

***MIND, BODY AND
ESTATES***

***Outer Estate Ministry
and Working Class Culture***

Joe Hasler

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INTRODUCTION

Housing Estates are very different. Council houses are found all over Britain. Some are in the inner city, some on the edges of towns. Some share the multi-cultural life of the inner city, others the mono-cultural world of the white working class.

It is the outer-city housing estates of the white working class people that have taken up a great deal of my Christian ministry. First as a community development worker in Birmingham, Essex, Huyton and Bristol and later as a parish priest in Bristol.

I want to write about the culture of these working class communities and the way people think theologically. There is a danger that priests and ministers fail to recognise the rich patterns of working class life, and perhaps even more worrying is that they are unable to see how working class Christians think theologically.

Our ability to connect with issues in people's lives rests on how we understand the way they see and do things.

One thing that is very clear to me, after thirty years of estate ministry, is that there are common themes in working class culture all over Britain. There are regional and local themes superimposed upon them.

One of the difficulties about talking about the working class is that in the past definitions have been based on the work place. Either the Registrar General's definition by occupation or Marx's workers relation to the means of production is based on the workplace. However, if we look at the working class through "mothers" and the "socialisation of the child", we find in this **lived culture** a more coherent story.¹ A story of a culture that persists, and changes, and still has a history and a narrative that cannot be ignored. A story that stands against a "classless society".

Working class culture is a way of living and seeing the world, and I want to present its strengths and difference in a way that does not seek to change it. Working class people are quite able to change their culture if it is to their benefit. What I want to do is understand the theological aspects of that culture in the interests of my ministry as a parish priest. This will be a step toward releasing local people to speak about their God in a way that is consistent with their understandings of themselves and those among whom they live. My concern is to affirm their authenticity, capacity and responsibility as well as my own.

The pattern of this booklet is to look at working class culture. Each aspect is mutually reinforcing. I shall do this by looking at housing estate life as if I was looking at an alien culture. How people speak, how they dress, where they live, socialise their children, use public space and produce goods. I do this because one of

our problems is that we take our culture for granted. "It's like a fish trying to have a concept of wetness"². We are so close to our culture we have to distance our eyesight to focus, and this is the framework of examining the culture I shall use.

After this I shall say something about the way faith and culture connect with each other. The connection may take many forms. They might struggle, contradict, affirm, or sit easy with each other³. But some inter-penetration should be expected. In this chapter I will report on the way many working class Christians see their faith. What are the repeated themes? How are they discussed? I intend to show that there is enough evidence to suggest the existence of a working class theology, although it goes without saying that there is still much work to be done before a working class systematic theology could be produced. Yet the indicators are that it may not be that far away.

Finally, I am aware that as I write it is fashionable to talk about the "regeneration" of housing estates. One of the catch phrases seems to be "joined up solutions to joined up problems". The spiritual, mental, emotional and physical "joined-up-ness" of our lives cannot ignore a theological perspective. It is crucial, like any other participative venture that this theological perspective comes from working class people on the housing estates under question.

Chapter 1 Working class culture

A. Language

If my two children who attend the local primary school come home saying "ain't", or loses the TT in butter; I might encourage them to speak "properly". Their response is that they don't have to speak posh.

Language use

All commentators agree that one of the things about a distinctive culture is a distinctive language. When I speak of a distinctive working class culture I join many sociologists in meaning that working class culture is a sub-culture of wider British culture⁴. So I would not expect to find a different language but rather a distinctive language use.

Socio-linguists notice three different kinds of distinctive language use in working class communities⁵. *Social accents* that drop **h**'s at the beginning of words, drop the

¹ Joyce *Class* p233-286

² Southgate J & Randall *Human Inquiry* p53-61

³ Neibuhr H R *Christ and Culture*

⁴ Giddens A *Sociology* p38

⁵ Trudgill P *Sociolinguistics* p34

g's at the end of words, and the replacement of tt's in the middle of words. Similarities have been noted in places as distant as Norwich and Chicago.

Social dialects, for example, "I ain't got no money", referring to the opposite of "I have some money", are another feature that tends to change in the shift from upper working class to lower middle class speakers⁶.

Bernstein discovered a particular structure to syntax, that reduced the number of qualifiers and clauses, used more metaphor and simile, and that was more direct. He called this a "restricted code" and referred to sub-urban language with all its qualifying clauses as "elaborated code"⁷. These headings are unfortunate in that they suggest that working class people are restricted and their sub-urban counterparts as skilled enough to be elaborate. However, this should not be allowed to obscure that fact that another kind of working class language use has been discovered.

Bernstein believed that these distinctive kinds of language use were the result of close networks, the dense family and friendship networks experienced at the time when children are learning language. This idea has been refined but sustained by later research⁸.

Stories and Yarns

If I am in a discussion about a community topic with members of the Tenant's Association, or a religious topic in a church house-group in a working class community, then the discussion will be in the form of a series of stories. These stories are not so much illustrating a point in the way that a public speaker might illustrate a point in their speech. They are more like stories that capture not just the facts of the matter but also the emotional tone. In some ways this explains why, when we talk about "telling yarns", there is a hint of mistruth or exaggeration. Yarns convey not just the objective observations, but also what the character(s) feel like.

Men in work breaks, at the bar or on big family occasions will engage in men's talk, telling stories of danger, stories of adventure, of good deals, and sexual conquests. If the process is examined carefully the qualifications to be a "story teller" often involves some kind of seniority: "Tell us about the war, grand-dad". Age is often the determining factor in claiming the right to tell your yarn at the time you chose, and others have to give way.

Some community groups, like the 23rd Brownies, have a person who is the "custodian" of their story. This person, may not be a current leader, but may have been a powerful founding member. The person who can tell the story of a group or an organisation has some power by being "custodian" of the story. Sometimes it is to their advantage, and sometimes to the advantage of the group, that they retain this

power and keep the story to themselves. The custodian of the 23rd Brownies is able to tell you why they were formed, what didn't work last time they tried it, and generally outline the tradition in which people feel comfortable working together.

Another function of stories is to make clear to people what is allowed and what is frowned upon. Some of the so called "gossip" that takes place in the post office queue relates stories of the exact degree of inebriation that caused a well known character to get thrown out of the bar at the community centre. Or it might be "tut tutting" about how the woman at number 16 had let her son-in-law leave his decaying car on the front garden and how it lowers the tone of the street. If these stories are conveyed and repeated often enough they give essential clues as to what is tolerable or what is useful information.

So stories indicate the focus for power, the medium of exercising control and the means of gaining information.

B. Physicality

I remember a Quaker naturalist telling me that we would all be equal when we removed our clothes. The suggestion is that our clothes mask who we really are, and there is a sense that makes this true. Yet it also true that what we wear emphasises who we are. Cendar's poem which includes the phrase, "on her dress she wears he body" is also true⁹.

Some writers about fashion note that the clothes we wear are part of a complex "sign system" at work in our culture and this enables them to speak of a "Language of Clothes"¹⁰. James Laver says that the three major themes of this language are utility, prestige (status and power), and sexuality (seduction and modesty).

In working class communities it would appear that men dress to accentuate their strength and women their sexuality.

Men are men

It seems as if younger men always wear jeans and t-shirts. Women dress in a variety of ways but men need to look fit, strong, sound and safe. This may also account for the male interest in sportswear, even though the evidence shows a lower participation in sport among working class males than their sub-urban counterparts.

Women are women

Some middle class commentators, when considering the dress of working class women, would feel there is a degree of brashness they might describe as tasteless.

⁶ Trudgill *ibid*

⁷ Bernstein Class, Codes and Control

⁸ Milroy L & Milroy J Social Networks and Social Class p9

⁹ Craik J Face of Fashion p1

¹⁰ Lurie A Language of Clothes p3ff

(This another case where working and upper class people are on common ground.) I think this is an alternative way of describing what Green calls a working class confidence in the body¹¹. I think that fashions that emphasise the woman's propensity to motherhood are far more popular than those styles that blur the distinctiveness between male and female.

Becoming an adult

It is noticeable that young men, either just starting work or approaching that age, may wear working clothes socially. Working boots or other utility clothes signal the boy has become a man now he is at work.

The Body and Self identity

When middle class people suggest some working class people have inferior taste or brashness in the way that they dress maybe they are indicating a greater sense of ease with one's body. In contrast I believe it may also be true that non-manual workers can sometimes feel that everything useful about their body takes place above the neck. The pre-occupation with the Cartesian, "I think therefore I am" and the notion of "mind over matter" all contribute to a devaluing of the body as a crucial part of our self-identity. Perhaps the tradition of manual work, and the value it gives physicality, along with the preference for visual and dramatic representations of pictures and narrative in language, gives the body a larger place in the working class personal sense of identity.

The philosopher Drew Leder maintains that many are still influenced by Descartes: "... women have been associated with the bodily sphere..."¹² i.e. linked with nature, sexuality and passions, whereas men have been linked with the rational mind. He goes on to say: -

"The same terms can be used to justify class and labour inequalities. Lower class workers are seen as just bodies who must be supervised by management 'minds'".

Value is put on education by many working class parents as the way out of a future of manual labour for their children. It is also apparent that for many, whose confidence in educational success is less certain, the body is an important source of self-esteem. Folk songs like "a loco fireman is my trade, two strong arms to swing the blade." (Which exult in the physical strength of the working man) reflect not collusion with oppression, but a source of dignity in the face of it. A greater place is afforded to the body as part of self-identity. Lower class workers can be seen as just bodies, but the working class pride in physical strength inverts this view. This inversion should be seen as a way of maintaining dignity and not as collusion with symbols that indicate a negative worth.

This respect for the body brings us to the "test case". "Death" is when the person is

thought to have left the body. Yet if the body is a major representation of self and identity this will be reflected, I believe, not only in the way bodies are clothed in our lifetime but also in the working class outlook on funerals.

Funerals

I believe that working class people may be less fearful of the corpse, and treat it as more representative of the person they knew than do other classes.

In working class communities funerals are very important events. They demand the best that can be found. The most expensive coffin that can be afforded, the best suit, a proper service, a good turn out. Every thing has to be done right. There is an impression from the funeral directors with which I currently have dealings those working class families are likely to want the "best furnishings" for their dead relatives. Many middle class families are not too worried about what is only going to rot anyway¹³.

The disposing of the remains of the deceased is one of the most important aspects of many working class funerals. A significant part of the conversation with friends is to talk about what one did and said when they went to view the body, what photographs were placed in the coffin with the deceased, what clothes, which football scarf etc. etc. The objects placed in the coffin are not things that may be needed in some after-life. Quite the opposite is true. They tend to be objects that affirm identity in this life: a wedding photograph affirming family identity or a football club scarf affirming community identity. There is recognition that the physical body has a place within a social context and this is part of how the person should be remembered.

I have also found that, especially in the death of the young, there is a greater physical involvement of family and friends. "His mates are going to carry him." Near kin place the ashes in the ground. This concrete activity is talked about much more in preparing working class funerals.

When the priest calls to arrange the funeral service it is more often the case that nearly all the immediate family will be there, and the priest often receives "apologies" from absent members. What is to be prepared is a "public" event at which their loved one is to "get a good send off."

Some of this could be accounted for by the fact that people in lower income groups tend to die at a younger age¹⁴. This will mean that more of the deceased's friends and relatives are still alive and active. Also that working class siblings, especially sisters, live in closer proximity to one another than their middle class counterparts. This explains how the culture is reinforced and maintained, but not the symbolic system that surrounds it.

¹¹ Green L God in City p109-110 5

¹² Leder D Absent Body p154

¹³ Clark Death, Dying and Bereavement p9 6

¹⁴ Townsend P Inequalities in Health p43-48

The body seems to be an important image and symbol for self-identity and an important vehicle of cultural expression in working class communities.

Mind and Body

I believe that the working class person may be more likely to see their body as being the most important part of their own sense of self-identity. My assertion is that **the Cartesian dualism between the mind and body has only lightly touched working class culture**. If the body is central to the “symbolic network” of working class culture then one of the first things we notice about each other’s bodies is our gender. Perhaps this is what underwrites the emphasis upon gender differentiation in working class communities.

C. Mothers and mothers and daughters

In “Women in Britain today” Beechey¹⁵ says there are strong grounds for believing that working class women are affected differently to middle class women. Gittins¹⁶ says that since 1850 onwards middle class feminists have been more concerned with the spheres of education and politics, while working class feminists with improving women’s economic situation. Certainly it seems as if much written by middle class feminists is alien to working class culture.

Being a mother is central to being a “real” woman. Women who are childless, either by choice or circumstances, or infertility, have told me how hard it is to join in conversations that are dominated by birth accounts, baby weights, labour lengths and whether you had an epidural or not.

The desire by women to find a ‘decent man’ who will love them and provide a good home and enough money, does not appear to have changed since the 1930’s. Men now take children to school if they are not at work, but “I don’t like being down there with all they women” is a frequent comment. The now so called “Parents and Toddler Club” where I am has only had one man come for more than one morning in the last ten years.

When working class men were asked about caring for children in terms of who should go out to work, and who should stay at home to care for them, they would say things like: -

- Women are made to feed.
- It’s more instinctive for a woman to hold a baby, to cuddle and change nappies, its more within their bodies¹⁷

Some working class men pointed to the cultural process of socialisation between mothers and daughters. Men could learn to do it, but why go to the trouble when women have got it all in hand anyway?

- Women get taught ...men could learn by watching films.
- Girls have practice...¹⁸

There are two aspects of these men's responses that indicate important things about working class culture. These beliefs are not limited to working class men but to women also.

1. women's bodies make it natural for women to be the primary carers
2. the mother-daughter bond is the means of the socialisation of the child-care role.

Matriarchal networks

The bond between mothers and daughters centred on the socialisation of children and the place of motherhood does seem very strong. I have worked on many housing estates. Each time I have asked the survey question, “Have you any relatives living in another household on this estate?” Those answering “Yes” increase with the age of the estate. Daughters have transferred to houses nearer their ageing parents in the past and often the relatives are mothers and daughters. Children, who ‘have done well for themselves’ may not live on the estate, but frequently visit in the car, are not the same as if they were living around the corner.

I find Barbara Harrison’s¹⁹ “three kinds of women” is an accurate and helpful description. She talks of ‘family women’ ‘marginalised women’ and women discovering themselves. *Family women* reflect the dominant matriarch structure of working class culture. The grandmother/mother/ daughter/aunt structure to social life. *Marginalised women* remind us that social housing will always attract an over-representation of those, who for whatever reason, are not part of a supportive family structure. *Those discovering their strengths* discover skills and opportunities that may necessitate a re-negotiation of family roles and expectations.

This intergenerational mother-daughter network is supportive in so many ways. There is a ready-made source of child-care. I have seen vacuum cleaners travel between households. I have overheard three sisters discussing whose gas bill to pay first to ensure that there was at least one cooker between them. Historically men and their wages are vulnerable to changing economic conditions. E.g. Casual work in the docks and similar arrangements where being “laid off” can make income unpredictable, such as for merchant seamen and long distance lorry drivers. However, when the men are working this could mean long period of loneliness if it was not for the support of other women relatives and friends. Similarly, the rotating

¹⁵ Beechey & Whitelegg *Women in Britain Today* p7

¹⁶ Gittins *Family in Question* p57

¹⁷ Walczak Y *He and She* p122-124

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ Harrison B in *Life Cycles* p145-146

shift work of men can make the woman's ability to work consistent hours impossible, either at certain times of the day or in the face of not being able to meet child-care needs. So it is not surprising that the matriarchal network is called upon and its resources taken for granted.

If the mothers and daughters make up a network of human relationships which gives rise to a major underlying structure of communications within estate life then they are like the lattice that describes the arrangement of molecules by balls and springs on the chemistry laboratory bench. When it comes to the home men are rather like the interstitial molecules that don't form part of the lattice but get caught up in it. In some substances, these interstitial molecules or atoms can strengthen the lattice by getting in the way and preventing them from easily sliding over each other. Without being mechanistic, the men may not form part of the network, but they certainly have an effect on the way the structure operates by being caught up in it and having influence upon it. This will be clearer as I consider the way this mother/daughter structure works in situations that are outside the home.

However it would be wrong to suggest that men do not belong to networks themselves. Fathers, sons and brothers are an extremely powerful influence on working class community life, but this will be explored in the context of the more public areas of community transaction.

Summary

I have taken up the theme of "physicality" and seen how this helps define for working class women the status of adulthood, which is conferred by motherhood. Their men also see that motherhood brings with it both the women's role in child-care and a social network of matriarchal nature.

Furthermore, I have begun to note some of the power matriarchal networks exercise on the way working class communities operate, but as yet have not seriously considered the place of men in community affairs. The paternal instinct is weaker than the maternal.

D. The Home

The family are gathered around the coal fire in either the front parlour or the living room finding sanctuary from a harsh world, not only in the warmth of the fire, but in the warmth of a motherly dominance that seldom has to raise her voice. How many of these features of working class culture have survived? It is difficult to assess to what extent the home is seen as a sanctuary from the harshness of life²⁰.

However one is increasingly aware of women with the rights of tenure, having gained it as a lone parent, and now refusing to share it with their male partner and

having only her name on the rent book. The pattern of it "being his home but she runs it" may still be in effect in the older generation where "he seldom moves from his chair" and certainly mother still rules in the home. However, in younger households the man can seem increasingly to be the less powerful actor in "her home" rather than having his own home.

When the choice of council houses come to mind, it is those with both a front room and a dining/kitchen that are the most popular. In Witham in Essex the people on the estate on which I lived were busy converting the "through lounge" into a front and back room, while middle class people were knocking down the dividing walls to make a "through room" in small Victorian terraced houses nearby.

Men's involvement in housework is still limited. He will mend the car and do most of the decorating. The garden can be more ambiguous. Generally men's claims about how much work they do in the home are exaggerated. The only comment about class difference in Walczak's study of men in the eighties is that in their marriages men thought that men looked for love and sex while their women looked for security and financial provision²¹. This seems to confirm what was said about fashion.

More and more part time work by women, not something they choose, but something reluctantly necessary, means that childcare in the home can be spread across several households. If their partners work shifts, husbands may sometimes share the job. More frequently, grandmothers and aunts share the task. This means 'home' is strongly referenced with 'family'.

In the home men are often not seen or heard. They seem to be a more hidden quantity. "Oh! He's as good as gold" we are told. This tends to mean that he either quietly sits in his chair, does those little mechanical repair jobs, or spends a lot of time in the garden. He generally doesn't "get under the feet" of the woman, and makes a discrete withdrawal when her friends or kin appear having already made some good-natured leg pull or teasing comment to show that her presence has been noted and not considered an intrusion. This is particularly true if the man is retired or unemployed and spends a lot of time at home. If the man is working then the house is clear for the woman and her friends. His return home is usually a signal for the visiting friend(s) to leave.

E. Our Street

In this section I hope to show that in working class communities the street is not just a tunnel through which one would drive a car on the way to work, school or shopping. It is a place where identities are formed, issues resolved and power exhibited. In this section I hope to show the beginnings of the social education made in the transition between the private life of "home" and the public life of "street".

²⁰ See Roberts, Hoggart, Martin & Willmott and Young

²¹ Walczak Y He and She p100-103

The Street - Conflict and Cohesion

Here is a recognisable scenario:

It is a warm weekday evening and the children have come home from school. Billy lives opposite Tommy with whom he and about seven other children play. They all live within a hundred yards of each other. Tonight Tommy has brought Joe home to play with them. Joe hits Billy on the nose and draws blood. Billy runs in to tell his mum what Joe has done to him. (This is the kind of situation where working class women have to be very good at mental arithmetic.) Billy's mum comes out to the street. "Who do you think you are!" she cries. (Or words to that effect.) "We don't need the likes of you spoiling what goes on in our street!" "Go and **** ** and play in your own street!" By now Tommy's mum has arrived on the scene. "Don't you ****ing shout at Joe like that. You haven't even tried to find out what happened. If he wants to play with Billy he has every right to. You don't own this ****dy street you know..." This is now the point at which mental arithmetic come into its own. While speaking with gradually increasing volume, they are counting the men they each have at their call.

(Thinks)... "I've got my husband and his two brothers, my sister's husbands can be counted on, but it's no good counting on Jeannie's bloke, he's too chicken..." And then an estimate of the other woman's men folk has to be made. This plays a large part in determining who backs down. If she has to back down, then the faster the mental arithmetic, the greater the possibility of doing so without losing too much face, because the process of backing down can be begun before the opponent has realised their strength.

It should be noted that the men, who are probably watching the horse racing, or reading the paper indoors, stay absolutely glued to their seats. Men on the streets under such circumstances will mean that protection has been called upon and a fight nigh inevitable. At this stage such an outcome is to be avoided. No one is looking for violence over such a trivial matter. It is not as if anyone has grassed to the police or the housing department. It is still largely an internal affair.

Furthermore, the reference to "...you don't own this street..." indicates that the conflict is taking place within a shared sense of ownership. Our street does not belong to any one of its residents. There is popular assent to the notion of "our street". If a whole group of non-resident youngsters were to appear and disrupt the play of the resident youngsters, then Billy's and Tommy's mums would be united in the matter of who had rights of play, if not even right of passage²². Of course, not all neighbourhood conflicts are worked out in this way, but this example indicates the link between the home with all its female domestic power, and the street with its pre-dominance of male public power. The issue of male power in the public domain is something to be explored later in the next section. The street is a place where territory, identity, neighbourly friendship and family power are worked out. This process begins from early childhood.

²² Schoenberg S Neighbourhood Viability 11

Street and Identity

As children grow up, the street is an important part of their widening experience. At first play is by the doorstep irrespective of its suitability. By the age of eight or nine they play within 400 yards of the front door. By early adolescence they concern themselves with the street as a whole²³. This means the street is a way of widening experience of the public life beyond the home. The street is an important building block in working class identity. You seldom hear people talk about 'our estate' in the same way as they talk about 'our street'.

Flats and Houses

The importance of having a door that opens onto a street maybe a factor in accounting for the undesirability of flats for many, though by no means all, people. Firstly there is a sense of sanctuary and security that goes with "behind your own front door" and the privacy that that entails. Secondly, there is the security from knowing who are the "eyes on the street". My own survey of flats in Birmingham showed a greater level of satisfaction on the top floor of blocks of flats. I later discovered that what was true for top floor flats was also true for those on the ground floor, but less satisfaction was experienced by those in flats which are "sandwiched". I.e. greater satisfaction for those in what most approximate to houses or bungalows.

The life and culture of the street is an important aspect of working class identity, and depending on the way the flats are constructed, this identity cannot always be developed in flats. Thomas distinguishes between those flats that are socially open and those, which are socially closed in their design²⁴. Those in flats with a more "socially open" design were able to recreate street life to a greater extent than those who lived in flats with a "socially closed" design were.

Good Neighbours.

One of the important things that I have found with neighbours is their eyes. When you have children, neighbours are eyes on the street. If children are not too young and you need to pop down to the shops, then you can ask a neighbour "to keep an eye on them". If you have got a little job and you are expecting a catalogue delivery, you can ask a neighbour "to keep an eye out for the van". If you are off to see your mum a few streets away and you have left your washing out on the line you can ask a neighbour "to keep an eye out for the rain". It is my experience that neighbours have eyes in the same way that walls have ears.

Sometimes it is wise to keep a ladder or a wheelbarrow well hidden or else it can be more borrowed than at home. Borrowing and lending are one of the most important forms of exchange. Respectability can be gauged by the sensitivity a person has to the balance of exchange. In communities where resources are short, favours are

²³ Green K in Children and Communities p75

²⁴ Thomas D Community worker as Stranger p130

always going to be "called in"²⁵.

Being indebted, financially or socially, does not enhance respect and dignity. As was noted from the street incident at the beginning of this section, "face" and "dignity" are still very important qualities. Neighbours are people you will probably need to continue to live among so dignity and face are long term considerations.

Who owns the street?

My office window overlooks one of the well-trodden pedestrian routes to the shops. In the morning, women, some with pushchairs, will walk casually down, talking, stopping, and all at a leisurely pace. Occasionally a man will rush by, his eye neither deviating to the left or to the right. A few minutes later he will pass by in the opposite direction, at the same speed, carrying a loaf in one hand and a bottle of milk in the other.

If it is later evening, getting dark, it will be the men who loiter and the women who rush by to the off licence to buy the packet of cigarettes. It is the 'lads' who occupy the strategic places sitting on the pub wall or outside the chip shop. Despite the advent of girl power, girls who join this activity get labelled in derogatory ways.

One of the factors that sustain this is how in early working life, even on job creation schemes, girls and boys are expected to contribute to the household budget. Girls are also still expected to do some domestic tasks. Boys are released from them on the grounds they are giving 'keep'. However wages are low and do not permit much spending on leisure. They can be seen on the street outside of working hours. For the girls the street becomes a less safe place to be, and outings are restricted to quick errands²⁶.

It is also true that for a young male, life can be easier if you are known to have a number of brothers. I even recall an incident in an infant school "after-school-club" where another had hit a little boy. Rather than castigate the offending child the mother admonished the victim's brother for not defending him. I remember her words; "You always stick up for each other. That is what family is."

Conclusions.

The street is not only an important place of socialisation where youngsters play and learn about neighbourhood and the rules of social engagement between people, it is also an important arena where powerful symbols are at work. It is on the street where symbols of power, sexuality and family are displayed, appreciated and given affirmation. This is borne out by many popular phrases. "Taking to the streets" is a symbol of male working class revolutionary power. Working "on the streets" or "streetwalker" is a pseudonym for prostitution. There are the powerful sentiments of

the pop song "Our house in the middle of the street." There is need to have "street cred" or to be "street-wise" as a teenager. The street remains a symbol that evokes images and sentiments that are not found in "the road", "the crescent" or "the avenue".

F. Work

It is still true that working class people are more likely to think of men's jobs and women's jobs²⁷. One of the women who works in the office at the city farm is always teased by the men returning with the tractor about her not doing 'real' work but only women's work. This involves youngish men who know full well that the future of work is in the service sector rather than in manual work.

In all classes there is little evidence that women who stay at home to care for their children are dissatisfied with their lot. Yet more go to work once their children go to secondary school²⁸.

27% of men work more than 40 hours and less than 6% of women²⁹.

Much has not changed about working class expectations. Women work part time. Men expect to work full time. Men are still seen as workers and women as home-keepers.

In areas of high unemployment, the need to supplement benefits has a high premium. The importance of brothers, fathers and men-folk-in-law, is very apparent. This is also true when it comes to reminding past work-mates of one's skills. This allows them to invite you to help them if a "little job" needs doing that will attract some income or benefits in kind. Men in wider family networks, who have qualities of strength, or particular trade skills, stand a good chance of receiving such invitations. My conversations with such men indicate that they feel that it is not like having a proper job, but it is better than nothing, and carries with it some aspects of entrepreneurial activity that goes with 'providing'.

Men who are less well connected need to be available to self-employed builders who need another pair of hands. If one observes the activity of men at pubs, cafes, working men's clubs, labour clubs, and community centres, it becomes evident that these are places where scouts can find cheap casual labour at a moment's notice. These are also places where men can escape the domestic space and retain a reputation of being "as good as gold" by not getting under "her" feet.

Men dominate the public spaces. And when things get competitive and valuable opportunities need safeguarding or protecting, father-son, brother-brother, and brother-brother in law, networks are important alliances in community. This, alongside being known as a skilled or hard worker, is essential for attracting

²⁵ Abrams P Social Change, Social Networks p12

Hasler J Neighbourhoods and Congregations p5

²⁶ Hollands R Long Transition p131-134

²⁷ Witherspoon S A Women's Work p195

²⁸ Witherspoon & Prior Working Mothers p151

²⁹ Labour Market Trends Jan 1996

additional resources.

"Around here the man is still the bread-winner. People will do anything for money." This was a comment, possibly a little exaggerated, made by a Bristol woman speaking on the "Network First" programme shown on ITV on the 5th of March 1996. The programme was dealing with the problem of selling drugs on housing estates.

Temptation is always there, and occasionally this means serious law breaking, but usually it means little more than not declaring a little extra income. I am not making moral judgements by suggesting that the working classes are bigger law-breakers than other classes. In 1972 Social security fiddling was estimated at £3.7m. And tax owed but written off in 1970 at between £235m. and £535m³⁰. In fact some have maintained that the extent of the so-called "hidden economy" is so small and ill defined that it is a myth³¹. But having said that, it is on the streets, in the cafes and in the pubs, that drug dealing and other forms of exchange and hiring labour takes place.

Being part of a male network is of vital importance if men are to continue to provide.

Adaptation or Loss of cultural identity?

With the loss of manual work, one of the crucial questions about working class culture is to what extent will this loss affect working class male identity? Will it eat into the working class people's view of their physicality and the distinctiveness of gender roles?

One significant Church-leader in Bristol, knowing that I am a priest working in the outer estate parish of Hartcliffe, said that I should tell the people of Hartcliffe that there was enough work for all, if not for themselves, then certainly for their children. Several caring city business and commercial people had done the figures and things looked optimistic. Of course it is important the church should bear good news. And it is also true that people need the information to help them come to their own conclusions. The problem for young men is that if these jobs are office jobs or working in "burger bars" they have a lot of issues to sort out.

What will it mean for them to do women's work? How will it affect the way that they sustain their own life in a working class culture? If they are to set up home with a woman, what will her expectations be? At what level of reduced "providing" will men be able to "trade in" a significant part of their image of protector? What might seem a very simple issue of men not being too proud, and having to get work where it is available, turns out to be a complex issue for not just the men, but a whole culture.

³⁰ Outer Circle Policy Unit

³¹ Harding & Jenkins Myth of Hidden Economy

The Organisation of work and its effects on the Culture

The organisation of working labour in large units, either factories or in heavy industry has largely disappeared. Even large groups of council employees have been broken down into small groups. Sometimes tasks are now contracted out to groups of self-employed men. There has always been a tradition of market trader type of entrepreneurs among the working class community, but the loss of large-scale employers has had far reaching consequences. Elaine Applebee, speaking in the General Synod of the Church of England debate on the report "Youth Apart" made these observations:

"... perhaps the most worrying issue is the loss of work from working class communities has meant for the socialisation of the young, working class men. Work for these communities not only meant money to live on but also contributed to a culture, which glued people together. It provided an important support to parents as their teenagers grew to be men. It provided the means by which young, daft boys became sensible young men to whom women were prepared to commit themselves. The workplace provided older men and a hierarchy through which boys learned their place, skills, discipline and self-control. When work disappears, so does the contribution of the community's cultural glue....³²"

Models of organisation

Another thing that work has given to working class culture is some models of organisation. Both working class men and women experience from their working lives, either at home, or in employment, models that influence the way community organisations and community groups operate.

One of the dominant workplace models is that of the worker and the foreman. The experience of the "worker" is that there is one person to whom they and their peers are accountable. Sometimes the worker will approach the foreman or the supervisor with a suggestion or an idea. The request will sometimes be suffixed with the statement, "After all, you're the boss. What you say goes."

Leaders of youth clubs, voluntary organisations and other bodies, who is paid by agencies who are centred outside the community and its culture, will recognise these words as statements that require careful responses. The danger is that the request will cause some conflict between the values of the agency policy and the values of the working class culture in which its project or branch of the agency is set. "After all, you're the boss. What you say goes." implies that you as boss must take the consequences of declining the suggestion. There are always more ways of making things not work than there are of making them work. Secondly this comment suggests that whether you will accept this suggestion or prefer that of someone else, is being watched and evaluated. Thirdly, if this suggestion is refused, a refusal will require an explanation. Should the explanation include a fear of breaking some rules determined by "outside" values, values that are "ridiculous anyway", the explainer

³² Applebee E General Synod Debate July 1996

can be made to feel the cultural distance between themselves and the culture in which they are set.

Within the community too, certain regimes operate a "foreman" style of organisation. Uniformed organisations like Boys Brigade, martial arts clubs, football and sports groups, such as darts clubs often have leaders (bosses) who need to be strong characters and can withstand the temptations to "be one of the boys".

Another dominant model is based upon the domestic sector of work and self-provisioning. This is highly influenced by the matriarchal nature of community networks. Here small groups run by women are often managed in the familial style of organisation. Working class women are trained (or socialised) to manage their families, a concept which here includes the extended nature of family life across several households. You find "the woman that runs the Brownies", "the woman who runs the playgroup", and "the women who runs the catalogue". They run these activities as a family affair, and often negotiate boundaries with other women to clarify legitimate spheres of influence to ensure that they do not have disputes about poaching from each other. Co-operation is too strong a word in what is a competitive atmosphere. (Family is an exclusive concept as well as being inclusive.) Perhaps it would be an overstatement to describe the inter group relations as a kind of "I won't stab you in the back if you don't stab me in the back." Clearly there are times when access to the groups that matriarchs run involve them being "gatekeepers" and some economic advantage. Involvement in such groups has to be weighed. Favours granted are favours that may be "called in" at a later stage. This style of managing is not restricted to women, but comes from the entrepreneurial model of domestic work. (Pahl & Wallace 1985). I remember many M.S.C. schemes in Liverpool dominated by particular families in those many of the staff was related to one another.

The final model is the one most vulnerable in the light of the restructuring of the economy that has been described. This is the Trades Union style of organisation. This style of organisation can be seen in working men's clubs, community associations, tenants associations and other male dominated local organisations. It runs on the basic idea that, "We all have our say. Everyone has a right to express an opinion. Then we vote and we all follow the majority decision." The weakening of the Trade Union movement since the Miner's strike and before, along with the shift from manufacturing industries to a more fragmented service sector, have all contributed to a decline of this pattern. If this is the case then can we expect a weakening of that kind of organisational structure in working class communities?

G. The Symbolic Network

A beginning has been made in understanding the symbolic network of lived working class culture. I want to emphasise that language, physicality, sexuality, home, street,

work, are parts, but parts that reinforce each other, a kind of system where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. A culture. More accurately a sub-culture of British society.

By a 'system', I mean the parts reinforce each other with reference to the whole. For example, the preference for metaphor and narrative connects with the physical and concrete way people act. The higher value given to physicality accounts for the more dominant part played by gender. Strong patterns of kinship organisation accounts for the perpetuation of certain kinds of language use. The whole system is a pattern of reinforcing factors.

While it is true that the culture is changing always, it is also particularly resistant to outside influences. Marxist ideas may have had a strong influence in parts of the workplace, but the strong notion of family³³ and the strong 'market trader' entrepreneurial spirit within working class culture has prevented Marxism taking hold. Working class culture may not be strong in propagating its own ideas but it is strong as a consumer in its ability to refuse outside influences³⁴.

For example, I was interested in the reactions of a woman's meeting I recently attended. The women were asked to respond to a story in which unemployed women had been offered a part time job. Her husband was also unemployed and resented her working. Was this reasonable? The women unanimously felt that, since there were children to support, the man's attitude was totally unreasonable. The conversation was in a popular feminist vein. When the question was posed, "Would it make a difference what kind of work she did? Suppose she got a job as a fork lift truck driver rather than that of a pastry cook?" Then the whole tenor of the discussion changed. Of course it was understandable that he resented it. After all they were only employing a women because it was cheaper. And then a debate about class solidarity began to be formed.

Changes threatened by economic restructuring.

Hollands³⁵, in describing the changes in the transition from school to work, points out that young people are not just passive recipients of the values of the schemes they are engaged with, "...Somewhere along the way they impart something of their culture and focal concerns..." on to these schemes. He goes on to say that "Yet, it is equally important not to over romanticise this level, or limit young people's expressions to a unitary cultural logic...."

I believe this to be a helpful statement, not just with regard to young people leaving school to start adult life, but to working class culture in general. In the face of new pressures there are no single responses, but a variety of things to test. And no doubt the passage of time will bring forth the most advantageous response that is most

³³ Jack I Class p166

³⁴ Turner G British Cultural Studies p199

³⁵ Hollands R Long Transition p195

consistent with the culture that people wish to preserve. At the same time it is important to recognise that there will be change, and changing circumstances will give rise to new outcomes.

The thrust of the changes brought about by recession and restructuring, and the accompanying social policy, seems to be strengthening the female components of traditional working class culture with an accompanied weakening of the male aspects.

The place of unmarried women with children, alongside other lone parent households, has the advantage of a greater control of the tenancy and, to some extent, the level of benefits over against the unemployed partner. When times get financially hazardous, it is not unknown for separation papers to be filed so that he, technically living with mum, claims independently from the lone parent family he leaves behind with its enhanced allowances. For many even getting married is not in their financial interest. The outcome is a greater female control over the home, not just in the traditional sense of housekeeper, but in the legal and financial sense too. Changes in the rules for new claimants may change or even reverse this trend.

It is the lack of manual work that has weakened the man's propensity to provide, except through the domestic and local economy that supports wage earning. So at the very time that the male worker's place and contribution to working class culture has been seen to be weakened, that of the matriarchal components to social life have been considerably strengthened. This is particularly so when the nature of economic restructuring has given rise to a greater availability of part-time women's jobs.

I have suggested that it would be extremely premature to write off the working class culture because the nature of male employment is undergoing considerable change. However all cultures are to some extent self adjusting systems³⁶ and many changes are likely to be prescribed within the reasoning and symbolic networks already at play. However this will only take place if there is time and space for working class people to make sense of these changes and what they can mean for them. For this reason, even with change in the wind, the current understanding of working class culture that I have outlined is likely to be in currency for a considerable time to come. It is with this confidence that we can move on to think about how working class Christians makes sense of the Christian tradition in the light of their culture.

Chapter 2 A Working Class Theology?

Having made a start in describing working class culture what does this mean when it comes to pastoral and evangelistic work in working class outer estate parishes? It is no help to replicate the patterns of sub-urban Britain, even if they are dosed up with a spot of liberation theology.

³⁶ Giddens A Sociology p438 19

One of my abiding memories is of a meeting in a family centre in Liverpool. I had just shown an episode of "Breadline Britain" on the video. The object was to activate, in a productive way, some of the anger felt by people watching. I had expected the viewers to express their own anger about their own circumstances when similar experiences were so sympathetically portrayed on the screen. However, the only anger expressed took the form of "How could these people parade their poverty? Have they no pride?"

Some time passed before I began to understand the language I had obtain from an interest in liberation theology made little connection with the working class people of Britain with whom I worked. The language of *poverty*, *oppression*, *solidarity* and *justice* was not part of the ordinary day-to-day language of the people living in the housing estates where I worked³⁷.

In this chapter I do not set out to help working class people *do theology*, but to hear how they have been doing it over the last 100 years or more. To listen to how their faith is shaped, not by outside influences of themselves, but how their faith is expressed in the culture of which they are part. The challenge is to move from how a British sub-urban theology can be translated in working class areas to how faith is part and parcel of peoples lived sociology.

I have been part of working class churches most of my life, and have engaged in numerous conversations. In addition I have some tape recorded conversation made in the course of some research I undertook. Some themes are consistently repeated and it is these I want to report here.

A. What is Church?

People are quite sacramental about 'the church'. There appear to move very easily from 'church as a building' to the 'church as a family of friends'. This is done much as one might talk about 'home' to describe 'family' and vice versa. It is as if the building is an outward and visible sign of the fellowship that meets inside. Building and people are spoken of just as they speak of home and family.

One of the important metaphors for church is the family of God. This is a useful metaphor in that it means that the church building is seen as one household in the households of an extended family rather like families spread across a housing estate. It also has the danger as a metaphor of exclusivity.

I have heard the church spoken of as the 'arms of Christ'. Arms that enfold, engulf, even cuddle. The sense that the church is a safe house is not about a building alone. It suggests that safety works in many ways. It is a fellowship where people take you for what you are. Safety is read as spiritual, communal and physical and these are not

³⁷ Wiltshire Liberation UK p78ff 20

separated even if they are differentiated. The sense of sanctuary and safety is very important. Like family, you can be challenged and cherished, but accepted.

Church is a place to be safe but not a place to just escape. It is a place that makes a difference. “We go out recharged.” “We see things different don’t we.” “Problems seem reduced.” Women often draw comparisons with the home. “We meet God at Home don’t we.” Safety and sanctuary are attributes of their homes too. But what is said clearly is that safety and sanctuary and God’s secret work in our hearts leads to transitions in our lives. Little transformations. God is made known and then things are different.

The sacramental understanding is very striking. Brian for example says

A thought that's just come to my mind what I can think of (about Holy Communion); it's not just having God in Jesus Christ in thought but if you can have something which is basically the most simple things on earth like a bread and wine you're having it basically not only in theory or thought when part - it's like Jesus body in it - it's you're having part of his creation - a practical - practical part of Jesus Christ's creation. So therefore you got that little bit of having something what God created without having just - just thinking about God within your mind, your heart and your soul. You're having something basically - in it - you're having something which is real, what you can see, touch, and smell and taste. That's how I see it

Having something of God, which is - which he has created - an appreciating while you have the bread and wine so you also appreciate the other things of life, which is food - the Bread of life.

The Holy communion is experienced by Brian in the way many others experience worship, or private time in Church, as an experience that transforms the bleak or limited nature of situations into something more energetic or hopeful.

The idea of church as a place is important too. The sense of church and home as places of sanctuary can be metaphors for each other. Church also represents a focus for renewal, or transforming events, by virtue of the sanctuary it provides. The sacramental understanding represents the way mind and body is not separated, but that an inner reality cannot be properly expressed without a physical dimension.

B. The Humanity of Jesus and the Fatherhood of God

When people are asked to describe God in the form of a picture, two contrasting images occur. The first is of a bright light, or a force or something that suggests illumination and power. The other image is of a male. Sometimes the middle-eastern man with a beard in the sky, but sometimes less certain. One woman said she thought God was a “male something”. The picture comes from the fact that Jesus was a middle-eastern man and he called God his “Father”. One man concluded that it is natural to expect an offspring to bear some resemblance to their parents.

Many, women particularly, see God as a protector and provider in the first place. He satisfies the requirements of the perfect man. He is strong but gentle, kind and thoughtful.

If pressed further for a “picture” there is a reference to Jesus as God. “We can associate more with Jesus can’t we?” “We think about Jesus more than God don’t we?” People seem to drift easily between Jesus and God. One person said, “God is the soul that engulfs, Jesus is like his flesh.” Again one is struck by the way Cartesian dualism is attacked by the sacramental view of life. The physical is not just symbolic of the spiritual; it is an actual sign of a reality that is not disassociated from the sign itself.

There is some evidence that working class people as a whole are not too comfortable with the idea of Jesus as the Son of God³⁸. Maybe the way working class Christians overcome this is by stressing the humanity of Jesus, who is also God.

Jesus is also regularly referred to as something solid you can follow.” God is someone who has not been seen. Jesus has been seen. “Well it’s Jesus we accept isn’t it, after all we have never seen God have we?” “Seeing is believing” and people trust what they or other people have physically experienced.

It would seem that people need two ways to talk about God. In the sense that God is beyond what we can see and know, God is a force or light. In the sense that God is personal and someone with whom we relate, God is the Father of Jesus of Nazareth. It is as if it is difficult to imagine a person who has no gender, or is beyond gender, particularly in a culture where the body is such a crucial part of one’s self-identity.

One interesting understanding of the atonement I heard was this. God is like a foreman. “God isn’t like most foremen I know. They make you do all the dirty jobs while they never get their hands dirty. God is like a foreman who gets his hands dirty.

³⁸ Ahern G Inner City God p131

C. Words and Action

“I don’t think God is logical.” This comment in the middle of a discussion about what it would be like to meet God strikes again at the heart of Cartesian dualism. Yet it would be wrong to say that logic was always spurned. There may be a gender difference here because the men tended to construct their replies in a logical way, even a technological way. The women tended to use an association of ideas more frequently. For example, when talking about prayer, the men tend to ask God for the tools rather than ask God to do the job for them. Being a worker, or fellow worker with Christ, leads them not to ask for a particular outcome but the tools to make a difference. One comment that captures the flavour. Looking at his hands he says to God, “You’ve given them to me. You make ‘em work”. This very physical picture of prayer stresses actions over and above words.

In some ways the respect for technology stands in contradiction to the statement that God is not logical. I think that this reflects a contradiction within the culture. Growing technology has been the cause of the loss of many working class jobs. Cartesian minds have stood against working class bodies and have done them a great disservice. Yet it is also true that working class people have seen education as a way of their children avoiding manual work. Perhaps it is a matter of doing business with the enemy but not being seduced by them.

This preference of action to words should not be read as a resistance to reading the bible. There are many regular bible readers among working class congregations. However, either because of poor eyesight or low literacy levels it cannot be assumed that everyone can read the bible. Yet people make very strong associations with bible stories. When I asked some people what stories were the ones with which they most identified the answers were as follows: -

- The single parent status of Mary
- The way the disciples misunderstood Jesus
- The suffering of Jesus
- The long journey the wise men had to find Jesus
- Sharing the bread and fishes
- The pestered Judge
- Jesus suffering for truth
- Peter’s denial
- Birth into poverty

The last two items were the ones most mentioned.

My final comment is about sensitivity to spiritual realities. I note a greater preparedness to talk about dreams and visions. We should note that this is one of the points where inner prompting and spiritual phenomena make impact upon our physical world

D. Sunday Worship

Forty people at St Andrew Hartcliffe Bristol were asked to pick the three most helpful/important elements of worship in order from the list below.

1. Singing together
2. Saying sorry / Being forgiven
3. Joining in the prayers
4. Hearing the Bible read
5. Listening to the Sermon
6. Sharing the Peace
7. Receiving Communion

The details of how many times each item was chosen are as follows:

	1st Choice	Total Choice	
7. Receiving Communion	22	34	85%
2. Saying sorry / Being forgiven	7	21	53%
3. Joining in the prayers	2	21	53%
6. Sharing the Peace	2	13	33%
1. Singing together	5	13	33%
5. Listening to the Sermon	2	10	25%
4. Hearing the Bible read	0	8	20%

85% i.e. 34 out of 40 people chose Receiving Communion within their first three choices.

55% i.e. 22 out of 40 people chose Receiving Communion as their first choice.

A combination which included two out of:

- a) **Receiving Communion,**
 - b) **Saying sorry / Being forgiven, and**
 - c) **Joining in the prayers**
- was chosen 29 out of 40 times (73% of those questioned)

Clearly singing and sharing the peace which are participative activities rate higher than passive listening. This I expected. But why should forgiveness and absolution rate so high. I think the transforming/ changing/ healing elements are what really have impact. Receiving communion and confession – absolution also both have sacramental connotations. The things that are most important are the things that mean you leave the church different to when you went in. In this sense they are transforming and are the actions that most clearly connect you with God. This is perhaps joining the prayers is also rated so highly. This sacramental view of church, God and prayer stands in stark contrast to the Cartesian separation of mind and matter, so perhaps this what we should expect given the way working class culture has been described.

E. Inclusion

Two other issues that are common to housing estate churches are about whether people should be baptised or whether Holy Communion should be distributed from an open altar/table. In neither case have local Christians been advocating an open policy. Opinions about this are varied. Those who stress the exclusivity of the family will look for an appropriate process by which people can come to belong. Those who stress the inclusive aspects of the family will want to include people in the action to belong first and take the appropriate process later. These debates take place in all congregations but in this culture the notion of family has a powerful influence. Those Christians who say they have had to battle with exclusiveness make powerful arguments in favour for openness and often feel that the church should be one place where you are accepted unreservedly. With Baptism some compromise is often found where a very inclusive and welcoming preparation process is agreed. At the altar/table protracted negotiations are not possible.

Chapter 3 Some Implications

In Chapter 2 there was a review of working class culture as a system. A number of aspects that made up the symbolic network of the culture were noted. These aspects make up a collage that enable people to make sense of, and to express what life is like. Actions speak louder than words. Men are men. Women are women. Family can be called upon and demand of you. Home is private; you can do what you want in your own home; it's no one else's business. In stark contrast the street is public. Work is definitive of male adulthood, child bearing that of a woman. Home is synonymous with comfort and sometime family. These are all features that make up the collage or symbolic network of working class culture. These symbols, or rather the tensions between them, have a bearing upon how faith is appropriated and expressed. People may not ignore many a well-meaning sermon or liturgy but those that resonate with the symbolic network are likely to be "meaningful" and feed the Christian's action in the world. The past chapter has shown how the culture provides the frameworks to some aspects of faith.

Church buildings - a case study in working class theology.

When discussing how people manage when they come to church for the first time, the point is often made about how church buildings are alien to many peoples' ordinary experience. Churches are large, tall, and often open buildings that have doors that creak so that when you enter for the first time every head turns around, especially in the smaller housing estate congregations. The newcomer can be made to feel very exposed and very much on show. The setting is one that does not, at least at first sight, appear very homely, and is one that is very public. Some might conclude that the answer is to build smaller, warmer churches with comfortable

chairs that are more homely and private.

On the other hand, when discussing what kind of building is suitable for a wedding or a funeral, most people who want to be married or buried in a church want a "proper church". The more Victorian or Gothic, the better. Cynics within the church often attribute this phenomenon to the need to produce adequate photographs. Of course weddings are public occasions even in working class communities, where church weddings are more and more of a rarity, but funerals are also as public as you can get, often involving whole sections of the community.

How are we to bring to bear on this issue, the discussion about the privacy of the home and the public nature of the street discussed in Chapter two?

A doorkeeper in the house of my God (Ps 84 v10)

I find it helpful to remember that the home is a place of privacy and sanctuary. It stands in stark contrast to the street, which is not a tunnel that people travel through to go to work or to the supermarket, but is a social arena that is the epitome of public character. It is this stark contrast that makes the issue so important in working class communities. If you are not a church-goer, then church is then part of "street". It seems to me that "going to church" for public occasions is a public event. On ordinary Sundays the difficulty with coming to church is only partly to do with how to deal with entering a building that is very different from one's home. The difficulty is really about having to make a public statement about belief, especially in a community where ridicule is likely to follow.

For many working class Christians, the day they made the leap from the private nature of their "homespun religion" to making that journey to public worship in church is a very significant one that they can still recall. The day that they started 'going to church' was the day they made a public statement for Jesus Christ, and if you ask many working class people about when they became a Christian they will answer with a story about how they first came to church. There is no conflict between this concrete action and inner belief. It would be a mistake to read this as in any way inferior to giving a statement about their first belief in Jesus Christ, which later led them to belong to the church. For most, it is not a question of believing preceding belonging. In a community where actions speak louder than words, and in a situation that might well attract ridicule, it would be wrong to think that people work out the theory and then act upon it, i.e. first believe and then go to church. Working class theology emphasises orthopraxis rather than orthodoxy and has its own validity. One of the ways in which the analogy between home and church is very powerful is that it makes concrete the shift that takes place in people's lives from private prayer toward public faith.

And in God's house for evermore my dwelling place shall be (Ps 23 v6)

When people become members of a church, the church begins to stop being

"street" and becomes "home". I find it a matter of interest that when the grass of the church grounds is left untidy people, who do not come to church and therefore see the church as "street", make no comment. The church grounds are neglected like so many other public areas. However, for those for whom church is "home", this neglect is a matter of considerable importance. The respectability of one's home is judged by such criteria, and so great care should be taken of God's house. For those who go to church, all the sense of sanctuary that is associated with home and family becomes part of the way that one begins to see church. This transference of expectations has both strengths as well as a number of weaknesses.

There are also some people who reverse the analogy between rooms and church. Until now I have been speaking of a contrast between the privacy of home and the public nature of Church. But for some the church is like a room that is an extension to their home. This room, which they occasionally enter, has been the place of family weddings, baptisms and funerals. They seldom enter this room and when they do, it is for a private family occasion. The only people they meet when they enter; besides their own family, is the vicar, priest or minister who has already presided over other family occasions. These public officials are even treated sometimes as an honorary family member. Private events such as these do not facilitate the transition from private religion to public worship, and are in danger of dulling the contrast and perpetuating the separation between the two.

It is important to draw a distinction to a home that has many rooms and the kind of front parlour worship I sometimes observe. When congregations become small, and it is not justified to heat the whole building, they meet in a small room or vestry. It is so homely, almost "front room-ish", that any new person would immediately feel as a visitor. Maybe even the congregation would find it hard to treat the new person as a potential fellow member and fall into the temptation of treating them as a visitor. It is very important to preserve the tension between home and street: private and public. In being God's house the congregation should feel at home, but it should not degenerate into being the congregation's home.

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places (Jn 14 v2)

Perhaps it is also true that many worshipping working class folk see the church as "God's House". "God's Home" is a title reserved for heaven. Perhaps this makes it important to treat the church building like a house i.e. as a building with many rooms. By this I am not suggesting that there have to be several side chapels dedicated to various Saints. This cathedral model is only one way of reacting. However, it is possible to have different corners; e.g. the baptistery corner, the study corner, the memory candle corner, the private prayer corner; as well as the sanctuary and the chancel³⁹. (R.Giles 1997 87ff).

Clearly movement through the building during worship best creates this image of different rooms. A common example of how we evoke the sense of house rather

than a room is in the way that people move from the sitting room (Nave) to the dining room (Sanctuary) to receive their communion, or from the baptistery to the nave after Christian initiation.

In a working class context it always indicates a sense of belonging when one is no longer confined to the front parlour and is invited into the kitchen, or in these modern times, the kitchen/diner.

In a more limited way, it is possible to give the impression of using different rooms during public worship. The leader(s), by using various back cloths; i.e. when preaching from a pulpit, reading from the lectern, taking the Gospel reading to the centre of the church, moving from the chancel step to behind the altar, or whatever is liturgically appropriate in the variety of denominational traditions.

It should be noted in this discussion that working class communities do not react positively to multi-use buildings. It may be that a degree of multi-use is acceptable as long as there are permanent designated "rooms".

Reflections upon the Case study.

In seeking to understand the attachment that working class people seem to develop with church buildings, the case study shows that it is not a simple matter of home is sanctuary and therefore Church is God's house. This is only part of the story. The 'text' is a complex inter-relation of the contrast between Home and Street, the statement made by actions rather than the words and the place of members and the place of guests. The symbol of home in relation to street also changes depending on the place that has been reached in the plot. The fact that this study gives rise to a complex interrelation of signs current in working class culture is perhaps the strongest evidence of a faith that is both incarnational and local.

Local agency and regional dimensions

This is important in dealing with working class culture because, while it may not be regional in a geographical sense, it has manifestations in almost every region of Britain. I have experienced this phenomenon in Birmingham, Essex, Liverpool and Bristol and other places from my own experience; and as I read the reports of those in Bradford, Sheffield and others in the course of this study, it is clearly a nationwide phenomenon with regional variations.

If churches are to support mission in working class culture there are implications for where, in church structures, different cultures meet. In the case of this study where working class culture meets the dominant suburban culture of many congregations. At present this support is often defined in economic terms. Where working class parishes or ministerial areas are in the minority, things like circuit or deanery boundaries are drawn up to ensure that wealthier parishes are distributed between circuits and deaneries. This means that financial support can be given if

³⁹ Giles R Re-pitching the Tent p87 27

the recipients are spread around among better off places. If the support were defined culturally, allowing room to discover new shapes to church organisation that was culturally appropriate, then consideration would be given to non-geographic deaneries and circuits. I see no evidence for this kind of action in any of the mainstream churches.

In some areas the congregations developing in working class culture are in the majority. It is interesting how Liverpool diocese has developed training initiatives for lay leadership teams in working class parishes that take into account working class agendas. (I.e. GUML). How do such initiatives take place when the working class voice is diluted around a variety of deanery synods, circuit meetings or their equivalent in other denominational structures?

Sometimes the meeting between cultures is situated within parishes. Often this is a primary reason for setting up a church plant to separate and recognise difference, and evangelise the working class part of the parish.

If what is needed is to launch missionary congregations, then in working class communities the congregations need to speak in and to their own culture, and develop forms of congregational organization that are consistent with a theology that reflects the local culture. This will require not only sensitive theologian/missionaries on the spot, but also flexibility in church structures. Without these non-geographical support systems to enable working class congregations 'be church' (Warren 1995a) in their own cultural way, and then properly to negotiate ways of dealing with the wider church through whatever authority systems are appropriate, little further movement is likely to take place.

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***MIND, BODY AND
ESTATES***

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and Working Class Culture***

Joe Hasler