at in the last section? We believe there is – and it's

wrapped up in a simple pair of metaphors which we are all familiar with in Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

Salt and Light

In Matthew 5:13-16 Jesus uses two analogies to describe the calling of God's people in the world: salt and light. From the context of these verses, Jesus puts the church squarely in the stream of the prophets. The role of the prophet was broadly to proclaim God's judgment or salvation, and call people to walk in God's ways and obey his commands (which were given so that it would go well with them). The church is to do likewise – but Jesus goes on to say more about how that should happen.

In first century Palestine salt had three primary functions: to preserve fresh meat and fish; to add flavour and nutrition to food; and as an antiseptic on wounds. These were so important that salt was frequently used as a form of currency (which is where our word salary comes from). If Jesus called his disciples 'the salt of the earth', it suggests he intended that they should have similar functions as physical salt, but in the social sphere. This meant preventing or at least slowing down moral decay and corruption; affirming what is good, beautiful and true; and bringing reconciliation and peace to broken relationships.

Jesus immediately warned of the dangers of salt 'losing its saltiness'. Now physical salt is only effective when it's in direct physical contact with the material it is intended to change. So followers of Jesus can only be like salt if they are fully engaged in the institutions of society around them. Withdrawing from politics, business, the arts or any other cultural endeavour because they are corrupt or sinful is one way that the Church loses its saltiness. The other is when Christians become so accommodated to the values of those institutions that they become indistinguishable from what they are called to change.

The second metaphor – light – functions at two levels. First Jesus said 'a

city on a hill cannot be hidden'. The cluster of lights from all the dwellings in a town would have been a welcome sight to travellers at night. So too the gathered witness of God's people – the church – shines out through all manner of good deeds. At the household level, Jesus spoke of a lamp on a stand, giving light to a single room. This would suggest that in the home or the workshop – in the domestic and neighbourhood context – followers of Jesus would brighten up the lives of those they welcomed or encountered daily through acts of love and service.

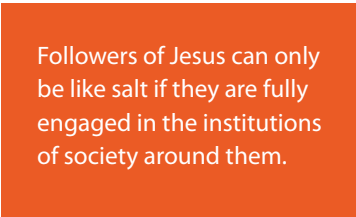
How might this form a strategy for long term city transformation? We suggest that the lamp on a stand represents the simple but transformative work of offering hospitality – something which almost every Christian can do. The city on a hill represents the corporate witness of local churches and Christian ministries, expressed mainly in prayer, evangelism, compassion and social action.

Salt, on the other hand, represents the witness of believers in a personal capacity through their work and public influence. This doesn't mean acting as a lone ranger, as Christians will need to collaborate with others to bring change to the workplaces or organisations of which they are a part.

However they will be acting primarily in a personal capacity, since local churches will have no jurisdiction in their workplaces. There are some areas of overlap between these two, for instance workplace chaplaincies and Christian professional organisations (e.g. Lawyers Christian Fellowship, or the Christian Police Association) can be recognised by employers as providing a valuable service to staff.

So in these two simple pictures, Jesus is suggesting a deep and wide vision for how to change the world: individually and corporately, in the home and the workplace, through resisting the effects of sin and affirming all that is good, building community and bringing reconciliation, being both creators and guardians of culture.

Of course, there is a limit to how far these categories can be held up as distinctive from one another, as there will always be overlaps and activities which don't fit easily into any category. Nevertheless, the emphases are important to distinguish between those things which are the responsibility of church leaders formally, and what individual Christians are personally responsible for, as they serve Jesus in their places of work especially.



Followers of Jesus can only be like salt if they are fully engaged in the institutions of society around them.

The lamp on a stand: households

Hospitality

“When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind”

(Luke 14:12-13).

Tim Chester writes about the centrality of meals to the mission of Jesus: ‘Meals are a powerful expression of welcome and friendship in every culture. This is why Jesus’ meals are so significant – they embody God’s grace and enact God’s mission.’⁴²

Eating together can make a deep impression on the lives of different groups of people in our cities. ‘Offering hospitality to those who are unable to return the favour mirrors the unconditional hospitality of God.’⁴³ We can bear witness to God’s kingdom by inviting in and including people who are relationally and physically poor – those who are lonely, isolated and vulnerable – who are on the top of God’s invitation list for his kingdom.

Sharing meals is an effective long term strategy for building relationships with people of other religions or none. Through this Christians can have a disproportionate impact on improving community relations – e.g. where there is mistrust towards the Muslim population. And of course this applies also to building relationships with believers from other churches. ‘Early Christian writers claimed that transcending social and ethnic differences by sharing meals, homes, and worship with persons of different backgrounds was a proof of the truth of the Christian faith.’⁴⁴

Being a good neighbour, practising sharing and offering hospitality are all ways to increase social and relational capital.

Being a good neighbour, practising sharing and offering hospitality are all ways to increase social and relational capital, and thus help to transform streets and neighbourhoods into more open, welcoming, and trusting communities.

The city on a hill: witness of the 'gathered' church

We earlier quoted Lesslie Newbigin as saying that the local church is a sign, instrument and foretaste of God's reign. The city on the hill cannot be hidden, said Jesus – which means we are on display all the time to those around us. Local churches are in some ways a microcosm of society and thus have many opportunities for demonstrating a radical counter culture within their community and institutional structures (as did the nascent church in Acts 2:42-47). In our churches, how do we address debt? housing? leadership? environmental stewardship? Are our church buildings places of beauty? In these areas and more we can learn to live out together the comprehensive redemption which Christ brings, and thus be a light to our cities. The following are four main axes around which churches can develop long term strategies to transform their cities.

a) Unity

Paul tells the divided church in Corinth: 'you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it' (1 Corinthians 12.27). He explains that just as the body has many different parts with unique functions, and all are essential in their different way to the body, so it is with the Church. The work of transforming a city should involve everyone in the body of Christ, not just individuals, but different congregations and Christian ministries. It is vital that they don't allow competitive attitudes to creep in; instead through building respect and trust, communicating regularly, coordinating their activities, and cooperating when there is opportunity, they seek God's kingdom first in their city together.

When churches in a city present a united front, it makes it easier to work alongside secular and local government authorities for the common good. There will be many opportunities for 'co-belligerence', where Christian and secular organisations work together towards common goals in the city.⁴⁵ Transformation is slow, and change needs a multipronged strategy that includes pastors and preachers, teachers and parents, police and town planners, accountants and architects – all working towards the same broad vision. Two hundred years ago the Clapham sect were a group of friends from a wide range of professions, who prayed together and laboured together over decades towards the transformation of England – and their impact is still felt today.

b) Prayer and intercession

United, faithful prayer is the hidden force for the transformation of our communities. This is what we are asking for when we pray the Lord's prayer: your kingdom come, your will be done on earth – in our places, cities and nation.

United, faithful prayer is the hidden force for the transformation of our communities.

The Bible gives us several examples of intercession on behalf of cities. In Genesis 18, Abram prays to God to have mercy on Sodom and Gomorrah. Jeremiah exhorts the exiles in Babylon to 'Pray to the Lord for [Babylon], because if it prospers, you too will prosper!' (Jeremiah 29:7). The Psalmist

prays against evil forces in the city: 'Lord, confuse the wicked, confound their words, for I see violence and strife in the city.' (Psalm 55:9) And Jesus poured out his heart as he lamented over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-39).

Patient, sustained, strategic prayer is necessary to connect the diverse initiatives of local churches and individual Christians across the city. Equally, prayer and listening to God are essential for discerning God's agenda for specific places, and understanding the unique contours of redemption for each city. The work of the kingdom will incur opposition from both spiritual powers and earthly ones, so prayer unites, protects and equips the work and witness of the whole Church.

c) Prophecy and evangelism

While prayer and intercession is a hidden work, with God as the primary 'audience', prophecy and evangelism are mainly for the public. In the Old Testament, prophets heard from God and declared what the Lord said to people. Their message could take many forms: proclamation of divine judgment (2 Kings 1:6), divine salvation (2 Kings 20:6) or both (Isaiah 65:7-8); a call to obedience (Amos 4:4-5); symbolic dramatic acts (Isaiah 20:2-4, Jeremiah 28:10) or forth telling what is to come in the future (Ezekiel 20:45-48).⁴⁶

Although it is becoming more difficult as Western nations reject their Christian roots, the church is still called to hold out a plumb line to indicate where our culture is bending away from God's good, right and just intentions. In a world that has increasingly lost its moral compass, the

church, despite its own failures, needs to speak out against injustice and unrighteousness. If we are truly to love our neighbours and be salt and light in our city, we need to articulate God's viewpoint on right and wrong. Sometimes that message will be more acceptable, where the culture holds a similar view (such as on human trafficking). But we must also find ways to address the more challenging areas around greed, materialism, and immorality – whilst being honest about our own sins and failings, so as not to become hypocritical or judgemental.

The other side of prophecy was the promise of blessing when people turn back to the Lord. Evangelism is strategically important for cities, and in the book of Acts, we see Paul deliberately targeting major cities in order to maximise the impact of the gospel. Meeks argues 'It was in the cities that [Christianity] discovered the means to spread across the empire in a time so short that we still find it astonishing.'⁴⁷ Tim Keller argues similarly: 'Because Christianity [in the Roman empire] captured the cities, it eventually captured the society, as must always be the case. What captivates the cities also captivates the arts, media, scholarship and the professions. Cities are the "culture-forming wombs" of the society, made by God to be so.'⁴⁸

In a world that has increasingly lost its moral compass, the church, despite its own failures, needs to speak out against injustice and unrighteousness.

d) Compassion and Social Justice

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—

when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? (Isaiah 58.6-7).

Earlier we saw how everything bears two simultaneous hallmarks: creational goodness and sinful corruption. Both individuals and institutions fail in one way or another in a fallen world, which leaves people hurt, excluded, marginalised, impoverished and vulnerable. This is especially true in cities,

where people migrate in search of work or a better life. The Christian response is twofold: in compassion we come alongside and care for those who are poor, excluded and vulnerable, and in social justice we seek to address the underlying causes of poverty.

Poverty is one of the most pervasive themes in the Bible, and urban areas often have significant concentrations of poverty and large differentials between rich and poor. In the Bible, specific groups of people are often mentioned as vulnerable and needing protection: foreigners, widows and orphans.⁴⁹ What do these groups have in common? They lacked the protection of a network of secure relationships. As a result, they would often have no land of their own, would lack economic independence and have to rely on charity or employment from other people. Their relational poverty left them vulnerable to being exploited. When thinking about who is poor and vulnerable in our city, therefore, we should go beyond a narrow economic view and think in terms of the more holistic biblical view of poverty, which is a lack of relational, emotional, physical and financial support. Responding to these dimensions of poverty can be as much pastoral as practical.

The more holistic biblical view of poverty is a lack of relational, emotional, physical and financial support.

Working for social justice is not optional. Jesus says: 'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' (Matthew 25:34-36). Followers of

Jesus are called to speak up for the voiceless and seek justice for those who are vulnerable and oppressed.⁵⁰

There are numerous opportunities to serve people in our cities, and Christian organisations and charities are already at the forefront of many social initiatives. As central government funding continues to be squeezed, these opportunities will only increase in the coming years.

The salt of the earth: the witness of the 'dispersed' body of Christ

We saw earlier that Christians act as salt when they are engaged directly

in the wider society, resisting corruption, affirming the good and promoting reconciliation. However, can we develop a more focused strategy for ways believers might impact some of the institutions which reflect and perpetuate the values of society?

The ‘big prize’ of social transformation is to make a lasting difference to businesses, schools, hospitals, prisons, town halls, factories, libraries, public service organisations etc. These are the ‘middle institutions’ between political leaders and individual citizens, the organisations where most people work and find their place in the world. Much Christian social engagement in the past focused on the twin goals of influencing policy makers in order to change laws (which people like Wilberforce and Shaftesbury did to great effect), and on changing hearts and minds – and ultimately public opinion – through grassroots campaigns. Both these are important, but they typically focus on single issues – which though worthwhile, do not constitute a longer term vision and strategy for the transformation of our cities or society.

Christians act as salt when they are engaged directly in the wider society, resisting corruption, affirming the good and promoting reconciliation.

Focus on institutions

When institutions are transformed, the impact can be multiplied vertically. Changes that are experienced in the values and culture of organisations can permeate down to the level of individual employees and their families. Similarly, the story of a transformed institution can find its way up to policy makers, who may go on to translate that success and effectiveness to other organisations in the sector.

What should the content and agenda for that change look like at the institutional level? Drawing from the biblical frameworks we considered in the last section, the kingdom of God will emphasise the value of every person, and expose any ways the organisation is exploiting the weak or promoting injustice. The Creation-Fall-Redemption framework will put the spotlight on uncovering the creational intention of each institution, and encourage believers there to excel in pursuing its purpose – while seeking to counteract the corrupting effects of sin in such a way as to be redemptive. Jonathan Chaplin writes,

*'To transform the institutions that are shaping our globalised world... involves not only the deconstructive task of exposing their dehumanising characteristics, but also the much more demanding constructive task of identifying their normative purposes and fleshing out how to advance these more adequately through specific attainable institutional changes – tasks which will be decisively shaped (inevitably) by one faith or another.'*⁵¹

When institutions are transformed, the impact can be multiplied vertically.

This provides a broad and coherent agenda. Various networks of Christians in specific professions, spheres of society and workplaces are grappling with these challenges, and others continue to be started.⁵²

The third approach adds further content and granularity around the core theme of relationships. Relational Thinking can take Jesus' command to love our neighbour and apply it into the heart of organisations in three ways:

a) Looking at the organisation through a 'relational lens'

Managers take most decisions about their organisations on the basis of finance (will this reduce costs or raise income?), regulation (will this meet our legal obligations?), output (will this improve productivity and help us meet targets?) or reputation (is this going to strengthen our brand?). Although these considerations are important, they are penultimate. The relational lens helps people see their organisation as essentially a matrix of relationships between the various stakeholders. For example, companies have relationships with their shareholders, employees, suppliers, customers, trades unions, regulators, and the community in which they operate. When these relationships are healthy and cooperative, the organisation will tend to accomplish its goals more efficiently. But if there are significant tensions in one or more stakeholder relationships, then the organisation will struggle and be less effective.

The relational lens also helps us to look at workplace problems differently: what issues of concern are being driven by underlying relational tensions? Would the problem resolve itself if a relationship issue was addressed? (e.g. high levels of sick leave in a team could be caused by a conflict with their manager). Or when considering alternative options around a decision, what might the relational consequences be for the people involved, including third parties? (e.g. what impact would an office relocation have on length of

journeys to work and therefore on the amount of time employees have with their children?)

b) Measuring the quality of relationships

A significant obstacle to relational issues being taken more seriously in organisations is not that they are deemed unimportant, but because relationships seem intangible and subjective, and people don't think they can be measured. Management focuses on measurable outcomes – not only in the corporate world, but increasingly in the delivery of public services. Relationships are a 'soft' part of the organisation, and don't appear on the quarterly dashboard of targets. In response to this challenge, the Relationships Foundation and allied organisations have been developing a set of tools to first measure and then manage stakeholder relationships. These are based on five drivers or preconditions of healthy relationships: directness of communication, continuity over time, breadth of knowledge, parity of power and commonality of purpose. Together these are called the Relational Proximity Framework⁵³. These tools enable directors to identify and take practical steps to improve any weak or misaligned relationships in their organisation, and have already been used across government agencies, large corporates and the non-profit sector in several countries⁵⁴.

When these relationships are healthy and cooperative, the organisation will tend to accomplish its goals more efficiently.

c) Becoming a relational organisation

Relational organisations emerge when directors and managers recognise that relationships are the glue which holds their organisation together, and value all their stakeholder relationships accordingly. This is more than about achieving outcomes more effectively – good relationships are considered worthwhile ends in themselves. Consequently, directors will develop strategies for improving stakeholder relationships, and consider how the goals, values and working practise of their organisation might be changed to support this new priority.

These ideas have been piloted in several different sectors, and there is a growing movement of relational schools, proposals for relational companies, research into relational peacebuilding and relational development projects⁵⁵. Of course, not every Christian will be able to influence the directors or senior managers of their organisation, but each one can think and pray

This is more than about achieving outcomes more effectively – good relationships are considered worthwhile ends in themselves.

through what relational change might look like – and then take the first step to apply it wherever they have opportunity. This might be called the ‘yeast strategy’, based on the parable which Jesus told (Matthew 13:33) about how the kingdom is like a small amount of yeast which was kneaded into a large batch of dough.

Although this section has focused on organisations and institutions, Relational Thinking can be applied more widely in the context of cities to questions such as housing, criminal justice, transportation and the delivery of public services.⁵⁶

Epilogue: Your City in 2050

‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.’ Acts 2:17

This booklet stops short of suggesting what a transformed city might look like. We can draw inspiration from biblical examples and stories of transformation in church history. But what about the future? What could your city look like in 30 years’ time? God is continuing to pour out his Spirit on his church – and we are invited to pray, dream, see visions and work towards the transformation of our city, inspired by the breadth and depth of what we’ve looked at in this booklet.

Paul reminds us that God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20) but that doesn’t mean we should not imagine or not ask! The following is a suggested template of areas and questions that might guide our prayer and strategic planning.

- **Evangelism.** How can we together as local churches ensure that each person in our city (present population plus those moving in plus those born here over the next 30 years) has an opportunity to get to know a Christian and discover something of who Jesus is?

- **Church growth and sustainability.** What should we do now to ensure that our local churches will grow in maturity as well as numerically over the next 30 years, that the next generation of leadership are being prepared, and that we are adaptive to changes in the wider culture?
- **Discipleship.** How will we ensure that every believer is taught about the total transforming vision of the gospel, such that they are not limited by a false sacred/secular dichotomy, and seek God's kingdom and purposes in everything they do?
- **Compassion.** What should we do to make sure that no one stays 'invisible' for long in our city due to poverty, isolation, addictions, mental illness or cultural prejudice? And what will be needed to ensure that those on the margins have a say in issues that affect them?
- **Building community.** What will it take to develop a broad culture of welcome, hospitality and sharing across our city, to build social and relational capital over the coming years?
- **Social justice.** What injustices are continuing unchecked in our city, and what will it take to diminish them significantly over the next 30 years?
- **Institutional transformation.** What should we do to ensure that believers in every major workplace and institution in our city are developing a vision and strategy together for the transformation of that institution?
- **Understanding the times.** How will we prepare for and respond with grace and wisdom to the social, cultural, economic and technological changes that are probably going to impact our city in the next 30 years?
- **Cultivating place and culture.** How will the majority of local churches develop a vision for the places where they are set, and how can believers who work in the arts take a more prominent role in the life of the city?
- **Governance.** What will it take to develop closer collaboration and partnership with the city authorities?

God is continuing to pour out his Spirit on his church – and we are invited to pray, dream, see visions and work towards the transformation of our city.

Whatever strategies are adopted and visions pursued, transformation will not take place in the lifetime of a typical project. It may take decades, not years, and require a 'long obedience in the same direction,' to borrow a

phrase from Eugene Peterson. The Jewish exiles carried off to Babylon were perhaps thinking that they would be able to return home soon, and so didn't want to invest in the life of the city. However, through Jeremiah God told them to make their home there and bless the city (Jeremiah 29:4-7). Even though we are not fully at home in this present world, we share the same mission as those exiles 2,500 years ago. Our destiny and the destiny of our city are more closely bound together than we realise. So let us be the best citizens we can be on earth, and seek the welfare of our city in every area, as well as being ambassadors for the kingdom which is coming, and looking forwards to the perfected city where redemption will be complete and creation restored.

Appendix

The verbs of the kingdom

The Kingdom can draw near to men (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15; etc.); it can come (Matt. 6:10; Luke 17:20; etc.), arrive (Matt. 12:28), appear (Luke 19:11), be active (Matt. 11:12). God can give the Kingdom to men (Matt. 21:43; Luke 12:32), but men do not give the Kingdom to one another. Further, God can take the Kingdom away from men (Matt. 21:43), but men do not take it away from one another, although they can prevent others from entering it. Men can enter the Kingdom (Matt. 5:20; 7:21; Mark 9:47; 10:23; etc.), but they are never said to erect it or to build it. Men can receive the Kingdom (Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17), inherit it (Matt. 25:34), and possess it (Matt. 5:4), but they are never said to establish it. Men can reject the Kingdom, i.e., refuse to receive it (Luke 10:11) or enter it (Matt. 23:13), but they cannot destroy it. They can look for it (Luke 23:51), pray for its coming (Matt. 6:10), and seek it (Matt. 6:33; Luke 12:31), but they cannot bring it. Men may be in the Kingdom (Matt. 5:19; 8:11; Luke 13:29; etc.), but we are not told that the Kingdom grows. Men can do things for the sake of the Kingdom (Matt. 19:12; Luke 18:29), but they are not said to act upon the Kingdom itself. Men can preach the Kingdom (Matt. 10:7; Luke 10:9), but only God can give it to men (Luke 12:32).⁵⁷

Endnotes

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- 3 Revelation 21:1-4
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- 6 Craig Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011) p161
- 7 Genesis 10:8-12.
- 8 Andrew Crooks, *The City in the Bible: A Relational Perspective*, (Cambridge: Jubilee Centre, 1997; available online at www.jubilee-centre.org/city-bible-relational-perspective-andrew-crook/) p.6
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- 12 Clinton Stockwell, 'Seek the Peace of the City! Biblical and Theological Perspectives on the City in Ancient Times, 2013, unpublished manuscript at: <http://www.academia.edu>
- 13 Jonah 4:11
- 14 Matthew 23:37; Luke 19:41-44
- 15 Jeremiah 29:5, 7
- 16 Psalm 69:35
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- 18 Isaiah 58:12
- 19 Tim Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), p.194
- 20 *Ibid.*, chapter 16
- 21 *Ibid.*, p.195
- 22 From the transcript of an interview with Dallas Willard in 2002, available at <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=92>
- 23 Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads* (London: SPCK, 2008) p.57
- 24 Michael Schluter and Roy Clements, 'Jubilee Institutional Norms: A Middle Way between Creation Ethics and Kingdom Ethics as the Basis for Christian Political Action' in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, (Vol 62:1, 1990) pp.37-62
- 25 Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011) p.72
- 26 Joel Green, 'The Kingdom of God' in *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* 2nd, ed. (Downers Grove, IVP Academic, 2013)

- 27 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, second edition 1995) p.110
- 28 *Living at the Crossroads* p.60
- 29 Tim Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) p.227
- 30 John Mark Comer, *Garden City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015)
- 31 *Living at the Crossroads*, p.49
- 32 Genesis 3:17
- 33 *Living at the Crossroads*, p.51
- 34 *Ibid.*, p.138
- 35 *Ibid.*, pp.131, 138-9
- 36 For an overview of this approach, see Guy Brandon, *The Jubilee Roadmap* (Cambridge: Jubilee Centre, 2012)
- 37 For a list of resources on this, see the Jubilee Centre's page <http://www.jubilee-centre.org/relational-thinking/>
- 38 Dr. George Vaillant, former director of the longitudinal Harvard Grant Study into happiness, concluded that 'The only thing that really matters in life are your relationships to other people.' See <http://positivepsychologynews.com/news/george-vaillant/200907163163>
- 39 Copernicus was the Polish astronomer who first claimed that the earth and planets actually revolve around the sun, not vice-versa
- 40 *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today*, p. 31
- 41 Cinnamon Faith Action Audit 2016; see <http://www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk/cinnamon-faith-action-audit/>
- 42 See <https://timchester.wordpress.com/2015/03/07/making-a-meal-of-it/>
- 43 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 2014), p.159.
- 44 Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Practices that Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), p.157
- 45 See the Cambridge Paper on this topic by Daniel Strange <http://www.jubilee-centre.org/co-belligerence-and-common-grace-can-the-enemy-of-my-enemy-be-my-friend-by-daniel-strange>
- 46 GF Hawthorne, 'Prophets' in *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IVP 1992) p.636
- 47 Wayne A. Meeks, 'Saint Paul of the Cities,' in Hawkins, (ed.), *Civitas: Religious Interpretations of the City* (Atlanta, Scholars Press 1986) pp.15-16
- 48 Tim Keller, 'A Biblical Theology of the City', in *Evangelicals Now* July 2002
- 49 For example, see Exodus 22:21-24; Deuteronomy 24.14; Zechariah 7.9-10
- 50 See the pamphlet *Evangelism and Social Justice* by Jubilee Centre/Just Love, available at <http://www.jubilee-centre.org/evangelism-and-social-justice>, and also David McLroy, *A Biblical View of Law and Justice* (Authentic Media, 2004)
- 51 Jonathan Chaplin, *Loving Faithful Institutions: Building Blocks of a Just Global Society* at <http://www.theotherjournal.com>
- 52 See a listing at <http://www.transformworkuk.org>

53 See <http://www.jubilee-centre.org/introducing-the-relational-proximity-framework>

54 See <https://www.relational-analytics.com/product/the-relational-lens/>

55 See <http://www.relationalthinking.net>

56 See <http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org>

57 G.E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996)

About the Jubilee Centre

Jubilee Centre's mission is to articulate a biblical framework for public life – especially the big issues around the economy, politics and society – and equip Christian leaders to be salt and light in a secular, pluralistic world.

How should Christians exercise public leadership? Is there a biblical alternative to capitalism or socialism? How does the gospel address individualism and consumerism? Grappling with these questions has forged the Jubilee Centre's mission for the past 30 years.

The way we do this is through research and publications, including the widely read Cambridge Papers, events and conferences. Often collaborating with like-minded organisations and churches in Britain and abroad, we seek to present radical, biblical responses to some of society's most pressing challenges, in a winsome and practical way.

We invite readers to explore the wide range of resources on our website (and those of our sister organisations), to sign up to receive Cambridge Papers quarterly, and to follow us on social media:

www.jubilee-centre.org

www.relationalthinking.net

www.relationshipsfoundation.org

www.relational-analytics.com

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Shining in the Sun

This booklet is written for people who are committed to seeing the good news of Jesus make a deep and lasting difference to every aspect of their cities.

It introduces three biblical themes that can inform Christian social engagement. The kingdom of God, the creation-fall-redemption worldview and biblical law expressed in relational terms are shown to offer complementary narratives for transformation. The simple metaphor of salt and light is then translated into a strategy for individual believers, local churches and Christian organisations to work together to make a lasting impact in their city.

The booklet concludes with suggesting ten areas around which a long term strategy can be developed.

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