

❖ Other Voices ❖

What is the meaning of this city?
 Do you huddle together because you love each other?
 What will you answer? 'We all dwell together
 to make money from each other'? or 'This is a community'?

T. S. ELIOT, *"Choruses from THE ROCK" (1934)*

It bears repeating that there is nothing inherently flawed about cities in the Bible. Cities are not set in contrast to the country.... The first city is built by Cain in Genesis 4 and named after his son. It represents the desire for protection and shelter, for oneself and in the name of one's children. The city has no name, no other purpose, than that.

CHRISTOPHER R. SEITZ, *Word Without End (1997)*

The twentieth century...has been called "the century of the homeless." Remember, we are witnessing the greatest migration in human history. Hemispheres are blending, and cities are filling up and growing. Only 9 percent of the earth's population lived in cities in 1900; by the year 2000 about 50 percent of our more than six billion people will be in urban centers.

RAY BAKKE, *A Theology As Big As the City (1997)*

Whenever and wherever societies have flourished and prospered rather than stagnated and decayed, creative and workable cities have been at the core of the phenomenon; they have pulled their weight and more. It is the same still. Decaying cities, declining economies, and mounting social troubles travel together. The combination is not coincidental.

JANE JACOBS, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities (1961)*

Faithfulness demands a critical rather than a docile partnership with the agencies of regeneration and development—be they government or commercial. This means that some fundamental questions need to be asked about the criteria for successful urban redevelopment. Individual prosperity, growth and land value are not sufficient on their own. Happiness, well-being and public space, for example, all need to be accounted for and valued. All these make for a good city.

The experience of the faithful on the ground is that the poor—if not getting quantifiably poorer—are the losers in a widening gulf between themselves and those who were growing more prosperous. There is a supreme

irony in the way that when redevelopment and regeneration take place, too often it is people experiencing poverty who are moved or stranded....

(Church of England) Commission on Urban Life and Faith, Faithful Cities: A Call for Celebration, Vision and Justice (2006), 1.24-25

The problem of the 21st century is how to live good and just lives within limits, in harmony with the earth and each other. Great cities can rise out of cruelty, deviousness, and a refusal to be bounded. Livable cities can only be sustained out of humility, compassion, and acceptance of the concept of "enough."

DONELLA MEADOWS, "Can Los Angeles Learn to Live with Limits?" (1994)

We are God's demonstration community of the rule of Christ in the city. On a tract of earth's land purchased with the blood of Christ, Jesus the kingdom developer has begun building new housing. As a sample of what will be, he has erected a model home of what will eventually fill the urban neighborhood. Now he invites the urban world into that model home to take a look at what will be.

HARVIE M. CONN, *Planting and Growing Urban Churches* (1997)

Heavenly Father, in your Word you have given us a vision of that holy City to which the nations of the world bring their glory: Behold and visit, we pray, the cities of the earth. Renew the ties of mutual regard which form our civic life. Send us honest and able leaders. Enable us to eliminate poverty, prejudice, and oppression, that peace may prevail with righteousness, and justice with order, and that men and women from different cultures and with differing talents may find with one another the fulfillment of their humanity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

***Book of Common Prayer* (1979)**

The tragedy of modern urban life is not only that so many in our cities are oppressed and powerless, but also that so many have nothing surrounding them in which any human being could possibly take sensory delight. For this state of affairs we who are Christians are as guilty as any. We have adopted a pietistic-materialistic understanding of man, viewing human needs as the need for a saved soul plus the need for food, clothes, and shelter. True shalom is vastly richer than that.

NICHOLAS WOLTERSTORFF, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (1980)

Unfortunately, if we were to take a hard look at how Christians in this country have come to view their cities, we would have to conclude that our views have not necessarily been shaped by the Bible, prayer, or meaningful discussions among fellow Christians. It might be more accurate to say that

the fear of cities, or the fear of one another, or possibly the love of convenience has been the actual basis of much of our current perceptions about the city.

ERIC O. JACOBSEN, *Sidewalks in the Kingdom: New Urbanism and the Christian Faith* (2003)

The ideal of almost all urban Americans is to acquire enough money to live out in the country; failing that, to live in the suburbs; failing that, at least to escape from the city on weekends and holidays. Throughout the ages, mankind has wished to flee the city; but usually it was for a time only, and then mainly to escape its smells, its dangers, its busyness. The Midwestern American has abhorrence for what is absolutely indispensable to a city – shaped space.

NICHOLAS WOLTERSTORFF, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (1980)

Christians are not their own, but they belong to God, and the Lord has assignments for all his servants. The question of where one selects a home and establishes residence is a religious question.... It must not only be compatible with, but a result of one's understanding of God's will for his life and the task God expects him to carry out in the society.... To the extent in which individuals, families, and churches are convinced that urban presence is God's will for them, they will accept the challenge to remain in the city and bear witness there.

ROGER S. GREENWAY, *Apostles to the City* (1978)

One of the most interesting developments to emerge over the last 20 years has been an increasing number of 'intentional' communities, especially in poor urban areas. These initiatives enable people of faith to express a lifestyle which some call a 'new monasticism.'... They have a structure that enables a deeper commitment (a total lifestyle informed by gospel values) than is usually expressed by membership of a local church; are responsive to local challenges; emphasize both devotion and active involvement; have flexible arrangements to enable people both to join and to leave; build an 'esprit-de-corps'; maintain a positive relationship to a local church, although the vocation of the group is not necessarily expressed through the church.... The challenge to longstanding local churches is to rejoice in the exceptional commitment that is emerging in so many diverse expressions.

(Church of England) Commission on Urban Life and Faith, Faithful Cities: A Call for Celebration, Vision and Justice (2006), 8.25-27