

Mapping Urban Mission

'Is it like losing a leg or not getting a new pair of trousers? Can we persuade the well-off to address poverty?'

The big resistance politically to addressing poverty is a fear that its eradication will harm the well off. The poignant turning away of the 'rich young man', an otherwise devout and committed follower of the Jewish Law, when told by Jesus that his final challenge was to give his wealth away to the poor (Luke 18: 18-27) is the challenge to the economically affluent. A friend who was educated in such circles said that her contemporaries dismissed all thought of addressing the issue. Having been told that it was harder for them to enter the kingdom of heaven than get a camel through the needle's eye, they abandoned all attempts and were aiming to enjoy all the wealth they could get. Yet it is clear that global and UK poverty can only be eradicated by a major shift in individual, state and corporate behaviour. Cancellation of debt and pressure for reasonable pay in developing world supply-chain factories and UK fast food outlets is just the beginning. Are people willing to pay the price? Scare stories are already on the way. How can the hearts of those of us with wealth be won over?

Ruth Levitas in an interesting analysis of social inclusion (Levitas, Ruth, *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998, pp.164-5) clarifies three ways that those in power regard those in poverty – as a moral underclass that needs improving, as people discriminated against who need including, and as victims of an unjust economic system which needs to be challenged. Her analysis is that the New Labour and EU agendas started on the inclusion footing, reflected in the creation of the government's Social Inclusion Unit. But as the Fabian Report *Life Chances* and the SIO's own web pages show, the moral underclass view is too often dominant, and has certainly come through in the spring General Election campaigning.

How can we ensure that the churches combat this view of people in poverty as 'the poor', 'them' and 'other' and instead as our equals made in God's image equally deserving of life in all its fullness (John 10:10)? Tim Chester's book *Good News to the Poor* has a useful chapter on good news to the rich that begins to tackle this. His four points (see review, p10) certainly go a long way to offer some ways forward. One of the key tensions is between self-denial and self-sacrifice ('they would not accept any worsening of their own services as the price of improving services for others...they would accept slow improvement of their own services if this enabled faster progress for the disadvantaged.' Fabian Report p.4). A faith that has the self-giving death of Christ at its heart, tends to jump towards the requirement of ultimate self-denial in death and understandably people shy away from this as too much, as my friend's school

contemporaries did. But perhaps the concepts of communal resources, hospitality and sharing that underpin the early Christian communities are more helpful: the generous grace of Jesus whose first miracle was to provide more wine for a wedding feast. Mvume Dundala, General Secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches, spoke at the recent Methodist Mission Adventure Conference. He was asked whether wealthy people might resist 'making developing world poverty history' because of fears of a downturn in their own economy. In reply he quoted Mahatma Gandhi 'There is enough for all our needs, but not enough for all our greeds' and David Deeks, General Secretary of the Methodist Church responded "it's more about standstill [for the UK] than an actual drop". The black majority churches that work on the stewardship model whereby those who do well financially have that wealth almost 'in trust' for the wider community, offer an interesting pattern too.

At a recent meeting of Christian agencies looking at implementing the Evangelical Alliance's 'United we stand' ethos by working more closely together, representatives were struggling to balance organisational self interest with joint working to achieve common goals. People's fear was of losing something – but reflecting upon Mvume Dundala's statement enabled us to shift to a more generous model, hence the rather graphic image of my title. Working more collaboratively and generously to serve our most disadvantaged neighbours better won't mean 'losing a leg', but it might just mean we don't get a new pair of trousers. Those of us in ministry and living in urban situations can do our utmost to combat the wearing effects of poverty but until there is wider motivation the cracks and fractures will remain. The example of the generous 'widows' who give their 'mites' will be the ideal, but for the majority the message of having a little less because you've given from your abundance just might be something that Christians and others in affluence are willing to hear and act out.

Some local authorities are working on this levelling-up basis – for instance Edinburgh City Council's 'One City' Report 2000 talks of a 'floor' of 'dignified life through which no citizen should be allowed to fall'. Rather those in power should 'find ways to help [those in poverty] to rise from this basic level to take better advantage of today's vibrant and specialised economy'. And wealthy individuals do respond. The marketing in 2000 of the Sheffield Employment Bond an initiative of Citylife (a project of the Relationships Foundation) with the South Yorkshire Community Foundation, especially concentrated upon convincing people with affluence that unemployed people in the city deserved their help and that contributions could make a difference. Almost 1,000 people in the city lent over £3/4m to the initiative. This 'feelgood' factor perhaps would help stave off the acidie of wealth talked of in the CBTI 'Politics of affluence' reader. And after all, those new flares would be 'so last week' very soon...

Erica Dunmow

Roger Dowley Day 2005

The first Roger Dowley Day was attended by around 60 people and was held at Brandon Baptist Church, London on 16th April with the theme: 'Social Justice, The Biblical Mandate'. The purpose of the day was to review one of Roger's written pieces (1915-2004) and its application to practice in the urban church.

Professor Chris Rowland made a searching assessment of Roger's main book: 'Towards the Recovery of a Lost Bequest'. Roger's layman's worknotes (1984) sought to integrate the findings of scholarship concerning the biblical pattern for a just community.

'Recent developments in New Testament study have stressed the political character of early Christianity as a counter-cultural minority whose deeds were what attracted people, not the sophistications of the arguments for its doctrinal acceptability.'

In the afternoon, Simon Barrow of Ekklesia made a presentation on 'The Church as a Justice Making Community' and held out a vision beyond of the lostness of the bequest of the Church as evangelical, ecumenical and catholic, layered, plural, faithful & communal.

Michael Eastman

'*The Recovery of a Lost Bequest*' is available from ECUM as well as other workbooks by Roger. Details of the next 'Dowley Day' from Rev. Roy Dorey, 132 Trafalgar Street, Walworth, London SE17 2TP Tel: 020 7701 9470 or Email: roy@philemon.co.uk

Unlock Walk No. 22 – Barriers & Bridges: A Walker's Eye View by David Harvey

Unlock's 22nd walk was one of the best. We saw a cross-section of life in the inner city with a tremendous range of peoples, housing, workspace and inspiring Christian mission. We started at Paddington Green Police Station and met the first of the 'barriers': Westway — so much of a barrier that we walked the wrong way down Edgware Road! Then through the contrasting areas of Lisson Grove and St John's Wood to Little Venice with its colourful boats and gardens. The Open Door Friendship Centre set in a large estate of flats offers the bridge of Christian friendship to the Muslim community. On to Notting Hill and Portobello Road: a kaleidoscope of sights, smells and colours. Then along leafy roads, past three transport 'barriers', into Paddington Station, along the towpath back to Little Venice and Paddington Green.

The lasting impressions will be the food smell with many tantalising new odours. At least two churches, St. Francis and St. Paul's, were revived from churches that had been forced to close due to lack of numbers and are now growing; The vibrancy of life in the city: The food in the markets looked wonderful, the shops were buzzing and the new developments around the canal inspiring. **Contact: Unlock for details of next year's sponsored walk!**