

**Is Preston becoming a Good City?
Christian understandings of what makes for
a good city**

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Introduction

This essay seeks to make a contribution from a Christian perspective, to discussion of the question, is Preston becoming a good city? The question arises from the 2006 Archbishop's Commission on Urban Life and Faith report *Faithful Cities, A call for celebration, vision and justice*¹. The report is intended to provoke debate and discussion among those who live or work in, make policy affecting or have a concern for cities. In this context the report asks 'What makes a good city?'

This writer recognises that the topic is potentially huge. To answer the question adequately would seem to demand a major profile of Preston, of the nature of cities and the ways in which Preston is a city. The subject also seems to require some exploration of Christian understandings of the notions of good and goodness whilst recognising there will be other understandings. In a post Christian and multi cultural setting, who decides whether Preston is a good city? Are notions of what is good general or particular? An essay purporting to present a Christian perspective must include some theology, and for that it has to draw upon biblical material relating to cities, itself the topic of many books. The essay attempts these tasks but can only do so from a small sample of sources and in an introductory manner.

Having established criteria for deciding what makes a good city, the essay then samples a small selection of policy documents published by the Preston Strategic Partnership, a body that takes a strategic overview of the

¹ Archbishops Council *Faithful Cities – A Call for Celebration, Vision and Justice*. Peterborough/London: Methodist Publishing House/Church House Publishing, 2006

development of Preston and tries to make a critical assessment of how well such policies reflect Christian understandings of what makes a good city.

Preston as City: place, power, process and centre.

Preston gained City status in March 2002 after winning a competition drawn up as part of the Queen's Jubilee Celebrations. But did winning an award make Preston a City or recognise that it already was, or was becoming a city? Just what are the distinctives that separate a city from other patterns of population?

In their analysis of what makes a city Conn and Ortiz cite Press and Smith

“definitions [of cities] largely consist of threshold criteria that describe minimal levels of demographic, institutional, or structural complexity beneath which city or urban levels cannot be applied. Such characteristics are “most readily found in population areas exceeding twenty thousand people.”²

So in terms of size, Preston qualifies with a population of around 130,000. But there are other considerations³.

According to Conn and Ortiz, this complexity is to do with the dynamics of place, power, process and centre, which combine to make up a multi-faceted yet holistic system.

² Conn, Harvey M. & Manuel Ortiz. *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City and the People of God*. Downers Grove, IVP 2001 pp160

³ see

When cities are understood as being about process, they are recognised as being ‘complex mosaics of institutions, family and kinship groups’. ‘Urban’ becomes not just a description of locality but of a mindset (Preston becomes a City because its people and others see it as a city).

When understood as being defined by their power, cities are seen as places that have influence over the surrounding non-city through a concentration of services and being the seat of political administration, economic opportunity and education.

All this can be said to be true of Preston as it has both Town and County halls, is the location for large employers (e.g. BAE Systems) and hosts a large campus of the University of Central Lancashire with 24,000 students⁴.

However, Preston also fulfils another of Conn and Ortiz’s hallmarks of a modern city in that the contrasts of power inequalities can be huge. In central Preston the wards of Ribbleton, Town Centre, Fishwick and St Matthews contain Super Output areas that score within the 10% most deprived in the country⁵, thus linking them with much larger inner city areas of Manchester, Liverpool and London

When cities are understood as being centres it is their expanding borders that engulf once geographically separate towns and villages that is meant and that

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⁵ See www.preston.gov.uk/Documents/General/Regeneration/nrfsummary.pdf

“cities in most western European countries still function as dominant cores for their regions⁶.”

Conn and Ortiz also trace how cities have developed in four ‘urban waves’ through centuries from being Shrine states, to centres of military and colonial power before becoming economic market places and finally centres of manufacture.

In this fourth wave indigenous populations were insufficient to meet the demand for labour so cities became centres that drew in immigrants. Fifteen percent of Preston’s population is from an ethnic minority background⁷

Preston has a large international student population⁸ and a growing population of economic migrants mainly from Eastern Europe⁹.

“Preston based its bid on its history, location, university and the fact that it is the traditional administrative centre of Lancashire¹⁰.”

From this very brief analysis, such a bid seems to have been justified.

Although on a small scale, Preston has many of the hallmarks of a modern city.

⁶ Conn and Ortiz p209

⁷ www.cre.gov.uk/diversity/map/northwest/preston.html

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⁹ Although there are no figures to confirm numbers of migrants the swell in numbers was recognised at a conference held in Preston in 2006 ‘Migrants and Minorities in Preston; A Christian Response? Details and papers are available on request from The Foxtan Centre, Knowsley Street, Preston, PR1 3SA

¹⁰ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hr/england/1872505.stm>

The City: Biblical perspectives

According to Conn and Ortiz, in considering the topic, what are biblical perspectives on the nature of the City we must be careful how we make comparisons.

Many of the cities described, in the Old Testament would bear no resemblance to the cities of today as they could have covered as few as ten acres, and have a population of maybe only a few thousand. A City was defined by its role, often that of fortified guardian of surrounding lands, rather than its size.

According to Conn and Ortiz, many scholars find that the bible is what they term 'antiurban'. Such scholars highlight how in Scripture, cities seem to give rise to all that alienates humans from God. An anti-urban understanding associates a state of perfection with the Garden of Eden. By contrast it is when humans fail and fall that they move away from the garden (the rural idyll where God is known and obeyed) and begin to build cities (the scene of rebellion to and distance from God).

From an antiurban stance Cain's building the first city (Genesis 4) is interpreted negatively. For example Bakke states that Cain founded the first city because after breaking fellowship with God he needed human community to compensate for lost fellowship¹¹. He interprets the story of the building of the Tower of Babel as a sign of human pride and arrogance displacing God.

¹¹ Bakke, Ray. *Theology as big as a city*. London: Monarch Publications, 1997.

Drawing on Ezekiel 16:48-50 he holds that Sodom is destroyed because the rich were getting richer and the poor getting poorer and this was a sure sign of a city under judgement. The same explains the destruction of Jerusalem when it was ransacked by Babylonian forces and the people expelled. This was because, as described in Jeremiah 5, the prophet could not find one honest man,¹² so illustrating how far the people of Israel had broken their covenant with God. This distance from God is illustrated by the oppression of the poor, injustice in the courts, corruption in the marketplace and a failure to offer God true worship as proclaimed by the prophets.

Such a view of cities will provoke the Christian to ask “Do we love the city or leave it? Did God make the country and the devil make the city?”¹³ If it was decided that this was true then we may give up the quest for a good city immediately believing that no such thing is possible as God sits in judgement on such places and peoples.

However, Conn and Ortiz find aniturban scholarship regarding the Old Testament unconvincing. By contrast, in their understanding when Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden they are given a cultural mandate that can be seen as an urban mandate, to populate, subdue and develop the world. This, they term, God’s urban intention and illustrate how God plays out his history of salvation in urban settings. In this interpretation, when Cain

¹² Bakke pp42-43

¹³ Conn and Ortiz p85

builds the city this is indicative of such a human destiny fitting with divine intention.

The history of the people of Israel as described in the Old Testament shows the nation populating and colonising the promised land people. To do this they moved into towns and cities already in existence. Moreover, in the book of Numbers Chapter 35 the Levites are granted cities (or towns) as places of refuge and asylum by the Lord. For Conn and Ortiz, these cities become the Torah Centres, marked by learning, compassion, justice and righteousness as the people live a distinctive life of devotion to Yahweh the universal God in contrast to the indigenous peoples' loyalty to the local Baal deities.

So the Bible is not anti-urban. Cities are not to be seen as places devoid of God; rather in cities the people of God are to live distinctive lives. Even Bakke, who seems to take an anti-urban stance, sees in the stories of people like Ruth the possibility of salvation for cities through divinely inspired human action.¹⁴

Furthermore, cities become places of order, creation, civilisation, life, beauty, safety and religion. This was especially true of Jerusalem in which the Temple was built.

¹⁴ Bakke Chapter 5 Hope in the City

“Jerusalem is depicted as the Holy City which will draw people to it and to Yahweh, Israel’s God (Isaiah 2:2-4, Psalm 48, Psalm 68:31). Jerusalem becomes a unique sign of God’s presence.¹⁵

Conn and Ortiz continue this theme of God’s urban intention when considering the New Testament. Along with Bakke and Murray¹⁶ they are keen to stress the urban nature of Jesus’ ministry. While much of Jesus’ ministry was in the region around the Ten Cities rather than within their walls, nevertheless the area was so populated with urban centres that must have influenced the surrounding society that it is better to see the area as more urbanised than previously thought.

In support of this they refer to Gospel references to “courts (Mt5:25) and city market squares (Mt 23:7; Luke 19:23) and metaphors of God as an absentee landlord (Mk 12:1-12).¹⁷ Any lack of reference to Jesus entering Gentile administrative centres is explained by his mission priority being to the people of Israel.

Similarly, the Acts of the Apostles illustrates how the Gospel is proclaimed in urban settings. The church is described as Ecclesia a word usually used to describe the meeting of an urban group of free male citizens of a city of Greek constitution. This idea of the church as an urban club brings echoes of the people of God as distinctive presence in which there is “neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female” (Galatians 3:28).

¹⁵ Conn and Ortiz pp 90-106

¹⁶ Murray, Stuart *The Challenge of the City: A Biblical View*. Tonbridge. Sovereign World 1993

¹⁷ Conn and Ortiz p120

In summary; cities may be the setting for acts of human depravity and rebellion against God. Yet they are also places in which God acts out his salvific purposes. But, is there a biblical example or vision of a good city?

Jerusalem; the City of God.

As previously stated Jerusalem came to be seen as the Holy City (Psalm 46:5) the sign of God's presence, God's special city exemplified by the building of his temple. Jerusalem came to be seen as the sign of God's grace, benevolence and protection. The decadence and corruption within its walls so condemned by the prophets were more than mere social ills. They were signs that this presence had been taken for granted or rejected. The prophets' call for justice and righteousness, not merely for themselves, but as essential for, and signs of, repentance and the restoration of a right relationship with God.

In exile, the people hope for the restoration of Jerusalem, but in increasingly eschatological terms. "Israel would one day return to the City of God, but not alone. With it would come the Gentile nations "from the ends of the earth" (Jer 16:19).

The theological significance of Jerusalem is heightened (fulfilled) in the events of Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and at Pentecost. Jerusalem is the starting point for Christian mission, a pivotal place in God's (urban) design.

Thus the understanding of Jerusalem as the City of God takes on “an idealised and symbolic form in the New Testament. The Jerusalem that is above is free and Christians are citizens of a heavenly city (Phil 3.20). There is indeed, at Mount Zion, a city of the Living God, a heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22, 13:14); a new Jerusalem which comes down (Rev21-22), in which God will be present in a unique sense, a sense vaguely realised in the Old Testament city of Jerusalem.”¹⁸

Such ideas lead Conn and Ortiz ask

“Can we go against society and take the side of the poor, be one with them and bring Christ to them in word and deed? Such a renewal of people and community exemplifies the new city that God will provide for his people in the last days. The model city is the city of God.”¹⁹

From this brief analysis, it appears that Jerusalem was seen as the model city in signifying the presence of God in the Temple and mirrored in the just and righteous way of life lived by its citizens. However, human weakness results in exile and abandonment. Despite this, hope in God’s eternal purposes remains and this hope still centres on Jerusalem, both materially and symbolically.

Later, the City of God comes to be understood in more eschatological terms to the point where Conn and Ortiz, after Augustine²⁰ appear to understand the

¹⁸ Conn and Ortiz p63

¹⁹ Conn and Ortiz p 339

²⁰ It is outside the scope of this essay to explore Augustine’s writings about the City of God other than to summarise that for him the ‘City of God’ consists of those who will enjoy eternal happiness with God in heaven in contrast to citizens of the ‘earthly city’ who will not. See www.humanities.mq.edu.au/Ockham/y6705.html

perfect city as being somehow beyond, or of a different nature to physical time and space in the here and now.

The 'City of God' becomes an ideal only to be realised in the end times with the final intervention of God in the consummation of his salvific intentions for the world.

So where does this leave us in deciding whether Preston is becoming a Good City?

Ideas of good and goodness.

Hollinger²¹ explains that what Christians understand to be good is shaped by their beliefs about the nature and actions of the Triune God. For Christians, this God is the Creator of a good world. Humankind is made in his image, meaning that there is something of the divine design, nature, potential and value about human beings. However, the world is fallen, that is, failing to achieve its potential; in biblical language, infected with sin. But the gracious God is now working to restore humans and the world to right relationship, through overcoming the alienation, and achieving the redemption of the world. This final consummation will occur when Christ returns as King of Kings. This

²¹ Hollinger, Dennis P. *Choosing the Good* Grand Rapids, Baker Academic 2002

understanding of the nature of God as perceived in the Creation, Fall, Redemption and Consummation is the Christian's foundation of the moral life.

“God as the ground of Christian ethics means that our understanding of the moral good, right, wise and just emanate from the nature and actions of God. As the creator of the universe and the sovereign over all life, God's own goodness becomes the ground or foundation of all human goodness. Goodness is embodied and personified by God.”²²

Therefore, while there may be shared ideas of the good and of human flourishing, for the Christian, there will be a particular understanding.

Choosing the good means choosing a life of love towards God and neighbour, but love that is a reflection of the nature and actions of God: creation, redemption and consummation. Mercy, love, forgiveness and justice are normative because they are rooted in the nature and actions of the Triune God.

Therefore, in seeking a Good City, Christians are likely to be looking for signs that the dignity and value of all human beings is recognised in and by society and that mercy, forgiveness and justice are in evidence in public policy and public life. However, and of note is Hollinger's contention that:

“Public Policy is the art of the possible within the *civitas*. Public policy and the law are usually the ethical minimum of a society. But the ethics of a religion will go further than this minimum, and this is true of Christianity. The further a society is away from adherence to one religion or another, the further it will be from that particular religion's ethics.”²³

²² Hollinger pp63-64

²³ Hollinger p22

Therefore, for the Christian taking a biblical point of view, recognition, by word and deed by its citizens of the rule of God, is likely to be viewed as an essential, if ultimate element to making a city good.

Hollinger suggests that there are two kinds of justice: *retributive* justice; what is due a person when that person has done wrong and *distributive* justice which is to do with what is due a person because of their inherent worth in terms of rights, opportunities, services they receive and ways in which they are treated.

Hollinger recognises difficulties in applying Scriptural texts from ancient cultures and contexts into modern society. However, he identifies as a Biblical normative those morals that are applied consistently in different contexts throughout the Old Testament and that are also confirmed in their application in the New Testament. In this way he describes three main strands in which justice and righteousness in the Bible is to be applied when understanding what is due human beings from a biblical perspective.

Firstly, Justice means there must be fairness and integrity in judicial law (trials Lev 19.15, Deut 16.18-20) and in civil law (in weights and measures Lev 19.35-36).

Secondly Justice means right living in all areas of life, that is, being just socially but also in personal character.

Thirdly, Justice is associated with a special concern for the oppressed, the poor, and those who lack the means of self-sufficiency.

Added to Justice is Love which complements justice in that it goes beyond what justice requires, at times by mitigating the harshness of the verdict of justice or through showing compassion required to those who in the short term lose out, (when, for example, they give wealth away to help the poor).

Similarly, love requires that justice is directed to exposing the societal or structural dimensions of ethical issues.

For Hollinger, it appears, such understandings give a Biblical underpinning to modern notions of equality of opportunity or access.

Equal access means people will not be prevented by personal or external factors from fairly competing for the rights, goods and privileges of any given society.

True justice will also take into account an assessment of need because sometimes what people are 'owed' or 'deserve' is based on their need, and their need may be greater than others because of special factors such as social, physical or psychological barriers preventing or inhibiting equal access.

This is an abbreviated description of Hollinger's analysis of 'good' in society.

He discusses many of the complex issues that arise from such a position,

such as whether welfare always increases self-esteem or the ability to partake in society. But there is no scope to consider matters here, just to recognise that for the sake of this essay, his position is accepted rather than critiqued.

However, one pertinent question that Hollinger does raise is 'what role should the state play in distributive justice?' How much can the state ensure people are good and the City is Good?

For Christians, he says, the biblical model places the onus on a person to be just and for that justice to have social out workings. The state has the task of balancing freedom, justice and order and therefore will not be able to ensure distributive equality. Any state that concentrates exclusively on distributive equality will not be a free society. A state that concentrates on order, will also not be free.

It seems acceptable to draw from this that for a City to be Good the state must play its part in seeking freedom, justice and order, but so must the individual and community, that is, those outside of statutory roles. This is required in a Good City.

Preston's Community Strategy

The Preston Strategic Partnership (PSP) is the key body tasked with overseeing the improvement and development of Preston's economy, social life and wellbeing.

Examination of its work can only be a beginning of any assessment of whether Preston is becoming a good city. Yet it seems a good place to start because of its strategic role. Other considerations must, regrettably, remain outside the scope of this essay.

The Strategic Partnership is headed by a Board. The Board includes representatives from the City and County Council, Health, Education and Employment establishments, the world of Business and Commerce, Housing providers and members of Community, Faith and Youth organisations.

The stated aim of Preston's Strategic Partnership is

“To make Preston the Third City of the North West by 2012.”²⁴

The first of three top priorities in achieving this is the regeneration of the city centre. This involves the development of business, job creation, better training for the workforce and improved transport, cultural, housing and health facilities and the reduction of the fear of crime. The second priority is to reduce crime and improve public safety partly by reducing anti-social behaviour. Thirdly, the strategy seeks to support and work with young people by focussing on their health, leisure, training, housing, employment and environmental needs.

²⁴ Preston City Council. *Community Strategy 2003-2012*
www.prestonstrategicpartnership.org.uk/Documents/Final%20Version%20Community%20Strategy%20.pdf

These aims are informed by seven visions drawn from research into what people in Preston say they wish the city to be like. These visions form the motivation for seven thematic working groups whose task is to fulfil the strategy of, by 2012, making Preston the third city of the North West.

The task of the 'Culture in Preston' group is to develop facilities, events and festivals that will enhance the cultural diversity, harmony and community spirit of the City. 'Preston Values its Environment' sets out to achieve a clean and attractive city paying attention to transport, air, land and water quality, green space and tackling waste and litter. The 'Health and Wellbeing' group aims to improve the quality of life for Preston residents. This is understood to include reducing health inequalities based on where people live, improving life expectancy and "improved health in terms of people's physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social wellbeing."²⁵ For the 'Quality Housing for Preston' working group the aim is to ensure everyone in Preston has the opportunity to live in a decent secure and affordable home in a safe neighbourhood. This will include reducing homelessness, helping the vulnerable and ensuring a range of housing provision to meet varying needs and abilities to pay. 'Learning in Preston' sets out to improve educational facilities and opportunities and provision in the community as well as in educational establishments. The aim of 'Prosperous Preston' is to encourage investment in the City that promotes its economic growth and reputation so that it becomes the 'key Regional City' in terms of Heritage and Tourism as well as economically. Finally, 'Safe Preston' sets out to achieve lower levels of

²⁵ Preston Community Safety Strategy 2003-12 p 20ff

crime and anti-social behaviour and communities that are harmonious, diverse and cohesive.

Particular mention is made in the strategy of the need for Neighbourhood Renewal. This refers to the inequalities in service provision, state of health, access to employment and condition of the living environment experienced by eight inner city wards in comparison to the rest of the City. While each Thematic Working Group has access to funds there is a special Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and a related Renewal Strategy.²⁶ Both aim to identify and tackle the most severe areas and kinds of deprivation.

The Partnership involves the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sectors, the so-called Third Sector. A Compact between the Partnership and Third Sector organisations “aims to improve working relationships, establish best practice in partnership working and seeks to ensure the structural and economic development of organisations and groups within the Third Sector.”²⁷

A Progress Report published in 2006²⁸ sets out to capture what has been achieved, what still needs to be done and where performance is weak.

²⁶ Preston Strategic Partnership. *Preston Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy 2006* www.prestonstrategicpartnership.org.uk/Documents/Local%20Neighbourhood%20Renewal%20Summary%20Strategy%202006.pdf

²⁷ Preston Strategic Partnership and Preston Community Network: Preston Community Compact www.prestonstrategicpartnership.org.uk/category.asp?cat=668

²⁸ Preston Community Partnership *Report 2006*. www.prestonstrategicpartnership.org.uk/Documents/Final%20PSP%Annual%20Report%2013%20Jun%202006.pdf

Analysis of the Strategy

One effect of having a Strategy with objectives to achieve and Progress Reports to monitor achievement, is that it gives a sense of Preston 'becoming'. The aim of the Partnership is for that 'becoming' to result in its 'third city of the North West' status. But is it becoming a Good City? What echoes of the biblical picture of cities do we find in the aims and visions of the strategy?

This topic can only be tackled with the recognition that the Bible does not address the vast array of contemporary issues confronting cities as illustrated by their inclusion in the strategy. However, as Hollinger says, the Bible does give frameworks and paradigms for modern application and we have identified some of these.

The Strategy seems to hint at a Preston similar to Oakley's notion of the City as a place in which God is present.

“the cities are wonderful places for us to learn more about the Divine method of being alive. Our constant encounter with difference and our fight to be a citizen, rather than just a consumer, are both pregnant opportunities for spiritual growth...the cities offer many opportunities for service to those who need assistance and human support.”²⁹

Yet the Strategy is a secular document, making no overt reference to religious symbolism.

²⁹ Reclaiming Faith by Mark Oakley in Walker, A. *Spirituality in the City*. London SPCK 2005

For Sheldrake,³⁰ cities need vision to truly prosper. He says, however, that the vision must be formed from a 'dialectical relationship' between the city as community *civitas* and the city as physical place *urbs*. Only when this occurs will there be a community centred plan for cities in which planners take into account how people live, and how they hope to live.

That the Strategy begins with vision, and that that vision is purportedly in response to consultation with local people, seems, therefore, commendable.

The thematic working groups tackle topics and set out to achieve aims remarkably similar to those identified in the Faithful Cities report from 'two years of listening and consultation aimed at establishing what people want in a good city (valued inhabitants, diverse and inclusive community, well led and active etc.).'³¹ This seems to imply that there is some kind of shared common vision, some shared ideas of the common good across our many-cultured society.

The Faithful Cities report calls for Urban Regeneration with people in mind.³² By this it means urban regeneration should be driven by values that 'reflect human satisfaction and purpose of life rather than the present preoccupation with quantity and economic growth.' It also states that regeneration strategies must be in response to the hopes and desires of local people.

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³¹ Faithful Cities p 58-60

³² Faithful Cities Chapter 6.

The Preston Community Strategy does indeed mention the need for linked green space and talk of regeneration in terms of human wellbeing and quality, rather than just quantity of life. This trend will need to continue to be applied if the hoped for £800 million Tithebarn City Centre regeneration scheme is realised.³³

The work of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy seems to reflect the biblical mandate for special provision for the poor and oppressed.

However, whilst there is a Faith Forum in Preston and it is supported by, and represented on, the Strategic Partnership³⁴ the strategy makes no mention of faith or faith groups. It speaks of spiritual development but not of religion. Why this is so is not clear. Religion and Faith, if recognised at all, may be subsumed within culture. This seems to imply that diversity is valued above religion, or that multi-faith matters are too complex to include in a strategy document. However, it does highlight that hidden away within talk of, say, human well-being are a number of different views of what that constitutes. For a Christian, human well-being and flourishing will involve an awareness of the nature of the God of Creation, Redemption and Consummation.

Likewise, what is meant in the report by spirituality, will have different meanings to different people. For example, as Williams puts it:

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³⁴ See www.prescap.co.uk/Faith%20Forum%20website%2016,3,05/Index.ht.

“ ‘spirit’ in biblical Christianity is a word describing the human self in tune with the truth of its own nature and with God, it is always a term that involves thinking about human interrelatedness.”³⁵

Faithful Capital

One effect of this apparent failure to recognise faith is to fail to recognise the contribution faith communities can and do make to a City’s becoming a Good City. The Faithful Cities report calls this contribution *Faithful Capital*.

Faithful Capital is seen in a faith community’s presence in and commitment to a community. The faith community is a resource of people, buildings, ideas and action. The action often makes a significant contribution to the wellbeing of the community and city.”³⁶ As Archbishop Rowan Williams puts it:

“The Church’s fundamental beliefs are about commitment – God’s commitment to a people, Christ’s commitment to a weak and failing body of human followers, the commitment embodied (literally) in the incarnation and resurrection. The question the Church always has to ask of any society, and any project within society, is about how it reflects the kind of enduring commitment to individuals and groups that builds them up and changes them and makes them what they can be.”³⁷

Conclusion

This essay sets out to make a contribution, from a Christian perspective to a discussion as to whether Preston is becoming a good city. It does so hesitantly and concludes in like manner. Perhaps what we have found is that there are notions of good and what makes for a good city that Christians and

³⁵ Urbanization, the Christian Church and the human project in Walker, A. ed. Spirituality in the City. London SPCK 2005

³⁶ For examples of such faith community action see Vincent, John. ed. *Faithfulness in the city*. Hawarden Monad Press 2003

³⁷ Faithful Cities Introduction page v

others share. There is some common understanding of language and ideas around human well-being and flourishing. There is an agreement for the need for justice, equality of opportunity, of valuing human dignity, creativity and uniqueness. There may be some shared notions of the need for vision. Yet at some point in any discussion, the Christian perspective will want to take leave of those common standpoints in the desire to say something more, or distinctive. These distinctives will be those that accord with a Christian world view and be informed by biblical motifs, distinctives in which the activity of the Triune God is sought, recognised, welcomed and anticipated. The answer whether Preston is becoming a good city will ultimately depend on the worldview of those who are making the answer.

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