THE SHAPING OF PUBLIC THEOLOGY IN EMERGING CHURCHES

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Abstract

‘Emerging churches’ claim they express new forms of mission and innovation appropriate for a post-Christendom context. A major text is Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch’s The Shaping of Things to Come, which advocates pioneering such churches throughout the Western world and giving priority to incarnational mission, non-dualistic spirituality and pioneering leadership. This paper examines the basis for public theology in Frost and Hirsch, and using Frost and Hirsch as a point of reference, analyses the public theology of three churches in Melbourne as case studies: Eastern Hills, Urban Life and Solace. These emerging churches in Melbourne are reflecting afresh on their approach to mission. They understand mission not as one of their church departments but as God’s mission in which they seek to participate. Commonly they see that mission needs to holistically include mercy and advocacy for justice and not just evangelism. They are beginning to reflect on the implications of the mission of the whole people of God; that it is the role of all of God’s people, not just professionals, and that it is carried out through the week and not just on Sundays. Adopting the language of everyday spirituality and a theology of vocation that helps people express mission in all of life is not unique to emerging churches, but they are particularly open to these perspectives as part of re-imagining mission in the public square.

Introduction – the public square and emerging churches

Most eighteenth-century small-towns had their public square or what was known as the commons. It typically included all the major social, business and government buildings. Law court, town hall, chamber of commerce, entertainment venues and church were all in this public space in which public life was enacted. We now use the term not about physical place but a space for mutual acknowledgement and ongoing debate. Public theology, as I am beginning to understand it as a newcomer to the conversation, is the thinking in the public square that we do about society. Contrary to forces of secularisation that would restrict Christian beliefs to the private realm, public theology asserts that there is a valid and valuable Christian voice to bring to public debate and decision-making about society, of which Christians are a part.¹

It is interesting to me that the conversations of this conference are in Canberra’s not public square but public triangle of government and other buildings. We appreciate the hospitality of ACCC and appreciate ACCC’s acknowledgment’s of indigenous

¹ For descriptions of the terms secularisation, public square, civil society and public theology see Colin Greene and Martin Robinson, Metavista: Bible, Church and Mission in an Age of Imagination (Milton Keynes: Authentic, 2008), 210-212.
In this paper, I want to look locally and particularly at the public theology of three emerging churches in Melbourne. Emerging churches are a global, cross-denominational movement that claim they are expressing new forms of mission and innovation appropriate for a postmodern, post-Christendom context. I have been visiting, interviewing and analysing case studies of how some Melbourne emerging churches express mission and innovation for their local contexts. (This is a project I am finishing over the next fifty-six days, or hopefully less, as I finish off my thesis, so I welcome your feedback and conversations, and want to express appreciation and my debt to Ross Langmead for his supervision and guidance in the project, and so also his influence in this paper). The thesis considered what forms mission takes in the lives of individuals and through the life of the congregations, how they form and express community, and how they introduce innovations and plan change. Fundamentally I was asking: Does the reality of emerging churches match the rhetoric? What can other churches learn from emerging churches, and what are emerging churches yet to learn? In this paper, I focus on the extent, nature and quality of their engagement with public theology; that is, what do they say and do in the public square. It explores ‘the shaping of public theology in emerging churches’, through the lenses of three emerging church case studies and one influential emerging church text.

*The Shaping of Things to Come*

An influential book for the emerging church movement, especially in Australia, is Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch’s *The Shaping of Things to Come*. They argue for the need for multiplying new missional structures, offer a theological paradigm for emerging churches and share stories from around the world of imaginative new expressions of church. The authors’ focus is not revitalising established churches, though they acknowledge a place for that. Their vision is to see new culturally diverse missional communities planted with three organic characteristics:

- ‘incarnational ecclesiology’ that infiltrates community networks
- ‘messianic spirituality’ that engages culture and everyday rhythms of life
- ‘apostolic leadership’ that pioneers new and innovative mission, prophetically questions the status quo and evangelistically goes beyond the church’s walls.

Each of these have some degree of relevance for public theology.

‘Incarnational ecclesiology’ is their primary framework for missionary practice. They maintain that as the fruit of God’s Incarnation, the people of God should be *incarnational* by entering into a culture, identifying with the people and experiencing

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3 My research had not specifically explored public theology but I revisited my DTtheol research and its underlying data and considered what forms of public theology they are developing and communicating.
life as an insider. Their vision is of a ‘go to them’ rather than ‘come to us’, missional rather than extractional, and incarnational rather than attractional approach. Leaving aside the debate over how helpful that dichotomy is, incarnational ecclesiology is helping emerging churches to think about: (1) how they can engage people in their community networks; (2) how they can utilise what Ray Oldenburg describes as ‘third places’: pubs, cafes, clubs and interest groups that people use as informal public gathering places, and so ‘invade secular space’; 6 and (3) how they engage not just church maintenance or even pragmatic ‘church growth’ issues but broader public issues.

Another distinctive of emerging/ missional churches which Frost and Hirsch advocate is non-dualistic and Jewish-inspired ‘messianic spirituality’.7 Messianic spirituality relates to the practical implication of Jewish monotheism that God is the one God over all of life; 8 that Jesus is Lord over all aspects and dimensions of life.9 Their agenda is to critique dualistic approaches to life which limit faith to the ‘sacred’ sphere of private belief and which warn against too much ‘secular’ entanglement. They argue God can be found and that we can work with God not just in the worship sanctuary but in everyday life and the public arena, and Monday to Saturday as well as Sunday.10

Thirdly, Frost and Hirsch, advocate for ‘apostolic leadership’ which pioneers new initiatives beyond the walls of the present church, and prophetic-type leaders who challenge the status quo and those who evangelistically proclaim what is good news, as well as pastors and teachers.11 They accept, and celebrate, that the church is on the margins of society, and can no longer presume a privileged role in the centre of the public square. They say that as the people of God, and living as we do in a significant time of transition and change, the church exists in a place of liminality, using Victor Turner’s phrase.12 The leadership task, drawing on Newbigin and the Gospel our

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6 Frost and Hirsch, Shaping, 40, 74-75; Ray Oldenburg, The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You through the Day (New York: Paragon House, 1989); Martin Robinson and Dwight Smith, Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow’s Church (London: Monarch, 2003). For each of the four churches of my research, their exploration of incarnational mission led to geographic moves and experiments in using ‘third places’ or at least shared public buildings. Connection left behind the old Croydon Church of Christ buildings and went through at least seven venues. Eastern Hills started in one community centre and have moved to a larger one. Urban Life moved from their old ‘country club’ acreage and large buildings to their renovated café and community centre in the centre of Ringwood. Solace started at Carey Grammar School Chapel and has since moved to St Paul’s in Fairfield, as well as using Balwyn Baptist and North Fitzroy Arts Centre for some of their activities. Their interesting choices of location, however, are just a symbol and tool for their mission of incarnating the presence of Christ in their communities. A paper on the relationship of church mission and buildings at the conference is: Margaret Reeson, ‘Too Big, Too Small: Finding Homes for Christian Communities’ (Paper presented at Australian Association of Mission Studies & Public and Contextual Theology conference ‘Christian Mission in the Public Square’, Canberra, 4 October 2008).

7 Frost and Hirsch, Shaping, 111-162.

8 Frost and Hirsch, Shaping, 126-128.

9 Hirsch, Forgotten Ways, 83-100, 143; see also Michael Frost, Eyes Wide Open: Seeing God in the Ordinary (Sydney: Albatross, 1998), 100-188; Frost, Exiles, 68-70, 97.

10 Frost, Exiles, 97.


Culture Network, is not to reassert the church as chaplain to society or provider of religious goods and services, but to imaginatively point to a fresh vision of God’s purposes in the world and explore how to encounter culture with the gospel.13

These are not unique or original contributions, but they are popularly adopted in emerging church circles and they are consistent with and potentially reinforce a public theology. The rest of the paper explores examples of how public theology is expressed in three local and particular emerging churches and considers whether they live up to the missional/ non-dualistic/ apostolic rhetoric of the literature. I hope these congregations will show some keys and principles for congregational public theology.

**Eastern Hills – Creating lives which reflect the kingdom of God**

Eastern Hills Community Church is a new church planted in Croydon by a group of young adults. They share passions for social justice and engaging the world, enjoying community and hospitality together, and celebrating anything creative from worship to cooking. Leadership is intentionally shared, although Toli and Emma Morgan have emerged as the main pastors. They meet at Yarrunga Community Centre and have sought to engage the broader community at a variety of levels – cultural awareness, high school groups, a creative group for people with mental illness, a soup kitchen team, assistance for Sudanese asylum seekers, and basically supporting anything people want to get involved in. Their original planning was inspired by reading N T Wright and rethinking how to express church, which they see as encapsulated in their mission statement, ‘Creating Lives which Reflect the Kingdom of God’.

A distinctive of Eastern Hills is engagement with their broader world. As a student at Bible College of Victoria, Toli vividly remembers a 1996 chapel sermon by Steve Bradbury, National Director of TEAR Australia.14 To introduce himself, Bradbury thanked the team that led worship and then commented:

> I have just come back from visiting quite a few different slums in Asia where we have different community development projects going and what we do here in worship has to somehow be connected. It must be connected to what is going on there is those slums in Asia.15


14 TEAR is a movement of Christians responding to the needs of poor communities around the world through relief and development partnerships. See [http://www.tear.org.au/](http://www.tear.org.au/).

15 Recalled by Toli Morgan, ‘Church and Culture Workshop: A Conversation with Eastern Hills Community Church’ (Becoming Multicultural Conference, Whitley College School of Ministry, Melbourne, July 2006).
Bradbury was urging students to do worship and theology which connected with global needs. Toli says they have been responding to that challenge:

It sort of summarises quite nicely the theological questions that we were wrestling with at that time … there was a bunch of friends who [were] really sort of wrestling with those sort of theological questions … how does the Gospel touch culture? How do we do Church in such a way that it is connected with the world in which we live, with the community in which we live? … How do we actually make this connection between our Worship on a Sunday and what happens in our world?²⁶

These questions about engaging world needs have inspired the formation and direction of Eastern Hills.

Eastern Hills have a creative, interactive approach to worship, and seek to engage the broader world through worship. One morning I attended we sang ‘Lord have your way’ and were invited to voice concerns for our world. It was a creative but simple framework for a pastoral prayer time. People mentioned Uganda and people coming out of slavery, indigenous communities, Iran, Iraq, East Timor, Jakarta, ‘my classroom’, Croydon Secondary School, mercy and wisdom for world leaders, people in prison especially a particular friend and people in local Supported Residential Services (SRS) housing. After praying for these concerns – mostly people on the margins and for troubled regions around the world – the worship leader also prays in a kind of ‘by the way God’ prayer for our families and those not with us today. It was a refreshing contrast to pastoral prayer times where a congregation focuses on itself and friends and family, and the worship leader’s ‘by the way’ prayer is for the broader world. For communion on another Sunday, we were invited to ‘bring our whole world to the table’ and write out on newspapers our frustrations including those things which distress us.²⁷ Using newspapers in worship helps people keep the connection between faith and public life.

At a local level, their mission or public engagement is expressed in a diverse number of ways. They understand themselves as the people of God sent into their world to bring life: ‘we believe the Holy Spirit sends us to our homes, local community and wider world and empowers us to bring about love, truth, hope, healing, beauty and justice’.²⁸ As a sent people engaging with global needs, they promote fair trade coffee and tea sales, and have prepared a ‘Sunday best cookbook’, sales of which go to Australian Wildlife Conservancy.²⁹ Their first social gathering was a rally to protest the deepening of Melbourne bay.³⁰ The church has ‘adopted’ Croydon Secondary College and runs lunchtime programs there with Youth Dimension. It started a Monday night soup kitchen, casserole bank and emergency fund to help people in need. The church has organised and helps sponsor a Thursday night indoor soccer

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²⁶ Morgan, ‘Church and Culture’.
²⁹ ‘Eastern Hills [Website]’.
team, which included a few Sudanese teenagers, and a volleyball team for Sudanese and soup kitchen friends.\(^\text{21}\) One of the main expressions of compassion and advocacy as a community is for members of the Sudanese community.\(^\text{22}\) Their engagement with the world has included a commitment to help make it more in line with the kingdom of God.

**Figure 1 : Eastern Hills Service**

![Eastern Hills Service](image)


**Urban Life – Living for the wellbeing of our community**

Urban Life has recently been transformed from Christian Life Centre, a flagship of the Christian Revival Crusade. It relocated from the ‘country club’ acreage on Ringwood’s outskirts into an old nightclub in the centre of Ringwood. They explain ‘The Urban’ is a café, community centre and children’s play area that also has church here on Sundays. They want to be a church their community would miss if they disappeared, and so have fostered community ministries, a soup kitchen, high school ministry, craft group, book club, Prime Timers social group, role-playing games and an exercise group. (In their NCLS measures, they show high scores on practical and diverse service – higher than average, though lower than might be expected and lower than average measures of faith-sharing and newcomers).\(^\text{23}\) Doug Faircloth handed over leadership to Anthea Smits and together they have revisioned what they do as a church around the twin priorities of community and mission. For them, community is

\(^{21}\) Eastern Hills, ‘Focus Group #2’; Toli Morgan and Emma Morgan, Eastern Hills pastors, Interview #2 by the author (17 July 2006).

\(^{22}\) Krystal, ‘Church and Culture Workshop: A Conversation with Eastern Hills Community Church, and Their Journey with Sudanese Refugees’ (Becoming Multicultural Conference, Whitley College School of Ministry, Melbourne, July 2006).

‘doing life deeply together’, exemplified by ‘Get Together’ small groups around a shared meal. Mission is ‘being found about our Father’s business’, which they have broadened beyond Pentecostal gifts and overseas giving. Their focus is captured in their mission statement: ‘Living for the wellbeing of our community’.

There are glimpses of missional activity in CLC’s history. Like many evangelical-charismatic-Pentecostal (EPC) churches, rhetoric was high for mission and evangelism, but the reality was that church programs which aimed at attracting and keeping people in church consumed a lot of energy. Furthermore, Anthea grew disillusioned with Pentecostal manifestations which had no missional outworking. CLC had been a centre for charismatic renewal since the 1970s and through to the infamous ‘Toronto Blessing’ in the mid 1990s. But it bemused Anthea that ‘amazing miracles’ did not often lead to passion for witness, community engagement and mission as she expected they naturally should.

Anthea teaches that mission is ‘being found about our heavenly Father’s business’. That means ‘finding God’s heart for a situation and being that, in partnership with God’. The best picture of mission, therefore, is God’s own self (Acts 2:42) rather than an activity or department of the church. Mission describes God’s character. So Anthea, like many in the emerging missional church movement, has had her imagination captured by missio Dei ‘the mission of God’ or ‘the missionary God’ as articulated by David Bosch and considered at the conference by Nico Koopman.

Anthea is clear to explain their holistic approach to mission involves proclamation and justice and mercy. Urban Life people often talk about their desire to see people come to faith through verbal witness. But they also have a clear commitment to service and demonstrating the gospel in action. Anthea says, ‘Christianity is often about populating heaven, where it needs to be about transforming earth’.

Urban Life is engaging their local community in a set of new ways. A daily mission opportunity for Urban Life is their café, kids’ play area and community centre in the midst of Ringwood’s shopping centre. The space they provide is a witness to a relevant church which is prepared to serve, and sometimes leads to opportunities to talk about faith. The church also gets involved in Clean Up Australia Day, a Pay It Forward (PIF) program with the local council and a schools ministry at a local high

24 Douglas Faircloth, Urban Life coaching pastor, Interview #1 by the author (20 June 2006).
27 Anthea Smits, Urban Life senior leader, Interview #2 by the author (8 August 2006).
28 Smits, ‘Interview #2’.
31 Smits, ‘Interview #2’.
school with mentoring, weekly breakfast and school camps. Each year they support the World Vision Forty Hour Famine, but in 2006 instead of fasting from food they spent their time cleaning the local methadone clinic. So as well as a variety of ongoing global projects in Cuba, Vietnam and Cambodia, they are increasingly involved in local community service.³²

Urban Life leaders are also engaged in advocacy for justice. Doug has good contacts with local political leaders and strong networks with broader church leaders – around Melbourne and internationally. His advocacy for social justice often becomes part of the prayers and giving of the church.³³ Although his political role, in the terms Shane Clifton spoke of earlier in the conference, is one of indirect influence.³⁴ Interestingly, Doug works part-time for Urban Life and part-time for a consulting business, a move which has impressed some who see how he integrates a life of mission with ‘normal’ work.

Figure 2 : Urban Life café

![Urban Life café](Photo by author. 23 July 2006.)

Solace – to enable a people to thrive as followers of Jesus, celebrating and re-making their everyday world

Solace was started by Olivia MacLean as an extra congregation of St Hilary’s Anglican in Kew. It has since branched off on its own but maintained Anglican and also Baptist relationships. From the beginning, the group wanted to create space for theological questioning and interactive worship for all ages and stages of faith and all learning styles. They focus on celebrating everyday spirituality and the vocation and

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³³ Steve and Rowena, Urban Life leaders, Interview by the author (27 July 2006).
mission of all members of their network. Their book *Remaking* and its seven ways of Jesus-centred spirituality are key tools for nurturing mission in everyday life. They help people reflect on their passions and dreams and celebrate stories of people being better neighbours, friends, advocates, businesspeople, teachers, nurses and environmental carers. They also have a particular local interest in Fairfield, where they are based now at St Paul’s and are developing a family wellness centre. The real focus of Solace, however, is not supposed to be any church events or pastors, but Solace participants living out the ways of Jesus. The most basic principle of Solace is ‘to enable a people to thrive as followers of Jesus, celebrating and re-making their everyday world’.36

Theologically, an understanding of the mission of God and the incarnation is an inspiration for Solace as they live out ‘being sent’ like Jesus. They articulate their incarnational basis in their constitution:

> Just as Jesus lived among a people of a particular time and culture so do we seek to live amongst people of our time and culture. Furthermore Jesus engaged in every aspect of life and taught that the work and reign of God encompasses the entire world, all things are or can be sacred and made new.37

Stuart said they are influenced most significantly in this by James Thwaites who teaches that the church as the body of Christ is the work of God in the entire world and not just the institutional church.38 Their focus is explicitly the ‘scattered church’, when the people of God are not ‘gathered’ for worship. They applaud the work of God inside church programs but also, and perhaps more importantly for mission, ‘beyond the congregation’.

Solace’s book *Remaking* is a collection of stories, artwork and exercises from twenty writers and ten artists, structured around the seven ‘Ways of Jesus-centred spirituality’.39 The first of the seven Ways focus on this sacramental tradition of celebrating God in the ordinary events of everyday life and work:

> *The Way of the Everyday* is about acknowledging that God is both above all things and in all things – that there exists no separate categories of

37 Solace, ‘Solace Community Draft Constitution’2006, http://www.solace.emc.org.au/dev/constitution.pdf/ [Accessed October 4]. This was drafted by a graduate of Regent College, Vancouver, which is known for its spirituality of vocation and everyday life.
spiritual and unspiritual, and that God can be found, and has an integral interest, in all that happens in the world.\footnote{Solace, \textit{Remaking}, 22.}

This denial of sacred-spiritual divisions is consistent with Frost and Hirsch’s nondualistic messianic spirituality, though Solace prefers more accessible language of everyday spirituality.\footnote{Frost and Hirsch, \textit{Shaping}, 111-162; Solace, Leaders’ Focus Group (3 April 2008).} The other six Ways also explore everyday themes – for example, following the Spirit of God already at work in bringing about God’s good intention in the world.\footnote{Solace, \textit{Remaking}, 94.}

Solace celebrates the ‘Way of the everyday’ in people who seek to remake their world in their work and relational lives. Pastors honour a physics teacher who started an ethics class for students, a businessperson who cuts profits by 15% to check that overseas manufacturing is as ethical as possible and the Year 10 student who attends the Christian group at school even though it is not his peer group.\footnote{Jude Waldron, Solace pastor, Interview #1 by the author (1 August 2006).} There is a research scientist who devotes herself to malaria research, conscious it does not attract huge funding but is one of the largest killers of poor people. A young couple is investing in housing which gives preference to marginalised people looking for rental properties.\footnote{Olivia MacLean, ‘The Ways of Solace’ (Forge Spirituality, Discipleship & Sustainability conference, Tabor College, Melbourne, 8 July 2006); Solace, \textit{Remaking}, 188-189.} Someone, with Solace’s encouragement, has encouraged his employer, a bank, to set up a contribution scheme so that when people contribute to their home loans, the bank contributes to a homeless scheme.\footnote{Waldron, ‘Interview #1’.} Karly moved into a new street and put on an afternoon tea to meet her new neighbours.\footnote{Olivia MacLean, Solace pastor, Interview #2 by the author (17 May 2007).} A couple of people have a weeknight set apart for writing to politicians.\footnote{Cate Lewis, ‘Just Letters’, Email post <solacecommunity@yahoogroups.com.au> (23 November 2006).} The naming and celebrating of these things reminds the community of their identity and how they are living out their purpose of remaking the world.\footnote{Barb Totterdell, ‘Edge of Chaos Solace’ (Class paper, Melbourne: Ridley College), 2004, 4.} Talking about how some people are doing radical things to remake their world inspires others to consider how to express their faith and vocation in their everyday context.

Friends of Abigail spoke of the example of her passions. She is passionate about Australian native plants and regenerating native areas, and has organised the involvement of Solace in Friends of Glass Creek, Greening Australia tree planting and Clean Up Australia.\footnote{See \url{http://www.GreeningAustralia.org.au}; \url{http://www.cleanup.org.au/}.} She is encouraged that ‘restoring the world in God’s intent’ is seen as part of her mission. As a parent Abigail seeks to help her children, though not explicitly Christian, to orient their lives the way God would want them. Furthermore, she expresses a strong sense of call to her work, teaching English as a second language. She appreciates that Solace validates her broader vocation and says that part of the purpose of Solace is to support people and their work rather than expecting they have to go somewhere else, for example Pakistan, if they want to be involved in mission. Whether through hobbies, relationships or work, she has a Solace-inspired or
at least Solace-affirmed understanding that bringing the life of the Kingdom of God is valid mission whether or not you mention the name of Jesus.  

Solace is active in environmental care as an aspect of holistic mission. Some EMC literature shows awareness of global mismanagement and the responsibility for Christians to be at the forefront of environmental sustainability. Remaking includes descriptions of global environmental challenges and suggestions for local action and stewardship which can make a difference to a person’s environmental footprint. Solace has participated in Clean Up Australia days. Solace are proud that they are a community which can see worship in a broader sense than singing and listening in a church service. For Solace, it was a distinctive annual event which set them apart from their mother church, which was concerned with keeping ‘normal’ worship services going every Sunday. Solace saw cleaning up parks together and with the broader community as an appropriate act of worship in itself.

‘Everyday spirituality’ is not merely a personal and individualised approach to faith. It reflects awareness that God is relevant to all of life and invites people to integrate their work, recreation and interests with their vocation. Remaking has a strong foundation of everyday spirituality, but it bases this on allegiance to a God who is interested in all spheres, not just longing for a deity who will bless the spheres in which a particular person is interested. For example, it resists narrow individualising of a consumer faith which is only good as long as it helps a person’s happiness. It points instead towards faith which builds hope in the midst of the bigger issues of our day: ‘To believe in a God who will protect you from car accidents and find you car parks sounds more like relying on fate rather than developing a spirituality which supplies meaning and hope’. Everyday spirituality is an aspect of mission not because it promises God will accompany people as their assistant through life, but because it invites people to enter and experience the Kingdom of God wherever they are involved. People at Solace understand that part of mission is bringing Kingdom values into everyday spheres. Solace is thus developing a mature and explicitly missional approach to everyday spirituality and public theology.

The model of ministry and structure of Solace are directed towards helping facilitate everyday spirituality. All staff are part-time, so they have a ‘foot in the world’ and can experience and model the challenges of balancing church and other work. They give priority to encouraging people to find and live out their vocations, rather than operating church programs. Stuart sees his ministry as a pilgrim-guide, like a spiritual director who travels alongside to help people find their passions. One of his dreams, for example, is to encourage the number of Children’s Hospital workers from Solace to get together for prayer and encouragement to help make the hospital the best it can be. Solace staff see it as their role to help people do the right things more than believe the right things. Olivia said they have a saying: ‘Jesus Christ bled for this

50 Solace, participants, Focus group #5 by the author (29 October 2006).
51 E.g, Frost, Exiles, 203-250; Alan J Roxburgh, Reaching a New Generation: Strategies for Tomorrow’s Church (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 76-92.
52 Solace, Remaking, 137, 176-180.
53 Solace, Remaking, 16.
54 Waldron, ‘Interview #1’.
55 Davey, ‘Interview’.
earth, so go and bloody do something about it’.56 They take time to intentionally ask questions like ‘Where is God taking you?’, ‘What are you enjoying?’, ‘What are you passionate about?’, ‘What is it about this community you are living in that you connect with?’ and ‘What are you challenged about or celebrating with people around you?’.57 Solace wants to help people dream about how to remake their everyday world – this is perhaps the most significant part of the shaping of public theology in Solace.

Recognising what God is doing in the world and joining in with that is important for Solace. The influence of this perspective can be seen in Stuart Davey’s work with SPACE. They begin their time by asking what good is already happening in their community: for example, things to cheer, celebrations to join and conversations which lead somewhere. Their meetings are discernment exercises to examine what good God is doing in their community so they can join in.58 This is a congregationally-based expression of public theology that I trust and pray we will see more of.

Figure 3: St Paul’s, Fairfield (Solace north-eastern hub)

Photo by author. 3 October 2006.

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56 MacLean, ‘The Ways of Solace’.
57 Solace, ‘Focus Group #1’.
58 Davey, ‘Interview’; inspired by Thwaites, Church Beyond the Congregation.