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ANDREW DAVEY

Flesh and Blood Cities: The Struggle for Urban Realism in Theological Practice

Andrew Davey calls for a new church praxis around the theme of persistence in the urban context and does so through a critique of contemporary urban theology. Late modernity's experience of urbicide combines with an implicit anti-urbanism in both Christian and secular thinking and also with a *laissez faire* attitude to city issues to offer a bleak outlook for city living. For the church and its partners, this must be overcome not simply by the tactics of resistance but through a strategy of discovering ways to 'live the urban'. Christian communities require a new praxis so that 'seeking the peace of the city' becomes both an authentic process and a realistic goal.

The problem

Christians have problems with the city. Theologians, even those who might carry the label 'urban', have and continue to fail to engage theologically with the reality of the city and urban life as it is lived and experienced by millions of people. Effective urban praxis/discipleship is dependent upon analysis and theology incarnated in the flesh and blood lives of people amid the concrete, steel and glass of urban contexts. In this article I want to explore the difficulties that Christians have with embracing the challenges, the vibrancy and propinquity of urban living in their practice of theology, and the need for a new theological praxis which places the church in the heart of the city and at ease with its urban presence.

There is an inherent anti-urbanism in the Christian culture of Europe and North America and I believe much of this can be traced to the inability of the church to throw off some of its cultural shackles. A large part, however, must be due to the way we do our theology, as it is often too easy to assume the bias apparent in basic theologies of the urban experience, which have imbibed the anti-urbanism of the Hebrew prophets regarding the pagan urbanism of the ancient Levant. At the same time some of our mainstream urban thinking has less consciously drawn on the ambivalence of influential twentieth-century writers and schools of urban sociology. The city has rarely been conceived as a place to love or feel secure in. More often it has been a place from which to escape or withdraw from, where the unregenerate are in need of regeneration; those who do stay adopt defensive strategies or utopian

eschatological theologies of how things should be. At a time when the future of our urban settlements is a matter of significant global debate, our failure as Christians is to recognize the challenge which urban living poses to our understanding of the nature of human community and identity.

The challenge was posed by the Spanish urbanologist Manuel Castells when he wrote: 'The destiny of humanity is being played out in urban areas, in particular, in the great metropolises.'[1] Our reluctance to engage consciously in holistic *urban* mission or to understand our place in an urbanizing, globalizing world context may mean that we have contributed intentionally or unintentionally to the fragmentation and deterioration of community life in our towns and cities.

The theological threat

Maybe the leading culprit was French philosopher-theologian Jacques Ellul for whom the city is the place of revolt and death, alien territory for the people of God, the consequence of rebellion and an academy for warfare. Rational, legal and moral solutions are as ineffective as are attempts to improve the lot of city dwellers: 'there is no way out but the cemetery.... For God has cursed, has condemned the city instead of giving us a law for it'.[2] Ellul's influence can be seen in more recent evangelical writing. Despite his involvement in the heroic struggles of slum dwellers and others, for Bob Linthicum, the city is primarily to be understood as the realm of Satan, of 'noise, power and evil', where the elect take on the powers in a battle for the city's soul in an urban spiritual warfare zone: 'The more effective our ministry is in the city, the more we will be focused on the battle between God and the powers of darkness seeking to conquer our city.'[3]

When Stuart Murray writes of the 'power of the city [being] defeated on the cross'[4] one is reminded of the radical geographer David Harvey's insistence that 'The idea that a thing called the city has casual powers in relation to social life is untenable'.[5] Human beings make cities and a 'powers and principalities' theology too easily relieves a great many Christians of any responsibility for the state of the city, even if their professional lives are enmeshed in its life and wellbeing. Casual use of the rhetoric of regeneration and exclusion has led to the failure of many to conceive their own complicity in a city's degeneration, disintegration and decline. We have failed to question our own exclusionary behaviour as individuals and as church which too often replicates the social processes of which we are so critical.

For such theologians the inevitable irredeemability of the city takes on an eschatological dimension. It only is really possible with a massive decanting programme at the eschaton – 'So long, Babylon, I'll miss you. But not for long. God's new city is coming.'[6] Where does this leave our urban mission? Is this a not

1   Manuel Castells, *Local and Global: Management of Cities in the Information Age*, Earthscan, London, 1997, p 3.

2   Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, Paternoster Press, Carlisle 1997, p 47.

3   Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology for the Urban Church*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1991, p 234.

4   Stuart Murray, *City Vision: A Biblical View*, Daybreak, London 1990, p 39.

5   David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geographies of Difference*, Blackwell, Oxford 1996, p 419.

6   Ray Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City*, IVP, Downers Grove, Illinois 1997, p 188.

particularly sophisticated development of older, 'pie in the sky when you die' approaches? Are we to perpetuate the dualism of the two cities, redeeming the unregenerate of one city (through all manner of programmes aimed at the poor) for their place in the approaching new urban order?

There are, however, some healthier theologies that use these assumptions to underpin real engagement. Using the analysis of Anthony Giddens, Australian commentator Ian Barns describes cities as the primary sites for the *disembedding mechanisms* of late modernity. [7] 'Cities make possible lifestyles of extraordinary freedom and choice, yet the absence of resilient communal traditions means that urban dwellers have few moral coordinates within which to make sense of their lives'. Barns notes the dichotomy presented by 'two cities theologies', suggesting that an alternative system of rule is to be played out in the affairs of the present city, not least through anticipative ecclesial practice that might 'enable us to reshape our civic imagination and reframe our urban practices' thus developing a new openness to the urban community. [8]

Privatization and nostalgia

But there remains the inflexible privatization of faith in urban society that has meant that individual personal morality [the man *(sic)* of integrity] and the full flourishing of the urban community have not been pursued together. The denial of the urban as the place where faith and discipleship might engage with civil society and flourish is apparent in many inbuilt attitudes in western Christianity. This reluctance to embrace urbanism is particularly apparent within the Church of England, where the urban versus rural scenario is often played out as if the urban threatens the basic tenets of faith concerning the nature and polity of the church. The urban church seems to represent the antithesis of the popular image of the church on the village green or the tranquillity of the cathedral close. Robert Orsi identifies similar attitudes in North America when he comments: 'Nostalgia and dissatisfaction with the qualities of urban life in an industrial and then post-industrial society have created a lasting myth of small towns and family farms as the bedrock of all that is characteristically American.'[9]

Norman Faramelli, Edward Rodman and Anne Scheibner (three key Episcopalian urban agitators) spell out the implications for the Episcopal Church in the United States:

> ...the Episcopal Church has difficulty in calling a program 'urban'. Whether that resistance is a cultural bias or not is hard to determine. Certainly the many pockets of rural poverty must not be ignored. It is clear, however, that there are political problems in referring to a program as 'urban', a legacy related to race and class, since the term *urban* to middle-class and white Episcopalians conjures up images of race and poverty. But the aversion to the word is

7   Ian Barns, 'Another City: Theology and the
    Ecology of Urban Life', *St Mark's Review*, No.
    181, 2000, pp 3-11.

8   Ian Barns, 'Another City', p 7.

9   Robert Orsi, ed., *Gods of the City: Religions
    and the American Urban Landscape*, Indiana
    University Press, Indianapolis 1999, p 13.

probably also related to a deeply rooted distrust of cities that has been part of the American tradition since the days of Thomas Jefferson.[10]

The dilemma the Church faces is how it can overcome such antipathy and engrained prejudice as it responds to some of the most acute challenges about the nature of and changes in human community that have ever been faced. Whatever our theological background, our effectiveness as Christian disciples depends on our awareness and understanding of the social processes in which we are all caught up. Our urban experience cannot be an acceptance of being shaped by external forces, or thinking that we can withdraw unaffected into our Christian enclaves, but must be the determination to enter the struggles to be the new protagonists in the shaping of communities and settlements.

Blind theorists

Those who have looked outside of the theological world to make sense of the city have often found these attitudes reproduced in secular form. The great chronicler of cities Lewis Mumford[11] offered little hope for the future of the metropolis and often in his own life and practice revealed an inability to come to terms with the reality of the urban experience, retreating into an idealism based on the ordered rationality of the garden suburb or small town and not on the vibrancy, congestion and propinquity of the modern metropolis. Despite his prominence in the field of urban planning and history Mumford seems never to have been comfortable with the reality of urban living. The veteran urbanologist Jane Jacobs, related the following anecdote in a recent interview: 'I had my doubts about him [Mumford], because we rode into the city together in a car and I watched how he acted as soon as he began to get into the city. He had been talking and all pleasant, but as soon as we got into the city he got grim, withdrawn, distressed. And it was so clear that he just hated the city, and hated being in it.'[12]

In her groundbreaking *Death and Life of Great American Cities* [13] Jacobs argued for a revitalization of the city from the street. The failure of planning practice and education should not allow cities to be written off. Cities are places of possibility and challenge; the real struggle must be to overcome the fatalism, the preconceived prejudices and the rigidity of the conceptualizers. This is often compounded by the rigidity of sociological approaches such as that apparent in the work of the influential Chicago School which, while able to comment on the constraints and harmful aspects of urban growth and land-use, often forced a model of concentric zones onto communities regardless of their real constituency, a model which many considered anachronistic even before the analysis was published. Dependency on such forced conceptualization is accompanied by often ignoring the complexity and

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10 Norman Faramelli, Edward Rodman & Anne Scheibner, 'Seeking to Hear and to Heed in the Cities: Urban Ministry in the Postwar Episcopal Church', in Clifford J. Green, ed., *Churches, Cities and Human Community: Urban Ministry in the United States 1945-1985*, Eerdmans, Michigan, Grand Rapids 1996, p 118.

11 See for example Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*, Secker & Warburg, London 1961.

12 Jane Jacobs, *Metropolis*, March 2001 (www.metropolismag.com/html/content_0301/jac.htm).

13 Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities: The Failure of Town Planning*, Pelican Books, Harmondsworth 1964.

potential of the anarchic, soft city, thus failing to develop an analysis of the possibilities of social solidarity or radical engagement engendered by the social and economic relationships and struggles of the modern city.[14]

> Being human is difficult, and therefore all kinds of settlements (except dream cities) have problems. Big cities have difficulties in abundance, because they have people in abundance. But vital cities are not helpless to combat even the most difficult of problems. They are not passive victims of chains of circumstances, any more than they are the malignant opposite of nature.[15]

More recent urban sociology has come to accept the multi-layered, networked nature of urban living and the need to be wary of monolithic approaches to its history or sociological structure. For instance, a recent textbook says '...the city cannot be thought of as having one geography and one history (and therefore one future). Instead cities are characterized by their new openness: to new possibilities, and to new interactions between people.'[16]

The energy of urban life comes from the interaction, negotiation and contestation of people learning to live in a shared context. The complexity of these layers and networks is added to by the trend to globalize affecting economics, the movement of people and information. What previous generations might have considered geographical norms are thrown. As time and space are compressed, new possibilities of communities and relationships emerge, not least as fast responses, possible and demanded, to financial, political and personal events on the other side of the globe.

Towards a new praxis

Too often our theology and social vision has been convinced that our cause must be the pursuit of an intelligible, serene, 'settled, harmonious, social order' in which the church's place is unambiguous.[17] 'If only things were under control' is the cry of longing often heard, suggesting that the programmes and struggles in which the church might find itself engaged are distractions from its real task, rather than the opportunity for the church to discover and engage with that identity through a genuinely urban praxis. Contrast this with Andy Merrifield in his recent book *Dialectical Urbanism: Social Struggles in the Capitalist City* when he bases his understanding of urban society upon an 'urbanism of ambiguity and contradiction and conflict' – essential to the task of discernment for effective social action. Merrifield is seeking 'an urban praxis that is incorporated in flesh and blood, that does bring real people – everyday people – to the fore, who in big and little ways somehow make a difference: they change a world that is changing them'.[18]

14 David Harvey *Social Justice and the City*, Blackwell, Oxford 1988, p 131.

15 Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, p 461.

16 Doreen Massey, John Allen & Steve Pile, *City Worlds*, Routledge, London / New York 1999, p vii.

17 Elaine Graham, 'Theology in the City: Ten Years after Faith in the City', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library University of Manchester*, 78:1 (1996), p 184.

18 Andy Merrifield, *Dialectical Urbanism: Social Struggles in the Capitalist City*, Monthly Review Press, New York 2002, p 17.

My concern is that as Christians we have assumed both ambiguity and often antipathy to urban living that have contributed to our inability to engage with one of the pressing challenges of our era. The ambivalent hesitancy has often meant that Christians have not considered issues of civility and citizenship in urban communities to be part of the formation of disciples, liturgy or their spirituality, all of which are vital foundation for Christian praxis. The result has often been a crudely forensic or pathological edge to theological writing of dangerous, unregenerate places whose salvation must always come from outside.

There is a vital need to deconstruct how we do our theology of the city and to face some painful truths about our complicity in the state of our urban communities. The cultural ethos of many ruling elites have given a Christian veneer to forms of community and city-wide governance while maintaining a hegemonic hold on power and resources in what are in reality fragmented communities. The retreat of the church into suburban ghettos where even those whose professional lives are bound up with shaping the city can retreat from its contradiction and demands, leads to a dysfunctional church where faith and worship become detached from work, community and civil society. Our urban crisis is not yet a catastrophe but the skills and insights acquired from a new praxis might enable the church in England to rise through the trauma if it does occur or contribute more wisely to the international debates about the future of urban settlements, and those about the presence and witness of the Church therein. Resisting urbicide must be an essential part of this praxis.

What is 'urbicide'?

Reflecting on the catastrophic events of 11 September 2001, Michael Safier wrote of the need to confront such acts of urbicide with a generous, open 'civic cosmopolitanism' that is both local and global.[19] The events of 11 September, while unique in their strategy and exposure, were not unprecedented attacks on the life and dynamism of urban community. Safier puts the attacks in the context of at least twenty other acts of urbicide – 'the deliberate destruction and/or disintegration of an entire way of living in a city, by means of both killing its citizens and maiming its culture of civility and diversity'.[20] Sarajevo, Belfast, Oklahoma, Banja Luka, Jerusalem, Kabul, Mogadishu, Baghdad all tell stories of such attacks. Some are limited and partial and others are devastating, involving tens of thousands of people and the 'negation of all normal urban existence, both literal... in physical terms... and even more significantly symbolic... in terms of such values as liberty, civility, diversity and co-existence'[21] by civil conflict, terrorism and international action. Stephen Graham has recent written of 'urbicide by bulldozer' in the settlements of Gaza and the West Bank accompanied by the 'forcible demodernization of Palestinian society'.[22]

19 Michael Safier is Programme Director for Culture, Conflict and Cosmopolitan Development at the Development Planning Unit, University College London (see www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu/).
20 Michael Safier, 'Confronting "Urbicide": Crimes against Humanity, Civility and Diversity and the Case for a Civic

Cosmopolitan Response to the Attack on New York' in *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action*, Vol. 5:3 (2001), p 416.
21 Michael Safier, 'Confronting "Urbicide"', p 422.
22 Stephen Graham, 'Urbicide by the Jordan', *New Left Review* 19, Jan/Feb 2003, p 64.

Urbicide thrives on the deliberate destruction of traditions of and reputations for co-existence, cultural pluralism and openness in urban communities that are impossible to rebuild after genocide or the uprooting of people. These dangers are inherent in the responses to 11 September in many cities where fear of otherness became apparent in attacks on Middle Eastern and Asian immigrant communities, as the fundamentalisms of the global stage became apparent in local arenas. The initiatives into which Christians and people of other faiths were drawn post 9/11 emphasized the need for a revitalized understanding and celebration of human community lived in diversity and openness with an explicit propensity to include and absorb newcomers of many kinds. In many places this has allowed the emergence of new alliances and new patterns of civic leadership. Such determination to resist urbicide was well expressed by New York urbanologist Peter Marcuse: 'Make it clear the city is a welcoming city for all peoples, that we do not confuse culture with cause, that we are and will remain an international city and a multicultural city; brag about it.'[23]

Elsewhere the metaphor of urbicide has been employed by those critiquing the failure of policy makers to take seriously the needs of towns and cities or the failure to develop community-planning practices. One Nigerian commentator has described urbicide as: 'the death of a city at the hands of its own people through the misguided efforts of its officials or the indifference and neglect of its citizens'.[24]

Though we are not faced with immediate destruction or fragmentation in our British cities (and I write this on the day the government is beginning to speak openly about civil defence preparations against 'terrorist' threats), there remains an ambiguity in much of our strategic theological thinking about how we engage and invest in the future of our urban communities. A failure to engage might easily become indifference to the need for sustainable, relational communities in which human being can thrive. The roots of urbicide might be found in taking 'the peace of the city' for granted, maybe even in the ambivalence with which some Christian writers have treated the real urban context, tending towards an idealized city or civic order rather than embracing some of the nonnegotiable contradictions and tensions of urban life. But cities are the reality we live with, urban living is the reality we live within. Alongside others we share urban space, in proximity, density, intensity and diversity with the attendant threats of suspicion, dislocation, inequality, exclusion and claustrophobia.

What then might then be the denial strategies through which Christians fail to participate fully in urban life, to engage in its struggles and avert urbicide?

Death by suburbanization

The suburbanization of the church has meant an often unconscious assumption of suburban interests by the whole church. According to Anthony Giddens one of the key forms in which a dominant group can impose its agenda on a wider social

23 Marcuse, Peter, 'Reflections on the Events: Urban Life will Change' in *CITY: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action*, Vol. 5:3 (2001), p 397.

24 Yacoob Abiodun, 'What the Nigerian Institute of Town Planning Should be Doing', *This Day on the Web* (www.thisdayonline.com/archive/2002/08/27/20020827est05.html).

group is through the representation of sectional interests as universal ones.[25] This is nowhere more apparent than in the denial of contextual models of doing theology and in the development of programmes, courses and patterns of church life as universal panaceas. While these initiatives promote models of church life which are drawn from the suburban ascendancy – this is not necessarily a doctrinal agenda but one in which power and position are maintained – this hegemony becomes more blatant when the church is engaged in its own internal financial debates. It has been suggested that these attitudes are in the same way apparent in the diversion of the *Faith in the City* process into a general exercise in philanthropy.[26]

The challenge we face in the large cities throughout North America and Europe is – to what extent are we prepared to let the detrimental urban forms and social trends we see around us, be reproduced in the lives of our churches? Congregations, city-wide church life and denominational networks all have tendencies to accept certain aspects of context as inevitable in their own lives. This can lead to an unquestioning compliance with such trends – gentrification, segregation, white-flight economic polarization, the increasing exclusion of minorities or the delocalization of concerns leading to indifference to the weakening of democratic institutions. As Christians we need to find ways of being at home in the urban environment which enables us to engage within the street, the school and the transport system.

The principal forms of suburban religion reflect this disembodied existence as migrant executives strive to recreate a religio-cultural experience of home, or young professionals pursue learning programmes that offer little scope for critical interaction with the material presented (with a notably selective use of Scripture) or with the systems of injustice in which the participants are caught through their work or social location. Too often churches replicate the dysfunctions and fragmentation of the urban societies of which they are part. Many churches are in danger of becoming the spiritual equivalents of gated suburbs, where, in the words of novelist J. G. Ballard, 'The most educated, creative and able people, in whom society has invested a great deal are going to step outside society and lock the door'.[27] This is closely connected to the proliferation of the 'Mega Church' model, very apparent in north America but not far from the aspirations of some British church leaders, which takes discipleship (by automobile) out of its spatial particularity and locatedness into 'high-production, high-entertainment' culture of the church as mall – a neutral, privatized environment with minimized opportunities for risk, encounter or participation.[28]

25 Anthony Giddens, Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis, Macmillan, London 1979, pp 193-196.

26 See Eric James, 'Seven Devils and the Church Urban Fund', *Crucible,* April-June (1991), pp 67-71 and Andrew Davey, 'Being Church as Political Praxis' in Chris Rowland & John Vincent, eds, *Liberation Theology UK,* Urban Theology Unit, Sheffield 1995, pp 55-74.

27 Johann Hari, 'Barbarians Build the Barricades', *New Statesman,* 3 December 2001, London, p 28.

28 Sze Tsung Leong, 'The Divine Economy' in Chuihua Judy Chung, Jeffrey Inaba, Rem Koolhaas & Sze Tsung Leong, eds, *Harvard Design School: Guide to Shopping,* Taschen, Koln 2001, pp 299-303.

Contributing to the success of the mega is that it functions suspiciously like a category killer- a specialized store large enough and seductive enough to wipe out the surrounding competition. Smaller churches simply can't compete with the high production, high entertainment services that mega churches offer: for every mega church that pops up, one hundred churches fold.[29]

Writing within the culture where such models seem to be in the ascendancy Marianne Sawicki takes the metaphors of salt and leaven, as the essential basis for resistance to the colonization of the lives of Christians by the ideologies of consumerism and suburbanism: 'resistance... can take the form of small scale refusals to comply with the alleged inevitability of the pomps and glamours of middle class life. Among I would name: automobiles and the commuting lifestyle... fashionable clothing manufactured offshore under oppressive labor conditions; the subtle self replicating practices of racism and classism [...] The Kingdom of God is sought resistively.'[30]

The urban does not have the assumed security and structure of the village or small town community. Propinquity, density and diversity are all aspects of urban life in shared space. Inequality, anxiety, exclusion and powerlessness are not confined to the urban experience but will be in concentred varieties in towns and cities. The proximity of pockets of wealth and poverty are increasingly pronounced, enhanced by new ethnic and cultural identities. A truly postmodern church has yet to emerge in the postmodern city.

From resistance to persistence

Learning to live the urban, learning to be part of the creation of the conditions for human flourishing must be a priority for the community of faith in the twenty first century. But maybe the resistance model suggested by Sawicki is still just a little to individualized and suburban; and this is nowhere more apparent than in the challenge that comes to us from the persistence of, the embeddedness of, Christians in the mega cities of the majority world; and the tenacious presence of Christians from the south in the supposed secular cities òf the North. Columbian philosopher-theologian Edurado Mendieta considers this to be a vital source of real resistance to the insidious impact of globalization:

...religion appears as a resource of images, concepts, traditions and practices that can allow individuals and communities to deal with a world that is changing around them by the hour. In the new *Unübersichtlichkeit* [unsurveyability] of our global society, religion appears as a compendium of intuitions that have not been extinguished by the so-called process of secularization. Most importantly, however, religion cannot be derided because it is the privileged, if not the primary, form in which the impoverished masses of the invisible cities of the world... articulate their hopes as well as critique their world. [31]

29 Sze Tsung Leong, 'The Divine Economy', p 302.
30 Marianne Sawicki, 'Salt and Leaven: Resistance to Empire in the Street-Smart Paleochurch' in Michael L. Budde and Robert W. Brimlow, eds, *The Church as Counter Culture.* SUNY Press, Albany, NY 2000, p 79.
31 Eduardo Mendieta, 'Invisible Cities: A Phenomenology of Globalization *from Below*', *City* 5:1 April 2001, pp 7-26 (see p 20).

I have argued elsewhere that urban theological praxis in our globalizing cities will locate us on what Manuel Castells has called the 'back alleys' of our global society alongside new networks, social movements and the migrant urban poor.[32] The actions and critiques, the tactics that emerge make visible the often invisible layers of a city's life.[33] Resistance is apparent through tactics that interrogate accepted and received knowledges of how the city is organized politically and sociologically. As Christians struggle beside the urban poor a new awareness emerges of the city and what it must offer. This is the struggle for what Henri Lefebvre called *le droit à la ville* [the *right* to the city], the acknowledgement of belonging, a sense of home and the ability to be a participant in the shaping of a city and the new presences in it.[34]

If, as Christians, we cannot live at home with the city and choose to our do living against the city, if our response to the city is the hold an unachievable ideal of a city up against the contradictions and ambiguities we live with, there is little our theology can offer to those who struggle to bring about change in what must inevitably be a negotiated community. We may even be complicit in urbicide. Cities are not accidental nor is their destruction. We need a theology and praxis that can build 'the peace of the city', that accepts (not necessarily embraces) the contradictions and struggle for 'the rights of being becoming and interconnecting'.[35] To build 'the peace of the city' must be a global strategy as we resist urbicide for the cities where we are at home and those where we are also strangers. Local pastoral practice cannot be separated from global, political praxis. To be at home with the provisional and transitory, as well as the embedded and obstinate; with the unknowable as well as the strangeness that can become the knowable and familiar. Eschatology aside, we need to get away from the notion that we are seeking 'another city' a utopian community of a small, ordered, manageable kind – we cannot undo the size or diversity of our cities or romanticize about the place we would rather be. Andy Merrifield again: '...people like you and me can construct real cities from below, not inherit phony utopias from above. We can inhabit cities made liveable by people struggling to live. Along the way we may see a little light in the here and now, a ray of hope, and discover a kindred community of fellow travellers.'[36]

Those must be the tactics we find in the counsel of Jeremiah to 'seek the peace of the city' (Jer. 29:7); an embrace, an acceptance of the city, with all its diversity

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32 Andrew Davey, *Urban Christianity and Global Order: Theological Resources for an Urban Future*, SPCK, London 2001, pp 36-39.

33 Cultural critic (and one-time Jesuit) Michel de Certaeu explores the differentiation between *tactics* and *strategies:* 'Tactics do not obey the laws of the place, for they are not confined or identified by it... they are not any more localizable than the technocratic (and scriptural) strategies that seek to create places in conformity with abstract models. But what distinguishes them at the same time concerns the type of operations and the role of spaces: strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces, when those operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert.' *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1984, p 29.

34 Henri Lefebvre, *Writing on Cities*, translated and edited by Eleonore Kofman & Elizabeth Lebas, Blackwell, Oxford 1996, p 195.

35 Ash Amin, Doreen Massey & Nigel Thrift, *Cities for the Many and not the Few*, Policy Press, Bristol, 2000, p 45.

36 Merrifield, *Dialectical Urbanism*, p 172.

and contradictions, as the context of a new praxis based on new presences, a pursuit of the right to a public *shalom* in which new possibilities unfold, the potential for grace is exploited and God's ordering is glimpsed on earth as it is heaven. As Brueggemann suggests this word, which for many will be a scandal, 'hated Babylon' is the location, context and foundation of a new urban ethics.[37] But the city can only live if there is commitment to its wellbeing, where its welfare is recognized as being bound up with the lot of its exiles and poor. The theological practice we pursue in our cities at the beginning of the twenty-first century must surely re-assert the centrality of that active pursuit of peace in all our strategies, tactics, acts of resistance, theologies and engagements as we seek to recover the potential and possibility of urban life in all its fullness for the city dwellers of our time. And it is in that persistent struggle for the peace of a globalizing, urbanizing world that I am convinced our vocation as Christians must lie.

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37 Walter Brueggemann, *The Land – Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (2nd edn), Augsburg Fortress Publishers, Minneapolis 2002, p 118.