

Two Years On: From the Perspective of Church House

PAT DEARNLEY

Imagine a typical Diocesan Synod in session, discussing its response to *Faith in the City*. Apart from the clergy, whose employment and (for the vast majority) background places them solidly among the professional classes, the lay members are drawn almost entirely from 'comfortable' Britain. In the midst of a lengthy contribution from the floor about the theological content of the ACUPA report a door opens off-stage. Enter an ordinary member of a struggling inner city parish who has himself been existing on social security for nearly three years and has little prospect of getting a regular job. Seizing the microphone he asks the bishop and representatives what precisely they intend to *do* about the challenge presented by the situation.

It would be interesting to know if any Diocesan Synod caters for such an intervention by a latterday Amos. More instructive still would be to discover what practical steps have been and are being taken to correct what the Archbishop's Commissioners called 'a grave and fundamental injustice' in our midst. In the torrent of words which flow through Synods, conferences, PCC meetings, study groups and private conversations at dinner parties or pub lunches it is easy to overlook the subtitle of *Faith in the City*: 'A call for action by church and nation.' Two years after the publication of the Report it is helpful to pause and review progress made and assess where we are. In the confines of a brief article it is impossible to do more than highlight a few significant features.

Unquestionably the pre-eminent feature of the post-publication period has been the contribution of *Faith in the City* to the general awareness of UPA issues in both church and the wider community. Doubtless the inner city riots of spring 1981 and autumn 1985 brought home to the firesides of comfortable Britain the economic and environmental deprivation which millions of our fellow citizens face every day. A stream of documentaries on television and articles in newspapers and journals reinforce this. In the churches many congregations have been emphasising their response to the spiritual and material needs of places where the Christian witness may be numerically small but desperately needed. Alongside The well-established Church Army, the Children's Society and CPAS are to be found new initiatives such as Church Action on Poverty, Church Action With The Unemployed and the Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission. For all of these the publication and ensuing discussion of *Faith in the City* has been a considerable encouragement in that it has brought the urban crisis on to the agendas of suburban and rural churches at the level of individual parish and wider groupings – deanery and local council of churches. This interest has yet to be translated into large scale shifts of resources, both of finance and

manpower. However, instances are growing of local churches making substantial donations towards projects in urban areas, and there is clearly a much greater readiness among younger Christians, single and newly married, to identify with local downtown congregations rather than automatically linking up with well-known and well-attended churches. There are also signs that middle-aged and even retired people are enquiring if there is a role for them in hard-pressed urban churches and communities.

This raises the most acutely sensitive question facing everyone involved in following up *Faith in the City*, namely how do those living and worshipping in what are sometimes facetiously referred to as 'BUPA' parishes, respond to ACUPA's call in positive and really committed action? The Commission was understandably cool towards the establishment of formal 'twinning' arrangements in view of the danger of reproducing some of the paternalistic attitudes of previous generations. But, as the Bishop of Liverpool stated in an address to the Mothers' Union, unless significant physical links are made between those in UPA and non-UPA situations it will be difficult for those in the leafy suburbs to understand the pressures confronting those in inner city and housing estate situations. (And it should be added, for UPA folk to realise that their suburban or country cousins have their problems too: a group from an inner London parish visiting their 'link' Sussex village were appalled to discover the total lack of public transport available to the sizeable proportion of residents who did not have access to a car). It is crucial that in the next phase of follow-up activity to ACUPA, models of good practice should be available to illustrate how links which are sensitive yet significant can be established and maintained. Hopefully these will include the raising of hard 'justice' questions about the factors creating urban deprivation and the implications these have for those whose lot is cast in more pleasant parts of the realm.

At national level two important decisions have been taken by General Synod in response to recommendations presented in *Faith in the City*. The first of these was to set up a Committee for Black Anglican Concerns in accordance with the Commission's concern to ensure that black (the term is inclusive of members of other ethnic groups besides the Afro-Caribbean) members of the Church of England are properly represented within the decision-making bodies of the Church, and particular issues (eg, encouragement of ordinands, spirituality, relations with other black-led churches etc.) are addressed by those with personal experience of problems encountered by the black community. The newly appointed secretary takes up her duties in January 1988, and with the election of the first black bishop, Wilfred Wood, to General Synod we can anticipate a much more informed contribution by black Christians in coming debates and formulation of policies. The second major decision taken in November 1986 was to establish the Church Urban Fund in response to ACUPA's recommendation that such a fund should be available to assist with the resourcing of innovatory projects in UPA communities which are not able

to secure funding from Church Commissioners, Dioceses or other central Church bodies. The official launch of the Fund with a target of £18 million (originally set at £10 million) is scheduled for April 1988, but the Trustees have already approved a few projects for grants from money received in advance of the formal launch. Parliamentary approval is awaited to enable the Church Commissioners to transfer £1 million per annum to the Fund. Projects will be expected to raise a proportion of their needed funds locally: ACUPA originally suggested this should be 50% but the Trustees have decided this must not be rigidly enforced in view of financial stringency faced by many inner city communities.

At the time of writing there is still considerable confusion abroad about the mechanisms for fund-raising in the individual dioceses, as well as some hesitation about how the targets can be reached in view of competing claims of existing appeals (eg, Cathedral restoration schemes) and internal diocesan initiatives planned to support UPA parishes. With the production of clear promotional material and widespread publicity it should surely not be beyond the reach of a Church of over a million communicant members to raise the sum – itself trivial by comparison with the billions of public and private funding required for urban regeneration. Further impetus to attracting money is likely to result from evidence demonstrated by projects clearly engaging with specific aspects of urban need. This should help answer the constant refrain 'What is the Fund going to provide?' which occurs whenever the subject is under discussion. Good video material (including clips from nationally screened TV programmes) can play a major part here as, for example, the story of St. Mark's, Mitcham 'Faith In the Suburbs' produced by Pace Productions of Milton Keynes.

In the other main area of national Anglican affairs, that of the Boards and Councils, the ACUPA report has been given careful and considered attention, with each board responding to the particular recommendations which come within its remit. Some of these will be agenda items for work by the Boards for many months to come: the influence of *Faith in the City* can already be traced in such documents as the Board of Education's *Called To Be Adult Disciples* presented at the recent (November '87) General Synod. There is keen interest in how ACCM (in conjunction with the Theological Colleges and Courses) reacts to ACUPA strictures on training for ministry, both ordained and lay. Several colleges have set in motion schemes to locate ordinands in solid urban parishes for part of their training – eg, Ripon College, Cuddesdon in Sheffield and Trinity College, Bristol in Walsall. One noteworthy concern to which *Faith in the City* drew attention is that of worship, including the suitability of *The Alternative Service Book* for many UPA congregations, and here it is encouraging to report that the Liturgical Commission is addressing this matter and hopes to produce some draft services in the near future.

The diocesan responses to *Faith in the City* vary enormously. Predictably the predominantly urban dioceses have been quick to mobilise: in the case of Birmingham their own 'Faith in Birmingham' initiative has been com-

menced. On the other hand, progress has been much slower in the largely rural dioceses, and it is scarcely surprising if the parishioners of Great and Little Muddelcombe are still under the impression that ACUPA is a variant of Chinese medicine. In general the suburban dioceses have responded encouragingly, with *Faith in the City* being discussed at Synods and diocesan officers promoting study at parish and homegroup level. Chichester diocese has over 100 links between their parishes and UPA parishes. Every diocese has an official ACUPA link officer and several dioceses have appointed full-time urban officers to carry forward the task of implementing *Faith in the City*. Working parties and sub-groups are operating at diocesan or more localised levels, either monitoring the entire Report or formulating responses to specific sections of it. One of the most impressive productions has been that of the 'Faith in Leeds' group, which significantly has been fully ecumenical from the outset.

One element in the on-going process begun by *Faith in the City* is the rising interest in 'audit'. Models of mission audits were in circulation well before ACUPA recommended the concept in relation to ministry and mission in urban situations. But the Report seems to have given it a powerful boost, even in some suburban areas, and requests are growing for examples of good practice and in finding consultants to help struggling congregations who are apprehensive about undertaking an audit. Several dioceses have mounted the exercise to include all their parishes though avoiding the actual term 'audit' (ie, in Birmingham 'Assessment', Wakefield 'Bread not Stones', Stepney episcopal area 'Stocktake'), while in most others it is being encouraged in a more piecemeal manner, sometimes emphasised by being included among the Archdeacon's questions at his visitation. By whatever method the exercise is approached it can prove an invaluable aid in enabling a local congregation to become (in ACUPA phraseology) more 'outward looking and participating'.

An important issue in many discussions and consultations about *Faith in the City* has been its theological basis which has drawn critical comment from across the churchmanship spectrum. Apart from individual essays and review articles in various journals no major theological work has appeared since publication of the Report addressing the cluster of questions involved in urban mission in this country. Books such as Raymond Bakke's *The Urban Christian* and Laurie Green's *Power to the Powerless* are welcome and overdue contributions to this concern shared by theological teachers and pastoral practitioners alike. Requests for study material by clergy taking sabbaticals or in-service courses are indicative of the need for further recruits to this cause. (How many academic teachers of theology live and worship in UPAs?)

This cursory review of ACUPA's progress during the past two years would be incomplete without explicit reference to the section of the Report addressed to the nation. There is a strong body of opinion (embracing the political 'right' and 'left') which interprets the re-election of the Thatcher government for a further term of office as a decisive rejection of

the proposals in *Faith in the City* for tackling the poverty and deprivation which disfigure our inner cities, post-war estates and mining villages. Read from another viewpoint, however, the intention of the Government to 'do' something about UPAs ('inner cities' in their terminology) can indicate that the furore attending the publication of *Faith in the City* in December 1985 and subsequent discussion has helped to concentrate minds already disturbed by the conflagrations in Brixton, Toxteth, Handsworth and elsewhere.

At this stage it is too early to assess what will be the effects of government initiatives spread across eight different departments, built upon premises that signal confrontation with local authorities. Proposals for poll tax, housing action and educational policies as they affect urban schools appear to indicate a radically different approach to that adopted by the members of ACUPA. There are clearly acute tensions inherent in relating the 'enterprise culture' to Biblical principles of jubilee, or reconciling the dominant commendation of 'choice' with a New Testament concept like *koinonia*. In political terms the debate has evidently moved beyond the text of *Faith in the City*. However, before critics consign it to the archives they would do well to reflect that the originator of the term 'two nations' was not some neo-Marxist churchman high on injections of liberation theology but a Tory Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli.

The Revd Prebendary Patrick Dearnley is Archbishop's Officer for Urban Priority Areas.