

How and where does God take place? How does the Holy Spirit make herself at home?

These were the challenging questions posed by German-Norwegian theologian, Sigurd Bergmann, at the international conference *God/city/place: interdisciplinary perspectives*, organised by the Lincoln Theological Institute at the University of Manchester on December 8th, 2006.

The conference was designed to advance theological discussion by bringing together two theologians and a critical theorist of space to engage critically with the question: how are the spaces of cities to be developed as habitable places, and what religious resources are relevant to this discussion? Opening the conference, urban geographer Edward Soja (UCLA and LSE) presented his view of the new contours of the emerging postmetropolis: our cities are making a journey, he argued, into a new form of the urban. Global patterns—including cultural heterogeneity, flexible and information-based capitalism, new ways of urbanisation, new technologies—were leading to an intensification of social and economic inequalities in the city, and new forms of control. Soja closed his remarks by arguing for spatial justice and democracy in the city, challenging theologians to see injustice as socially produced rather than as God-given or environmentally-given.

Picking up some of these themes, Sigurd Bergmann (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim) argued for a plastic-critical theory of the urban, and posed the question: given the boundaries and symbolics of exclusion in our cities, what sort of God, and what account of the spatiality of God, might be understood as critical of these? In this context, how is the ubiquity of God, the incarnation of God and life-giving Spirit to be interpreted? Nor were these all the questions that Bergmann urged his audience to consider. In an extended coda to his paper, Bergmann enquired after the theme of remembering and forgetting in the city: if amnesia is a necessary condition of the development of the postmetropolis, what might it mean to keep alive the dangerous memory of the city's past? And who does this remembering: if the urban poor are to be subjects of their own history and so of their own remembering, what sort of urban theology would support such remembering from below?

In the last, formal contribution to the conference, Timothy Gorringer (University of Exeter, UK) argued that the built environment of the city is a material expression of culture and thereby is informed by values. However, what are these values and what is their source? Like Bergmann, Gorringer proposed that we should explore the relationship between the spatiality of God and urban spaces in order to explore the homeliness of the world. Gorringer then posed the question: how might the church bear liberatory witness to the homeliness of the world? In answer to this question, he offered seven 'marks' of the church—including a church that is local yet globally networked, that lives by memory and tradition, in which sin is recognised and forgiveness asked for, in the context of a common story and common hope.

This conference, described as 'inspiring' by one of the participants, was brought to a close by a spirited plenary session. Warm thanks to the conference delegates and speakers, the trustees of the Lincoln Theological Institute and the School of Arts,

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