Urban Spirit

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Dark Matter
This paper is a follow-on from my two previous offerings. The first examined the range of structural and theological obstacles that we face in urban ministry. The last critiqued the over-optimism about how much of the kingdom can be realised in the now as opposed to the not-yet.

Both papers threaten to leave us in a dark place [to quote Henry Everett’s response to the first]. How can we have hope? How can we continue to ministry? If we do not believe that change can come? Whether spiritual revival, or social renewal?

The answer lies, I believe, in the realm and the reality of the Spirit. We need a theology of the Spirit in the City – Urban Spirit. This is what I would concentrate on if I had the time to do another PhD or conduct a research project.

Liberty X
South African Black Theology defined God as ‘freedom’ – representing the aspirations of black people under Apartheid for freedom. Although perhaps an abstract theology, based on idealist philosophy, borrowing from Tillich; this Feuerbachian projection nevertheless opened up avenues for black liberation.

In the face of closure, lock-down of possibility – sociological and theological – re-assert the freedom that comes in Christ. Especially the freedom that comes from his Spirit. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. He is the spirit of freedom – from constraint as well as condemnation. The spirit of life, not the Spirit of Death.

The Spirit opens up possibility. He is creative. But we must resist an over-ready equation of Spirit with Wind in Jesus comments to Nicodemus. Jesus actually says that it is one who is born of the Spirit who will be like the wind. The Spirit-born person will blow like the wind. He or she will be so unpredictable you will not be able to tell what they are going to do next. You will only be able to see the results of their actions. This is the opening up which the Spirit can be expected to do among Spirit-filled people in the urban [or indeed anywhere]. We must encourage the creativity and experimentation that will demonstrate the flow and blow of the Spirit in the urban ecclesia.

Bottle Neck
Instead pastors and priests are too frightened to trust their people, and end up holding them back, discouraging ideas & initiatives. I remember David Watson saying that too often it is the leader of a church who is the cork in the bottle neck, who prevents the new wine of the Spirit from gushing out, rushing forth. We need to get out of the way. That means trusting our people. Taking risks. Allowing failures to happen.
For example, we cancelled out evening service – finally! It had got quite small in attendance, and leaders had lost our way and lost our enthusiasm for the service. There were two results from the cancellation. Firstly, we all and a feeling of relief! We didn’t have to keep this thing going anymore. Frequently, we are better at starting programmes than ending them. Secondly, however, there was a flood of new ideas. An empty space had been opened up in our church diary, and people queued up to try out new ideas.

An open mic evening for music and poetry, by non-christians as well as christians, with games and food – aimed at young adults. An open worship event for charismatic-style praise and sharing. A training session for our pastoral care team volunteers. A social evening at my house, which gave chance for discussion to emerge about politics and eschatology. Another idea, which didn’t come off, was to have a prayer meeting for the local school. Meanwhile, recently, in this slot, we’ve had another open-mic evening, a support group for chronically ill people, and a social with bible study for young adults and youth workers.

**Lose Control**

It’s dangerous – to allow the Spirit to work among his people. Leaders with middle class, academic, training often do not allow others to actually take responsibility for anything important. Leaders insist on being present, over-seeing, or actually controlling. There are sometimes church members with agendas of taking over the church and attacking the pastor. But often such conspiracies only exist in the febrile mind of the insecure local church leader.

I remember arriving at my first pastorate. A young guy had been trying to push the church forward in mission and renewal before I came. He told me he wanted to start a prayer meeting, and said that I didn’t need to go to it. Now I would welcome such a release from obligation. But then, as a young, new pastor, I felt threatened – was he trying to construct a power-base for himself by forbidding me to attend? Actually, now I rather think he was insecure also – threatened by the arrival of a pastor who would have the authority to finally force through the very changes he had been trying to achieve. Eventually, and sadly, he left. We could not co-exist in the same space. What a loss!

This is a continual danger. My intercessors have pointed out recently that the only meeting which finishes on time is the one led by me! They are more aware of the Spirit’s overflow where time is elastic. While time-keeping is a sign of concern for people who do need to leave in order to be somewhere else, I do wonder if I am missing something here. John Arnott answered a question at a conference about why revivals end. He said it was when the leaders try to take over; they try to make meetings ‘useful’, ‘achieve something’, extra to the sheer manifestation of God. The same tendency is evident in every attempt to assert control over meetings which threaten to get out of hand. In order to ensure that everything is done ‘in order’, we risk killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. Annie Dillard writes that worship should be dangerous. Who knows when the fire might break out and consume us?

**Letting Go**
Recently I became aware of another feeling of threat. We have had two trainee pastors with our church, on church-based courses from Spurgeons College. Both of them were/are highly gifted people. I began to feel threatened, though neither gave me any objective reason to feel it. I realised I had to let go, and let God work through them. Likely though it is that both will achieve more than I ever have. It’s like Saul and David. How different it would have been if Saul had reacted from a secure personal foundation when the crowds cheered him for his thousands but David for his tens of thousands.

Leaders need to let go of authority, and loose people from the bonds of the clerical, the hieratic, and the sacerdotal. Whatever we loose on earth is loosed in heaven. Let’s pray for the Spirit to be loosed among us, to be released. That may be in a social project for mothers, political campaigning against euthanasia, praying for healing in a service, or asking for people to be filled with the Spirit at an Alpha course. Often we pay merely lip service to notions of empowerment and equipping. The current enthusiasm for ‘Deep Church’ is useful in reining in the excesses of charisma through recovering ancient disciplines and traditions. But in the re-emphasis on the sacraments and liturgy, we risk the dis-empowerment of those who lack the educational skills to manipulate verbal symbolism set by the educational establishment. That Baptists are involved in this suggests that the distinctive contribution of the English Free Church tradition is being lost in the pendulum swing back towards the religious spirit in post-modern Britain.

We talk about the Missio Dei – that it is God’s mission in the city – but then we re-assert our control and decision-making. Once I asked a Brazilian pastor about his philosophy of ministry. He simply talked about how he prays and fasts for three days, and God gives him the answer or the strategy to address the situation. We, on the other hand, fall prey to the managerial temptation, the pragmatic, problem-solving worship of technique and methodology, rather than lived dependence on the Spirit.

**God Ideas**

At a recent leaders’ weekend away, we realised that we needed to catch up with what God has been doing among us. Often when leadership manuals refer to change management, they mean the changes which we initiate. Others deal with the changes in context which we must adapt to. The first makes us appear in charge, autonomous, practical atheists. The error is humanistic hubris infecting current management and leadership books. In them, we are encouraged to set our own goals, and work to achieve them.

Urban missiology often makes the second mistake, portraying us as the victims of circumstance, trapped by sociological determinants. Rightly, we appreciate the need to respond to our context. Context shapes strategy. But we must also not be context-driven. For this can make us passive, accepting constraints, and limiting our horizon of what is possible. In contrast, we ought to be following God, and the changes he instigates. Sometimes he will slower than, moving at his own pace, to achieve goals we are not even aware of, but which are needed before we can progress to our own plans. At other times, he will be ahead of us. This is what we are experiencing. We realise that the church has doubled in attendance over the last ten years – not revival status, but growth nevertheless. So we are having to think about adjusting how we do things to respond to what he is already doing among us.
So, the main task is discernment. Discerning spirits, which is a gift of God’s Spirit. Some ideas will be good ideas, but nor God ideas. Another spiritual gift will therefore be prophecy. Prophecy is communicating God’s word for this people at this time. It is revelation of his heart, his plan, his will, for a situation. It may be short on details or how exactly to achieve the vision. But is motivating and empowering for action. For a church built on the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, the need is for a restoration of prophecy. Especially so for our multi-racial, as the key prophetic revelation for Paul was the formation of one new humanity out of the racial-religious ghettoes of Jew and Gentile.

**Prophetic Liberation**

The prophetic also allows participation by people who will not able able to hold their own in an academic discussion. Maing space for church members to share their dreams [and I do not mean by this aspirations, though these are also important], but their actual dreams that they have in their sleep. Allowing time in meetings for the reception of prophecies and visions. Not the management-speak abstractions of ‘dreams’ and ‘visions’, but the real supernatural breaking in through gifts of revelation and speech.

Sociologically, this gives the urban poor space to speak. In the church they can be schooled in power and deliberation. This is a radical stance in a world which values only the professional power of symbol-manipulation by the educated elite. Frequently, however, I have seen church leaders exclude people from leading extempore prayer or from sharing in meetings, because they are unsure what will come out of their mouths. Anything that threatens to become indecent, extreme – talk of demons or deliverance, miracles or healings – is forbidden and silenced.

What began in the charismatic movement as an experience of liberation where anyone could share a ‘word’, has become in many churches a power-game where only designated ‘Prophets’ can speak, and microphone control or platform control are closed doors to the participation of ordinary people. In it we see the return of mediatory priesthood, through a historical religious revolving door, as a mediatory prophethood.

**Transformational Limits**

Politically, prophetic theology takes on the idols of power; where state theology defends them and church theology restricts the prophetic spirit to the church-world. The dualism of church and world, sacred and secular, have no place in our prophesying.

In the Spirit-realm, there is a glorious freedom from results. We do not expect the full realisation of the kingdom in the present, but only at the consummation. So we are free to do what is right, rather than only what can be demonstrated to be effective. Nor, however, do we expect gradual progress or amelioration. The gradient of history can go down as well as up.

Mission as transformation may be a creditable aim. But it is no longer a necessary expectation. This is so whether we look for personal improvement, political reform or spiritual revival. Nevertheless, although our efforts may not bring transformation in
the immediate, we do point towards the final fulfilment. We are witnesses for truth. So while political action may not bring the eschaton, it is still important prophetically.

**Heavenly Vision**

Instead of transformation, we need a politics of transfiguration. Andrew Davey discussed this with me recently, though I suspect we each mean something different. I remember Desmond Tutu speaking in Birmingham NEC about the politics of transfiguration. This was part of mission week organised by the then Bishop of Birmingham, Colin Buchanan. The week was a financial flop and forced his resignation. But Tutu’s point was more poignant due to the near-empty NEC arena in which he spoke. Transfiguration is free from results. It does not belong to realm of the visible. The actual transfiguration of Christ on the mountain top was thoroughly historical, geographical and incarnational. That is, it occurred at a definite time and place, culture and context; which means we can expect transfiguration to occur in our own time and place, context and culture.

Transfiguration is transient, temporary. It is visionary, a glimpse of the heavenly reality on earth. Here Rowan Williams’ discussion of the role of icons in opening up the heavenly dimension in contemplative prayer is an important entrypoint to mystical experience with direct relevance to the urban loss of horizon. Through the visionary we are ourselves transfigured, expanded, to embrace more of ultimate reality. Transfiguration overturns all our supposed notions of the pragmatic or the effective.

To that extent a genuine transfigurational politics will be different from what Paul Lehmann wrote about in the 60s, where it was simply subsumed under the rubric of 60s countercultural radicalism. We need real vision[s] to feed our vision off political change. Political activists too often ridicule popular spirituality – perhaps not of South American Catholics which are full of ‘colour’ and exoticism, but of our own home-grown Pentecostals. Many share dream experiences with me, for example, that to them seem as real as their everyday consciousness. What happened in the dream actually ‘happened’. The dream is true. Shaman-like it provides knowledge of the real and strategies for symbolic intervention in personal problems, church planning, or social projects.

**Blowing Bubbles**

The transfiguration of earthly reality in the light of the heavenly is about ferment, as Brother Roger of Taize said. Bubbles of the kingdom. Rising up and popping as they make contact with the air. Effervescent life. Fermentation of new life. Continual production of taste and flavour – a recent scientific report showed it is the bubbles in champagne that give it the taste!

All our projects and programmes are short-lived prophecies and parables of the kingdom, foretastes. Important to do, but not bearing any ultimacy. Our awareness of the provisionality of all our efforts stops us taking ourselves to seriously. And this helps us cope with the end of projects, the stopping of funding, the lack of evangelistic results. The fulfilment is at the end, when heaven comes down to earth. For urban mission the actual end-time symbol is crucial – Zion, city of our God. For the urban missionary, where disappointment is daily, this is an important focus. We
can combine the apparent unworldly emphasis on the spiritual, the heavenly, with the emphatic stress on this-worldly projects to express heaven’s kingdom now.

Although Tom Wright appears sometimes over-optimistic, this is genuinely ‘collaborative eschatology’: holding the tension, living in the gap, stretching the poles, bearing the pain. Creating temporary liberated zones, autonomous of empire. But not just creating social projects. In the gap between now and the consummation, the Holy Spirit is the downpayment, the guarantee, the earnest, of our inheritance. The anointing therefore an experience necessary, not optional, if we are to wait in hope. The Spirit is the eschatological gift of Pentecost. Otherwise we must keep going relying on the never-never. To cope existentially in the now of the not-yet, we need his presence: long-term illness of epilepsy, homelessness and eviction of a woman from supposedly safe half-way house refuge from domestic violence, addiction to drink and the struggle for sobriety. It may be that Marx was right, that this is merely consolation, compensation, but without it we cannot survive in a broken, fallen world.

**Force Field**

Michael Welker expresses the idea that the Spirit is like a forcefield of energy, where something happens, where justice and liberation occur. Our churches and projects in the urban are zones where God’s Spirit-energy is present to set people free. Like an imaginary line which marks a border between earth gravity and moon gravity. If we cross that line, mimicking Michael Jackson’s Moon Walk, we immediately receive new powers, to perform incredible feats. Like superman, we can leap over tall buildings, run faster than a speeding train, stop a moving bullet.

In the space of the Spirit new things become possible. The Spirit is the connection point between earth and heaven. The Spirit is the skin of God. Like an expanding balloon. The skin is part of the balloon that comes into contact with anything as it expands. So the Spirit is the ‘part’ of God through which God connects to the world. This is another way of expressing the ancient tradition that God the Father has two hands with which he operates in the world – the Son and the Spirit.

The agency of the Spirit is the means by which heaven comes down to earth. Not looking into heaven, passively, as the disciples did at the ascension, waiting for the kingdom to arrive. But receiving the power of the Holy Spirit in order to do the kingdom works now, to bring the reality of heaven to the earth, not completely buy proleptically as Ted Peters puts it, presaging the future reality in a present, partial expression. Even liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez recognised that all political achievements are only anticipations of the new heaven and the new earth. This frees us from the demands of ‘success’ to do what is right, without anxiety about our effectiveness. We participate in socio-political action, but dialectically - without idolising it, or expecting it to effect the kingdom in its fullness.

**Space Project**

Ministry is incarnational, and therefore geographical, located in a place. Barth wrote that heaven is a place. We cannot simplistically say it is a no place, because it is spiritual. Heaven is where God is. Through the Spirit, then, heaven comes to earth.
In our congregations we see a thick expression of heaven on earth, through relationships and projects, instead of a thin theoretical description. Theology is practical, seen in action. Taking up current geographical terminology, heaven functions like a ‘third space’, where the new becomes possible, outside of the determinisms of sociology. A place where possibility is negotiated and performed.

As churches in East Germany provided space for radical discussion and challenge to the Communist system, so our churches are experimental laboratories of the Spirit. A theology of Urban Spirit will take up the hints in Hegel and Schelling of how God expresses himself in the world through the Spirit, but without the self-alienation, separation or incompleteness within God. Instead, his expression into the world is a revelation of his self-giving love. Nevertheless, the idea that the Spirit can be discerned in the world-spirit, world-history, the urban geist, is an important insight for the urban missiologist. He or she thereby becomes a pneumatic urban semiotician, reading the signs of the Spirit-derive in the cityscape.

Where God is happening. God as event. The where as well as the when. But space, and place, also imply border, boundary. Where are the borders of the Spirit-zone? Omnipresent, everywhere-Spirit; but not equally acting. The field of force is not evenly spread. The layer of Spirit is thick and thin in different places. The concentration is weaker or stronger. Depending on openness to his flow. So, although the Spirit is omnipresent, he is present, as Aquinas said, in different modes. And there are borders between different spiritual dominances. The edges are the battle zones. We can draw up a map of the city, a cartography of the spiritual. But not static. The procession of the Spirit implies he is always processing, moving. As wind-born Christians we are those who fly over boundaries, cross borders. In Azusa the colour line was famously overcome by the blood. Joel prophesied that the Spirit would come on ‘all flesh’, reducing status and the arrogation of superiority by the educated, as even ‘servants’, men and women, were seized by the poet-prophet awen.

Opening Up
So we can open up spaces of hope in the city. We say: ‘Come Holy Spirit’. But actually he is here already, just not acknowledged, not welcomed in. We invite him to move among us. Sometimes he is present in power, manifest presence; at others hidden. We need to manifest. This is how Spirit works: demonic or divine. The son operates through incarnation, becoming flesh. The Spirit operates through manifestation – seeking a body, not via homoousion-union, but external-internal combination – demon-possession of pigs, divine-giving of gifts.

In a prayer meeting, we have to keep our eyes open to see on whom the Spirit is resting. In a community, we need to watch for signs of divine openness to new interventions. For this we require the cultivation of the contemplative gaze. Derived from the Greek theoria, to see, spiritual seeing is as relevant to social intuition as to personal insight. If we are to see the Spirit inspiring our work, then the Spirit must be incorporated into the initial planning of our work. Milbank has written that contemporary social ‘theory’ needs to incorporate this theological vision.

The cycle of hermeneutical reflection in contextual theology often does not include actual praying. It remains an otherwise wholly secular activity, that cannot but produce secular narrowly political solutions to problems whose terms of reference
are set by sociological analysis. Liberal critique of Biblical revelation, and evangelical rationalist suspicion of the charismatic, took away the legitimacy of spiritual experience and the role of testimony in allowing the \textit{lao}s the power of speech. The new of the Spirit overshadowing the social womb is thereby necessarily excluded from our calculus.

\textbf{Radical History}

The wild joyous anarchism of the Spirit. The sudden gusts and draughts and eddies in the air. As you round the corner of a building, a sudden wind blows you sideways, as you hit a different atmosphere. I remember living in a tower block. Lying in bed at night, I could feel the building shake and tremble under the assault of the urban \textit{ruach}. The Spirit is scary.

The ranters, levellers and diggers of the English revolution were not all wrong. And Baptists were included alongside Fifth Monarchy men, Quakers and spirituals as dangerous heretics of their day. Their heirs among the Pentecostals are similarly threatening to normalcy, proper standards, orderly ways. Not every idiosyncratic doctrine taught; but the primal experience this blasts apart the iron cage of rationalism. It is no accident that wherever the gospel grips the urban poor it is in its charismatic aspect.

Any assertion of the Spirit is subversive. Not some genera notion of ‘the spiritual’ but the Spirit of Jesus. And especially not under the control of the clergy. Here is where I part from Milbank’s Catholic anti-protestant position. In his dialogue with Communist philosopher Zizek, he accuses the latter of being essentially protestant in his understanding of Christianity. Zizek rises to the occasion, and agrees. According to him, Milbank asserts a basically harmonious, Catholic vision of society. In contrast, Protestantism is founded on the fundamental rupture, the break, antithesis.

Faced with a harmonising post-modern consumer culture, and its current break-down in global recession, this deviant non-conformity is what we shall need - based on the Word addressing us from beyond, an alternative logos grounding prophetic critique of what is. But in the radical ‘spiritual’ Reformation, this ‘free spirit’ becomes another fount of other-speech to that of the authorities. Dangerous, producing at times violence and massacre, before the pacific Mennonites took charge, the inner light provided strength to defy.

\textbf{Hot Flush}

One response to the non-arrival of revival is to continue with business-as-usual, to dig in for the longterm, emphasise the overall strategy for mission as \textit{Kultur-kampf}, to seek relevance through social projects. By this, however, we may miss immediate opportunities. Alongside strategy we need tactics. Besides programmes we must seek relationships. Bureaucratic pre-organised projects can make us ignore the personal relationships that actually transmit the spirit of love person-to-person.

In addition, we have to hold ourselves open to the divine \textit{afflatus}, the spiritual spark, that could lead to the new, the re-newing. The fire. Our student pastor said to me that at college they would not allow him, or me, to say that the Spirit is ‘fire’. That’s just a symbol, not reality. This impersonal image may downplay the personality of the Spirit. But it is real. It aptly describes the subjective feeling that often comes when
the anointing hits us: we feel the goosebumps, hot-and-cold all over, pins-and-needles, trembling. The tears flow. I am describing last Sunday’s Alpha session on the Holy Spirit.

Tongues are not necessary signs of the Spirit’s filling. But they are real signs. And useful for praise or prayer, when words exhaust themselves. Charismatic sound is the equivalent to contemplative silence. Both are affective means of spiritual practice. Elliot’s ‘raids on the inarticulate’. Hyperbole, extravagance, utterings and mutterings – when language, vocabulary exceeds its limits – Marion’s ‘saturated phenomenon. He meant the liturgical, but it applies equally too the pentecostal: that phenomenon which runs over the limits of understanding, that implies a surfeit of meaning not wholly contained within itself, a pointer, a sign to the something more.

Tongues release the human spirit through direct contact with the heavenly Spirit. Mediated certainly, through psychology and sociology, but immediate, direct, to the person’s own experience, spirit-to-spirit. But specifically without the mediation of the priest or the institution. In our own case also, without the hype, the manipulation, of the Pentecostal parade. No music, no loud voices, and no pushing over!

Fiery Tongues
Tears falling, hands fluttering, bodies falling. A Hindu at Alpha explaining that he felt his senses expanded: he could hear everything, smell everything, he felt like he could ‘touch the air’, ‘embrace the air’. Charismatic critics may claim that this is just a human reaction to the Spirit’s activity, but we cannot thereby dismiss it. Still, we are human beings reacting to the Divine Spirit.

These ‘phenomena’ are not incidental, accidental, to the filling of the Spirit. They are part of the spectrum-range of Spirit-experience. And they are important as catharsis for the urban church and the urban Christian – to ‘feel something’, concrete, tangible, to challenge the plethora of images, messages, feelings bombarding us in the urban mix.

For intellectuals, speaking in tongues exists as glossalalic metaphor, for entering other ways of understanding and speaking. Zadie Smith, Cornel West, the band Talking Heads. But we do it for real; break open the cast iron cage of [human] language – not silence but the explosion of language into new sounds, non-sense. When the Spirit descends on us in our Nights of Prayer, when our worship leader leads us into the presence, then we are caught up in the swirl of sound – spiritual tongues, global languages, silence. Pascal – Fire. Aquinas – straw.

Be Prepared
But because we do not know where the Spirit will lead, we therefore enter uncertainty when we enter the Spirit world. It becomes less clear. Because we are out of control. Not only will others not know where we are going next, what we are going to do. We ourselves may not know, and may not want to go or do what the Spirit says. Jesus says to Peter that he will be taken where he does not want to go. All ministry, but perhaps especially the urban, is a process of losing control, of kenosis, self-emptying. It is the field where we die to self, where we lose our life so that we may find it.
The city is full of the unexpected. We do not know what will happen next. It is not the city of reason, as Richard Rogers’ ‘humanist city’ pretended to be. These pretensions of humanistic hubris have been exposed by the recession. Post-war state planning tried to re-make the city according to centralised rationalistic blueprints. But recent re-casting of London under the demands of international finance capital was an equally utopian attempt to start again. This time driven by profit not politics. Here was the problem with the concept of urban ‘renaissance’, as Schaeffer points out with the original historical renaissance: a naturalistic, humanistic, rationalistic attempt to remake the city, without recognition of spiritual [human] needs of the reality of spiritual [Divine] limitations on our freedom of action. Another expression of utopian assumptions in the modern world that we can re-find society from scratch breaking free from nature and from norms.

Instead we inhabit complexity, and chaos. Each part is ordered, but the overall pattern is beyond our prehension and our comprehension. We learn to live with questions, appreciating the uncertainty and ambiguity. Because what appears to us as conditioning or caprice, fate or fortune, is according to Augustine the providence of God. The chaos of the City of Man is cyclical, lack of progress; but the confidence of the City of God is linear, full of direction. And it is the Spirit who drives the process, that aspect of the Triune Godhead which moves creation on to its own perfection.

**Miracle Music**

But therefore we also learn to expect the unexpected; the miraculous is no stranger to the city. The proximity of the ‘other’ in the global city: weird differences in lifestyle, clothing, appearance, music. The presence of festival, art, dance, music. The city is the artistic centre.

Several transient artists recently passed through our church community: an elderly Nubian poet visionary painter producing paeans to world peace, an urban graffiti artist working with our youth project during a local community festival, a fine arts student resisting the commercialisation of design for consumerism and helping a project supporting *dalit* rights in Britain, a Brazilian flower-arranger, and a Naga painter, video-installation artist whose exhibition I am going to tomorrow. The Spirit is the fount of creativity: Bezalel *redux*. And the musics. Not merely the stereotypical rap, hip hop, gospel, r’n’b and soul. But bossa nova and samba. And recently a Congolese choir visiting us; and Monteverdi’s Vespers at a local Anglican church. All participation in the eternal singing in tongues of the Spirit, music of the spheres.

Not unusual for an urban congregation. The turn-over of people, the churn, may be tiring, but it is also thrilling. Always someone new to get to know. These encounters present opportunities for developing a new ethic of solidarity, as Mendietes claims. But against his claim, that this prevents us appreciating the transcendental ‘Other’ [God, the Supernatural, spirits], because it normalises our experience of difference, and therefore makes it difficult to imagine or conceptualise a genuine spiritual ‘Other’. Rather, the global city is the place *par eminence* that prepares us for the experience of the numinous.

**Stay Fresh**
Far from being a Kantian sealed-off realm, the *noumena* are ever-present; the daily witnessing of the weird and the strange in our city streets actually may serve to open us up to the deeper strangeness of the Divine Other. Because, although his is other, he is not ‘wholly other’. His *ganglia* reach into the circuits and networks of our postmodern cities; veritable rumours of angels, signs of wonder, noticeboards of transcendence.

The city is the place where God keeps our eyes open, our souls tender, and our receptivity fresh. In the last two years, our church has opened a cell group in Surrey. Not unusual for city centre mega-churches. But we are a local community-based church. One pastor from a large central church, with whom we are cooperating on a Street Pastors scheme, was surprised to learn that most of our people are local to the building. All the churches he knew attracted people from all over London – but then he was in the south of Westminster, where few people live. They are a commuter-based, city-wide church; we are a community church.

Where the disciples saw only a Samaritan woman, Jesus saw with harvest eyes. The wind in the windows. Our new cell group was formed because a Brazilian couple from our church moved out there, and wanted to keep coming to the church. They met some other Brazilians and formed a cell. This has grown and we are having to consider whether to plant a church there. The shock of the new. The flow of the Spirit. The move of God. And we are playing catch-up – again. Now, we’ve got another new cell – this time Congolese. The spiritual forcefield expanding, humming, vibrating across London’s systemic ecology of connections. The Spirit moving along the circuits, networks, relationships of the urban diasporas. What next?

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