On the Role of the Church in Social Change: An Exploration from the Biblical, Theological and Empirical Perspectives

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I. New Jerusalem Vision and the Kingdom of God on Earth

The first part of this paper is the biblical exposition respectively by Dieter Georgi's on the "not 'heavenly' any longer" New Jerusalem vision and by John Vincent's on the Kingdom of God on earth. Dieter Georgi and John Vincent have adopted different approaches, but both have arrived at the same conclusion that the church on earth has a divine mission in initiating and facilitating a positive social change for securing social progress and well being of the human in our cities.

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A. Not "Heavenly" Any Longer

Dieter Georgi contends that John's New Jerusalem vision, firstly stated in Rev. 21:1-8 and further elaborated in Rev. 21:9-22:5, "is not 'heavenly' any longer", but "takes on colors of contemporary urban reality, of its hopes and promises" of the then ideal secular Hellenistic city in John's time. This New Jerusalem vision is imbued with "concrete and constructive suggestions" for "real churches, for the city as a central reality, and for a sane world."[2] We therefore should not undermine its contemporary reference for building of "the new city as worldwide democratic community" on earth, which is by nature "more than the present Christ community/church."[3] Georgi argues that as the conclusive message of the New Testament, this new Jerusalem vision becomes a prototype of an ideal city on earth "with God and the Lamb as architects and mayors," which explicitly emphasizes the communal relation of God and human and exhibits "the eschatological form of all humanity" and "the ideal rational order" inherent in the heavenly Jerusalem.[4]

Georgi further points out that in contrast to other biblical New Jerusalem visions like the one stated in Ezek. 40-48, John's New Jerusalem vision is one not sited on a high divine mountain but on a valley plain. Besides, there is no temple in John's New Jerusalem vision. The presence of God is a concrete reality and an immediate experience as God actually dwells with the whole community in this New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:3), instead of being worshipped in a temple in the New Jerusalem vision as depicted in Ezekiel. Georgi argues that this exclusion of the divine mountain and the temple allegorically exhibits that John's New Jerusalem vision is pointing to its contemporary reference for the secular, earthy and reachable humane

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[2] Dieter Georgi, *The City in the Valley: Biblical Interpretation and Urban Theology* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005), 161-67.

[3] Georgi, *The City in the Valley,* 168-69.

[4] Georgi, *The City in the Valley,* 54, 169-70.

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city.[5] Furthermore, its twelve city gates and twelve foundations of
the city wall respectively inscribed with the names of twelve tribes of
Israelites and the twelve apostles' names also allegorically conveys
a message that John's new Jerusalem vision is inherently "a living
community that reaches from the past and from the future into the
present time," thus highlighting its contemporary reference for now and
here in addition to its eschatological dimension.[6] Georgi concludes:

> Over against the picture in Ezekiel, the new Jerusalem of John is heaven
> in its entirety, and it is open heaven, heaven come down onto earth, in
> fact, heaven and earth in one.[7]

This New Jerusalem descending on earth thus becomes "more than
a physical city;" "a synonym for the universe" imbued with ultimate
"happiness, peace and redemption;" "the eschatological form of all
humanity" and "the ideal rational order" inherent in this new Jerusalem
of "heaven in its entirety." Its contemporary reference for building "the
new city as worldwide democratic community" on earth, which is by
nature "more than the present Christ community / church," is John's
prophetic and concrete challenge to the present time. John's vision of
the New Jerusalem therefore exhibits divinity, eternity and immutability,
particularly it is conducive to the ultimate communal relation of God
and human.[8]

Georgi's interpretation of "not 'heavenly' any longer" New
Jerusalem vision naturally leads to a legitimate concern on our
contemporary cities now and here in the real world, drawing our focus
on those essential attributes for arriving at the ultimate utopian open,
democratic and sustainable city with a new redeemed community
fully embedded in God's grace. As an illustration, it has city walls
but with permanently open gates to all, thus allegorically representing

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[5] Georgi, *The City in the Valley*, 169, 176-77.

[6] Georgi, *The City in the Valley*, 178.

[7] Georgi, *The City in the Valley*, 177.

[8] Georgi, *The City in the Valley*, 168-69.

unconditioned openness in contrast to a "gated city" of isolation, limitation or protection. The enclosed space within this walled city bears no grand architecture or buildings, but a wide main street in the middle which alludes to an ideal and inclusive built environment conducive to meetings, assemblies and many-sided communications among all peoples.[9] The vision therefore implicitly pointing to the primary focus of a good city is one that focuses on the humanity aspects, that is, the well-being and social progress of its citizens, but not on its grand architecture or massive physical planning which are the conventional image of a great fast growing modern city.

B. God's Alternative City

On the contrary, John Vincent entirely disagrees with Georgi's conception of the "not 'heavenly' any longer" New Jerusalem vision. He instead contends that the New Jerusalem vision "is not an actual earthy city;" and is "merely another symbol of the eschatological union of the faithful with the Lord" in the ultimate distant future. It is a vision of apocalyptic literature envisioning a future spiritual situation in the hope of compensation of the hopelessness of the earthy Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem vision therefore has no material and direct application for the contemporary real cities on earth.[10]

John Vincent nevertheless shares Dieter Georgi's conviction that it is a legitimate concern and necessary action of the church to address on the genuine well-being of human in our cities now and here in our real world. He buttresses up his argument with the "the Kingdom of God on earth" concept proclaimed in the New Testament, instead of the New Jerusalem vision as Georgi does. The contemporary reference of the

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[9] Georgi, *The City in the Valley*, 176-79.

[10] J.W. Rogerson & John Vincent, *The City in Biblical Perspective* (London; Oakville, Conn.: Equinox Pub, 2009), 72. John Vincent is the author of the second part of this book focusing on the New Testament context; while J.W. Rogerson is the author of the first part on the Old Testament context. This paper is confined to the deliberations of John Vincent in the New Testament context.

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Kingdom of God on earth, John Vincent advocates, is the clear and loud proclamation demanding the necessary action of the church and her Christian faith-based community to build and sustain "God's Alternative City" in our contemporary cities now and here. This "God's Alternative City" is a genuine hope of ensuring a sane world on earth as already proclaimed by Jesus in his time:

> The expectation of Jesus is that there can be a new, more satisfactory, more just, situation in the human city. The image of the earthy Kingdom of God is indeed of a new and better human situation which affects everything, all places and all people. The Kingdom of God on earth, which Jesus embodies and proclaims, is initially God's gift of a prophetic and salvation-bring project and community.[11]

And John Vincent continues to strengthen our belief in this hope by highlighting that Jesus had indeed demonstrated a way to achieve this mission of building this Kingdom of God on earth here and now. Jesus proactively engaged himself with the stakeholders in the then religious and socio-political contexts in his time including at times confronted, or even subverted in the eyes of the Jewish religious authorities, the established traditions and practices. Jesus pointed to us those essential and achievable attributes necessary for the building of this Kingdom of God on earth, which "is not primarily a new religious entity" but in material is God's Alternative City on earth in clear opposition to the then prevailing religious practice of the religious authority and the development model of Roman earthy cities. This Alternative City is a new earthy reality affecting everything by its alternative practice and imbued with alternative values and judgment. John Vincent stresses that "for Jesus, God's Alternative City replaces Jerusalem" where "radical reversals are thus facilitated."[12] This is the substitution and transformation of Jerusalem, which metaphorically signifies cities on earth are built largely "based upon dominance, paternalism and

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[11] Rogerson & Vincent, *The City in Biblical Perspective*, 68.

[12] Rogerson & Vincent, *The City in Biblical Perspective*, 69 -71.

the power of force," with God's Alternative City where love and care is the foundation stone as well as justice and care for the needy and under-privileged are nurtured for securing human well-being and a genuine flourishing life on earth:

> For this, Jesus substitutes a political state determined by human love and by the imitation of a divine "Father." Jesus's kingdom is thus a force of radical humanization and secularization. ... Jesus's alternative city is determined by each being the servant of the other and by lordship existing in servanthood, based on radical egalitarianism and "levelling"... Jesus substitutes a realm in which the poor and the "little ones" are privileged.[13]

This God's Alternative City, as the Kingdom of God on earth, shall and will continue to take shape and be realized in different spatial and temporal contexts on earth, including our cities here and now.

C. On Earth as in Heaven

It is remarkable that both Dieter Georgi and John Vincent respectively advocates that the church and her Christian faith-based community have the mission to fulfill, execute and administer this God's Alternative City and this "not 'heavenly' any longer" New Jerusalem on earth. John Vincent considers that the building of the Alternative City on earth is inherently part of the "God's Project" on earth such that the church and her Christian faith-based community have a divine duty to continue and concretize this God's Alternative City Project on earth in their own spatial and temporal contexts. He utterly demands the proactive participation and involvement of the church and her Christian faith-based community to work towards this God's Alternative City Project on earth on two levels: firstly to address immediate present issues including the personal and community needs in contemporary

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[13] Rogerson & Vincent, *The City in Biblical Perspective*, 69.

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cities; and secondly also to seek and bring structural changes "to the wider context of people and institutions in the city. "[14]

Similarly, Georgi believes that the church and her Christian faith-based community bear the responsibility and possess the transforming power in the building of this "not 'heavenly' any longer" New Jerusalem on earth by initiating and facilitating the necessary social change for securing social progress and well being of the human in our cities. Georgi particularly draws our attention to Paul's proclamation in 1 Thess. 5:8 that the justice and righteousness that accompanied with this positive social change could be reinstated within and through the Christ community and then extending to the urbanized world through trust, love and hope.[15]   The following quotation from Dieter Georgi serves best to sum up this point:

> That is, this recovery of justice begins within the Christ community. The Isaiah text, however, has its real objective the outside world. Through his quotation of the biblical prediction and its application to the Christ community, Paul thus stresses that within and through the Christ community an efficacious provocation of its environment occurs.[16]

II. Theologies on Social Change

Dieter Georgi and John Vincent certainly represent those ingenious efforts in ascertaining the biblical teachings for the church and her Christian faith-based community to have a legitimate concern and due care on our cities here and now. The second part of this paper is a

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[14] Rogerson & Vincent, *The City in Biblical Perspective*, 79-81.

[15] Georgi, *The City in the Valley*, 94-97. By making specific reference to Paul's exposition of Isa. 59:17 as stated in 1 Thess. 5:8, Dieter Georgi suggests that Paul was indeed advocating to the members of his congregation in his time that the Christian community indeed had to shoulder "God's definitive intervention to right the wrong in God's people and states," thus was no longer confined to the very end time as originally meant in Isa. 59:17.

[16] Georgi, *The City in the Valley*, 96.

survey of selected significant contemporary theological contemplations, which are considered to be in different degrees and extents related to the New Jerusalem vision and the Kingdom of God on earth concept, with a view to furthering our understanding on the role of the church in championing for a positive social change in the development of our cities.

We start with the theological reflection of Y.T. Wu (吳耀宗), a Chinese theologian in Mainland China, on this issue in the context of the then Mainland China in the 1930s. Y.T. Wu conceives that Jesus Christ's preaching mission on earth in his spatial and temporal contexts was also targeting at meeting the materialistic needs of human as well as addressing at times the structural issues in the community in addition to the spiritual needs of human such that the church's preaching of the Gospel should inherently be a "Social Gospel" on the Kingdom of God on earth imbued with a passion of salvation for all.[17] Y.T. Wu therefore considers that the church should always not to forget the unique contribution of Christianity in initiating and facilitating social change and transforming the society for improving the well being of human. He boldly advocates that the conventional welfare and charity services such as on education and public health services all along provided by the church are good but not adequate in providing genuine and fundamental improvement to the community. This is because such conventional welfare and charity services could not address at all the structural issues and ills largely due to the specific socio-political structure and system. Having said that, he however admits that he, or Christianity, could not offer any concrete action plans for straightforward practical application as a panacea for such ills and issues. Instead he points out that the unique contribution of the church and Christianity hangs on her faith in and advocacy for those fundamental principles, a spirit and an attitude, of which they would be timeless and universal core values applicable in all ages for sustaining a genuine life-flourishing community for

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17 吳耀宗著，邢福增編注：《社會福音 / 沒有人看見過上帝》（新北市：橄欖，2016），頁 32、34。

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human. This in material is the imitation of Jesus Christ by the church to give overt priority concern on and care of the humanity, largely by the actions of love and against violence as well as the willing to give and sacrifice:[18]

> 耶穌所注重的是人：人的價值，人的意義，人的可能。(Jesus Christ's focus is on human: the value of human, the meaning for being human, the potential of human.)[19]

This overt priority concern on and care of the humanity indeed echoes with the core values of God's Alternative City on earth and New Jerusalem vision on earth necessary for securing the well-being of human and a genuine flourishing life on earth. Y.T. Wu has gingerly opened the prelude of the theological deliberations on the church's role in initiating and facilitating social change in contemporary cities with a clear and loud prophetic voice that the church could have a key role in guarding against the undermine of humanity in the name of progress and development of our cities.[20]

In 1960s, Harvey Cox's *The Secular City* made a leap forward in the theological construct on the role of the church in facilitating social change of cities amid in the process of rapid urbanization process at the global level. Cox at the outset has firmly claimed the desperate need of a theology of social change that could enable the church to discern and join the action of God as well as to function as a continuing responsive faith-based Christian community in the contemporary world. With no less importance, this theology of social change could also enable the church "to make sense of a wholly new world" in the unprecedented

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[18] 吳耀宗：《社會福音 / 沒有人看見過上帝》，頁 xliv～lv、lxviii～lxix、41～53。

[19] 吳耀宗：《社會福音 / 沒有人看見過上帝》，頁 48。The English translation in bracket is done by the author of this article.

[20] There is an alternative view that the "Social Gospel" of Y.T. Wu could be the product of a patriotic response and practical concern of the church on the future of Mainland China in the then socio-political context of Mainland China; and this is not entirely in line with the Social Gospel in the West which proclaims and advocates the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth by rectifying the suffering and injustice, ills etc. emerged in the development process in the West. See 吳耀宗：《社會福音 / 沒有人看見過上帝》，頁 xx-xxiii、lv。

rapid secularization and urbanization process at global scale, extending from Europe and North America to Africa and Latin America in various extents and degrees. Cox's theology of social change is a pioneering theological contemplation in positioning the church in the right position to come up with the necessary actions and responses in meeting the mounted challenges amid the rapid social changes in the "wholly new world." With the blessing of this theology of social change, Cox believes that the re-engineered church hopefully could preach its *kerygma* (Gospel) and could execute its *diakonia* (services) more effectively and aptly in the vortex of rapid social change of our contemporary cities in God's grace.[21]

It is conceived that Harvey Cox's theology of social change is rooted in the biblical concept of "the Kingdom of God." Cox has even adopted the theological position that "the Kingdom of God" has inherently "becomes a christolological one" such that both the man-centered and God-centered theological interpretations on the Kingdom of God are relevant. As Jesus personified "the Kingdom of God" on earth, it is thus inseparable for the divine initiative and human actions in realizing "the Kingdom of God" on earth, ultimately for social progress and well-being of human. This in material is also the fulfillment of God's Alternative City on earth as suggested by John Vincent. Furthermore, given the fact that the Kingdom of God on earth in the life of Jesus exhibited the "fullest possible disclosure of the partnership of God and man in history" in working towards "the Kingdom of God" on earth, the church therefore also has the indisputable mission to continue the mission of preaching and serving in the real world with a view to making connection our secular cities in our own specific spatial and temporal contexts with this God's Alternative City. On the New Jerusalem vision, Cox also contends that the eschatology on the New Jerusalem vision is not merely a futuristic and eschatological one,

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[21] Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), 105-7.

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but with no less importance, it is in the process of realizing itself here and now on earth such that we live in a world today where the coming of the Kingdom still occurs.[22] And the Kingdom of God on earth is always the coming kingdom, is just arriving and has never come in its fullness and perfection.[23] Cox gingerly then reminds the church and her Christian faith-based community that indeed "the Gospel summons man to frame with his neighbor a common life suitable to the secular city" and with no less importance, to inject "hope made visible" for our cities here and now by adjusting and tuning the church's necessary services and actions rightly and timely in responding to the changing socio-political contexts of our global cities. This calls for a change and response of the church is particularly intensified and catalyzed by the rapid urbanization process of our cities at the global level:[24]

> In fact the reality of the emerging Kingdom [of God] is the essential presupposition for the preaching of the Gospel. Within the reality of the Kingdom, the Gospel becomes a call to discern the signs of kingdom and to respond appropriately.[25]

In the course of secularization and urbanization, the church is therefore summoned to "discard the old and take up something different" in order to be effectively and faithfully performing her vocation as a dynamic and responding faith-based community,[26] whose ultimate task is to discern and join the continual action of God in realizing the Kingdom of God on earth, or in fulfilling God's Alternative City on earth in John Vincent's concept.

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[22] Cox, *The Secular City*, 110-12.

[23] Cox, *The Secular City*, 116.

[24] Cox, *The Secular City*, 121.

[25] Cox, *The Secular City*, 121. The words in bracket are inserted by the author.

[26] Harvey Cox, "Introduction to the New Edition" in *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 2013), 16, 19. Harvey Cox conceives that "secularization is the historical process... in which society and culture are delivered from tutelage to religious control and closed metaphysical worldviews" and urbanization is one of the motors for this secularization process. This is in essence the disenchantment of religiousness in the secular city. Also see Cox, *The Secular City*, 113.

Cox contends that God continuously acts through our "historical events," and such events are inherently "social changes" happening in the secular city. He has even alerted his fellow Christians that they should not be handicapped by a static theology in meeting the challenges of rapid and accelerating social change in the real world.[27] It is therefore essential for the church to ensure that the hope for the Kingdom of God on earth is practiced, demonstrated and visible in today's secular city, not merely as a static preaching doctrine:

> In our discussion it will designate that aspect of the church's responsibility in the city which calls for a visible demonstration of what the church is saying in its kerygma (Gospel) and pointing to in its diakonia (services). It is "hope made visible," a kind of living picture of the character and composition of the true city of man for which the church strives.[28]

Cox then states firmly that the "something different" for the church nowadays is to be "God's avant-garde" and the city's "cultural exorcist" in the sense that the church is demanded to "improvise and adapt to shifting cultural situations" as well as to confront the "magical and superstitious worldviews" respectively.[29] Cox particularly highlights that the healing and reconciling powers of the church concretized in the struggle for the wholeness, well being and health for the whole community in the secular city, both for the people of faith as well as for the people of no faith, would be her distinctive way to realize this "hope made visible" in the secular city. Only in this way, the church can faithfully imitate Jesus in the secular city here and now in realizing the Kingdom of God on earth and in making a genuine connection to God's Alternative City, just like Jesus' ministry coming to his people "not primarily though ecclesiastical traditions, but through social change"

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[27] Cox, *The Secular City*, 105-7.

[28] Cox, *The Secular City*, 144. The words in bracket are inserted by the author.

[29] Daniel R. Karistai, "This City is Under Construction," *Baptistic Theologies* 7, no.1 (2015), 106.

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for demonstrating and practicing on earth of God's intention of a genuine life-flourishing earthy life for all humanity as well.[30]

Some 50 years after *The Secular City*, Cox has revisited his position on the secularization phenomenon. He realizes that after years of further observation, secularization is not a "taken-for-granted process" and urbanization is not "the breeding ground of secularization" as he has originally predicted. Nevertheless, the rapid global urbanization process "remains an inescapable reality" and "an avoidable fact of life" and the city is inherently the facilitating context for nurturing the "spiritual complexion of the world" and "an emerging multicultural world."[31] Not only the disenchantment of religiousness in the secular city has failed to emerge, the modern world is moving away from the traditional religious patterns towards a more diversified and complex spiritual and liberating movement. Cities are now cosmologies of multicultural values, diversified secular worldviews as well as pluralistic in religion including mutated religions and intensively religious modern spiritual formations. Cox reminds us that "the city" is indeed used by him as a metaphor for "the world" in *The Secular City* such that he is inherently focusing on the world through the city. Under this new circumstance of cosmologies, he thus postulates that a "worldly" theology of the secular is a necessity so that the church and her faith-based community can be rightly placed in this new circumstance of highly urbanized world to nurture and demonstrate "the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven." The ultimate mission of the church is to engage the sacred and the seculars in our urbanized world including the "secular religions" and "religious secularities" as an opportunity so that both "the sacred and profane" can "jostle and interact" in the secular city today.[32]

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[30] Cox, *The Secular City*, 147-48.

[31] Cox, "Introduction to the New Edition," 38.

[32] Cox, "Introduction to the New Edition," 29, 34-38.

Sharon V. Betcher has further developed Cox's ideas focusing on this new circumstance of cosmologies. She has drawn our attention to Cox's further elaboration of the "tectonic shift in Christianity" in today's world such that the church today must seen to be "a way of life rather than a doctrinal structure," as stated in Cox' *The Future of Faith in 2009,* issued also some 50 years after *The Secular City*:

> ... in his 2009 text, *The Future of Faith*, Cox moved to the declarative, announcing a "tectonic shift in Christianity," a shift into the "Age of the Spirit" in which the religious returns as "a way of life rather than a doctrinal structure," as the experiential practice of "faith and love," as distinct from belief.[33]

Hence, a genuine commitment of the church and her faith-based community to "practiced paths of faithfulness to life" as a shared vision for the sacred and seculars working together for the common good of the contemporary cities could put Christianity in a better position to win the understanding and acceptance in today's global cities of religious and ideology polyphony imbued with multiple values. Betcher particularly highlights that in today's modern world, the church together with her faith-based community should no longer be confined to a concern merely on the personal spiritual intimacy with God but must have a mission of making themselves readily available as "an active force of the sacred in the city" within the particularity of a place. Betcher suggests that "Christianity can remember itself as a practice" and is obliged to "find some new ways to become operational" in today's global cities, particularly having regard to their contexts of religious polyphony and multiple values:[34]

> Where Christianity must now find an "operationalizable form," a model of practice, even for the secular, something beyond the parish structure, mendicants can be its presence in and on behalf of the city.[35]

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[33] Sharon V. Betcher, *Spirit and the Obligation of Social Flesh* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 169.

[34] Betcher, *Spirit and the Obligation of Social Flesh*, 169.

[35] Betcher, *Spirit and the Obligation of Social Flesh*, 106.

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Probably Inspired by Cox, Sharon V. Betcher contends that the church and her faith based community is obliged to work together with his neighbor for a common life suitable to the secular city in today's global cities of religious and ideology polyphony. Sharon V. Betcher's operational model for Christianity today in the "Age of the Spirit" is a model of practical actions of the church and her faith-based community in collaboration and engagement with the seculars in the city, that is, in Cox's terminology engaging the sacred and the seculars including the "secular religions" and "religious secularities" in the secular city. She comments that our theology turning to the seculars would be the way out to aptly respond to the circumstances of our global cities today of which our "traditional, initially unresponsive, clergy and theology" has failed to respond to the new circumstance. Here comes Betcher's theology for the seculars. In simplest terms, Betcher argues that just like the sacred, the seculars in our cities in the "Age of the Spirit," including those who do not share our Christianity faith, those with other faiths or even with no conventional religious faiths at all in our cities of religious and ideology polyphony, would aspire to a religiously spiritual life with "alternative values and attitudes" that largely counter to the materialism and individualism values permeated in our global cities.[36] This shared commitment to practiced paths of faithfulness to a genuine flourishing spiritual life among the sacred and the seculars of no faith or other faiths would be the foundation to realize Betcher's theology for the seculars in our global cities.

Sharon V. Betcher is convinced that the church today must recognize and accept that her Christianity faith-based community and the seculars could and should proactively interact and collaborate together as an active force in the city seeking "practices loosened from the parish institutional structures" to "humanize and renew our cities."[37] This active force is empowered by the Spirit in effecting the transforming power of this active force in the city. Taking her

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[36] Betcher, *Spirit and the Obligation of Social Flesh*, 2, 6.

[37] Betcher, *Spirit and the Obligation of Social Flesh*, 106.

position that the Spirit is not an essence and would honor those spiritual seculars, not necessarily to be religious or theistic, Betcher argues that the Spirit can be "as a 'necessary prosthesis,' an aid that might help us advance towards spacious and fearless empathy, towards forbearance amid messy entanglements:"[38]

> Spirit as prosthesis capacitates our corporeal becoming with the world. As a prosthesis capacitates the body, Spirit capacitates our "belief in the world," enables the mutual submission — or entrustment — of the flesh one to another.[39]

Under the transforming power of the Spirit prevalent in our cities, one could open up and eager to "being with" one another in the city, thus ultimately leading to "the disciplined practice of corporeal generosity" and to "the embrace of social flesh." This will be the new foundation for shaping the "sensibilities and ways of seeing the world" and the search for an "alternative to what fragments the city between those with economic access and those without access to the commons of life, leaving many on both sides shivering in their self-protective loneliness and cynicism."[40] Betcher then concludes:

> For life in postcolonial cosmopolis, we need ligatures of friendship amidst the rampant dislocation—not that we imagine a great communitarianism, but rather that through friendship we might live an alternative to the existentialist individualism, which this "spiritual, but not religious" ethos can engender— a theology for seculars.[41]

Under Betcher's theology for the seculars, the physical church is to some extent downplayed and her Christianity faith-based community is sublimed as the sacred force to outreach, engage and collaborate with the seculars, and then together they emerge as an integrated whole and active force with transforming power blessed by the Spirit to act in the

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[38] Betcher, *Spirit and the Obligation of Social Flesh*, 12, 170.

[39] Betcher, *Spirit and the Obligation of Social Flesh*, 191.

[40] Betcher, *Spirit and the Obligation of Social Flesh*, 192.

[41] Betcher, *Spirit and the Obligation of Social Flesh*, 192.

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entire community for the common good and well being of all. This should be the optimal "operationalizable form" of today's church, and Christianity indeed, in today's global cities.

To fully appreciate the ideas of Cox and Betcher, we should not lost sight of the Bonheoffer's influence on Cox's theological construct. Cox once admits that his claim on the need of a "worldly" theology of the secular in today's world is inspired by Bonheoffer's conviction that "the church exists not for itself but for the world."[42] In a nutshell, Bonheoffer demands that the church congregation, as a faith-based community, should each member recognizes and responds in actions to the needs of each of the unique other in the church community; and with no less importance, also to extend such care and actions to all the needy outside the church in the wider community, that is, our neighborhood. This is a call for "being with-one-another" and "being-for-one-another" with the ultimate mission to accomplish "the realization of Christ-reality among us in the world."[43] It is therefore considered that the "worldly" theologies of Cox and Betcher together is a step forward from Bonheoffer and have opened up a new way for the church to survive and function as a living church in the global cities of cosmologies today. Upon reviewing the performance of the Latin American church some seventy years after Bonheoffer, Carols Caldas also confirms that such "worldly" inclination with openness, inclusiveness and outreaching to the seculars is a key for the church to function and to grow in the changing real world:

> So must live the Church. Thinking about Bonheoffer's understanding of how the church must be, Prof Brigitte Kahl said:
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> It is precisely and in particular the Christ event of incarnation, crucifixion and redemption that requires us to accept our solidarity with them,

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[42] Cox, "Introduction to the New Edition," 36.
[43] 李文耀：〈教會的他者是誰？潘霍華的觀點〉,《今日華人教會》（12/2020）,頁4～5。

who we had thought were the sinners, the outsiders, the non-us: Jews, Catholics, heretics, Muslims, unbelievers'...[44]

Cox and Betcher add that the church is unique in serving the world as the blessed sacred force empowered with the transforming power when she outreaches, interacts and collaborates with the seculars in the wider community.

Lastly, Nestor O. Miguez's theology of urban space could further enrich our understanding of the irreplaceable role of the church to steer and to catalyst a positive social change in our contemporary cities for sustaining a genuine flourishing city in God's grace. Miguez conceives that the human spiritual corruption for maximizing individual and corporal economic benefits has naturally become the primary driving force in ensuring maximum effective and efficient economic gains in our city development, resulting in the present corrupted and unjust world political-economic camouflaged in the name of progress and change. Social progress for a genuine flourishing human experience, or a positive social change, is downplayed or even ignored. Under this circumstance, our urban world is not in line with the creation and intention of God, thus could be handicapped as a conducive human flourishing environment for advancing the genuine well being and spiritual needs of human beings.[45] So Miguez advocates that the church is tasked to act in faith along with God under "a vision inspired by God" and be guided by her commitment to a life flourishing environment that is conducive to the hope and love that could be guaranteed by the "promised reign of God." While Miguez identifies the inherent human corruption as the root of our corrupted built environment that demands God's transformative power for a change in the right way;[46]

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[44] Carlos Caldas, "70 Years later- what do we have to learn from Dietrich Bonheoffer in Latin America today?," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 2, no.1 (2016): 41.

[45] Nestor O. Miguez, "A Theology of the Urban Space," *Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 4 (Fall 2019): 572.

[46] Miguez, "A Theology of the Urban Space," 577-79, 564 -65. Nestor O. Miguez stresses the importance of human beings in maintaining a constant dialogue with God and nature in the planning and development of their built environment – the paradigm shift from the plan of salvation to the dialogue of salvation.

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Gorringe calls for a fundamental change in human mindset so deep that is indeed a return to God who is the ground of all beings for identification of the true nature of the common good, rather than mistaking to the power or the market.[47]

III. From Practices to Theologies

The unique practical experience of the Church of England and the Church of South Africa in initiating and catalyzing a positive social change respectively in their specific temporal and spatial contexts, as empirical data from practice, will be surveyed in the last part of this paper with a view to enriching and refining our understanding on the role of the church in social change. Nevertheless, the author is obliged to caution that the UK and South African experience are significant and valuable empirical data in enlightening us our understanding on this aspect, but certainly they are products of specific socio-political contexts and are not intended to be normative for straight forward application in other cities of different socio-political contexts.

A. The Church of England Experience

The practical experience acquired by the Church of England (the Church) in championing a positive social change in the context of the inner city problem in the United Kingdom (UK) in 1980s warrants our study here to see its lesson on the role of the church in social change. The report of the UK Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, *Faith in the City*, was issued in 1985 which was certainly a call for actions by the Church of England in addressing the poverty and sufferings due to the then serious inner city problem in the UK.

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[47] T. J. Gorringe, "Salvation by Bricks: Theological Reflections on the Planning Process," 101 and T.J. Gorringe, *The Common Good and the Global Emergency: God and the Built Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 34.

It had provided an overview of the urban future of UK with constructive and innovative suggestions to chart new thinking, directions and actions for tackling the inner city problem at that juncture. Some twenty years later, the Church of England reaffirmed that the *Faith in the City* Report was able to timely alert "a public and a Government" the urban destitution problem in inner cities and the urgent need of public policy and investment on urban regeneration to tackle the inner city problem. Since the issue of the Report, the Church of England had continued its determination and actions in addressing a practical and pressing urban problem for the well being of human and betterment of the community.[48] This is certainly a significant pioneering attempt at that time and remains an invaluable lesson for the church today. Upon reviewing this amazing achievement and success in actions, Anthony Harvey has particularly highlighted that we should not lost sight of the theological significance of this Report on the role of church in social change. The Report has dedicated one whole exclusive crucial chapter on theological deliberations in relation to the Church's stance on and response to social change in our contemporary cities. Anthony Harvey considers that the theological deliberations in this exclusive chapter may not be structured coherently and persuasively to be a theology of city, but certainly is a radical alternative theology critically reflecting the role and mission of the Church in facing and anticipating social changes in our cities.[49]

Indeed *Faith in the City* admits that they are not in a position to propose a coherent and structured "theology of the city" for general application in a wide set of circumstances, but it has nevertheless formulated an authentic theology for the Church of England aptly in response to the specific social change due to the inner city problem in the then UK context. Such a theology serves primarily to justify

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[48] The Church of England, *Faithful Cities: A call for Celebration, Vision and Justice* (Church House Publishing, London, 2006), v.

[49] Anthony Harvey, "Introduction: An Alternative Theology?" *in Theology in the City - A theological Response to Faith in the City*, ed. Anthony Harvey (WBC Print Ltd, Bristol), 1.

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and to empower the Church of England to take desperately needed actions as a living church on earth for improving the well being of those almost forgotten people suffering in the poor social conditions of inner cities. *Faith in the City* is a vivid concrete example to demonstrate Cox's theology of social change in the real city context, that is, a living church has to be one which is clearly seen by the community a visible demonstration of her preaching and services in the vortex of social change in our rapid urbanization process. This time the Church of England has proclaimed clear and loud that the Church needs to be the "hope made visible" in the UK's inner cities, to be more specific, in the UK Government's designated Urban Priority Areas (UPAs) in such inner cities.[50]

While *Faith in the City* accepts that the Church has a critical role to play in responding to social change in the contemporary world, it highlights that there is a well defined scope for the Church's involvement in terms of focus and priority. The call of the Church in taking forward Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God on earth should inherently focus priority on actions directed towards individual personal dimensions (i.e. personal charity, service and evangelism), but this should not barred the Church's mission to negate the impacts of the profound social and political implications on the well being at individual level. The Church has to embrace both ends. *Faith in the City* draws our attention to the fact that Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom on earth was targeted at personal concern for individual, family and local communities, but at the same time the normal priorities of wealth, power, position and respectability in the then social and religious contexts at Jesus' time were also challenged and even overturned in the process.[51]

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[50] The Church of England, *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation: The Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas* (Church House Publishing, London, 1985), *69.*

[51] The Church of England, *Faith in the City*, 48.

Faith in the City has put forward that the Church is justified to focus her priority on charity, service and evangelism at individual personal level; and this is understandable as they are relatively uncontroversial and straightforward. Nevertheless, the Church cannot entirely stay away from assuming the role of a protagonist of social change to rectify structural societal issues such as injustices and inequalities inherent in the structure of society. *Faith in the City* advocates that the Church is duty bound to be a protagonist of social change in the world because God has a genuine concern and a genuine hope for an alternative ordered society, as all along reflected in the tradition of Christian social thought:

> That God has an interest in the ordering of society is thus a conviction which runs right through the Bible and on into a long line of Christian social theorists from St Augustine to the present day...[52]

Nevertheless, there is no one panacea to cure all situations:

> No single blueprint has emerged. The prophetic call for justice, with its concern for the rights of the weak and the poor, is heard again and again: but there is no generally agreed manifesto for a Christian social order. Yet this long tradition of Christian social thinking, if it does not offer an immediate alternative to the present political and economic system, has nevertheless kept alive the fundamental Christian conviction that even in this fallen world there are possibilities for a better ordering of society.[53]

Furthermore, *Faith in the City* has cautioned that Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God on earth did carry "profound social and political implications" and even the then established practices and authorities were at times challenged by Jesus; but only a "tendentious reading of the gospels can suggest Jesus was primarily a social reformer, let alone a violent revolutionary" as Jesus' proclamation was "an intensely personal concern for individuals, families and

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[52] The Church of England, *Faith in the City*, 52.

[53] The Church of England, *Faith in the City*, 52.

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local communities."[54] But how to tip the strategic balance on this aspect, *Faith in the City* is to some extent silent in offering a simple and straightforward answer. Perhaps this question could only be answered by being sensitive and responsive to the specific historical and socio-political contexts of the church, bearing in mind that there is "no single blueprint" or "generally agreed manifesto" to address every situation. In the instant case, the Church of England has accepted that at that specific historical socio-political context, her call is to cultivate and promote community developments for the poor people at the UPAs in inner cities with a view to redressing their distress and sufferings by undertaking actions which are intermediate between personal ministry targeting at individuals and actions directing at society as a whole for the building of "a just and compassionate social order."[55] As mentioned above some twenty years later in 2006, the Church of England issued her second report, *Faithful Cities*, as a demonstration of the Church's continual commitment in furthering her visions and missions in the city started at the time of *Faith in the City*. This *Faithful Cities* Report has at the outset affirmed that that the continuing presence of the Church in marginalized communities, namely those in the UPAs, at a time when other agencies abandoned these communities is one enduring legacy left by *Faith in the City*.[56]

Furthering the theological reflection and practice adopted in *Faith in the City*, *Faithful Cities* proclaims that theology for today's world could no longer be just "talking about God" academically. Today's theology must primarily be "practical" in two aspects: firstly, it is "a source for transformation" enabling every faith-based community to learn and to faithfully practice their live in the world continuously under the grace of God; secondly, it is "performative" demanding the "very practices of transformative faith-in-action" of such faith-based communities in the world. It follows that the Church's engagement

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[54] The Church of England, *Faith in the City*, 48.

[55] The Church of England, *Faith in the City*, 56-57.

[56] The Church of England, *Faithful Cities*, 7.

in the social change of cities stems from this conviction that theology is not merely private and personal, but should be transformative and performative in engaging ethical, social and political matters in the public domain with a view to proclaiming and practicing the visions of God who is all along "present and active in the whole of creation and the entirety of humanity. "[57] A living Church on earth is thus necessarily in a continuing state of transformation and then in the process of making impacts on and initiating changes to the world for the ultimate attainment of a life enhancing urban life for individual and the community as a whole:

> ... In fact there are those who would argue that the Church should especially listen and respond to the experience of the marginalized and poor. Urban parishes have more than their fair share of both. The processes of listening, learning, engaging and reflecting will help new models of church to emerge and new ways of working [to] become evident. But the lives of those who are drawn into these communities should also be enriched and transformed. And the work of transformation does not stop there. Well-supported, local, vibrant Christian communities play their part in the transformation of their neighbourhoods; they are active partners in regeneration initiatives; they are always seeking ways to encourage human flourishing.[58]

The longing for the New Jerusalem vision should be deep in the mind of the Christian faith-based community and is indeed reinforced every time when they pray "thy Kingdom come on earth as in heaven."[59] The ultimate bigger question for the Church, as expounded in *Faithful Cities*, is "what makes a good city" from the theological perspective and the role of Church in taking forward this good city for human flourishing in God's grace. With the benefit of her practical experience accumulated in its community involvement in UPAs

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[57] The Church of England, *Faithful Cities*, 14-15.

[58] The Church of England, *Faithful Cities* , 14.

[59] The Church of England, *Faithful Cities*, 66.

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in inner cities, the Church accepts that the city inherently functions "as a place of encounter between people and the God" as well as "the space between what is and what is to come" in the sense that "it is a place of waiting but also the space in which the humanity is called to work for God's purposes." The answer to this ultimate question points to the strive for design excellence focusing adequately at the social well being at community level which would be conducive to the nurturing of those social visions and values that are essential for securing social well being and life flourishing earthy life. *Faithful Cities* postulates that the Church together with her faith-based community should be transformative and performative in engaging in the social change of our contemporary cities to strive for those Christian values of justice, empowerment, situatedness and diversity as well as to guard against largely or overtly economical and gated development.[60]

It is therefore not surprising at all that *Faithful Cities*, almost as a concluding insight of its theological reflection, heartily embraces the urban planning theorist Leonie Sandercock's concept on spirituality in urban planning as "something close to the stuff of the Old Testament prophetic visionary" with the following quoted at the beginning of its chapter 6 on the deliberation of a good city from the theological perspective:[61]

> I want a city where people take pleasure in shaping and caring for their environment and are encouraged to do so. I want a city where my profession contributes to all of the above; where city planning is a war of liberation fought against dumb, featureless public space; against STARchitecture, speculators and benchmarkers; against the multiple sources of oppression, domination and violence; where citizens wrest from space new possibilities, and immerse themselves in their cultures while respecting those of their neighbours, collectively forging new hybrid cultures and spaces. I want a city that is run differently

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[60] The Church of England, *Faithful Cities*, 54, 60.

[61] The Church of England, *Faithful Cities*, 62.

from an accounting firm; where planners "plan" by negotiating desires and fears, mediating memories and hopes, facilitating change and transformation.[62]

Upon reflecting and furthering her over thirty years practical experience of walking along with the community amid the social change of the inner cities of England, the Church of England has firmly established and justified her theology of social change with well defined targets, priorities and objectives as well as with no less importance, affirming the performative and transformative power of the Church in cultivating and making positive social change for securing a life enhancing urban life for every individual and the community as a whole, largely by reference to the Christian values as mentioned above. Indeed the Church of England in 2006 resonates with Y.T. Wu's prophetic voice made in 1930s that the church has a divine mission in guarding against the undermine of humanity in the name of progress and development.

B. The South-African Church Experience

To further appreciate the evolution of theologies of social change in different socio-political contexts, this paper will continue to survey the unique experience of the Church in the South Africa too with a view to understanding their louder voice and greater determination to serve as a transformation and change agent in the apartheid socio-political context, as compared with the church experience in the western world. Jerry Pillay has drawn our attention to the two important documents which clearly demonstrate the Church's serious theological reflection and struggle on the structural injustices and ills of an apartheid society, namely, *A Message to the People of South Africa* and the *Kairos Document*.[63]

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[62] The Church of England, *Faithful Cities*, 54. See also Leonie Sandercock, *Cosmopolis II - Mongrel Cities of the 21st Century* (London and NY Continuum, 2003), 208.

[63] Jerry Pillay, "The Church as a Transforming and Change Agent," *HST Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 73, no.3 (2017): 9-10.

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A Message to the People of South Africa was issued in 1968 by the South African Council of Churches. This Message proclaims un-ambiguously that the then apartheid socio-political structure that nurtured the then "South African way of life" is inevitably against the Gospel of Christ. The South African Church is therefore obliged to denounce "the evil of apartheid" which is the very first step in initiating a positive social change and injecting visible hope in the wider community, ultimately bringing social progress and well beings for the South African people. The South African people "should be able to see the Gospel of Christ expressed in the life of the Church." And with no less importance, the South Africa Church should strive to "work for the expression of God's reconciliation here and now," instead of waiting for "a distant 'heaven' where all problems have been solved."[64]

The *Kairos Document* was issued in 1985 and revised in 1986. At the outset it claims to be "a people's document" with extensive consultations and consensus building at the community level and is intended to be a biblical and theological contemplation tailored-made for the socio-political context of South Africa with a view to formulate an alternative theological model that could lead to appropriate necessary responses and actions from the African Church, thus making a real change to the future of South Africa.[65] The *Kairos Document* concludes as "a prophetic response," with the formulation of "a prophetic theology" which could aptly read "the signs of the times" and then could speak "to the particular circumstances of a particular time and place," that is, the specific socio-political context of the apartheid South Africa in the instant case. This prophetic theology is by nature practical and not academic, though not necessary to be comprehensive. The utmost importance is that it is always confrontational to the structural ills and

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[64] Theological Commission of the South African Council of Churches, "A Message to the People of South Africa," *Worldview Magazine* 11, no. 11 (1968): 12.

[65] The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document/Challenge to the Church: a Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa (1985)," in *The Moment of Truth: The Kairos Documents*, compiled and edited by Gary SD Leonard (Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research, 2010), 5.

evils of the time so that it naturally comprises "a reading of the signs of the times;" "a call to action;" "a great deal of emphasis upon hope" as well as "a spirit of strength and determination."[66] Jerry Pillay has rightly highlighted the theological orientation advocated in the *Kairos Document* has fanned the flame of the social involvement by the South Africa Church as follow:

> It *(the Kairos Document)* asserted that the Bible does not separate the human person from the world, in which he or she lives; it does not separate the individual from the social, or one's private life from one's public life.[67]

Indeed the *Kairos Document*, as a prophetic voice, has ridden out the crosswinds with irrepressible energy in a divided church context, proclaiming loud and clear against both the State Theology which wrongly justifying the authority of the South African apartheid state, and the Church Theology which uncritically accepting a false peace and counterfeit reconciliation with the injustice and oppression of the apartheid social structure.[68] This to a great extent reminds us again its resonance with Harvey Cox's theology of social change in the reality of South African context that the South African Church is performing a living church as a visible demonstration of Christ's messages, service and hope to the community.

The *Kairos Document* is largely a call for change in theological orientation orchestrated by the South African Council of Churches at national level; and this new direction continues to impart to and evolve in the wider Christian communities in South Africa. The subsequent rise of the African Independent Churches and the African Christian Theology in the 20th century which has played a more active role in the transformation of African society and community is an obvious

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[66] The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document (Revised second edition, 1986)," in *The Moment of Truth: The Kairos Document*, 63-64.

[67] Pillay, "The Church as a Transforming and Change Agent," 10.

[68] The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document (1985)," in *The Moment of Truth: The Kairos Document*, 8-21.

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development. Jerry Pillay calls this a "missionary revolution" with the primary goal of "not to get people to church but to get the church into the world" with a view to "transform the world with the justice and peace of God" for securing genuine "fullness of life" on earth.[69] G.J. van Wyngaard also points out that the search for theological position of the Church in South Africa in response to the rapid social change in South Africa also continues to evolve recently in end of 2010s, this time focusing on the engagement of local churches in South Africa with urban fractures and vulnerabilities surfaced and precipitated in the community in the rapid urbanization process. There is "no uniform approach" for the local churches to follow; but in the process, the local churches should bear in mind that they are tied to and even informed by the social context of the city and so that they must listen to and make conscious responses to the social change in the city and initiate actions to seek the welfare and well being of the city and its people.[70]

Ferreira I.W. in 2010s' continues to trumpet an invitation for the churches in South Africa to a "new urgent missiological reflection" as well as a call to "find a new way of being part of God's mission" within the cities of our world. The focus of such a mission is comprehensive and holistic care of everybody in the city. It will undoubtedly require substantial personal effort, focus and sacrifice particularly from God's people by giving and empowering the others. It would be a community transformation process initiated and orchestrated by the church, ultimately a visible demonstration of God's shalom in the city via concrete and tangible improvement of the welfare and well being of people in the city. The primary objective of such a community transformation process by the church is "to seek God in all that we are and do, so that God's kingdom and glory may become more present on earth as it is in heaven." This community transformation is executed

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[69] Pillay, "The Church as a Transforming and Change Agent," 11.

[70] G.J. van Wyngaard, "Conceptual Considerations for Studying Churches' Engagement with Urban Fractures and Vulnerabilities," *HST Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no.3 (2017): 4.

via actions largely targeted at meeting the social and humanistic needs of human beings for a genuine life flourishing experience with God's grace, thus "to restore people to a full expression of their humanness as made in the image of God." Such actions include those "to promote trusting, reconciled and just relationships with people;" "to form communities that have a shared vision, a sense of community;" and with no less importance, "to create new institutions and restore existing systems and structures."[71]

IV. Sacred and "Worldly" Orientated

By now, I hope this paper has demonstrated from the biblical and theological perspectives as well as supplemented with the selected practical experience that the church on earth has a role in facilitating and catalyzing a positive social change in our cities in today's rapid urbanization at global level for the cultivation and development of a genuine life-flourishing society for human in God's grace. As already elucidated above, we are confident to conclude that the church on earth is summoned by the Gospel to practice its faith in actions as "a way of life rather than a doctrinal structure" and to inject "hope made visible" for our cities here and now in different temporal and spatial contexts, ultimately leading to advocacy and struggles for priority concern and care of the humanity. While the church is justified to focus her priority on charity, service and evangelism at individual personal level, the church cannot entirely stay away from assuming the role of a protagonist of positive social change to rectify injustices and inequalities inherent in the structure of society. The church exists not for itself but for the world by assuming a "worldly" orientated position in the sense that she needs to be sensitive to and makes the timely response to their specific and dynamic socio-political contexts. The operational model

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[71] I.W.Ferreira, "Seeking God's Shalom in South African Cities through a New Glocal Togetherness," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no.1 (2017): 2, 6-7.

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for the church today should be a model of advocacy and actions of the church and her faith-based community in collaboration and engagement with the seculars in the city together to aspire to a religiously spiritual life with "alternative values and attitudes" that are largely conducive to a genuine life-flourishing society for human in our cities. This is in material a fulfillment of God's Alternative City on earth and the "not 'heavenly' any longer" New Jerusalem on earth.

As a concluding remark to complement the argument for the "worldly" orientated church, this paper would like to highlight two quotations made by Richard Kieckheffer in his study of church architecture, namely, John Gordon Davies and Giovanni Michelucci. When John Gordon Davies in 1960s explored church architecture from historical perspective, the same time when Cox's *The Secular City* was published, he warned against the false division between sacred and secular in the spatial concept of church architecture, thus implicitly running the risk of isolating the church from the world in the name of sacrality. He promotes a dialogue of the church with the world in design terms in order to signify that there is no dichotomy between religion and life; and the church's concern is on all human activities in the world.[72] Giovanni Michelucci even takes a more assertive position claiming that:

> ...But it is not the church that is sacred, it is the city that is sacred, and the church should fundamentally represent the spiritual values of the city. But the strange thing is that the church refuses to allow a presence of the "sacred" (that is, the city) in its temples. It closes its doors; it keeps the city from coming in.[73]

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[72] Richard Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 283-84. This is a voice from church architecture perspective to advocate for the ways to enhance the visibility and presence of the church in contemporary cities. However, this is not within the scope of this paper to elaborate further on this perspective such as the deliberation on "opening up" the church to community in design terms as well as the promotion of secular/share use of church buildings in maintaining a closer tie with the community, both in terms of innovations in architectural design and expansion in church functions.

[73] Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley*, 284-85.

Indeed this could be the ultimate big question and challenge for the church today, that is, to facilitate and promote a good city through the church's advocacy and practice in facilitating a positive social change in the urbanization process at the global level for human flourishing in God's grace. A living church today should be sacred and "worldly" orientated such that she has become the sacred force under the visions of God to outreach, engage and collaborate with the seculars in the world to proclaim and to practice together for the ultimate attainment of a genuine life-flourishing earthy life for every individual and the community as a whole. This is in material a divine mission of the church to fulfill God's Alternative City and this "not 'heavenly' any longer" New Jerusalem vision on earth with the ultimate purpose to guard against the undermine of humanity in the name of progress and development in the rapid urbanization process of our cities.

ABSTRACT

This paper starts with the biblical exposition respectively by Dieter Georgi's on the New Jerusalem vision and by John Vincent's on the Kingdom of God on earth to demonstrate that the church has a key role to execute and administer the "not 'heavenly' any longer" New Jerusalem on earth and God's Alternative City on earth. The relevant theological contemplations including Cox Harvey and Sharon V. Betcher which are to different degrees and extents related to this New Jerusalem vision and the Kingdom of God on earth will then be explored to demonstrate that it is a mission of the church to initiate and catalyze a positive social change to achieve the New Jerusalem vision and the Kingdom of God on earth as in heaven in the rapid urbanization process of our cities now and here in God's grace. Lastly, the lessons learnt from the unique practical experience of the Church of England and the Church of South Africa in catalyzing such a positive social change respectively in their specific temporal and spatial contexts will be examined.

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撮　　要

　　本文先行探討格奧爾（Dieter Georg）及文森特（John Vincent）分別從聖經研讀進路解說新耶路撒冷及神國度降臨人間遠象，思考教會在推動新耶路撒冷在地及神的在地城市所肩負的角色。文章繼而會檢視相關神學論述包括考克斯（Cox Harvey）及貝徹（Sharon V. Betcher），他們倡議教會在全球急促都市化的過程中肩負推動正面社會變遷的使命，從而落實合乎神心意的新耶路撒冷在地及神的在地城市的遠象。最後本文亦會探討英國教會及南非教會分別在其特定時空環境帶動正面社會變遷的實踐經驗帶來的啟發。