JELLICOE REVIEW 2010–2011

JELLICOE REVIEW
2010 – 2011

CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY CENTRE
2011

BOOKS FROM THE CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY CENTRE

Effective Organising for Congregational Renewal
Michael Gecan and Neil Jameson, with contributions from Sean Connolly, Lina Jamoul, Amy Lawless, Matt McDermott and Angus Ritchie

Published by the Contextual Theology Centre

Prayer and Prophecy: The Essential Kenneth Leech
Edited by David Bunch and Angus Ritchie, with a foreword by Alasdair MacIntyre

Published by Darton, Longman and Todd

Faithful Citizens: Catholic Social Teaching and Community Organising
Austin Ivereigh

Published by Darton, Longman and Todd

Crunch Time: A Call to Action
Edited by Angus Ritchie, with contributions by Luke Bretherton, Maurice Glasman, John Milbank and Vincent Rougeau

Published by the Contextual Theology Centre

The Summer 2010 Jellicoe Interns and their Tutors at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine, home of the Contextual Theology Centre and its Jellicoe Community

CONTENTS

Introduction 7

The Legacy of Fr Basil Jellicoe

Diarmaid MacCulloch 19

Simon Cuff 27

Testimonials

Summer Interns of 2010 35

Year-round Interns of 2010-2011 46

Staff 53

Jellicoe Sermons

Sermon for the 75th Anniversary of Fr Jellicoe's Death

Bishop of London 65

2010 Jellicoe Sermon: *A Life Beyond Self*

Bishop Doug I. Miles 73

Jellicoe Seminars

Faith, Organising and the Big Society

Arabella Milbank 87

Joshua Harris 139

Introduction

The Revd Dr Angus Ritchie
Director, Contextual Theology Centre
Jellicoe Chaplain, Magdalen College, Oxford

Last summer marked the 75th anniversary of the death of Fr Basil Jellicoe, at just 36 years of age - bringing to an end an extraordinary ministry, rooted in the slums of north-east London. Jellicoe had passion and prayerfulness, humour and charisma. Above all, he was inspired by the conviction that the life of God could and should become flesh in every earthly community. Through a combination of vision, energy and practical wisdom he transformed the slums of Somers Town into affordable, high-quality housing that endures to this day.

This inaugural *Review* tells of the work of today's Jellicoe Community. Inspired by Fr Basil's example it is

engaging another generation of Christians in the work of social transformation.

Remembering Fr Basil

Jellicoe studied at Magdalen College, Oxford, before trained for the priesthood at St Stephen's House. Upon ordination in 1922, he was appointed as Magdalen's missioner to the slums of Somers Town, near Euston Station. The opening contributions to the *Review*, from Bishop Richard Chartres, Prof Diarmaid MacCulloch and Simon Cuff, tell of Fr Basil's response to the squalor he encountered. Jellicoe preached against the slums (and the indifference of those who could change them) as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual disgrace." Indeed, as Prof MacCulloch explains, he did much more than preach: "Half a century before the development of London's docklands, Fr Basil Jellicoe had pioneered an economically viable and morally inspiring form of 'regeneration'. More recent initiatives have all too often alienated and displaced the original residents. Jellicoe's version of neighbourhood renewal took local people seriously, and ensured their needs were given pride of place."

Today's Jellicoe Community

The Jellicoe Community was founded to enable another generation of Magdalen students to live out these convictions, on residential placements in East London. More recently, interns have been drawn from a much wider range of colleges and universities. Today's students are part of a movement for social justice initiated by those living in the inner-city. In the last couple of years broad-based community organising has received a new prominence in the media. Some readers will recall the Citizens UK Assembly on the eve of the General Election, attended by the three party leaders, in which Gordon Brown encountered a Latin American family, the mother of whom cleaned the Chancellor's office for rather less than a Living Wage. Many more will be aware that it was the community organising alliance in Chicago that trained the young Barack Obama.

Jellicoe Interns are placed in Christian congregations involved in broad-based community organising. These churches span a wide variety of traditions – Pentecostal, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army and Church of England.

Community Organising

These churches are all members of London Citizens, the capital's broad-based alliance. It contains over 160 dues-paying organisations – alongside churches there are mosques, temples, schools, student and trade unions. Their common action has achieved some striking results. London Citizens has won over £30 million pounds for low-paid workers, and secured the world's first Living Wage Olympics. The Citizens UK Assembly in May secured commitments from David Cameron and Nick Clegg to the end of child detention in the asylum process, and to Community Land Trusts as a way of achieving decent, affordable housing in our own generation.

In organising, the common action grows out of the relationships – relationships based on an attentive listening to people's circumstances, passions and values. Community organising is not unique because of the things it campaigns for. What's distinctive is the process. The action is not merely for the poorest and most marginalised in society – it is taken by them. People used to being passive recipients of whatever the

political process deals out become agents of change. The process matters every bit as much as the results.

The 2010/11 Jellicoe Internships have been largely focused upon 'CitySafe', a London Citizens campaign which responds to the evils of gun and knife crime, and was initiated by the young people who (though often stigmatised in the media) are most likely to be its victims. Much of the *Review* consists of testimony from these interns about the impact of the work – on the communities in which they were placed, and also on themselves.

Signs of hope

The staff of the Contextual Theology Centre, which runs the Jellicoe internship, have been surprised and heartened by the interest it is generating. At a time when people are supposed to be apathetic, we are finding a real appetite for engagement with social and economic justice - engagement driven by the very people who are supposed to be hardest to involve. At a time when young people are supposed to have given up on institutional religion, we find them increasingly drawn to a form of social action built on the life of local

congregations. And at a time when the media is full of stories of church disunity, we find Christians working together across a wider and wider range of denominations and traditions. The approach of community organising is to build relationships around the issues on which we can agree. This is not to evade the serious issues of disagreement. Rather, the hope is through organising on the areas where passion and vision are shared, we can come to more contentious issues with deeper bonds of trust and solidarity.

Prayer, reflection *and* action

The growing interest in Jellicoe internships – and in their combination of prayer, reflection and action – has led us to found a wider 'Jellicoe Community'. This brings together people, initially in Oxford and East London, who wished to give more depth and structure to their spiritual life and their social engagement. We envisage a combination of local cells, occasional larger gatherings, and one-to-one mentoring by a team of Community Chaplains – helping members of the community to discern and live by a personal Rule of Life.

In denouncing slum housing as "an outward sign of an inward disgrace", Jellicoe's words, and indeed his whole life, proclaimed the intimate connection between spirituality and social justice. Jellicoe knew that when the Spirit of God warmed and transformed human hearts there would be evidence of this in the public sphere as well as the personal. We were honoured to have Bishop Douglas I. Miles, with decades of experience of community organising in inner-city Baltimore, to launch the Oxford Jellicoe Community. His sermon at Magdalen College, reproduced in this *Review*, bears eloquent witness to the indivisibility of personal and public transformation.

Next steps

For Fr Basil Jellicoe, his *almae matres* were more than a source of funding or of recruits for his work. Social transformation requires the engagement of intellect as well as enthusiasm – and in 2011/12, an exciting extension to our work will be the launch of Jellicoe Research Internships. This will supplement the very practical engagement in community organising with a programme of research. This work will be vital if the Church's social witness is to be both faithful and

powerful. How should Christians respond to the language and vision of 'the Big Society'? How might the work of community organising among migrant communities in London enrich civil society in countries such as Zimbabwe, the Congo and Bangladesh? What has Biblical teaching on usury to say to today's financial systems? These are questions our interns have already begun to address, through our existing programme of Jellicoe Seminars. Josh Harris and Arabella Milbank (whose seminar papers are reproduced in this *Review*) are playing a leading role in developing this work into a more formal, structured programme.

Getting involved

Many of our readers will already have some engagement with the Jellicoe Community – as past or present interns; members of our partner churches, colleges or universities, or as donors of time or money to this work. As the *Review* indicates, we have a great many people to thank for making the Community possible. I would particularly like to thank the contributors to the *Review* (and Liliana Worth, its Editor and an intern and member of staff here at the Centre); the staff and officers of the Contextual Theology Centre

(especially the Revd Adam Atkinson, Senior Tutor; Ian Bhullar, Manager; Sr Josephine Canny, Community Chaplain; and Fr Sean Connolly, Assistant Director), and above all the interns and the people of our partner congregations.

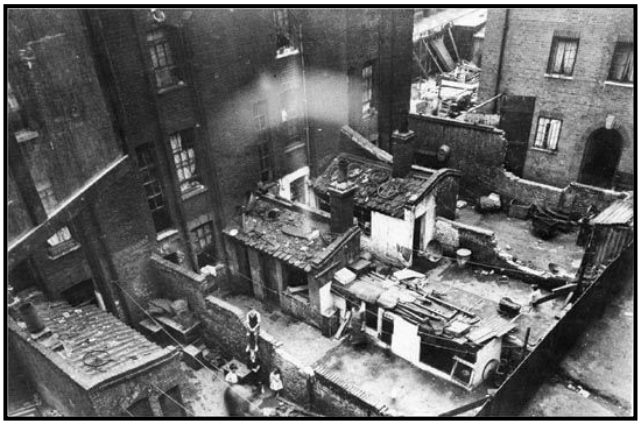
If you are not yet engaged with our work, but the stories and reflections below make you want to find out more, please visit our website (http://theology-centre.org/support) or contact us at The Contextual Theology Centre, The Royal Foundation of St Katharine, 2 Butcher Row, London E14 8DS.

The Legacy of Fr Basil Jellicoe

Catholic, not churchy

Diarmaid MacCulloch
Professor of the History of the Church, Oxford University

In this article, published in the Church Times on the 9th April 2010, Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch finds that Fr Basil Jellicoe fought against an outward sign of an inward disgrace in the slums of Somers Town.



Social change: the slums of Somers Town before Fr Jellicoe's ministry

The Anglo-Catholic tradition has more than its fair share of characters: clergy remembered with affection many years after going to their rest.

In Canning Town, Fr Goose remains a much-loved figure; in Wapping, Fr Lowder is still venerated for his work amid the cholera epidemic. And, 75 years after his untimely death, aged just 36, Fr Basil Jellicoe continues to inspire the affection of his former parishioners — the legacy of his unique blend of passion, good humour, and charisma.

That the children of his parish should have premièred Jellicoe: The musical as recently as 2003 is one small indication of his extra ordinary and enduring character and impact.

Basil Lee Jellicoe was born in Chailey, West Sussex, in 1899. The Jellicoes were a well-connected family: Basil's father, the Revd Thomas Jellicoe, was cousin of John Rushworth Jellicoe, Admiral of the Fleet during the Battle of Jutland in the First World War, later ennobled as Viscount Jellicoe of Scapa.

Basil's early years contained the same mix of privilege and service: educated at Magdalen College, he left Oxford in 1917 to serve in the Mediterranean as a Royal Naval Volunteer. He then followed in his father's footsteps, training for the priesthood at St Stephen's House, Oxford, before his appointment in 1922 as Magdalen's missioner to the slums of Somers Town, near Euston Station.

Jellicoe regarded the state of his parishoners' housing as a scandal. He preached against it as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual disgrace"; for it revealed the callous indifference of those with power and influence.

Fr Jellicoe was determined to use his privileged connections very differently, enlisting the support of the Prince of Wales, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Housing Minister in his St Pancras House Improvement Society.

The obituary in The Times gives some flavour of his extraordinary energy and enterprise: Fr Jellicoe "resolved that he would not rest till his people had homes fit to live in, and the re-housing schemes started

by his society have already provided many excellent flats, with gardens, trees, ponds, swings for the children, and other amenities. Although the rents charged are not more than what the tenants paid for the old slums, the loan stock receives two per cent and the ordinary shares three per cent."

The Metropolitan Germanos of Thyateira of the Greek Church (left) and Fr Behr of the Russian Church (right) visit Somers Town with Fr Jellicoe (centre)

Half a century before the development of London's docklands, Fr Jellicoe had pioneered an economically viable and morally inspiring form of "regeneration".

More recent initiatives have all too often alienated and displaced the original residents. Fr Jellicoe's version of neighbourhood renewal took local people seriously, and ensured that their needs were given pride of place.

Fr Jellicoe's work proceeded from his conviction that every human being bore the image of Christ. In the thanksgiving service for the renewal of St Martin-in-the-Fields in 2008, the Archbishop of Canterbury recounted a characteristic incident: "Fr Basil was challenged by some of his more narrow-minded High Church friends about why he would come to celebrate and preach in a parish church like [St Martin-in-the-Fields] where the Blessed Sacrament was not reserved. Fr Jellicoe said he had no problem at all in coming to preach in a church part of which was reserved for the service of Christ in the form of his poor."

Fr Jellicoe's beliefs led him to seek homes with beauty as well as utility. The design of the new homes was inspired by his alma mater — he was determined that

good architecture and space for art and contemplation should not remain the preserve of the élite. If you walk round Somers Town today, you will see the homes Fr Jellicoe won for his parishioners. Dig a little deeper and you will see the warmth with which he is still remembered. What stands out most is his compassion and charisma: playing the accordion and riding an early motorbike; challenging the prejudices of his time with the adoption of a black child; as much at home riding in a coal-merchant's cart as in the cloisters of Magdalen.

Out with the old: Fr Jellicoe's giant effigies of rats and bugs, which were displayed in Somers Town and ceremonially burnt on the day demolition of the slums began

Jellicoe: The Musical was a fitting tribute; for Fr Jellicoe was something of a dramatist, setting alight huge papier-mâché effigies of rats on the day the slums began to be demolished.

Fr Jellicoe's impact crossed continents as well as generations. One hundred and ten years after his birth, the Jellicoe Community was founded to bring students to live, work, and pray in London's poorest neighbourhoods.

This new movement began at Fr Jellicoe's old college. In its first two years, it has grown to include students from across the University of Oxford, as well as the University of Notre Dame, in Indiana. Inspired by his witness, the Jellicoe Community is bringing real change to those who struggle for affordable housing and a living wage today.

Too often in our time, Anglo-Catholicism is equated with the narrow-minded idolatry of tradition. Fr Jellicoe stands as a reminder that the true Catholic spirit is not obsessed with "churchy" matters. Rather, it believes that the whole of human life is to be re-shaped by the gift which we receive at the altar.

This truly Catholic sacramentalism sees the transformation wrought in the sanctuary and in the slums as a single, grace-filled action, in which the good things of creation become the means by which we taste and see the life of God.

The Revd Rob Wickham, a former Vicar of St Mary's, Somers Town, assisted in the preparation of this article.

Side by Side into Battle

Simon Cuff
Keble College, Oxford

The Jellicoe Community was formed three years ago. ***Simon Cuff*** *was one of the first to join. In this article, from the Church Times on the 9th April 2010, he explains its vision.*

The England of Fr Jellicoe's days is gone. The wider divisions he challenged, however, still run deep.

Fr Jellicoe's ministry was distinctive because it went beyond noblesse oblige. The people he served were given a genuine voice in the transformation of their communities. It is this aspect of his work — the recognition of the dignity of the poor, and a commitment to their ability to shape the future of their neighbour hoods — from which the Jellicoe Community takes its inspiration.

Drawn from the Universities of Oxford, East London, and Notre Dame, Jellicoe interns live and worship in

some of London's poorest neighbourhoods. Some are on full-time summer internships, others on longer placements that are combined with study or paid work.

In each case, students live in community, with a daily rhythm of prayer, and regular fellowship and reflection. Interns can relate their placements to undergraduate and Master's-level studies in theology, politics, and law.

The function of the interns is to help inner-city congregations, of various denominations, that are involved in community organising. This is a way of working across traditions and faiths for social change. The movement began in the United States, and is now most famous for training the young Barack Obama.

On both sides of the Atlantic, churches are the mainstay of the movement. The London alliance London Citizens was founded after the Docklands redevelopment displaced many thousands of inner-city residents. It has been able to secure a living wage for those who clean and guard the towers of Canary Wharf: part of the £25 million it has won for some of London's poorest households.

Today's interns are not simply latter-day Jellicoes, either in terms of their own origins or their work. The diversity within the Jellicoe Community, in both social class and in ethnicity, suggests some progress in the battles against injustice.

The interns are not there to win battles for local people, but with them, organising across divides of faith and culture to build a powerful and lasting alliance. Interns help inner-city churches identify their own leaders and priorities, to build relationships with other local institutions, and to campaign together.

The Jellicoe Community was founded in 2008 by the Revd Angus Ritchie, director of the Contextual Theology Centre. It is now an important part of the work of the centre, which was set up to promote and reflect on Christian engagement in community organising.

Inspired by my own Anglo-Catholic heritage, I was one of the first of the Jellicoe interns, and have seen first-hand its capacity to develop leadership, build relationships of depth across faiths and cultures, and secure changes in people's lives and neighbourhoods.

The housing built by Fr Jellicoe's St Pancras House Improvement Society

Both the students and their host congregations come from a wide range of traditions: Pentecostal, Salvationist, Methodist, and Roman Catholic, as well as the many and varied kinds of Anglican.

Seventy-five years after Fr Jellicoe's untimely death, his vision remains as compelling and as urgent as ever: that this same humanity that God took to himself in the person of Jesus Christ must never be allowed to suffer the indignity of social injustice.

It is our prayer that the Jellicoe Community can help to make that vision a reality.

Simon Cuff is a Jellicoe alumnus (intern 2008 and 2009) and is currently undertaking research for a DPhil in New Testament Theology at the University.

Testimonials

Summer Interns 2010

Daniel Stone
St Peter's College, Oxford
Placed at A Radical Church (ARC), Forest Gate

My internship was spent in an area of East London notorious for knife crime and gang warfare. I worked primarily with the ARC; a church based in Forest Gate that 5 years ago was galvanized into action by the murder of one of their young people, Charlotte Polius. The vision of the church leadership and the enthusiasm of their young people meant that rather than stirring up interest, the emphasis of my internship was on building relationships and opening lines of communication with other members of their local community so they could act together for change.

Over the period of the internship I came to realise the

simplicity of community organising and just how beautiful this simplicity is! It is based purely on relationships - talking and then acting with your neighbour to empower people to bring about the change they want to see.

We introduced a number of young people to the Citizens UK City Safe campaign that aims to develop local solutions to issues of knife crime. During the meeting a young lady said that there wasn't enough for young people to do and that one possible solution could be to encourage young people to take up boxing. Earlier that very same day we had been speaking to a former Ugandan Olympic boxer who wanted to expand his boxing programme to include more young people from Forest Gate!

The mission statement of the ARC is 'keeping it simple, keeping it radical and always keeping it real'. For me this perhaps best sums up the aims of community organising in that issues such as knife crime won't be solved over night but by taking small steps to implement what we still sadly consider to be 'radical' ideas of community cohesion we can perhaps begin to change things.

Daniel has subsequently been elected to the position of Vice-President (Charities and Communities) of Oxford University Student Union. He is training students in the methods of community organising to build power in their colleges.

Emma Priddin
Trinity College, Oxford
Placed at St Mary's, Cable Street, and E1 Community Church, Shadwell

London's East End is a diverse place, a fact that you do not easily forget when Canary Wharf is ever in view as you walk down Cable Street to Morning Prayer each day, or when in the evening you pass from poor to rather more affluent housing in the course of getting to the pub. My particular placement also happened to incorporate a degree of ecumenical diversity. During July 2010 I was an intern with both St Mary's Cable Street, an Anglo-Catholic parish church, and E1 Community Church, a Baptist church which often meets in St Mary's church hall.

Through contacts made in these communities I conducted a series of one-to-ones, culminating at the end of the month in a meeting of members from both churches as well as from St Paul's Shadwell, where three other Jellicoe interns were placed. The group began to look at planning an event which would promote social cohesion in the local area and focussing especially on the Watney Market. It also resolved to

carry out further one-to-ones in turn. The group continues to meet, the July interns having left.

I now work as a parish assistant for the town-centre church of St Paul's Bedford. Although I am by no means a community organiser in the strict sense, the principles (and sometimes the accompanying jargon!) of community organising have remained with me. Fundamentally this is about listening, about building relationships, and about having the vision which believes that things can be better than they are.

Tom Daggett
Lincoln College, Oxford
Placed at Salvation Army, Stepney

In July 2010, I worked as a Jellicoe intern with the Salvation Army in Stepney. The Ocean Estate, on which I worked, presents exciting opportunities for community organising, many of which have already been fully embraced by Nick and Kerry Coke and the Salvation Army congregation.

One of the most pertinent issues for the local community pertained to anti-social behaviour, often a result young people gathering on the streets as they had nowhere to go. Importantly, too, many members of the youth population felt at odds with other demographic groups living on the estate. The outcome of my month in Stepney was a meeting in which representatives from the youth population, members of different churches, elderly residents, and other citizens of the estate were able to voice their opinions about social tension. The meeting resolved to send a delegation to Tower Hamlets Council, which was to make demands on youth services for urgent attention to be paid to an inefficient youth centre. It was inspiring to work with such a

passionate bunch of people; sentiments of disparity between demographic groups were soon exposed as false as common areas of concern were identified.

The impression left on me by the dynamism of the Jellicoe community has been huge – as well as having the honour of working in partnership with community groups and the Salvation Army, it was exhilarating to work alongside fellow interns who shared similar beliefs about the necessity of social action. I also made many great friends. As I'm finishing my degree in Music Lincoln College, Oxford, I look forward to returning to East London in October to work for the CTC.

Tom is returning to the Contextual Theology Centre in September to work as part of a Community Organising team at St Peter's Bethnal Green.

Jaya Carrier
Balliol College, Oxford
Placed at St John-at-Hackney

After four weeks of working at St. John's, a community walk was organised on our very last day. Intended to be a reflective walk, it offered the chance for members of St. John's to come with us to four designated places that had been the focus of local concerns in our one-to-one meeting. In a month that had been hectic and always throwing up the unexpected (!), the walk was a wonderful way for all to pause and be together.

Getting the walk together was tense at times; we were continually unsure of even a few people turning up, despite our bribes of tea and cake at the end! Also, in order to truly reflect our work overall, we were keen for there to be a representative spread of people across the parish. Therefore, we were really delighted to see that this all came together, with a sizeable and representative group coming along with us. What was especially heartening was the presence of young people and children; as something that was of such major concern to almost everyone we had spoken to, it was great to have their participation. The children were

particularly engaged with the process; we created 'wish tags' that we had prepared to tie at each site which offered words of reflection. We invited the children to tie these, as well as offering the group to write on blank ones their own wishes and prayers. On what was a reflection of things that were occasionally rather solemn in tone, it was wonderful to have joy, excitement and participation.

The feedback we received from those joining us on the walk was fantastic, and really allowed us to leave Hackney on a high. Perhaps the most uplifting aspect of the walk, however, was that the participants all stayed for tea and cake afterwards – some for some hours – just talking, catching up, laughing and reflection. This, for me, is what it is all about; togetherness.

Jaya is currently studying for a PGCE and is looking forward to working as a Primary School teacher.

Rebecca Fay
Queen Mary, University of London
Placed at A Radical Church (ARC), Forest Gate

I was a Jellicoe intern during July 2010, during what I fondly remember as 'the summer of Jelli-love'. I arrived not knowing a single person in the intern cohort, unsure about my faith, unsure about my career path, unsure about my place in society. I was placed with A Radical Church (ARC) in Forest Gate, a young, energetic congregation which challenged my pre-conceived ideas about worship.

We re-invigorated the young people at the ARC to focus on an existing anti-knife crime campaign which had so much undeveloped potential. We brought young people from other congregations together and they organised a Community Walk to raise awareness about what reducing knife-related violence in their neighbourhood and to build relationships with the shop-owners and shoppers of Woodgrange Road.

I'm currently in my final year of Law at Queen Mary; the internship brought me a new circle of friends, a new confidence in myself and a new faith in the power of

communities. The internship made me realise that I wanted a career that would allow me to contribute in a meaningful way to the lives of others and so my focus has shifted to roles which encourage this and to firms which have a genuine belief in corporate social responsibility. I feel confident that the young people I worked with during the summer will go on to become leaders in their area and make real change in the lives of their neighbours. I bumped into one of the young people recently and he was passionately telling me about their plans for the campaign; I may have contributed in a small way to his enthusiasm, but the young people of Forest Gate are the real catalysts for change in their community.

Rebecca is finishing her Law course at Queen Mary University and has recently accepted a job offer in corporate governance. She is looking forward to starting her new role in September.

Year-Round Interns 2010-11

Josh Harris
Keble College, Oxford
CTC Research Coordinator and Parliamentary researcher

Placed at St Paul's, Shadwell, my summer Jellicoe internship provided me with a great opportunity to immerse myself in an active and busy congregation in East London. Engaging with the mission and activities of an outgoing lively church was exciting and tiring, and a real privilege to share in the life of the congregation for a month. However it also proved a real challenge to explore what place there was for community organising in a church already focused on urban mission and community outreach. Our work at St Paul's therefore largely comprised of building a picture of the passions and concerns of the congregation and its leaders and helping articulate how community organising might fit into their many other activities.

I enjoyed my time so much that I have since stayed not only at St Paul's, Shadwell, but also as part of the Jellicoe

Community. I primarily work in Westminster for a MP, but now also coordinate the research programme at the Contextual Theology Centre which includes recruiting new Jellicoe Interns as researchers!

My involvement with the Jellicoe Community both in the summer and now provides me with a space to understand and articulate how my Christian faith impacts on the action and politics I want to see changed, but also embeds me in the local community in a way I'm not sure I would otherwise be. For a society and a generation which is otherwise so fragmented, being rooted in a place and community is deeply valuable.

Josh will continue to work at the Contextual Theology Centre for a further year as Research Coordinator.

Katy Theobald
Balliol College, Oxford
Salvation Army, Stepney

My placement is with Stepney Salvation Army, a relatively new church that is very active in the community. Over the year I have met with members of the congregation and also residents and service providers in Stepney. My focus has been on provisions for children and young people. When I began the internship an issue had already been identified with local youth services, and I was able to join the meeting where an action was planned to address this. In addition, I have been working within my congregation to consider how we could support local young people, particularly those who feel they cannot engage with existing youth provisions.

Much of my time has been spent meeting those who provide or use youth services in Stepney. I was able to draw on the relationships I have built with different local organisations very recently, when assisting the Church leaders Nick and Kerry to respond to proposed cuts to local Children's Centres services. We submitted a letter of opposition to the local council and were able to

cite the support of local schools, charities and youth centres which I had previously engaged with.

Working as a Jellicoe Intern has been both enjoyable and fulfilling. Stepney Salvation Army is a great church and attending has really changed my view of worship and faith. Our weekly worship involves everyone, and is about exploring the Bible and concepts in Christianity. Once a month, the Church runs Good Neighbours where we go out as teams to help older people in the community by gardening, painting or simply visiting them at home. Not only is it a wonderful way to engage with the community, but it is the ideal way to put our beliefs into action. Experiences like this, and the internship as a whole, have encouraged me to reflect on my faith and try to actively express it in everyday life.

Katy will be undertaking postgraduate research in Education with a view to shaping policy in later years. In addition to her role as Jellicoe intern, Katy is currently co-authoring a book on Psychology and Educational Research.

Liliana Worth
St Hugh's & Wadham Colleges, Oxford
Administrator of the Contextual Theology Centre and intern at St Mary and St Michael Catholic Parish, Commercial Road

My 'Jellicoe Journey' began on a minibus which would take a small group of graduate students to their Hebrew classes on the outskirts of Oxford. These journeys would be punctuated by tales of social justice campaigns conducted by a London charity from a certain Simon Cuff, author of a piece included in this review. A few months later I found myself in East London training to build relational power in the institutions of this deprived area. A far cry from Lamed-he verbs and dusty books indeed!

But the Jellicoe internship turned out to be exactly what I needed. During my years at Oxford I had struggled with the darker side of student politics, with my faith and with the intellectual self-indulgence and isolation that a life in academia can sometimes abet. At the Contextual Theology Centre I found a way to marry my Catholic beliefs with social action and grassroots politics – and to put aside the luxury of the Ivory Tower

for the needs of Tower Hamlets. Based at St Mary and St Michael's on Commercial Road, I learnt about the power of relationships, 121s and about the successes of the Living Wage campaign. I have grown in faith and met some incredibly kind and supportive people: I have been consistently surprised and inspired by those around me – fellow interns, staff, parishioners, tutors, PTA members of the school – and am very thankful for the way they have challenged me to think about the kind of life I would like to lead. At a time when materialism and a money-driven culture can be seen everywhere, it is a gift to see others putting people first and building stronger relationships in different communities, both big and small.

My time in East London has pushed me to think seriously about teaching in the area: few things would beat working towards social justice in schools while also indulging my geekier side!

Simon Cuff (Jellicoe alumnus) and Liliana

Liliana is planning to return to Oxford in October to undertake a DPhil in English and work as the Jellicoe Community Coordinator.

Staff

Laurence Mills
Magdalen College, Oxford
Jellicoe Community Development Manager

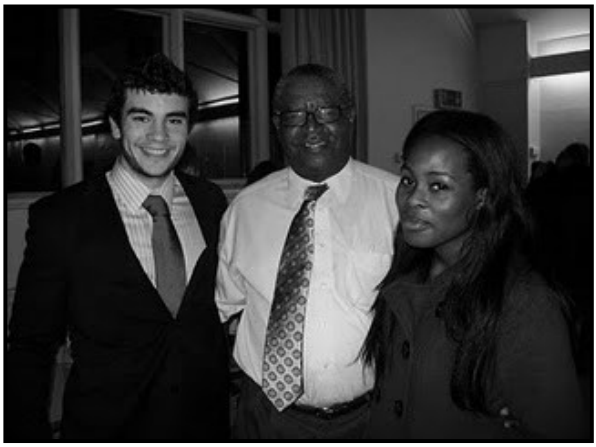
I first became involved in the Jellicoe Community during my first year at university after I had met Angus Ritchie at an event on the work of London Citizens. I spent the following two summers doing the Jellicoe Internship in East London and focussed the majority of my work on engaging churches in the City Safe Campaign. After I had graduated, I came to work full-time at the Contextual Theology Centre as the Jellicoe Community Development Manager. The role provided me with a unique opportunity to oversee the expansion of the Jellicoe Community at what was an exciting time for the Contextual Theology Centre, Community Organising and the role of Christians in 21st century politics.

The Jellicoe Community has grown enormously since 2007 when the first of the 'Jellicoe Societies' was founded in Magdalen College with the aim of recruiting students to work with churches engaged in Community

Organising in East London. The Jellicoe Internship has increased in popularity, expanding from one intern in the summer of 2007 to fifteen interns in the summer of 2010. In November 2010 the Community itself expanded with the founding of the Oxford Jellicoe Community, supporting the work of over ten college Jellicoe Societies across the university. In addition to the proliferation of involved colleges, the Community was joined by St Michael at the North Gate and St Mary Magdalen as Jellicoe Partner Churches. It was an honour for us to host Bishop Douglas Miles from the Koinonia Baptist Church, Baltimore, USA as the keynote speaker at the launch event and for the 2010 Jellicoe Sermon at Magdalen College. His talks, sermon and advice to students were a highlight of the Community's year.

The Oxford Jellicoe Community now holds termly Jellicoe Seminars on Christian engagement in public life and cross-denominational worship and prayer events. We continue to look ahead to build and expand the Jellicoe Community Internship Programme of 2011. The Jellicoe Community also supports the wider charitable and campaign work of its members and has

become increasingly involved with the Oxford Living Wage campaign in recent months.



Laurence, Bishop Doug Miles and Jellicoe Intern Antonia Adebambo

The Jellicoe Community, now stretching from the east end of London to the colleges of Oxford University, continues to support Christians in their personal journeys in faith and churches in their institutional campaigns for justice. The Community has become a focus point for Christians who, from their faith, are drawn to social action in the same way that Fr Basil Jellicoe was drawn to act when faced with the injustice of the slum housing in Somers Town in the 1920s. The

prospects of continued growth, renewal and fellowship mean that an exciting future lies ahead.

Laurence will be starting the Graduate Diploma in Law this September.

Ian Vijay Bhullar
Keble College, Oxford, and University College London
Manager of the Contextual Theology Centre

The greatest challenge I faced on coming to community organising was having the courage simply to ask people for one-to-one meetings. It's almost become a maxim of Christians in community organising to say that the one-to-one is "counter-cultural": in a city where it is a consensually understood sin to make eye-contact on public transport, the one-to-one is upheld as an action that forces us to connect in a meaningful way. I had my doubts about just how radical these conversations could be, but realised when I asked for my first few meetings in October 2009 and faced wariness that perhaps I was asking to do something that many people wouldn't have any reason or volition to pursue. Almost two years on, the relationships I built in initial one-to-ones are friendships, and they cross cultural, age and faith boundaries in a way they would not have done had I not intentionally sought to meet my new community.

I came to community organising as a Jellicoe intern working with St Mary's Church, Cable Street, in the Docklands area of Tower Hamlets. Cable Street is the 'third' connecting road between the City of London and Canary Wharf, but unlike the Highway and Commercial Road it is hidden away from most Londoners' view. It reportedly suffers from many of the problems common in Tower Hamlets: economic deprivation, marginalised youth and an active drug trade. But interestingly, the concern of many members of the community is not with these issues but with social cohesion: members of churches and mosques alike ask, “How can we get to know our neighbours?”

With the invaluable help of the organisers at The East London Communities Association (TELCO), St Mary's and its Baptist partner East One Community Church have been able to respond to this question. A small group meets specifically to arrange one-to-one meetings with people from TELCO-affiliated Muslim community groups at East London Mosque and Darul Ummah mosque and community centre. Church-leaders and -goers have visited the school at Darul Ummah and shared meals with members of East London Mosque.

Most significantly, members of the churches have been part of campaigns for the London Living Wage, for affordable housing and to ensure that the 2012 Olympics will benefit East Londoners, alongside citizens from many different faith communities.

I consider myself fortunate to have been in community organising during the historic 2010 General Election and the subsequent radical change in government. The May 4th Election Assembly, attended by David Cameron, Nick Clegg and Gordon Brown—and to which churches and leaders associated with CTC contributed an inordinate amount—was the highest point in Citizens UK's history, and gave tangible power to the 2000 assembled community members. For the six months prior, I had worked with Citizens for Sanctuary in their successful campaign to end child detention for immigration purposes by helping to build teams of community lobbyists in 200 key constituencies across the country.

This breadth of experiences has given me a unique start to my professional life. I have learned how to use relationship-building and power analyses to change the environment in which I work. More importantly,

through community living I have developed a spiritual pattern that sets me in good stead for my life beyond East London. And in my fellow community members and interns I have made friends who I hope will remain with me as spiritual companions for many years to come.

Ian will be moving to China in September to join the Chinese Government Scholarship Programme as a sponsored candidate from UCL. He will be employed as a researcher in the social sciences.

Jellicoe Sermons

Sermon for 75th Anniversary of Fr Jellicoe's Death

Rt Revd and Rt Hon Richard Chartres
Bishop of London

Preached at a service of thanksgiving at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, London, on Sunday 25th July 2010

"We are going to build Jerusalem in Somers Town" declared Fr. Basil Jellicoe after his appointment to the Magdalen College Mission in 1922.

He was a man of manic energy with powerful Establishment connections and a blue in networking which drew the Prince of Wales; the Archbishop of Canterbury and even Queen Mary into the campaign for better housing in one of London's worst remaining slums. Bad housing, he said was "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual disgrace". So the St Pancras House Improvement Society was founded – "an

economically viable and morally inspiring form of regeneration" according to Diarmaid MacCulloch.

He was following a noble tradition. Hope is fortified by seeing how far we have come since 19th c. London was described as the "City of Dreadful Night".

Progress had been made since the Royal Commission on "The Housing of the Poor" reported in the 1880's on the state of the rookeries which formed a great horseshoe around the city from St Martin in the Fields and St Giles to Clerkenwell and Whitechapel.

The decade also saw the beginning of a more thoroughly scientific attempt to map social distress. Charles Booth's famous poverty map was first exhibited in Toynbee Hall and Oxford House in 1888. It used a colour code from yellow for respectable to black for "seats of vice".

It was hard however to keep abreast of the rising population and by the beginning of the 20th century the problem of overcrowding was still acute. 45% of the inhabitants of Finsbury for example lived as whole families in one or two rooms.

Some urban reformers under the influence of anarchist ideas dreamt of an alternative society of voluntary co-operation living and working in small self governing commonwealths. The Garden City movement is one of the fruits of this tendency. A rather different route into the future was laid out by le Corbusier whose vision was more authoritarian and centralist.

Jellicoe had his eyes firmly fixed not on some ideal scheme of social improvement but on his parishioners, the actual tenants of the slums in his parish and in the rest of the borough of St Pancras. It was an essential part of his plan that the buildings refurbished by the Society were let at precisely the same rents as the old slums to local people.

In view of recent Government rhetoric it is perhaps instructive that if you start honestly to build the Small Society in a particular locality then the effect especially in our wired up world can be immense.

Jellicoe like many Anglo-Catholics had a theatrical streak. He celebrated the beginning of a new phase of demolition and reconstruction by a ceremonial burning

of huge effigies of the *cimex lectularius*, the slum bug which infested the condemned properties.

He had the charisma of a founder but it was necessary for others to consolidate his work after a number of breakdowns. Paradoxically this released him to spread the St Pancras model throughout the country.

He disappears from the Diocesan Directory in 1929 at the time of one of his breakdowns but it was also then when Whitbread's gave Jellicoe the control of a rebuilt pub in Stibbington Street licensed to sell beer but not spirits and equipped as a place of innocent recreation. He dreamt of founding a college for publicans where in Jellicoe's words "young men of the best type would regard the office of publican as a great and honourable profession – a magnificent opportunity of social service by providing decent and happy recreation for their fellow men."

F.D.Maurice, one of the greatest prophets of the Church in London said – "To me the Kingdom of Heaven is the great existing reality which is to renew the earth".

There was an earthiness and a realism about Jellicoe's vision at a time when some Catholics in the Church of England had deified the Church and were making the scarcely credible claim that the Kingdom had arrived in its life and structure. Other people were shy of claiming that the Kingdom could have any embodied form at all and should be regarded as something that would only be realised and entered by individuals, only beyond time and space.

Jellicoe laboured with great integrity to do justice to the sense that the Kingdom has already broken through in the work and teaching of Jesus Christ; that Jesus calls us to a transformation of the world and not merely a spiritualised description of it or an elaborate mythology; that the Lord's prayer is intended to pray down the Kingdom into the present; that we are in a zone of struggle and sacrifice with the principalities and powers still in possession of the surfaces and spaces of our world. "To me the Kingdom of Heaven is the great existing reality which is to renew the earth."

How the transformation is to be effected and what the New Jerusalem will look like when it appears – these are all difficult questions.

But the difficulty does not acquit us from the effort of making some anticipatory sketches and essays which may themselves play a part in liberating the influence of the end time so that it can contribute to the transformation of the present. Part of the real weakness of the church at the present is our lack of clarity and specificity about the shape and nature of the Holy City for whose appearing we are meant to be looking and working.

The Nineteenth Century secular visions of heaven and earth have faded in t n the face of the ingenious hells that were created by the social engineering experiments of the 20th century. The Utopian laboratory was built on top of a vast graveyard and revealed itself to be under the occult management of death.

Jellicoe believed that Jerusalem could be glimpsed in Somers Town and the way to it was by that love of God which is not an emotion but self giving of the absolute kind that we see in Jesus Christ hanging on the cross; self giving to our neighbour in whom we see and serve God himself.

The Jellicoe interns are exploring this path for themselves and for us although I hope earnestly that they will not be as neglectful of their own health as he was. But nevertheless if Jerusalem is to be built it must be with sacrifice. Jellicoe still challenges us 75 years after his death at the early age of 36.

A Life Beyond Self: The 2010 Jellicoe Sermon

Bishop Doug I. Miles
Koinonia Baptist Church, Baltimore

This is one of a series of annual 'Jellicoe Sermons' preached at Magdalen College, Oxford.

As I prepare to preach this sermon I am requesting those present who are 35 and older to help me preach. If you are in agreement with what I say, give affirmation by the nod of the head, the wink of an eye or by letting a smile play across your lips.

M. Craig Barnes, in his marvellous book 'When God Interrupts', makes the assertion that "God must save most of us from 'the life of our dreams'". That most of us do not end life, nor find ourselves at this junction of life, doing what we as teenagers or even young adults had wished for or expected to be doing. Most of us are not married to the heartthrob of our teen years. Many of us are not doing professionally what was our original life's

quest. Many of us are not living where we thought we would reside or are not travelling roads we thought we would travel.

Thanks be to God that in His omniscience, He has delivered us from the life of our dreams. Why does he do this? I venture to say that He does so for one of at least three reasons.

I. The life of our dreams may not have been what was best for us.
II. It may not be what God wants for us.
III. It may have ended in our destruction rather than our usefulness for the kingdom.

This was true of a shepherd boy king named David in his humanity; and probably true for Jesus in his ever dawning sense of his divinity.

David, the youngest of Jesse's sons, in the culture from which he comes, could not have dared dream that his life would carry him down the road it does nor to the dizzying heights he attains. In Jewish culture of that day the youngest son was last in line for inheritance, last in line for the patriarchal blessing, last in line to secure a

wife, last in line to leave the father's house. Last, last, last. It did not matter how gifted he was, nor what spirit of ambition drove him or how willing he was to work – his destiny was to be last.

Yet David probably dreamed of becoming a great psalmist and blessing family, friends and the kingdom with the gifts so richly bestowed upon him. Hear him:

"In your strength the king rejoices, O Lord,
And in your help how greatly he exults."

"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
The world and those who live in it."

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures."

"The Lord is my light and salvation: whom shall I fear?"

A blessed musician with ability that far exceeded the ordinary, David probably dreamed of dazzling the ladies with the playing of the lute or mesmerizing a generation with the melodies produced at his hand.

He never imagined he would be King of all Israel and called a “Man after God’s own heart”.

And most assuredly our Lord – Jesus – made a similar journey to his place between two thieves on a cross on a hill called Calvary. In his humanity as a child, he could not have possibly imagined the winding road of his life nor that one day, centuries later would we today be gathered in this place dedicated to His glory as we worship Him as “King of kings and Lord of lords”.

He had such an impossible beginning that we have glossed over with tradition and the hindsight of adulation. A bastard child of what seemed an illicit relationship between a young woman engaged to a man probably four times her age who on the eve of her marriage turns up pregnant by an unknown father.
Tradition said and literally required that she would at worst be stoned to death for her seemingly shameful dalliance and at best be returned in shame to the house of her father as damaged goods.

So as a child – a middle child of a stepfather with sons and daughters both older and younger than Jesus, and Jesus as Mary’s eldest child who bore the chief

responsibility for her welfare in old age – his horizons were severely limited by life's circumstances.

Yet he probably dreamed of becoming a master carpenter in the king's service who one day would be called upon to design and build the framework for some magnificent structure in Jerusalem – a structure that would dazzle men and be blessed by God. And as in the case of David, he too had to be rescued from the life of his dreams.

There are some seated here today who will be delivered from the life of your dreams and thanks be to God for that deliverance.

So how do we get from the life of our own dreams to a life that counts beyond self? Allow me to suggest three quick points and I will be done.

I.

To claim a life that counts beyond self one has to come to a day of decision for God.

Our faith is not a faith of osmosis whereby we can acquire a relationship with God simply by being around people who have such a relationship. Religious faith is like a tooth brush – each person should have his or her own and use it regularly. And life will lead you in some directions that will cause you to choose for or against God, especially if you seek to be open to His revelations.

David found this to be true early in life. As he kept his father's sheep there was a time when a bear came to destroy the flock and he slew the bear with sling shot in hand. On another occasion a lion attempted to harm the flock and once again sling shot in hand he killed the lion. What some would have pointed to as either luck in human skill David saw as divine intervention for His sake.

The Bible informs us that aged twelve, Jesus is found by a frantic Mary searching for what she believed to be her lost son, finds him in the Temple in Jerusalem, and when chastised Jesus responded, "Did you not know I must be about my father's business?"

We do not know what revelation led to that declaration but we do know that 18 years later he sits in a

synagogue in Nazareth, quotes from the prophet Isaiah, and claims a place in the prophetic tradition of Israel: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...”

If you want a life that counts beyond self – in the days of your youth choose for God.

II.

To live a life that counts beyond self requires a willingness to take risks, we are challenged to dare to be different – to march to the beat of a distant drummer.

One day David took provisions to his older brothers who were engaged in battle against the Philistines – as he approached the battlefield he found a giant named Goliath daring the children of Israel to send down to the valley a man that would dare to stand up to him. David saw “teachers, scholars, pastors and preachers, captains and generals” on the mountain side afraid to go down to the valley. And this shepherd boy, this slight lad of shepherd status dared in the name of God to go forth and slay the giant.

Our Saviour, Jesus Christ, one day walked away from his carpentry shop, walked away from family and risked scorn, ridicule and pity because of what he believed to be God the Father's claim in his life.

What are you willing to risk to be on the right side of justice, to be on the side of that arc of the universe that bends towards justice?

Are you willing to do as Jesus did and exchange the truth of the moment for the fact of the matter?

The truth of the moment – Jesus gives up carpentry.
The fact of the matter – He claims the Sonship of God.

The truth of the moment – the lure of the prosperity of the healer.
The fact of the matter – true treasures in heaven.

The truth of the moment – the ridicule of men.
The fact of the matter – The affirmation of the father: "This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

What are you willing to risk to claim a life beyond self?

III.

To claim a life beyond self requires a willingness to be available to God.

In all his shenanigans and moral mess David always made himself available to God when God wanted to use him.

Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane made the conscious choice to make Himself available for a divine appointment on Cavalry.

God does not call us to be the best at anything – though some of you are and will be.

He does not challenge us to be the brightest – though some of you are.

He calls us to show up, available and willing to be used.

He calls us to show up, as Noah did to build the Ark.

To show up as Joseph did to save his family from famine.

Show up as Moses did to go back to Egypt to tell Pharaoh to let God's people go.

Show up as Joshua did to fight the Battle of Jericho.

Show up as Daniel did to meet and slay a giant named Goliath.

Show up as Nehemiah did to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Show up as Esther did proclaiming, "If I perish, I perish. I am gone to see the king."

Show up as Jesus did for a date on Calvary.

And if we show up, God will show off in and through our lives.

Are you willing to lend a life that counts beyond self?

Jellicoe Seminars

Faith, Organising and the Big Society: What the Middle Ages can teach us about Faith, Organising and the Big Society

Arabella Milbank
New College, Oxford
Jellicoe Intern at St John-at-Hackney, 2010

The 'Contextual Theology Centre', through which my and all Jellicoe Community placements are run, has as its geographical context a transplanted medieval institution in Limehouse Docks. The Royal Foundation of St. Katherine, founded in 1147 by Queen Matilda, but moved to its current location in 1948, retains medieval elements both material and theoretical. Weathered medieval bas-reliefs sit in a contemporary cloister. The postmodern aesthetic is continued in the palimpsest of a chapel featuring Gothic quire stalls alongside a 21st century mosaic floor and reredos. These again are inscribed with the text and image of a living Middle Ages, as the words of Saint Augustine circle the central compass rose, harmonizing with the Katherine's wheel

or Ship's-wheel motif in the harnessing of the age-old seafaring tradition of the docklands to the true pole of an ageless faith: 'We do not come to God by navigation but by love'. The Foundation itself, originally a hospice and almshouse complex on the banks of the Thames, functions in a continued but updated restatement of its medieval ideals. The salve for body and soul is given through a 'charitable conference and retreat centre', within which the Contextual Theology Centre plays its part, emphasising the continuity of *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa*, of thought and action. The Middle Ages is still with us, and, as I will suggest, it is partly still with us precisely in this sense of ideal continuity between our spirituality and our charity, and, indeed, our politics.

As a '*Middle* Ages,' between 'ancient and modern,' 'beginning and end' the *medium aevum*, has been constantly re-imagined and re-appropriated in the service of both nightmares and visions. It is median space, as dark corridor or golden passage, with shifting

time boundaries: from as early as the 3rd century AD to as late as the 19th century.[1]

It has often been posited in antithetical relation to the modern: either with the sense of irreconcilable difference of alien mentalities and social patterns, or in a search for the lurking emergent forms of our current reality. Both approaches can again be subdivided depending on one's view of modernity as a whole: we can find the brotherhood of spirit, or perhaps that alterity which might teach our own age how to be other.

As, in our postmodern era, we reassess our positive valuation of the modern, I would like to suggest we require an intelligent and nuanced vision of the pre-modern that is nonetheless unafraid to suggest we might have moved back as well as forward.

At the same time, this permits a re-habilitation of a consciously politicised awareness of the medieval. As the 'buzzwords' of community, locality, and even faith

[1] Jacques Le Goff, perhaps most extremely, sees the Middle Ages as associable with the continuity of pre-industrial society in his *Pour un autre Moyen Age.* Editions Gallimard, 1977.

come back into fashion so does the medieval—witness the rehabilitation of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis in film, a slew of recent BBC series from Merlin to a documentary season on the Normans, or indeed the naming of the 'Robin Hood tax'. There is retention of the idealized or 'golden age' portrayal of corporate responsibility and vibrant popular culture, as the wholesale rejection of a medieval 'Dark Ages' by historians becomes more and more mainstream.

Understanding the Middle Ages as a period where state, secularity and market were relatively unformed, or, depending on one's perspective, in the process of formation becomes an excellent corridor to walk down as we re-evaluate modern assumptions of their compartmentalised dominance. This is something which both the work of London Citizens to rebuild civil society and the coalition government's Big Society intiative seem to attempt to do.

The Big Society, behind which David Cameron continues to put his weight, and which forms a vital part of Conserative policy despite its relatively poor public perception, lays its hope in not merely a smaller state but the total shift of emphasis to the innate power of

what Disraeli would have called 'the noble system of self-government', the power of communities to organise and structure themselves.[2] This can sometimes involve rather a lot of hand-waving as he tries to pin down a sometimes nebulous 'Big Society spirit'. This has, in his recent rhetoric at the 2010 Party Conference, already got a life and an existence. In the light of the wave of violent protests which were to follow in the months following we might argue it also has a dark side. Cameron maintained that, 'When we say 'we are all in this together' that is not a cry for help, but a call to arms. Society is not a spectator sport.'[3] Spoken in October, these words took on a sinister edge in November, when it seemed that rallying cry had been heeded in a totally unexpected manner. Given the perhaps selfish focus of middle-class students protesting middle-class concerns—the university education that has become *de rigueur* for a certain wage-bracket—we might ask whether this does not prove precisely that Cameron has underestimated the

---

[2] Benjamin Disraeli, *Selected speeches of the late Right Honourable the Earl of Beaconsfield.* ed. T.E. Kebbel. London : Longmans, Green, and Co.,1882 vol. 2.455

[3] Speech to the Conservative Party Conference, October 2010

self-regard of a nation and a generation. However, amongst those protesters are many who evidently feel they are acting for a common good, for the future of all, and indeed have an evident sense of 'big society spirit'. This was being harnessed in tearing apart police cars, in a scene of actual civil unrest rather than the rosy 'revolution' of mass mutualisation Cameron envisaged.

Where is the society you offer us, is the question being posed with increasing fury, as you take away the state support on which we depended? On the other hand, the corporate anger on display is its expression, the people-power he evokes with a deliberate consciousness of his paradoxically radical rhetoric.

David Cameron, if he is sincere, has a real dilemma: how do you dream a society back into a state of love and charity; how do you persuade a nation that the good times will not come if they do not craft them? How do you move from the language of rights—on both sides—to that of responsibilities—on both sides? Is there a natural state of *communitas* waiting to be discovered, or has this more truly faded out? This paper will not seek to offer solutions, but it will sketch out some parallels in the life and society of the Middle Ages.

What is important for this discussion is the truth concerning which, in my view, R.H. Tawney is the best expositor: that the distinct character of medieval thought, in particular, and to some extent its society – as I will demonstrate – is a syncretic and unified vision linked by a common belief, by the real fact of its pre-secularity. It was an 'Age of Faith', even if this did not necessarily mean that sacred and secular powers did not compete and clash. They were nonetheless powers exercised by individuals, and within a legal framework and a social theory, based in and carried out with the principles of a Christian morality.

I would argue that what I will identify as 'medieval strands' in both London Citizens' organisation and the foci of its campaigns point to this necessarily totalizing vision, which refuses to ignore either people's human context or their thick contexts of motivation and belief.

This synchronic appreciation of ways of thinking does not seek to forget the vast ruptures of the present and the past – the deprivation and poverty of much of the Middle Ages, our current prosperity but alienation, the 'new poverty' of debt culture and conspicuous consumption – but rather to redeem both, by realizing

the unrealised ideals of the past in the present: the history of medieval thought may be as valuable as the history of medieval events.

The reference within the ideas and projects of London Citizens to the seemingly archaic and medieval has not gone unnoticed by its thinkers, and is indeed perhaps inevitable given the strong presence of individuals and communities of faith amongst its members.

Hence the CitySafe project with its basis in a concept of sanctuary and community self-policing; the anti-usury project which a London Bishop of the 14th century might well have approved of; the community land trusts which take up a medieval concept of land as held in trusteeship before God; the Living Wage Campaign which reaffirms the Catholic Social Teaching ideas of 'just wage' and 'just price' themselves extracted from scholastic theology.[4]

Communitas and Caritas

[4] Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 1894. See Austen Ivereigh. *Faithful Citizens: A Practical Guide to Catholic Social Teaching and Community Organising.* London : Darton, Longman and Todd, 2010.

The primary uniqueness of London Citizens lies in the fact that it is not defined by an aim or project, or a narrow identification with political party or cause. At the same time, it is perhaps naïve to state that, as a movement, community organising is not grounded in any one idealogy, even if that idealogy is founded not on what divides but what unites. 'Power precedes programme' is the almost infamous dictum amongst those in the movement: the strengthening of civil society (the *polis*, what lies between the individual and the state) is of primary importance against any single cause or campaign.

If there is one concept that is absolutely indispensable to the work of London Citizens, and indeed any citizens' alliance, it is community. The term is so widely disseminated now (community centres, community policing, community action, and so forth), a buzzword for an age that increasingly seems to envision politics along the faultlines of communitarian and libertarian, not right against left, that it risks becoming a shibboleth. Roberto Esposito's insight into *communitas* as 'the unreachable Object' may go some way towards explaining why it is so difficult to place, this third leg

which is neither the projected state nor the atomized individual.[5]

Esposito's recent book opens with an examination the etymology of *communitas*, to illuminate its essential dimension of obligation and indeed ineffable connection to lack or *onus*. We gain from his exposé the sense that our loss of community identity is not so much a failure to belong—after all, there are many ways of belonging in modern society, all finding expression in our consumer choices, our leisure choices, our political choices, our career choices—but instead a failure to discover the space of non-subjectivity and indeed obligation, an enforced reality that it is impossible to *own* without donation, that is community. In a community, as I was told by a youth worker whilst working in Hackney, you 'give what you get'—there is a breaking down, then, of the sense of personal self as opposed to collective self, private and public.

[5] Roberto Esposito. *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community.* Transl. Timothy C. Campbell. Stanford : Stanford University Press, 2009.

In the middle ages this greatest of the three theological virtues, *caritas*, transfers only slowly onto the material demonstrations of such virtue: the giving and receiving of alms which will eventually give it the sometimes pejorative connotation of today—the palliative donation, or even cheque-book politics.[6] The love which drives the Christian giver was imagined by canon law as owed to all, its expression managed according to St. Ambrose in a radiating diffusion.[7] One owed *hospitalitem* and *eleemosyna* first to self, then family, then community, then strangers both faithful and infidel—of course all of this an expression and affirmation of the charity that is primarily and absolutely God's.

The primary virtue of *hospitalitem* is always mentioned first in the context of canon law and its expression in

---

[6] See James William Brodman. *Charity and Religion in Medieval Europe*. Washington, D.C. The Catholic University of America Press, 2009, p. 3. and *passim*.

[7] Brian Tierney. Brian Tierney. *Medieval Poor Law*: A Sketch of Canonical Theory and Its Application in England. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959, p.56.

the decrees of provincial synods.[8] It is this taking-in of guests, this sharing of goods, that is primarily the sense of charity which also presumes the fundamental commonality of property which runs throughout canon law even where it acknowledges rights of ownership. The fundamentals, then, of *caritas* make a great deal more sense in the context of fixed, known local communities. Charity begins at home and hence retains its sense of love even when it is dealt out to the wandering stranger.

In England, the breakdown of the manorial system caused by the Black Death and the early emergence of capitalism in the mid 14th century causes a massive dispersion of population. As a result, the *pauperes* are increasingly identified with the emergent able-bodied beggary, a pejorative connotation which complicates the notion of charity displayed through hospitality and almsgiving. What had once been an additional aid to a relatively stable, if servile and meagrely-fed, population can now be seen as fuelling a cycle of impoverishment. Hence the poor and charity lose value together, as both alms and the destitute become people and things to be

[8] Tierney, ibid. p. 68

held at arm's length, rather than integrated into the life of the community as charity and the temporarily suffering brother or sister in Christ.

Big Society seeks to compete with emerging European patterns by emphasising subsidiarity and localism. Transition towns emphasize the new spheres of the local and the international, rather than the fixed boundaries of the national economy. It is hard to deny that in the Middle Ages this subsidiarity was to the fore, as small independent communities transacted their affairs with only distant involvement from Medieval Christendom or the barely evolving state. The myth of a repressed peasantry under a seigneurial lord, himself bound in a contract of fealty to the king, has given way to a more flexible understanding of interpersonal covenant and a wavering boundary between freeholders and vassals. Moreover the customary rules of inheritance and obligation held villeins and lords in a stable, if less-than-totally mobile, pattern of social relations. What we perhaps conceive as the shackle of the land would probably have been sensed more as security of land attachment.

The key subsidiary units of the parish and the fraternity or gild both operated in ways that frustrate our division of sacred versus secular and that suggest a broad understanding of the transcendent spirit of *communitas.* Love for one's 'even Christian' was the fundamental of English Medieval piety, as tracts of the time indicate. The absorption of all other elements of the faith—the ten commandments, the sins and virtues—imply a faith that has more in common with the post-Vatican II character of Catholicism, alongside a doctrinal orthodoxy less emphasised in the modern era. The didactic and devotional texts we retain from the Middle Ages imply an understanding of works of mercy and virtues as more symptoms of the love of God than requirements of the faith.

Clive Burgess is a medieval historian eloquent in expressing how the social contribution of voluntary groupings had at its origins a set of spiritual assumptions and priorities. In order for the true value of every element of society to be recognised, in an understanding of hierarchy we seem to have lost today, it was necessary to view social hierarchy as participating in the full gamut of the celestial hierarchy.

All those involved in caritas are also giving back via caritas' reciprocal dimension: the larger, poorer body plays an essential role by the intercessory force of their prayer: 'the collective significance of lesser men was comparable to that of the greatest'.[9]
Witness again a passage from Langland'

For alle are we Crites creatures, and of his cofres riche,
And bretheren as of oo blood, as well beggeres as erles
[…]
Forthi love we as level children shal, and ech man laufe up oother
Alter alterius onera portate.[10]

Burgess demonstrates that hierarchy does not necessarily have to be seen as a subordinating phenomenon, but indeed, when integrated into the

[9] Clive Burgess. 'Time and Place: The Late Medieval Parish in Perspective.' in *The Parish in Late Medieval England*. Eds. Clive Burgess and Eamon Duffy. Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2006, p.17.
[10] William Langland. *The Vision of Piers Plowman*. Ed. A.V.C. Schmidt. London : Everyman, 1995. Passus XI, lines 198-9; 207-10.

divine hierarchy, contains and posits all the reversals and paradoxes of that greater vision.

A religious account, it is evident, tends to dissolve or complicate the assumption of distinct groups within a social order subordinate to one another by need.

What this has meant in contemporary Catholic thinking, and in the subsidiarity movement in Italy for example, is the burgeoning of self-organising voluntary groups, intermediary institutions providing services, the fruits of piety but also—in a recent emphasis—social solidarity and autonomy from ecclesiastical or central government.

As Pope Benedict XVI has suggested in his first encyclical of 2006:
'the formation of just structures is not directly the duty of the Church but belongs to the world of politics…proper to the lay faithful…to configure social life correctly'

In the Middle Ages, we can argue, there was at no level more synthesis than at that of local and popular expression, whereas the further upwards we travel the

more we enter into separation and indeed competition of powers—the more we enter into disembodied, projected conceptualisations. This is true of the institutionalised church and the institutionalised state.

The Middle Ages' association with a lost sense of communal belonging, all-pervading importance of the sacred and non-virtual, less material existence innately connects it to the lost sense of *communitas* in Victor Turner's understanding—an authentic condition of immanent sacrality.[11]

This is still true: Again and again, on placement in Hackney, this lost sense of community, neighbourliness and hospitality was bemoaned to me. In every case those who spoke had a sophisticated understanding of what these qualities truly meant. For one Nigerian woman, it was the assumption of a kitchen open to all

[11] Lior Barshak. 'Chapter 6: The Communal Body, the Corporate Body and the Clerical Body: an anthropological reading of the Gregorian Reform'. in *Sacred and secular in medieval and early modern cultures : new essays*. ed. Lawrence Besserman. New York; Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. pp. 101-121.

comers, and not just the frugal English cup of tea; for a grandmother, the right (indeed the responsibility) to scold both one's own grandchildren and a neighbour's; for another the notion that the hours of work she put into the young people on her estate was not a pure act of supererogation but directly impacting her own quality of life.

The concept of charity as a continuity of virtue and action was most strong in the middle ages, as is evident from referring to a range of popular literary sources, without delving into the statutes of canon law or even the sermon tradition.

The 14th century social justice blockbuster, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, takes its 'amphibious' narrator Will—a married clerk in minor orders, between church and world—through a dream vision whose focus shifts constantly between salvation history and differently figured representations of *Ecclesia* and *Mundus*. Its Christ-shaped farmer hero, Piers Plowman, is a peasant Messiah.

As Will leaves behind clerkly culture and academic scholastic quibbling to seek charity through conscience

and action, the poem becomes evidently a tribute to the 'discipline of the heart' and the value of Christian *culture*, embedded Christianity over religion understood as purely clerically or scholastically overseen. It should be stressed that Langland remains an orthodox religious thinker, no Wyclifite, but his orthodox necessarily accompanies an immanent, here-and-now realisation of the gospel imperatives. The continuity of God's love and human love is a participatory reality, and the direct means for his England to become a truly just and loving community.

Charity is evidently fundamentally understood as *caritas*. It is love which leads to action, not action which is valid in and of itself. Moreover the double-love commandment is in some sense a single love commandment, and God not worshipped if his love not redounded and poured out upon all.

The poet expounds upon the golden commandment,

> whoso loveth noght, leve me, he lyeth in deth dyinge
> And that alle manere men, enemyes and frendes,

Love hir eyther oother, and lene [give to] hem as hemselve.
Whoso leneth [giveth] noght, he loveth noght,
Oure Lord woot the sothe
And comaundeth ech creature to conformer hym to lovye.[12]

Langland's masterful alliterative style places love and gift, *love* and *lene* in syntactic, sonic and semantic parallel in order to stress the coincidence of virtue and action. So too with the subject and object of the loving exchange: *eyther oother* and *hem hemselve* blend in sense and sound, collapsing individual identity. A study of canon law reveals debate over whether this was not an obligation of the Christian life: property was so much to be considered as theoretically common that income beyond need was owed to one's suffering brother.[13]

---

[12] William Langland. *The Vision of Piers Plowman*. ed. A.V.C. Schmidt. London: Everyman, 1995. Passus XI, lines 176-80.

[13] Joannes Teutonicus, a canonist of the 13th century, and followed by others down to the 16th, perhaps the source, indeed of the Tudor Poor Law which underlies our modern welfare system. Brian Tierney. *Medieval Poor Law*: A Sketch of Canonical Theory and Its Application in

The most damning indictment that has been made of the charity of the Middle Ages is that amidst all this talk of charity and almsgiving self-interest was dominant – that is to say, the love of self which sought to escape what has been seen as the other side of a divine contract:

> Give, and it shall be given unto you… For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again[14]
> And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise[15]

The motive of fear or retribution in the afterlife, or even in the current one seeming to lead in the modern consciousness to a theory of social contract and compromise.

Of which, according to some historians, the outworking was necessarily an indiscriminate charity that only contributed to poverty and suffering in society.

England. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959, p. 30.

[14] Luke 6:38

[15] Luke 6:31

What the Middle Ages can show us is what a syncretic understanding of the relationship between faith and society might look like.

Luke Bretherton's impressive and intriguing latest book suggests, although this view is gradually nuanced and sophisticated as the book progresses, that what he calls 'seeking the welfare of the city' for the Church necessitates, within Augustine's *saeculum* or fundamentally fallen world, pursuing 'temporal' goods and 'negotiating a common life' which to some extent revalues the 'earthly', 'contingent', 'ad hoc' politics the church is already carrying out. This can, of course, lead to problems as teleology inevitably matters—as is evident, for example, in the assisted suicide debate. He has a point in that, as Jacques Maritain states it,

> 'the cause of freedom and the cause of the Church are one in the defense of man' but it is significant that currently 'broad-based community organising' is, fundamentally, faith-based.

Part of what I am suggesting is that the spirit of mutual obligation and medieval community was dependent on

its nature as an age of faith and the self-sustaining reality of the small rural parish communities which were, for most of its length, the norm. When urbanization accelerated in the fourteenth-century the self-organising voluntary fraternities played a role in maintaining this social glue. Thus it may not be possible to find community again or that 'Big Society spirit' unless we go to the heart of society as the Middle Ages knew it: localised, embedded in love for God and neighbour.

The Role of the Parish

Voices within Big Society thinking and coalition have indicated interest in galvanizing faith communities for involvement, as well as in the work of community organizing, witness the candidate's 'fourth debate' at a Citizens UK gathering. The authors of a book giving a theological defence of the parish were interrogated at its launch by one such representative over its potential role as a fulcrum for his vision of the new free association. The past role of the parish in welfare provision and as a centre of true communal gathering could not be more relevant.

The territorial division of the parish is the most longrunning in the history of England, and denotes the sphere of influence around a parish church or minster, the mother-church for a defined local area, from an acre to several square miles. We associate the parish church now with a certain image of English rural idyll, but they were just as much a feature of urban areas. London, in the later Middle Ages, had 92 parishes. The parish church was the focus of what could often be a deeply elaborate internal structure, even in the smallest settlement. In both a rural and an urban context they were nexuses of charitable outreach.

Fascinatingly, it is emerging in the most recent medieval historical research that at the level of local urban community the interpenetration of consiliar, parochial and guild leadership was extremely extensive, as parallel oligarchies interacted with the more general electing body in a relatively open system of government marked by lay involvement and responsible citizenship that integrated precisely the political, the spiritual and the roughly profession-oriented. That is to say, there seems to have been a natural overlap of what we would think of as ‘church’, ‘state’ and ‘third-sector’ provision

which acknowledged the *communitas* or sacrally immanent corporate body.

It is unclear as of yet precisely what this would mean for either Citizens or the average Church of England congregation, and of course both the citizens alliance and parish communities are rightly wary of instrumentalization at the hands of the state. Luke Bretherton itemizes the three risks for the Church in a postsecular age in his recent book *Christianity and Contemporary Politics* as 'co-option, competition, and commodification'. Bretherton argues that this mixed moment is also 'part of the normative condition of the Church'. We are somehow always in Augustine's *saeculum*, 'an ambiguous time, a field of wheat and tares, neither wholly profane nor sacred'. [16]

Bretherton argues that we can only rediscover this pursuit of the common good through a realistic politics of compromise best realised through the methods of community organising, what the assessment of community organising unveils is that while the

[16] Luke Bretherton. *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. p.4.

emerging relationship between church and state tends toward co-option, other more constructive ways are available, ways that simultaneously allow the church to be the church, cooperate with religious others in pursuit of earthly goods in common, and contradict the totalizing tendencies of the market and the state.[17]

He seems to argue that keeping politics and worship 'separate' will permit a pragmatic political action that 'seeks the welfare of the city' without envisaging any continuity between the earthly and the heavenly kingdom and thus somehow over burdening what is achievable in the political realm with eschatological expectations.

In essence, this maintains the Church as a kind of 'department' or at least 'departmentalised' into its doing and its being elements, its political and its worship wings. Of course we do not wish the church to be merely a voluntary wing of the state, nor should churches be seen as one spiritual choice on a supermarket shelf. How is this countered by a look at

[17] ibid, p.106

the early Medieval Church-as-state? What seems evident is that on this model the Church was permitted to operate both very locally and internationally: laws governing charity, for example, were disseminated by papal decree and played out in the daily life of a rural parish. The relation might be explicit—a requirement to provide *hospilitates* to the poor appears into the canons of a provincial synod and enforced by Episcopal visitations—but since this was restatement of Gospel and reinforcement of the natural law of the heart, to a Christian worldview, it might equally emerge organically in a community context. Canon law confirmed virtue; it did not create it.

The modern parish has shown potential to be as multifunctional and active in community as it was in the middle ages, when the nave of the parish church acted as the physical site of a range of activities, as the work of scholars such as Eamon Duffy and Katherine L. French has amply demonstrated.

Her colourful example is of a record made of witnesses to a baptism in the Lancashire Church of Walton, where their 'reasons for being there' range from a cockfight to a business transaction to 'seeing a man from Liverpool'.

Three also mention hearing mass, but it seems we can conceptualise participation in the liturgy as somewhat haphazard. The parish was schoolroom, theatre and even mart.

Churches now are running community banks, post offices and acting as the site of multiple community groupings, from tutoring initiatives to the more predictable activity groups—from steel pan drumming to toddler ballet—which nonetheless have a vital function against such modern signs of 'broken Britain' as youth violence and apathy.[18] Beyond this complementary activity is the sheer potential of ordinary Sunday congregations which themselves bring together an unimaginable cross-section of individuals in communities whose diversity may otherwise be only

[18] St Mary's Cable Street runs a community bank on a Sunday morning; St James Church, Hemingford Grey and All Saints, Sheepy Magna took over the running of their local Post Offices when closed and many more may follow under the government policy of 'Outreach' facilities; the Stoke Newington and Hackney parishes in which I was placed as a Jellicoe intern had a full range of complementary groups and activities in place including a homeless outreach which had used space in the church as dormitories.

theoretical; 'neighbours' otherwise incommensurably separated by boundaries of class or income, or even simply the resolutely family-centric individualism of the modern era, exchange the kiss of peace as the medieval 'social miracle' continues to have some small effect.

David C. Harvey's work on the medieval parish and local community also stresses the vital importance of these 'free and equal lay communities…with an allegiance to locality and place' as places of 'semi-autonomous community organisation'.[19] The parish community was thus not only concerned with internal questions but knew how to place pressure on the immediate and ultimate ecclesiastical authorities. A particularly striking 14th century Cornish example is the 1380 petition to the Archbishop of Canterbury and eventually the papacy of parishioners of a tiny church in Meneage, St. Mawgan—sea-shore was too narrow for two men walking abreast to carry the bier at a funeral. Which it is suspected was 'a device to use as a lever,' much as now the means of London Citizens sometimes serve its ends.

[19] David C. Harvey. 'Territoriality, parochial development, and the place of 'community' in later medieval Cornwall'. *Journal of Historical Geography.* Volume 29, Issue 2, April 2003. pp.151-165.

This form of 'civil action' is effectively communities campaigning for the maintenance/creation of community centres of life in its fully spiritual and material sense which and supply the absolutely fundamental moments of its affirmation—not only the celebration of the mass but also the rites of burial, marriage, and baptism which point to hope beyond death and bless the steps of this earthly pilgrimage.

The policies of the Reformation weakened the informal aspects of parish provision as they strengthened the formal, and perhaps made the Parish an outpost of the state. It may be only fitting that the parish return to its more grassroots, popular and non state-defined role. As a centre of community it can hope to reintegrate the social 'goods in common' to its continued daily affirmation of these as absolute goods before God.

In the small case study Eamon Duffy has published of the North Devon parish of Morebath the medieval concept of broad-based community is evident. The importance of the religious or devotional element is stressed by this Catholic historian but has been supported by other studies. Duffy points out that as the parish became more secular, responsibility was less

well distributed across the community, and *obligations* of welfare were placed upon the parish to replace the acts of superogation and devotion the gap between rich and poor in the Elizabethan period widened.

French and Duffy have also been behind the collation of evidence for the impressive abilities of local parishes to raise funds, for their own use and to answer outside demands—collections for government needs for example in the case of raising militias. In a sense the 'Big Society' vision for is precisely concerned with a rejuvenation of this vision of the local community as more than a unit of governance. Of course there is a great deal of paradox inherent in the attempt of state forces to demand, or even to promote, territorial identity and self-governance. At the same time, the parish church is ideally located in function and thinking to rediscover a neighbourhood or community sense of self and responsibility. It retains the values and virtues of the Age of Faith which were the fuel of the ethos of mutual obligation.

However the medieval parish somehow reducible to that of a community centre in a religious age—because of the necessary interpenetration of these elements

(spiritual, mercatorial, political) at a more than organisational level. Hence seems evident that for the parish to regain a role in government it has to be fundamentally in a relation of some opposition or alterity, also—given the compartmentalisation of the state, market, church in modern society. That is to say, it has to remain faithful to a syncretic understanding of our existence as beings of flesh and spirit, where sermons against debt-culture will continue to evoke the cloud of angelic witnesses, where judgement and salvation are more real than poverty and wealth. Moreover this must extend to its role in the secular sphere: confidence in the superiority of Christian ethics is nothing to be ashamed of.

Citizens UK and the Medieval Fraternity

Before turning to the patterns of local community life in general and its potential contribution to Big Society thinking, I going to take the liberty of stretching a point, and in the great humorous tradition of British medievalism—from *1066 and All That* to *Monty Python* and *Blackadder*, draw a somewhat comic comparison:

I am about to find a medieval parallel for the Citizens Group in the great intermediary organisation of the Middle Ages, from the 8th to the 16th century, the fraternity or guild.

This was, roughly, a grouping of voluntary membership, a friendly association with a basis in piety and statutes whose terms stressed a foundation in charity and a requirement to give alms, which supported and knit togther its members for reciprocal benefit. Apolitical, independent of the state, they nevertheless acted for member's interests and could constitute the *de facto* local government of an urban area. The latest scholarship suggests these groupings experienced a surge in membership in response to social dislocation, a truth of the genesis of London Citizens as well.

For ease of reference, I will focus on our own island. There were 30,000 fraternities in England at the end of the Middle Ages, one for every 100 inhabitants or three per parish.[20] Gilds were one of the things to suffer at the

[20] My figures are taken from Gervase Rosser, 'Solidarites et Changement Social: Les Fraternites urbaines anglaises a la fin du Moyen Age.' Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales. 48e Annee. No. 5 (Sept.-Oct., 1993) pp. 1127-1143

Reformation, when successive Tudor acts reinforced the Parish as a *formal* element of government and the long process of the dissolution of the monasteries and their related charities inflicted significant blows against *informal* civil society organisation, localised education and services as all was brought under state control.[21]

There are some evident caveats to this comparison, but fewer than one might imagine.

Broad-Based Organisations?

The descendents of the medieval guild have more often been identified with trades unions—this since there has been an unnecessarily narrow focus on the trade guild, which would bring together in friendly association workers of the same profession or pursuit in mutual support.

[21] 'Chapter 5: Private Enterprises, Public Duties' in Anthea Jones. *A Thousand Years of the English Parish.* Moreton-in-Marsh, 2000.

However recent study of the medieval guild illustrates how frequently the formation was, to begin with, much more broad-based than this might suggest.

Not only were guilds frequently based around a range of categories of belonging. Guilds existed by locality, by age—guilds of children—or nationality—guilds of German immigrants. They also existed as pious fraternities or *stores* within rural parishes. Through these diverse constitutive factors, the guilds themselves operated as sites of social integration. This even more so as membership of multiple guilds was frequently the case. Hence by locality—social layers would interact—by profession—geographical boundaries might be transcended.

An Archbishop of Canterbury and a small-time blacksmith could be members of the same gild, and on the occasion of a fraternity feast, this would have been actualised as gentry and small-time artisans met on equal terms around the common table.

Just so, London Citizens, non public-funded, based on the glue of relationships rather than the formality of the institution, is a diverse assembly of intermediary

bodies. This clearly echoes the make-up of London Citizens itself, which operates around the assumption that all are welcome to this politics, the helped and the helpers, in reciprocal union for the common good. Indeed it assumes that the distinction I have just stated is a basically artificial one.

The Fraternity Feast/The Assembly

The large-scale visible confirmation of the patterns of community created and sustained by membership of a guild was to be found on the occasion of the annual 'fraternity feast'. More than mere celebrations, and rather, like Citizen's Assemblies a vital element of the way fraternities operated, members would gather following the annual patronal mass in the guildhall or church house. The equivalent for a village guild might be a 'church ale' or gathering of devotion. It was at fraternity feasts that relationships were cemented and formed, the basis perhaps for future employment or action.

As with assemblies, then, the function of these feasts is both symbolic and constitutive. Attendance was considered an essential of membership, the meal a

fundamental expression of the basis in love and charity the guild statutes expressed.

The event itself involved what we might see as a ‘paraliturgical’ communal act of feasting and rites: a loving cup was passed around, fraternal kisses were exchanged, and prayer was mixed with celebration in a lay expression and outpouring of faith and community as blended realities.

Just so, at an Annual Assembly, faith is not masked or dissimulated under the common goals, but motives are articulated and narratives told by means of the contributions of rabbis and vicars, and the performative element is prominent. As with assemblies, then, the function of these feasts is both symbolic and constitutive. Attendance was considered an essential of membership, the meal a fundamental expression of the basis in love and charity the guild statutes expressed.

At the same time these were forums for identity creation, as tribute was paid to the patronal saint and its expression of community history—the myth-making aspect which is no less true at a Citizen’s Assembly, as

achievements are recorded and to some extent mythologised.

Several guilds would often share the same meeting day within cities, another factor which demonstrates these fraternity feasts were genuinely about a coming together of the whole of civic society. This was an affirmation of bonds which transcended consanguinity or the professional, although these were also embraced within it.

Function

Without wishing to underestimate the value of those scholars contributions which assert the key role of fraternities for personal and national piety and devotion, more recent research has focused against this on the (parallel) social contribution of these fraternities, and indeed their role as a 'third leg' in the stool of seigneurial and church governance.

The evidence suggests that a fraternity might come together over a particular civic question (and not purely questions relating to their particular trades, for example).

Fraternities were also the source of some material support for members in times of poverty, aid that might have been in the form of a kind of 'benefit', monetary or in clothes or a meal. However perhaps more importantly than this it gave those belonging an amount of leverage within society; they served a dignifying function, just as Citizens gives disempowered groupings power to act.

At the same time, and unlike the disassociated function of the welfare state, they assumed in their members responsibilities both social and pious—moral standards were in the statutes, as was the spreading of charity via almsgiving.

The understanding of reciprocal *communitas* of a charitable foundation where the individual need blends into the collective, is evident in the presence at these feasts not just of a cross-section of labouring society but generally also a representative group of those defined by their poverty or destitution—or the opening of the doors of the guildhall or churchhouse afterwards for this element of society to share in the feast.

The guilds may have been significant in their development of social organisation and indeed civil society in independence of ecclesiastical or manorial control—they could be the foundation of civil resistance or rebellion, protest accompanying creative action: as was the case, to cite a very local example, in Abingdon in the 14th Century. This small burgh was dominated by the local Benedictine abbey, against whom a violent revolt was staged, which productive pressure seems to have eventually led to the authorisation of the guild which proceeded to undertake certain collectively beneficial measures of the sort that define the smallscale change Citizens is based around: a new bridge, the refurbishment of the town's spiritual centre (its cross), the founding of a hospice for paupers.

At the same time this action would have been impossible had the guild not also been a site for affirming and positively expressing the value and the truth of our reciprocal dependence and obligation: it was dependent on lay faithful. The point here is that *all and no* charity was 'private' in our modern sense. It was operating in more personal terms even on a large scale. To return to the example of the Royal Foundation of St. Katherine's, kings and queens were still acting as

private individuals, capable of endowing individual charitable bequests. Another representative of medieval charity were the penny doles dispensed by monastic houses on the anniversary of a benefactors death alongside his remembrance in requiem masses for the state of his soul. These were of course particularly large for royal bequests; Westminster Abbey would dispense penny doles to about 14,000 paupers for a royal obit.

The campaigns and initiatives which have emerged through the work of London Citizens suggest, on the other hand, that an embedded interfaith politics which does not discard the faithful justification from the perspective of community experience and catholic social teaching is in fact a realisable reality. Interestingly, this involves reclaiming models and theories which to a medievalist's eye look surprisingly familiar. By running through some of these examples I will seek to show how it might be possible to visualise the unknown future through some of the best aspect of medieval theory and practise.

Sanctuaries (City Safe)

Sanctuary rights in the Middle Ages exist in an ambiguously administered space between community, ecclesiastical and state sanction. Just so this initiative on the part of London Citizens, whereby shops and public spaces are rendered 'safe havens' by the voluntary agreement of local shopkeepers to report crime and protect anyone seeking safety behind their doors. They put up a sticker, and interact with the forces of law and order by means of the crime-reporting; and it is also a scheme that the Lord Mayor's office has signed up to. However the act itself is a pledge of a much more personal sort, which attests to the shopkeeper's sense of his own community and self-identification as part of responsible civil society.

Of course the primary sense of 'sanctuary' is a sanctified space, a church or temple. However in the Middle Ages, from where we derive our usually metaphorical use of the term 'sanctuary', their use was in itself as a powerful tool running counter to the impersonal forces of the law—a loophole to mercy within the instituted ways of the realm. The concept that a fugitive, fleeing sometimes from recrimination, sometimes from

creditors, sometimes simply from enemies, could find shelter in the space of a church, the acres around it, or in the person of a holy man is only officially entirely discontinued in the 19th century. It has recently been resorted to again to protect immigrants. It is easy to view this practise as one of retreat, fleeing to the distinct and protected space, but this is where our modern idea of removed sanctity jars against the medieval idea of an immanent sacrality intimately woven into one's local and national identity. Sanctuary was to claim one's place, claim one's saint: more like fleeing to the Town Hall (if that were not the domus of pure bureaucracy now) or the local shop (if that were not the temple to consumption and uniformity now).

The London Citizens campaign associated with this concept of sanctuary began in Tower Hamlets focuses, vitally, around a community myth. A myth which, like most, has a very real and resonant foundation: the murder of a child, Jimmy Mizen, by gang members in a local bakery. As a result of a campaign led by his family and the church congregation of which they were members, with the support of London Citizens, shopkeepers, originally along the street where he died but now city-wide, have identified their premises as

spaces of communal jurisdiction and indeed mercy from the harsh reality of human *in*justice. The nihilistic chaos of gang violence or what seems to be humanity's most fallen side is responded to not by the projected and sometimes arbitrary justice of a law or process but the real and immediate aid of those staffing the shop or building resorted to.

Sanctuary rights originally inhered around a human figure—the abbot of a monastery, for example, and only latterly to a building or the area around it. Even then, as recent scholars have shown, the concept was essentially dependent on the human mercy and response of the community itself, who would administer (and sometimes not administer—in close relation to the idea of sanctuary is, paradoxically, the lynch mob) today, significant community participation and support—to the extent that it could function as the exercise of a collective justice which 'knew better' than the official prognostication of innocence or guilt. What is essential to note is that a value 'beyond the law,' an essentially transcendent understanding of justice, was administered at the subsidiary level—the relation between community and transcendence, the deeply personal and the divine, is visible once again.

In Citizens practise, the sanctuary programme involves a negotiation with the police, but fundamentally CitySafe is about the rebuilding of community relations, both relying and embedding concepts of mercy and justice instinctive and inherent—relying on the person—and transcendent, rooted in an inalienable truth of a right to be loved and held safe, alongside a reclaiming of space marked by the brutal delimitation of gang postcode boundaries as fundamentally charitable and embracing. The resort to a place of sanctuary as indicated by its blue sticker is also a reminder of a certain story—a local story—just as a medieval sanctuary claimer would invoke a local saint. The campaign only works via a sanctification of communal space, and medieval church sanctity only worked via the communality of the sanctuary.

The Living Wage

This is the most high-profile and widely successful campaign undertaken by Citizens UK, which has garnered support from Boris Johnson to (both) Millibands, and that of public authorities and large corporations: from HSBC to the City of London.

In this case 'medieval' resonances can mean, in a sense, a worked-out theological underpinning, an economic theory unafraid to root its arguments in the transcendent. Faith underlies the thinking of projects emerging from London Citizens—faith of its many constituent members as well as its intellectual supporters.

There is, beneath the initiatives, a shared assumption that, as R.H. Tawney put it,

> Society is a spiritual organism, not an economic machine, and that economic activity, which is one subordinate element within a vast and complex unity, requires to be controlled and repressed by reference to the moral ends for which it supplies the material means.[22]

The concept of a living wage is both grassroots-generated and faithful to Catholic Social Teaching. It is from this long tradition of scholastic and canon-law debate that this arises. The assumption that there exists

[22] R.H. Tawney. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. London : Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1926. p.62.

such a thing as a ‘just wage’ and indeed a ‘just price’ is very strong in the Middle Ages: reliant on the concept that work itself is a duty done to God.

This refusal to ignore spiritual needs is evident in the human-shaped politics by which London Citizens operates—the campaign for a living wage did not begin with a calculation, it began at the ‘end’ with the frustration of one man, whose own particular labour was as a cleaner in HSBC’s offices, that he could not fulfil his duty as a father towards his children—a vital element, we might say, of his personhood.

It was in response to this moral end, which also related to a communal moral end insofar as the wider alliance he was part of had recently been concerned by the interfaith hostility shown by their young people that he chose to act.

The living wage itself is based on a realistic calculation of the needs of an individual, not on an abstracted figure produced by the pressures of the market—an emergent horror that medieval thinkers predicted when they warned against the unrestricted greed of usury and

avarice. The market innately calls no-one to account, dehumanising labourer and employer.

Lessons

So what has the Middle Ages taught us about faith, community organising and the Big Society? I think it is decidedly arguable that, prior to the formation of the nation state, the positive role of subsidiary organisations was an important factor in building local identity and local provision. This relied on a co-operative effort of parish, civil and fraternity or guild enterprise, underpinned by a shared belief in the fundamentality of *caritas* understood as reciprocal obligation as well as acts of mercy. Whether or not this in practise led to a people materially 'better-off'—and no-one is seeking to deny our education, healthcare and welfare provision is not in many ways vastly superior in quality today—it is arguable that by reclaiming the virtuous basis of this society we could make much better use of the strides forward in thought and technology we have made. Certain elements of the dissociative, alienating and rationalist consensus politics seem to have failed us: be this in the widening gulf between rich and poor, the economic crisis, our

violent communities or simply the widespread sense of that ineffable quality: loss of neighbourliness and community identity, truly the absence of *caritas*.

It is evident that London Citizens reclaims a synthetic medieval vision—one that permits virtue to play a role, and faith to inform policy as part of an authentic grassroots politics. This, we must be aware, is not necessarily a strong element of government provision for the Big Society project, even putting aside the risk of a welfare market or other practical concerns about precisely how this Big Society will work.

The work of the church is always primarily the church's work, of salvation and sanctification, the love and worship of God. At the same time the Church's duty is to spread charity into action, the practise of what is preached—hence the powerful relationship between Chaucer's Parson and Plowman in *The Canterbury Tales*, brothers in labour and provision of spiritual and material victuals. It is vital that this be seen as part of what constitutes our ultimate good. The rich wealth of the church is that it does not seek to divide and compartmentalize one element of culture from another, and this is something it has—atavistically and

medievally—to some extent retained against the pressures of structural projection that have gone into the formation of the secular state.

The concept of devolving power back to communal contexts does seem a hopeful one in that it permits politics to be done once again out of rich, informed, contextualised and not *necessarily* secular contexts. Community organising acknowledges that in a pluralised society these do not always pre-exist, and it encourages their formation alongside campaigns which take into account, in a thoroughly medieval way, virtue in its transcendent and yet entirely human reality. For this reason, it is a positive force. However the role of the parish as an independent entity, acting as the church pointing upwards beyond the terrestrial hierarchy will continue to be essential: remaining without it to remain within it, counterculturally visionary even as it is embedded in the social reality of human lives.

There is a risk that the parish may feel 'used' or co-opted as a branch of an alliance that retains explicitly political aims, or indeed that Citizens' itself may become more about programme than participants if it continues to think in terms of 'power'. The Medieval Fraternity

was based on real relationality and friendship, not the public and sometimes dangerously intentional relationship I was sometimes encouraged to pursue. Citizens' dependence on the exteriorised *common purpose* rather than a shared faith is of course a necessity of the modern era, and is of course one of the reasons the Contextual Theology Centre should play an even more integral role. However the work of the Centre needs to penetrate even more into the contexts of the neighbourhoods, congregations and unions on which the alliance itself draws: for only in the sure certainty that this reflective and faith-based work is being done will it not become yet another political operator or projected corporate body.

To return to the words of Saint Augustine embedded in the floor of the chapel at St Katharine's, the way forward is not always plottable in human co-ordinates, but a governmental policy that seems to re-invigorate our thinking along the lines of charity and relationality should be supported by a church that sails in the sea of souls towards God 'not by navigation, but by love'.

Faith, Organising and the Big Society

Joshua Harris
Keble College, Oxford
Research Coordinator, Contextual Theology Centre

The following paper reflects recent work on the Big Society and seeks to identify some of the main themes and issues facing Big Society as a public policy agenda as a primer for discussion. It draws heavily on the work of thinkers at the forefront of current political thought and theology including Austen Ivereigh, Rowan Williams, Luke Bretherton and James Davison Hunter. The paper outlines what community organising is, stressing the importance of relationships in political activism. It then discusses key elements of the Big Society and makes explicit that this phrase refers to both an anthropology as well as a public policy which are themselves distinct, if clearly related, categories. This helps set the scene for a brief discussion of some of the currently unresolved issues facing the Big Society as a policy agenda and identifies the problems of nurturing personal virtue against a

backdrop of liberal individualism in particular for further discussion.

The purpose of this paper is threefold. First, to sketch out what community organising is and what is special about it. Second, to 'join the dots' between community organising and the Big Society, while hopefully making clearer what the latter means. And third, to offer a few thoughts on what the Christian voice can add to the conversation which is distinctive and perhaps challenges and opens up a few unresolved tensions at the heart of current political dialogue.

In so doing, these remarks will be introductory rather than comprehensive. My aim is to introduce some of the themes lying behind the work and mission of the Jellicoe Community and, more broadly, of Christians engaged in politics today.

So, what is community organising? An opening disclaimer must be that, as anyone involved will tell you, community organising has to be experienced before it can be fully understood. Yet allow me to

sketch an outline of what this movement is and what it can offer us as would-be agents of social change.

The term community organising became a little less unknown during the 2008 US presidential election campaign when it emerged Barack Obama had sharpened his political teeth as a community organiser in the South Side of Chicago. But what do community organisers actually *do*?

Community organising is a *method* of political activism more than anything else, and it relies on relationships for its power. Community organising describes the process of building deep relational bonds based on *people* rather than *issues* and then using those relationships to work for the common good. Let me unpack some of that. Almost every form of political activism we know is based on issues. Organisations and alliances emerge to campaign for an issue or an ideology. Make Poverty History, Jubilee 2000 debt campaign, League Against Cruel Sports, Liberty, British National Party, and so on, are all organisations or campaigning alliances orientated around the achievement of goals which are defined in terms of issues or ideology. Community organising is principally

concerned with relationship. It is about ordinary people engaging with politics – that is, the exercise of power – through their institutions – churches, neighbourhood associations, unions, schools – which form an alliance in order to promote the common good, based on relationship building. Community organising is the means by which those institutions form people as democratic citizens, and citizens' organisations are the vehicle by which they, through their institutions, transform society.

Community organising first brings people into relationship with one another, around shared values and concerns, then it deepens that relationship through common action on an agreed issue which is important, at that time, to that set of people. When the issue disappears, however, the people are still there and the relationships are stronger and therefore ready to take action on the next agreed issue. Each time an action takes place, those relationships are deepened and civil society is strengthened and, in a favourite community organising expression, we begin to reweave the fabric of society and thus reverse fragmentary individualism.

So what is a community organiser? The two key roles in a Broad Based Organisation, such as London Citizens in the UK, are organisers and leaders. A leader is a director of a charity, or a parish priest, or a headteacher, or a doctor, or an ordinary citizen with vision. Most people don't think of themselves as leaders, but that's one of the tasks of the organisers – to find people like you, and encourage you to think of yourself as a leader. The organisers are professionals who make things happen. They are employed because they are good relationship-builders. They are skilled at helping people see themselves as leaders, training and encouraging them to act as public people. They facilitate, encourage and empower. They do not direct, determine or decide.

So often our political agenda, indeed much of the philosophical legacy of the Enlightenment and the liberalism which followed in its wake, focused on the capability – the power – of the individual. Yet this ignores the way in which power is built through relationships. The state is powerful versus the people not because it is a single strong agent, but because it is a tightly spun web of institutions, individuals and interests which together have a corporate power which

its individual components might lack. The power of the state to pursue criminal justice, for example, rests on a whole nexus of relationships between the law and the judiciary, the police and other law enforcement agencies, the legislature which makes the law, an effective legal and penal system, and so on. Power is found in networks, and the more we are connected the more potential we have for power. Community organising is about building power on the basis of communities and relationships.

Community organising is based on the premise that, and here I am quoting Austen Ivereigh, "democracy and the market are not machines that run by themselves; and when they are left to themselves, operating in a vacuum of legitimacy, unaccountable, they tend to run amok, detaching themselves from the values and purposes for which they exist. A healthy democracy and a human economy require active, organised citizens, people imbued with habits of heart and mind, and equipped with the arts and skills of public action to hold them to account". Austen is a Catholic community organiser, a journalist and a former public affairs director for Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor, and he is the author of *Faithful Citizens,* the excellent

introduction to Catholic Social Teaching and community organising. It is Austen's contention, shared by many Christians, that the Christian faith in various articulations and expressions has a fundamental commitment to personal and community well-being, what is known as shalom, and a central element of this involves safeguarding both the individual and their community from the dual threats of government and market. Essentially, Christianity is about calling power to account and empowering the weak, the vulnerable and the dispossessed.

This theme of empowerment is central to understanding the principles of community organising because a Broad Based Organisation like London Citizens is a power alliance within which different traditions and interests in the civic sector can act together to bring about change for the common good. Its purpose in so doing is to make both state and market more accountable to civil society.

But what is civil society and why should the state and market be accountable to it?
Civil society is the bedrock of healthy democracy. It is neither public like the state nor private like the market.

Instead, it is made up of what we often refer to as 'voluntary organisations' – churches, schools, charities, resident associations, trade union branches, youth clubs, and so on. The dynamic behind these organisations is not profit and they are not, usually, paid for by the taxpayer. We have all encountered civil society in one form or another. And it is a renaissance of these groups which the Big Society, as a policy agenda, is intended to ignite.

Vital to the Big Society is a belief in the power and importance of community and civil society. In his major speech on Big Society during the run-up to the 2010 general election, David Cameron described it as a "guiding philosophy" in which he aims to create "a society where the leading force for progress is social responsibility, not state control. It includes a whole set of unifying approaches – breaking state monopolies, allowing charities, social enterprises and companies to provide public services, mend our broken society, and rebuild trust in politics. And it's the thread which runs consistently through our whole policy programme – our plans to reform public services, mend our broken society, and rebuild trust in politics. It's about enabling and encouraging people to come together to solve their

problems and make life better". This is intended to be a sweeping and radical agenda.

David Cameron further described his vision for a new Britain in an article in October 2010 in *The Tablet*, in which he wrote "The new British government strongly believes in pushing decisions down to the local level, and in involving as many people and organisations as possible in working for and achieving the well-being of every community".

Those of you familiar with Catholic Social Teaching will immediately recognise the resonance this has with the principle of subsidiarity. Indeed, it interesting to note that two of the major intellectual influences forming the foundations of the Big Society idea have been Philip Blond, author of Red Tory and director of the recently formed policy think-tank ResPublica, and John Milbank, theologian and former teacher of Blond, who are both Anglicans in the Catholic tradition.

However, despite the temptation to indulge in some theology and political philosophy at this point, I do not intend to cover the intellectual basis and roots of Big Society as an idea in itself. I am more concerned to

draw attention to some of its implications as a public policy agenda. As a policy programme it is a moving feast and is being increasingly appropriated as a headline banner for any kind of community orientated, volunteer led activity or group. Sensing the direction of the political wind, almost everyone wanting government support or to 'keep up with the times' is declaring that they are, though they might not have realised it before, a perfect embodiment of the Big Society ideal. Groups including our churches have scratched their heads in puzzlement because, they say with a bit more justification than most, we've been doing Big Society all along. But Big Society as a policy programme, rather than a broader vision, a broader anthropology if you will, of how society might function, is indeed a new development. And as with most new developments, there are still unresolved practical difficulties in its implementation. For a start, and herein lies, for me, the most interesting question and challenge in Big Society, how is it possible – indeed, is it possible – for civil society to be somehow created by government diktat? Is the right place from which to lead the civil society renaissance really the Cabinet Office?

Nat Wei, a young social entrepreneur who is part of the team leading Big Society delivery in the Cabinet Office, used his opening speech in the House of Lords to liken the Big Society to nurturing an ecosystem. His use of metaphor is worth quoting at length:

> I describe this as the big society coral reef, because at the heart of this debate, in my humble opinion, is not just what civil society thinks social policy should be or even what government pronounces, but a collective and very British constitutional negotiation of a partnership for the 21st century that values and combines not just the seabed, the bedrock of our public services – to protect the vulnerable – but the coral represented by the many current and future providers of those services that add variety and innovation and humanity to their delivery. Last but not least it is the very fish that feed in these waters, the local citizen groups that can extend, vivify and shape this landscape in ambitious as well as humble ways. No single part of this ecosystem can or should dominate, but by working well together each comes to

> form a whole that is often more than the sum of its parts.

It is important, with this metaphor in mind, to remember that coral reef develops *organically* and over a *long period* in the *right ecological conditions*.

There is little the government can do about those two first conditions. Indeed, overbearing government action may actually stunt the growth of civil society. In any case, Big Society will almost certainly have slipped off the policy agenda, as all big ideas usually do, within the next five to ten years or so. The experience of community organising demonstrates that the development of a thickly textured community, the creation of deep and faithful communal bonds, takes years and a great deal of hard work which often goes unseen. The best organisers often remain relatively unknown, because they are concerned with building the long-term capacity of others rather than their own reputation. It requires a level of commitment that short term political action cannot – and if we bear in mind it being artificial, should not – sustain.

It is the third aspect on which Nat Wei is absolutely right to liken Big Society to a coral reef. It depends for its survival on the right ecological conditions. This is where government action can help the re-energising of civil society. A great deal of this might mean less government and state regulation – health and safety being a classic target or community group ire, as representative of the growth in regulation on voluntary and community groups. Yet it will also take investment and money. If Big Society is used, as its detractors fear, simply as political cover for government spending cuts then it will not deliver on its objectives. It is in creating the right conditions for civil society, the right legislative and ordered framework for it to flourish, that government is able to act.

However, what I want to avoid explicitly is us falling into the trap of divorcing completely political and civil society, as if government is an entirely alien being to the rest of society. Dialogue between the two is essential. Not least because the idea that there are political people and civil society people is nonsense! Civil servants, politicians and policy makers are – believe it or not – real people.

The problem which inhibits the necessary dialogue between government and civil society is instead, in my view, a question of expectations. There has been fundamentally a failure to ask, let alone answer, important questions about what we consider the role of government to be. We are, I suggest, broadly confused on this.

To give an illustration, health and safety is decried as a burden on community groups, a subject of derision and mockery. Yet what happens when an individual is hurt as a result of negligence by a company or public body? We are an increasingly litigious society and the tendency to blame someone else is endemic. So which do we want? Less regulation on safety, or protection and compensation for when we get hurt? Another issue arose when airlines demanded compensatory payments from the government (which means, in fact, other taxpayers) during the recent volcanic ash incident which closed UK airspace. Their demand may have some justification, though perhaps not, and yet those same airline executives complain about the taxes their companies pay and regulation they endure. Do we want government to pick up the pieces when things go wrong? I believe that there is a strong case for saying

that the state should never have become the default provider of all services in the first place, but if this has been the accepted position since the Second World War, how are we going to break our addiction to government support? We want local control of health services – a change which is coming – but we don't like it when someone living elsewhere can access medicines or treatment that we, because our local health trust (and whether we elect it or not is immaterial to this) has decided not to invest money in that service. We call this, contemptuously, the 'postcode lottery'. But it is an inevitable result of localism. A rather jaded politician said to me once that the problem with British people is that we want Scandinavian standards of social care on American levels of taxation. There is truth in that, and voter expectations deserve to take significant responsibility for the approach and size of government we now have. We might want lower taxes and less government interference in our lives, but are we really prepared to accept a lower level of service from the government or decreased protection?

In other words, we need to ask ourselves what the proper purpose and function of government is, because our answer to this shapes our response to the Big

Society agenda and the wider ideal of civil society. One evident reason why some people reject the Big Society as simply political cover for Conservative cuts is because they perceive the state as responsible for providing services which many believers in Big Society argue should be carried out by civil society and not government. Our understanding of the role of the state is central to our response to Big Society.

I do not have space to develop here a theory of the state, but I am encouraged by renewed serious efforts to do so from a Christian perspective, such as in the recently published *God and Government* which is almost unique in seeking to make political theology accessible to the lay reader.

While I may not have time to talk at length about the role of the state, let me say a little more about why civil society and the state are different.

If the basis of political and economic society is the *contract*, the basis of civil society is the *covenant*. Jonathan Sacks suggests that this is maintained "by an internalised sense of identity, kinship, loyalty, obligation, responsibility and reciprocity". Unlike legal

and economic relationships, civil society relationships are covenantal not contractual. It is an entirely different type of relationship.

Luke Bretherton describes a citizen who is fully part of civil society as a *vow-keeper*. Faithfulness, or vow-keeping, is central for development of any kind of common life. Major social and political movements which have transformed society have been marked by a profound commitment to relationships. The Clapham Sect abolitionists, the Chartists, early trade unionists, the suffrage movement, the Anti-Apartheid Movement, all spring to mind as movements in which personal relationships were prioritised as a means of building powerful civil society bonds. Bretherton remarks that movements like this represent the assertion of the priority of social relationships, and the upholding of common values and a common life over and against their instrumentalisation and commodification through political and economic processes.

There is a problem at a very practical level rooted in the use of the phrase, "common values and a common life". While we might think of certain values which we would like to see included in any definition of the 'common

good', it is not clear that these have any traction as universally accepted aspects of the 'common good'.

To illustrate the point, consider Bretherton's views on faithfulness which he describes as 'vital' for developing common life. Without faithfulness, Bretherton writes, "trust cannot develop, promises are broken, commitments are not kept and so the possibility of long-term reciprocal relations is dissolved". This may well be an observation we share, and we may well regard faithfulness as an important virtue, but is it one widely shared in practice? Any anecdotal survey suggests that commitment is declining in the importance with which it is regarded, in every kind of relationship. It is disturbing to see in London a growing number of billboard advertisements for websites which facilitate marital affairs. I reference this not as symptomatic of a society which devalues faithfulness but as symptomatic of a society which has embraced moral pluralism, or perhaps more accurately a moral vacuum, to the extent that it is prepared to accept someone's right to advertise a service through which a married individual can find a partner for extramarital sex because, one particular poster said, "life's too short to stay faithful". Faithfulness may well be important,

but do we really base that observation on commonly accepted ground?

Now the reason I introduced this paper by describing community organising to you is because it is a method by which the common good is discovered, negotiated and acted on. Through it, we learn to mediate our differing conceptions of the good to find a basis on which we can act. The remarkable thing with community organising, in our experience in east London, is that it is much easier than you might expect to agree on that common ground. It is premised on, and supports, the prioritisation of relationships – family, friendship and neighbourhood – and the commitment to a common set of values: taking responsibility, hard work, loyalty, reciprocity and the dignity of the individual. Yet these are not values that we as a society – that is, we the aggregation of individuals resident in this nation – necessarily advocate, share or experience. The tension for Big Society as a policy agenda, therefore, is that in trying to scale up the kind of society – what some have called a thickly textured community – that community organising nurtures as well as depends on, it relies too heavily on assumptions about the rest of the population.

The question that is begged, and which very few people are currently prepared to talk about too publicly (with the notable exception of Archbishop Rowan Williams in his speech welcoming Big Society with two-and-a-half cheers) is whether Big Society should be concerned with individuals rather than just communities? And by that I don't mean concerned about meeting the needs of people or empowering them per se. I mean, does the Big Society require certain kinds of people to succeed? Surely in any vision of a future society in which we'd like to live, we have to include some clear sense of the kind of people we want to see around. Big Society demands that we reconnect individuals and communities together and stop treating them, as liberalism tends to, as discrete categories. The dominant liberal view in political discourse prioritises the individual autonomous agent. To a large extent this has been a good thing; it helped give us human rights and provides intellectual defences against oppressive powers of state, market or fellow citizen. Yet the decoupling of human rights from responsibilities owes much to us ceasing to think of ourselves as primarily creatures of community. In a very practical sense, the triumph of autonomy and liberalism has led to an exaltation of choice as the high watermark of good

social affairs. Again there is plenty that is good about this, such as the choice to choose our life partners, the choice to choose to believe in God freely, and so on. But there is much about it which is alarming. We forget at our peril that our choices are conditioned, and even the availability of options is curtailed, by the culture and community in which we exist. The liberal ideal of a completely free and rational agent is a myth. We cannot detach ourselves completely from community, even if we can gain a greater or lesser degree of disinterestedness in it.

Now I am getting drawn too far away from my focus and have just made several sweeping statements but my point in doing so is to highlight that there is likely to be a problem when a society which broadly accepts, in an unconscious and largely uncritical way, the main premises of liberal individualism meets a public policy based on a communitarian anthropology, Big Society. The question of whether we need certain types of people to build the Big Society takes us to the heart of this dilemma.

How might we instil virtue in people, that they might invest themselves in civil society and be faithful to it

and to each other? What are the environments in which people can grow and develop and become characterised by virtues such as courage, moderation, the capacity to plan intelligently, fairness, respect?

People do not learn these virtues by being lectured, or inspired in some vague way by a figure like Obama, Mother Theresa or Gandhi. They learn them, it seems, by growing up in dependable communities, in families, in local supportive communities where those virtues are taught, modelled and rewarded.

This leads to an observation that churches are a prime example of such a dependable community where virtue is taught, modelled and rewarded. And for us as Christians we have an even deeper layer of understanding in our belief that we are being recreated, renewed, by the Holy Spirit by God's grace. This talk of virtue is not, I hope, over-laden with negative connotations. If a church supports the family, for example, this is not because of an abstract commitment to Family Values but because of the contention – and, thanks to the work of the Centre for Social Justice in particular, the evidence based case – that what people need most as they grow up is the security and

dependability in their emotional environment found in different ways but often in the family setting. In creating the Big Society we need to work with the grain of these communities.

As I draw this paper to a close, let me refer you back to my earlier discussion of community organising. It is about relational power built across, between and from community. It aims to reweave the fabric of society by investing in social bonds, strengthening them as well as creating some for the first time, and uses these to act to protect the common good. Yet it relies on two assumptions. First, that the common good can be articulated, agreed and acted on. This is the case in London Citizens, but how far and how quickly can this be scaled up? Is it stretching the bounds of possibility to find a common good that we – the British people – can agree on? Is it right for the government to identify the common good? Or should we grant the government an ordering role, as many now argue, and perceive Britain less as a homogenous society and more as a community of communities, as Anglican theologian John Neville Figgis described? Are we prepared, as people who have quite a well developed sense of the common good, to resist attempts to use the state to implement

this and instead put ourselves to the much harder, more time consuming task of building this consensus out of community organising style negotiation, common action and faithful relationships?

The second assumption is that people are prepared to act to achieve this common good. Community organisers talk about finding an individual's self-interest, but this is not the same as myopic selfishness. Being prepared to give up your time to go on demonstrations, do the hard work of activism, spend precious time and energy on relationship building – this all takes a degree of commitment to the common good. And that, I believe, requires individuals with certain virtues which haunt our society still but seem to be in decline. Will the Big Society agenda tackle the question of individual virtue or will it succumb to the weight of liberal individualist assumptions and avoid the question altogether? I believe that those of us of faith have something quite special to contribute to this discussion.

But is this a discussion we are ready to have? Giles Fraser, who is currently canon chancellor of St Pauls Cathedral, wrote in the Church Times on 22 October that "there are times when it is all too sensitive to have

the big argument. Liberals believe only in peace – and they want it even if they have to live off the fat of the past to achieve it".

My concern is that Big Society is doing precisely that. It is reliant on notions of civic society borrowed from a past in which we agreed more readily with a universal understanding of the 'common good' which are no longer the lived experience of large sections of the population. It recalls a time of agreement on personal virtues which is no longer with us though we are haunted by it. Of course there are many exceptions to this, and the proposed Big Society Day is an attempt to recognise these, but they remain exceptions because they are, increasingly, exceptional.

Contextual Theology Centre
Royal Foundation of St Katharine, 2 Butcher Row,
London E14 8DS
Tel. 020 7780 1600
www.theology-centre.org

Published by the Contextual Theology Centre