

CITYtheology

MAGAZINE OF LEEDS CHURCH INSTITUTE

A LEEDS TRANS
WOMAN OF FAITH

THE GIFT OF HOPE
IN UNCERTAIN
TIMES

DWELLING
AMONG
THOSE WHO
HATE PEACE

BOOK REVIEW:
CELEBRATING
FORTY YEARS OF
FAITH IN THE CITY

AUTUMN 2025
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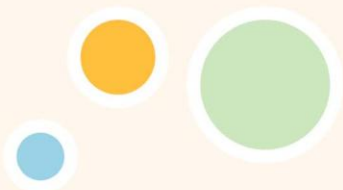
Welcome to CITYtheology

For most of my life, I've made the annual August bank holiday pilgrimage to Greenbelt Festival. It has been a spiritual home to me, where my passions for creativity, activism, and Christian faith fit together without the friction that often surfaces between them in the wider world.

The festival's 2025 theme was 'Hope in the making'. We could all use an injection of hope at the moment. This year, news headlines have gone from bad to worse, and no matter where you look it feels as if there is reason for despair.

The articles in this issue offer a few insights into how Christians in Leeds are finding the only unconditional hope there is – hope in the God of justice and peace. This hope allows us to breathe deeply and act boldly, knowing that we are held in love.

My hope is that the words of these writers inspire you to join in this hopeful action, wherever you are today.





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Emma Temple

Editor

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The Gift of Hope in Uncertain Times



John Richardson is studying an MA programme at the University of Leeds with sponsorship from LCI. Here he shares his reflections on the unconditional hope we are offered through the love of God, even in the uncertain times we're experiencing.

In a previous article in City Theology, I talked about the importance of 'place, meaning and hope' for all those who face challenges of all kinds in their lives. I suggested that the social, communal and personal 'structures' upon which we could provide security,

stability and a sense of the future, have morphed into a post-structural world. Those of us who work and study in the field of community work of differing kinds can see this in the daily life struggles that many people face in simply 'getting through a day!'



The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman wrote two very short books in the late 1990's (Alone again: Ethics after Certainty) and early 2000's (Liquid Times; Living in an Age of Uncertainty) which have proved to be both apposite and prophetic to the theme of hope. Other thinkers, including theologians such as Pete Ward, have used the term 'Liquid' to describe the situation in which solid and reliable structures and relationships, on which we could base our ideas of certainty and security, have been eroded away to reveal fluidity and uncertainty. This has led to a sense of fear and foreboding, what may be termed an 'existential crisis' or 'ontological insecurity'. Of course, the depth and severity of crisis and insecurity depends very much on where and in what circumstances one lives, but it is a feature of life in the 21st Century.

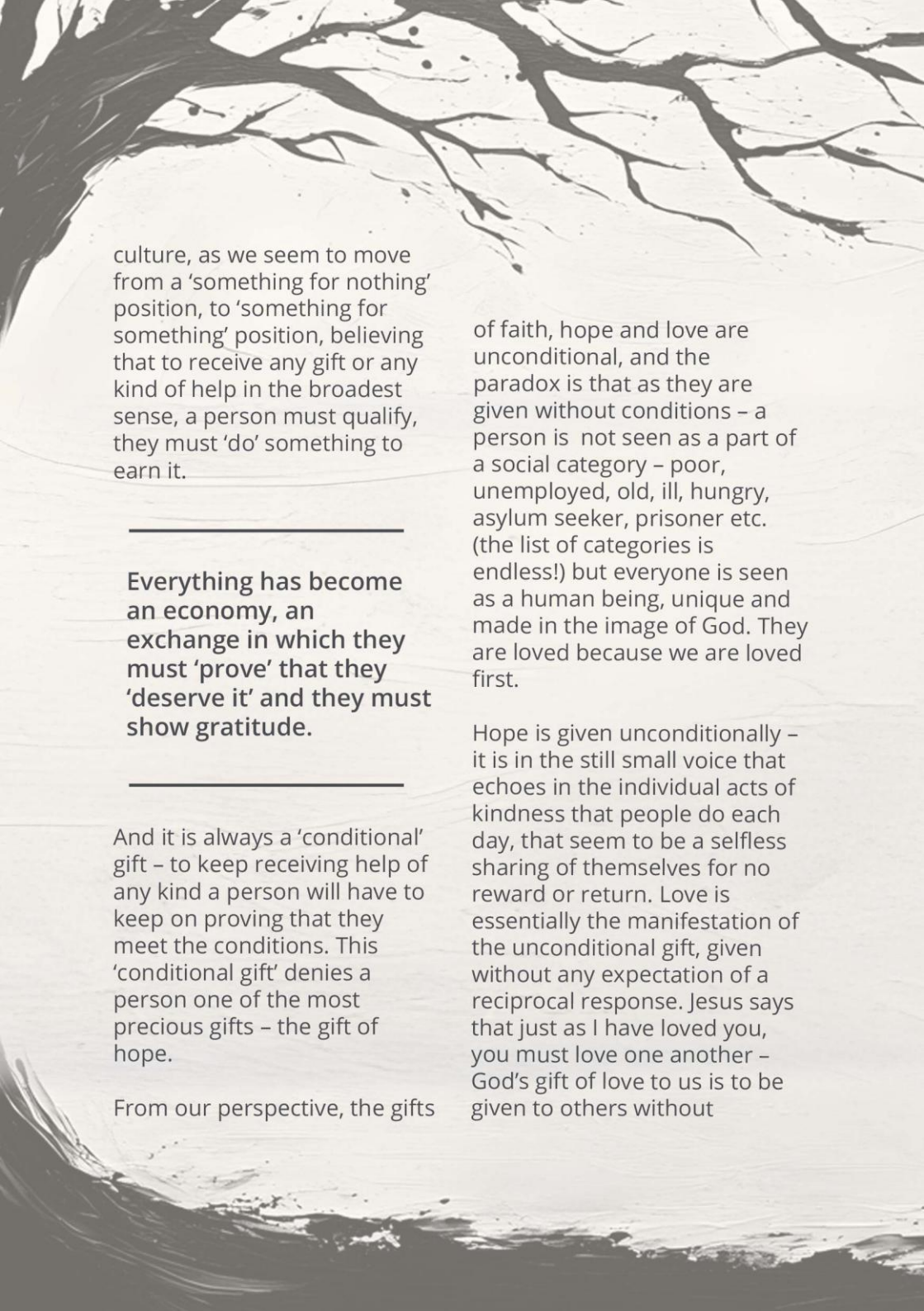
So, in these fluid and uncertain times, how can we begin to feel a sense of purpose, meaning and security?

Perhaps we can begin with St Paul. I'm sure you'll be familiar with this quotation from Paul's letter to the church at Corinth: *'And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.'* (NRSV 1 Cor v 13)

I suggest that 'these three' are in fact gifts – a gift of faith, a gift of hope, both surrounded by the gift of love. The gift of faith in the present moment, the gift of hope for a future and the gift of love in which past, present and future coalesce. But they are not gifts, as usually understood; there is no other agenda behind the gift, and we do not have to face any qualification criteria to receive these gifts. If we think of gifts for Christmas, birthdays or other special days such as anniversaries, or flowers for 'special occasions', there is an expectation of receipt and gratitude. Perhaps when we receive a 'surprise gift' there is an expectation of explanation – these things don't usually happen, so there must be a reason for the gift. There is a 'why' question to be answered.

We struggle to understand this concept in our context and





culture, as we seem to move from a 'something for nothing' position, to 'something for something' position, believing that to receive any gift or any kind of help in the broadest sense, a person must qualify, they must 'do' something to earn it.

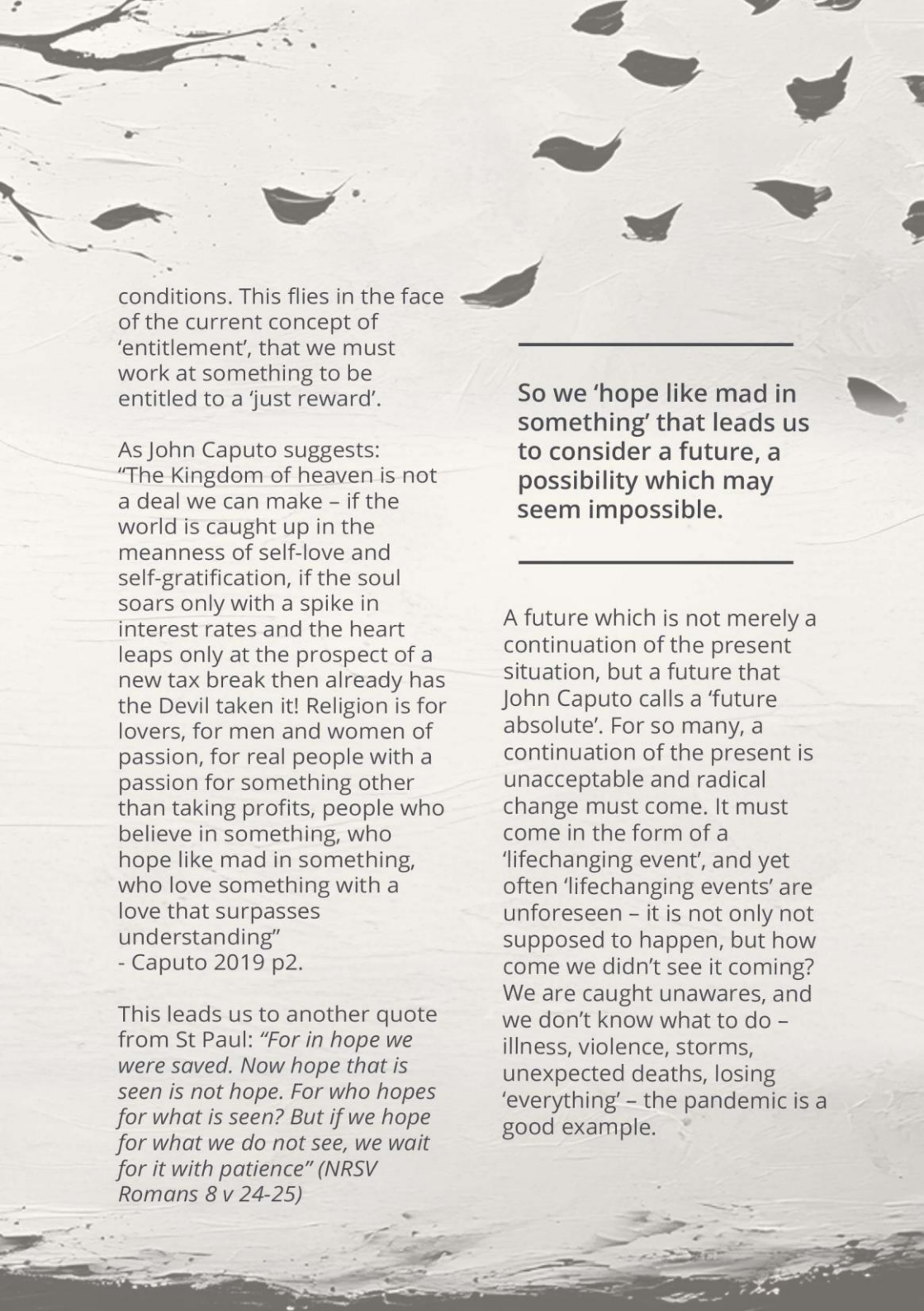
Everything has become an economy, an exchange in which they must 'prove' that they 'deserve it' and they must show gratitude.

And it is always a 'conditional' gift – to keep receiving help of any kind a person will have to keep on proving that they meet the conditions. This 'conditional gift' denies a person one of the most precious gifts – the gift of hope.

From our perspective, the gifts

of faith, hope and love are unconditional, and the paradox is that as they are given without conditions – a person is not seen as a part of a social category – poor, unemployed, old, ill, hungry, asylum seeker, prisoner etc. (the list of categories is endless!) but everyone is seen as a human being, unique and made in the image of God. They are loved because we are loved first.

Hope is given unconditionally – it is in the still small voice that echoes in the individual acts of kindness that people do each day, that seem to be a selfless sharing of themselves for no reward or return. Love is essentially the manifestation of the unconditional gift, given without any expectation of a reciprocal response. Jesus says that just as I have loved you, you must love one another – God's gift of love to us is to be given to others without

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conditions. This flies in the face of the current concept of 'entitlement', that we must work at something to be entitled to a 'just reward'.

As John Caputo suggests:
"The Kingdom of heaven is not a deal we can make – if the world is caught up in the meanness of self-love and self-gratification, if the soul soars only with a spike in interest rates and the heart leaps only at the prospect of a new tax break then already has the Devil taken it! Religion is for lovers, for men and women of passion, for real people with a passion for something other than taking profits, people who believe in something, who hope like mad in something, who love something with a love that surpasses understanding"
- Caputo 2019 p2.

This leads us to another quote from St Paul: *"For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience"* (NRSV Romans 8 v 24-25)

So we 'hope like mad in something' that leads us to consider a future, a possibility which may seem impossible.

A future which is not merely a continuation of the present situation, but a future that John Caputo calls a 'future absolute'. For so many, a continuation of the present is unacceptable and radical change must come. It must come in the form of a 'lifechanging event', and yet often 'lifechanging events' are unforeseen – it is not only not supposed to happen, but how come we didn't see it coming? We are caught unawares, and we don't know what to do – illness, violence, storms, unexpected deaths, losing 'everything' – the pandemic is a good example.




Equally, there may be lifechanging events that have a positive outcome, but in this current climate we seem to focus on 'bad news', with an expectation of 'something bad happening.' The effect is that, not only does it change how we behave today, it changes how we might anticipate tomorrow and into the future. It may also feel that there appears to be a lack of choice and can create hopelessness or even despair, a feeling that there is no possibility of a positive future.

The gift of hope has the intention that we can develop a new perspective, that there is something to look forward to, and that may be as simple as 'getting through' the next few minutes. 'If I can get through the next few minutes there is hope that I can get through a few more minutes – every journey, even of a thousand miles begins with one step'. The hindrance to hope is fear, fear of ourselves and other people. When we can begin to see the source of this fear then we can begin to face it, full, and unafraid.

This involves compassion, care, encouragement, enthusiasm, support, all of which involve

resources, time, space and the greatest of all, the Love of God. Time and space to reflect, to re-appraise, to try, with support, new ways of acting, rebuilding and moving forward knowing that we can love because He loved us first! The best example of this is through agencies such as Alcoholics Anonymous that offer an unconditional gift. Members are members because they are members! There is no 'why'. It simply is and lives without a why. To ask why is to miss the point – it is an unconditional gift. Our hope is a response to the insistent call of God coming through events in answering by personal, relational, and compassionate hope for ourselves, for each other and for the world. As Desmond Tutu and Douglas Abrams suggest:

'Hope is based not on the ephemerality of feelings but on the firm ground of conviction. I believe with a steadfast faith that there can never be a situation that is utterly, totally hopeless. Hope is deeper and very, very close to unshakeable. It's in the pit of your tummy. It's not in your head. Despair can come from deep grief, but it can also be a



defence against risks of bitter disappointment and shattering heartbreak. Resignation and cynicism are easier, more self-soothing postures that do not require the raw vulnerability and tragic risk of hope. To choose hope is to step firmly forward into the howling wind, baring one's chest to the elements, knowing that, in time, the storm will pass.' - Desmond Tutu

'As the Archbishop was explaining, hope is the antidote to despair. Yet hope requires faith, even if that faith is in nothing more than human nature or the very persistence of life to find a way. Hope is also nurtured by relationship, by community, whether that community is a literal one or one fashioned from the long memory of human striving whose membership includes Gandhi, King, Mandela and

countless others. Despair turns us inward. Hope sends us into the arms of others.' – Douglas Abrams (Both quotes taken from *The Book of Joy*, Penguin Random House, 2016).

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“Dwelling among those who hate peace”



Naomi Orrell is an organiser with Christians for Palestine UK, a grassroots organisation of Christians marching, demonstrating, and praying for peace and justice in Palestine.

While the injustices of the Israeli Apartheid (a term used by Amnesty International, B'Tselem and the World Council of Churches among others) have been ongoing since 1948, the escalation of violence towards Palestinians following the horrific 7th October 2023 attack has seen many groups of people across the world jump into action.

Many Christians have felt the call to stand in solidarity with Palestine, recognising that our faith calls us to speak up for the oppressed and the marginalised.

For Christians for Palestine, this has meant organising blocs of Christians joining with national and local marches for Palestine, including marches in Leeds and York.

Like many people, I have struggled to grasp the scale of the violence following the 7th October attack. Social media has allowed us to witness, in real time, the genocide that is happening in Gaza. I have to admit that there have been several times when it has been too hard to comprehend what is happening. For many of us, scrolling through our social media feed has become a surreal experience, flitting from videos of the violence in Gaza, to videos of violence perpetrated by UK police officers, to videos of horrific violence towards immigrants in the US (all uncomfortably interspersed with mundane updates and jokes from our friends). There have been moments where I have struggled to comprehend the level of complicity the UK government and media have had in this conflict, most notably the production of arms that are being used by Israeli forces and the IDF

soldiers who have been trained on UK soil (a fact that was uncovered last month). The words of the Psalmist keep coming to mind: “too long have I had my dwelling among those who hate peace.” (Ps 120 v.6).

There have been times where it has felt that doing anything in light of this has been futile.

I will admit, there have been times where hearing stories from Gaza and the West Bank have made me want to look away. However, it is this discomfort that reminds me that, as Christians, we are not called to follow the easy path.



We are called not only to live our faith out in our words, but also in our actions. One of the passages of scripture that speaks to me about this is from the Letter of James:

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." (James 2:14-17)

This scripture reminds me that my faith demands that I look past this discomfort. It is a reminder that our calling to stand with the oppressed demands that we speak out in whatever way we can,

through vigils, demonstrations, even direct action. The more I learn of Christianity, the more I learn that it is a call to a radically different way of life.



I believe that I am bound by a calling to imagine a better world and make it a reality – a world fuelled not by violence and destruction, but by compassion and peace.

It is a call that can put you at odds with institutions of power, including the Church, but it is a call I want to commit myself to follow. My faith is too important to me to let it die.

Getting involved with Christians for Palestine has offered me some amazing opportunities. One particularly memorable moment was being asked to

speak at an Interfaith march for Palestine in Leeds last December. Standing alongside other siblings of faith is particularly important in a conflict where faith has been used to justify the violence.

I am well aware that going on marches and taking part in vigils will not solve the crisis we see unfurling before us. However, I do believe that it is a place to start. There have been many times I have come away from a demonstration where I have felt invigorated, reminded that I am not the only person (and certainly not the only Christian) who cares about the people of Palestine. I am reminded that, no matter our tradition or belief, we are all part of the body of Christ, trying to live out our calling to “seek peace and pursue it” (Ps. 34 v. 14). If attending a demonstration is the spark that leads to someone joining the fight for Palestinian justice, then that is enough for me.



A Leeds Trans Woman of Faith





Pauline is a Geordie by birth and a Yorkshire woman by adoption. She is a bicycling table tennis playing vegan trans Tolkienist. She is retired after many years working for the Department of Health. She lives in beautiful Leeds and is greatly enriched by her chosen family, friends queer and unqueer and the fantastic community at All Hallows Church and at Heart in Headingley.

Leeds has been good to me.

I came here, with my job and family, in 1992. There has been much change in the city since then and there has been a good deal of change in me as it was in Leeds that, eventually, I came out, transitioned and began living as a woman, as my authentic self. I was fortunate to find in Leeds warm-hearted, welcoming and tolerant people and an established, thriving LGBTQ+ community which has given me a lot of support and encouragement.

However, it has not been an easy journey to get here.

A large part of my life has involved a struggle between two powerful and seemingly incompatible forces within me: my faith in God and my search for sanctity on the one hand; and the relentless, implacable drive to become a woman on the other.

I grew up with an idea of God as punitive and judgmental,

unforgiving without penance and expiatory pain. I struggled with intense feelings of guilt. The Catholic Church was a good fit for me and I was received into it as an adult convert. There was much I loved – and love – about Catholic spirituality but I think above all I was drawn to the church as possibly the one vessel strong enough to contain what I felt were the unholy forces within me and allow myself to feel a sense of virtue, even a heroic feeling of self-sacrifice and commitment to the way of the cross.

I was most certainly one of those Christians much more comfortable with the crucifixion than the resurrection. The way of sanctification was the way of self-denial, above all denial of who I actually was.

I tried hard to be a truly devout, observant Catholic, attending mass daily if I were able, finding in the

sacraments my spiritual nourishment. I prayed fervently to be free of the “demon” of transgenderism. I was anointed. I went on retreats, including a CofE healing retreat where the prayer ministers assigned to me identified my father’s involvement in freemasonry as the likely cause of the troubles and failures of my life. They said I was cursed – I guess I knew that already. I read out a recantation. The “curse” remained.

So when I finally took the plunge and decided to come out as trans it was not with any great sense of joyous liberation but rather with a despairing sense that everything else I’d tried had failed so I might as well follow what my heart was telling me, had been telling me all along. I still had a sense that I was maybe turning to the dark side, that I was tasting forbidden fruit. Then a colleague at work told me about The Sibyls, the pastoral care group for trans Christians. Amongst the Sibyls I found people who saw being trans not as a curse, but a blessing. That far from being contrary to an angry God’s

will, it was the very thing God wanted for me.

What I had been running away from for so long turned out to be a merciful God who wanted me to be myself, to be happy.

I'd been, spiritually, barking up the wrong tree for much of my life. My eyes were opened by people talking about the barriers between them and God falling away after they transitioned. One trans woman boldly said that God had become her lover.

For some years I stayed within the Catholic church feeling that God had given me a new mission – to represent the reality of a trans life more truthfully to a church whose ideas about trans people were woefully mired in mediaeval natural theology and gender essentialism. I was also reluctant to part from a church which had been so important a part of my life

and identity for so many years. But the new position I was in – no longer the privileged cis het insider but on the margins and under suspicion – opened my eyes to things in the church like misogyny, homophobia and transphobia that somehow before I'd managed not to see. Pope Francis did much to change the culture of the church for the better but made clear his view of trans people in the document "Dignitas Infinita" which while upholding the innate worth of all human beings by virtue of their humanity strongly condemns "gender theory" and gender reassignment.

All this took a toll and the bonds attaching me to the Catholic church were further weakened by the enforced absence from mass during the pandemic. So eventually I abandoned my allegiance as a Catholic and reverted to the Anglican church I had been brought up in. I now worship at All Hallows church in Hyde Park where I have been welcomed, accepted and trusted, where I have flourished as never before. Where people of all gender identities and sexualities are

loved and affirmed. Where waifs and strays, odd-bods and misfits fit in well. Should not all churches be like this? The CofE I knew in my youth has certainly greatly changed and now has women priests and bishops and trans people have been ordained and serve the church with great distinction. But the CofE remains rather intractably divided on the LGBTQ+ issue. Parts of it lag behind secular society with the acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities and relationships.

Secular society itself is divided on how trans people are regarded. After decades of gradual progress, we are now seeing a major backlash. Surveys show declining support for trans people and the ruling just before Easter by the Supreme Court that for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010, “sex” means “biological sex” and not “certificated sex” (i.e. trans people with a legal recognition certificate are not included in the sex-based protection) was widely welcomed by the government and media as bringing “clarity”. I am one of the few with a gender recognition certificate. My birth certificate says “girl”. I

signed a statutory declaration that I would live for the rest of my life as a woman. I was told that I would be treated as a woman “for all purposes”. Now I am told that I cannot even use a ladies’ loo to have a pee. The Supreme Court judges took 88 pages of turgid legal argument to reach a conclusion that we have on good authority is contrary to the intention of those who drafted the legislation, as passed by Parliament. But the government, far from now seeking to restore the law to its original aim, is happy to be let off the hook of having to come down on one side of a divisive issue.

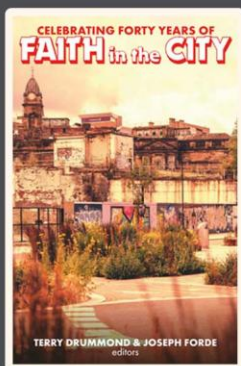
Many trans people were already living lives of considerable anxiety and even fear. They face years of daunting gatekeeping and waiting lists for even a first appointment for trans-related healthcare. Many have suffered rejection by family, friends and loved ones. The journey of transition can sometimes feel like a kind of calvary. It surely speaks to the strength of the need to live as one’s authentic self that we are prepared to endure this. Of course while the losses are often grievous, the rewards

are also great.

Life after transition may fairly be compared to a kind of resurrection – the death of a false self, perhaps accompanied by loss of prestige and status, followed by re-birth into a true self.

It is surely a “pearl of great price” for the sake of which trans people are willing to give all they have. Conservative Christians may say that we cannot have an identity in Christ and a trans identity. I would respectfully suggest that on the contrary trans people can only have an identity in Christ in its fullest sense if they accept their trans identity as a precious, sacred, intrinsic part of who they are. God may then indeed become our lover.

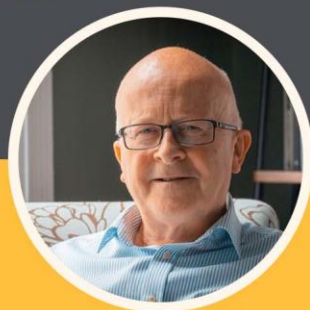




Book Review: *Celebrating Forty Years of Faith in the City*

Terry Drummond and Joseph Forde, 2025,
Sacristy Press, 270 pages, £19.99

Review by Revd Dr Chris
Swift, Director of Leeds
Church Institute



I came across this new publication while attending a conference to mark the 40th anniversary of 'Faith in the City'. For those too young to remember, 'Faith in the City' was a report published by a Commission convened by the then Archbishop of Canterbury.

It was a response to the rapid changes taking place in the England's urban centres, and surrounding suburbs, under the administration of Mrs Thatcher's Government. It offered a critique of deprivation and asked searching questions about the Church's commitment to the city. At the event in Sheffield marking the anniversary of the publication,

Alan Billings – once of the original commissioners – commented that the report was leaked by the Cabinet to the right-wing press. The response was as predictable as it was misguided. Accusations of Marxism only served to increase awareness of the report and it went into several reprints.

The new title by Terry Drummond and Joseph Forde is timely, as questions continue to be raised about our cities and the place of churches within them. It begins with a

chapter by Andrew Bradstock which sets the scene for the development of 'Faith in the City' and reminds us of its role in recommending the creation of the Church Urban Fund. The Church was not only preaching but acting. The report had a range of other consequences. It has been suggested that it led to an increased profile for urban issues in the manifestoes offered at the next election. It also led to Synod's creation of the Committee on Black Anglican Concerns.

Andrew Bradstock's opening chapter reminds the reader of the Church of England operating at its best. Local parish and ecumenical inner-city experiences being shared with the Archbishop of Canterbury leading to the creation of the Commission. This utilised the Church's presence across the nation and the unique position of the Archbishop within the Establishment, enabling work that was deeply rooted and broadly hopeful. At the same time the chapter offers critical reflection on an enterprise in which no one living in the conditions of the Urban Priority Areas was a member of the Commission.

Alan Billings was one of the original Commissioners and offers what is perhaps one of the most engaging and useful chapters in his consideration of 'what we failed to notice'. These issues range from a benign assumption about the positive role of religion; the erosion of parish ministry; and the weakening of Christian culture in communities. As with much of the book, Billings offers an accurate reminder of the world into which *Faith in the City* was launched, midway through what I regard as the 'golden decade' of the Church of England's past 80 years. Beginning with a Falklands Memorial that refused to ignore the Argentine dead (1982) and ending with the passing of legislation to permit women to be ordained (1992). *Bliss was it in that dawn to be ordained...*

Billings locates *Faith in the City* in the tradition of Anglican social theology of William Temple. He also cites the influence of Niebuhr and his work to interpret love of neighbour in modern societies. In a similar vein, Temple argued that 'love in social organisation is justice'. It is from this rich heritage that *Faith in the City* emerged.

Ian K. Duffield reflects on his move into urban ministry and the impact of *Faith in the City's* publication. Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of his reflection is the shape the report gave to the kind of actions that followed. For example, that the local Church Urban Fund committee determined to meet in the parishes that were making funding applications – not sitting in a bland diocesan office. For all its limitations and weaknesses, this echoed liberation theology's commitment to be 'with' people.

The Bishop of Manchester, David Walker, offers a personal perspective reflecting whether 'any cabinet minister today (would) feel a church report ... merited a sustained public attack'. This is a sobering assessment of the Church's dwindling relevance in national life and political debate. Walker sees the continuing impact of *Faith in the City* when the focus of the Church's work progresses from the individual to the societal; the pastoral to the political.

The book's third section concerns the lived experiences of urban ministry, examining the legacies of *Faith in the City*

and the future possibilities for mission. For Terry Drummond, the Church has appeared to be increasingly obsessed with halting and reversing numerical decline; reduced the Church interest and resourcing of urban theology; and dismantled patterns of traditional parish structures and services to the community. There is little evidence that this strategy has delivered the level of growth it was designed to create.

Susan Lucas holds out hope that a Church riven by division might, possibly, offer a version of 'dissenting relationality' which, in 2025, might aid urban communities which are experiencing their own divisions. The prophetic voice of Sophie Valentine Cowan should discomfort Church leaders and decision-makers, as she observes that the lack of financial support for estate churches is 'not accidental'. Choices have been made: and continue to be made.

Angus Ritchie and Averil Pooten Watan begin their chapter with the words of Ken Leech, and a critique of the Church's benign assumption that all people mean well. This is developed into an analysis that identifies the soft-peddling

of liberation theology, which ensured that the power-dynamics of the Church of England continued unchallenged. Unsurprisingly, this chapter turns to community organising as an effective model for the progress of urban mission and ministry.

The fourth part of the book looks to the contemporary challenges of faith in the city. Joseph Forde sets out the challenges which the Church of England faces today, in very altered circumstances. Even if the appetite existed for a report like *Faith in the City* in the 2020s, the estimate of Church leaders is that there would be insufficient capacity to deliver something of such complexity and consequence.

The Church today is far from the Church of England in the 1980s. Welfare has turned into wellbeing, and the Church continues to support many isolated people, and people with mental health conditions, with a wide variety of activities.

Yet, at the same time, the Church has seen its influence decline at an exponential rate.

Jenny Sinclair's chapter explores the Catholic Social Thought (CST) tradition and reflects on a commitment to the common good. Sinclair, the daughter of Bishop David Sheppard, makes the important connection between her father's title *Bias to the Poor*, and *Faith in the City*, which came two years' later. However, she notes some of the common weaknesses of the two documents, which include both paternalism and a belief in the ability of the political centre to effect the changes required. Sinclair questions our use of language in the urban context, stating: 'In God's worldview, poor people are not marginal'.

In their brief conclusion, Drummond and Forde identify the legitimate risk that nostalgia for a parish system that no longer operates as it did, could prevent the celebration of Christianity in the city and new forms of ministry that have arisen. For them, there is much to celebrate in contexts that continue to be vibrant, challenging and faithful.

This is an important book, and one that deserves to be read by anyone concerned with the legacy of *Faith in the City* and the questions of urban ministry today. In a world that has become increasingly connected in the past 40 years (during which time the internet materialised) I would have welcomed some international perspectives. The work of Allen Boesak is relevant, and there have been other overseas authors who have commented on urban ministry in the UK. Perhaps some of the hope for the UK's urban theology

needs to draw from the deep wells of other contexts. After all, many of the UK's cities today are rich in their diversity of global Christianity, and wider networks might lead to an abundance we would otherwise struggle to imagine.

¹ Huotari, R., & Grönlund, H. (2024). *From Below, to Inclusion, Through Transformation: Urban Theology in the Twenty-First Century*. *Open Theology*, 10(1), 20240002.

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