



GRESHAM COLLEGE
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A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey Transcript

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"A Land flowing with Milk and Honey"

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A contribution to the City of London Festival and its celebration of the International Year of Biodiversity.

"And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with great terribleness and with signs and with wonders. And he hath brought us into this place and hath given us this land that floweth with milk and honey."

So the priest in the Book of Deuteronomy looking back on the Exodus and describing the Promised Land in terms which have become proverbial - a land flowing with milk and honey - *eretz za-vat ha-lav oo-d'vash*.

Honey was not of course a Hebrew preserve. The Egyptians kept bees 5,000 years ago and sweetened their food and wine with it. Honey was also used medicinally and as a love potion.

In the funeral ceremony for all but the poorest Egyptians the chants included the prayer that milk should never be far from the mouths of the dead and the claim that honey was "the lord of offerings and celestial food for it is sweet to the heart: it opens the flesh, knits together the bones, gathers together all parts of the body and the dead drink the smell of it". Royalty were entombed with pots of honey which have been found unspoilt by archaeologists.

For some reason the scholarly consensus used to be that the Hebrew references to honey referred either to the produce of wild bees or, more likely, to honey derived from dates and figs. Then in September 2007 it was reported that 30 intact beehives and the remains of up to 200 more had been discovered in the ruins of Rehov, an ancient city mound in the Jordan valley about three miles south of Beit She'an. The hives were dated to a period between the mid 10th [when King Solomon reigned in Jerusalem] to the early 9th century BC.

The city of Rehov is thought to have had a population of about 2,000 in the 10th century BC and the beehives made of straw and unbaked clay were found in orderly rows.

Remains of the bees themselves were also found and tests established that they were not native to the surrounding region. They appear to be similar to the Antalyan bee of central Turkey. There is speculation that the native Syrian bees were too aggressive to be kept in a dense urban environment, while the Anatolian bees are believed to have produced 5-8 times more honey.

There was obviously a long distance trade in bees, since portable hives have been discovered and an Assyrian stamp of the 8th century BC has provided evidence of a consignment of bees which had been brought some 250 miles from the Taurus Mountains in S. Turkey.

When I was a curate in Bedford there were beehives in the Vicarage garden. We experienced an invasion of rude country bees and there was a precipitate decline in the manners of the inhabitants. A more refined queen had to be imported from Lundy Island, if my memory serves me, to restore decorum.

There has always seemed to be an affinity between the church and bee keeping. I remember one splendidly eccentric priest in the Diocese of St Albans who made a lethal home made wine from the rose petals of the wreaths deposited at the Enfield Crematorium. He was also an enthusiast apiarist and in writing his letter of resignation to the Bishop declared that it was time 'for the clergy of the Church of England to give up their modish obsession with synods and salvation and return to their true business in life, cricket, bee keeping and siring Nelsons'.

In June bees from Shropshire arrived to take up residence in various sites in the City, notably on the roof of St Paul's. There is a world wide urban bee movement. For example earlier this year the ban on keeping bees in New York was overturned. Earlier

today there was a Honey Ceremony in Leadenhall Market as part of a programme celebrating honey and the bee, which included Arvo Part's intriguing piece - 'If Bach had been a Beekeeper'.

The City of London Festival (CoLF) is making a very appropriate contribution to the year of Biodiversity as awareness grows of the plight of the honey bee whose numbers have suffered with the diminution of wildflower rich landscapes, disease and the possible effects of pesticides and climate change. Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) first noted in the US in 2006 is a real threat to the survival of the honey bee as one of the most efficient pollinators of crops like the Californian almond. An alarming report in the Observer on May 2nd suggested that for the fourth year in a row more than a third of colonies have failed to survive the winter. Billions of bees worldwide have died and scientists are still unclear about what precisely is causing the catastrophic fall in numbers.

Now CCD is increasing in the UK - hence the urgency of the CoLF campaign.

Urban honey, as I know from sampling the honey from Lambeth Palace Garden, can often be delicious and surprisingly varied given the variety of planting to be found in cities. When I was a parish priest in Westminster we used to produce honey on the roof of the Church School. The produce was used to revive an ancient Christian custom of presenting the newly baptised with milk and honey as a symbol of their entry in to the Promised Land.

Honey is heavily freighted with symbolism and the collapse of the colonies of honey bees has uncanny resonances with the troubles of human communities.

The Promised Land as a land flowing with milk and honey was of course, in origin, a rural vision but, following the installation of our city hives, I want to reflect on the Promised Land in respect of our urban environment.

The Bible has an ambiguous view of cities. Cain, the murderer of his brother is identified as the founder of the first city - just as the foundation myth of the city of Rome involves the murder of Remus by his brother Romulus. Babel is an image of human presumption and is destroyed. Then at the end of the New Testament there is a vision of the City of God, founded not on blood taken like the cities of Cain and Romulus but on blood given by the Lamb that was slain.

The story of the Promised Land involved an Exodus from slavery. In the history of cities and urban planning in recent times there is no doubt that Egypt was located in the horrors of 19th c. London which played a large part in inspiring visions of a better and more creative urban future.

Much has been achieved in transforming lurid London into a more liveable London. The City recently has become a greener place, for example, and the care that the Corporation is showing in maintaining and creating green spaces is one of the most cheering aspects of the present urban scene.

Every City needs to ensure the supply of everyday nourishing milk. In consequence, many of the planning documents produced in recent years have a rather narrow focus on the needs of London and its City as a financial centre.

But milk and honey belong together and honey stands for delight in life which makes a vital contribution to the liveability of a City. It is the honey that attracts the most talented workers and persuades the stranger to come here to do business in our midst.

So I want to turn to the vital importance of the availability of honey in the cultural, artistic and spiritual life of the City, and what can be done to promote quantitative and qualitative easing in the supplies from the Honey Bank.

Hope is fortified by seeing how far we have come since 19th c. London was described as the City of Dreadful Night, when Disraeli simply said it was 'Babylon'.

In 1883 a remarkable pamphlet was published which, with the assistance of the journalist W.T. Stead, editor of the London evening paper, the Pall Mall Gazette presented a horrifying image of London.

Andrew Mearns was a Congregationalist Minister and his 'Bitter Cry of Outcast London' was the product of first hand experience. He was also a first class dramatic writer.

'Few who read these pages have any conception what these pestilential human rookeries are, where tens of thousands are crowded together amidst horrors which call to mind what we have heard of the middle passage of the slave ship. To get to them

you have to penetrate courts reeking with poisonous and malodorous gases arising from accumulations of sewage and refuse scattered in all directions and often flowing beneath your feet; courts many of them which the sun never penetrates, which are never visited by a breath of fresh air and which rarely know the virtues of a drop of cleaning water.'

The conscience of Victorian England was pricked and a Royal Commission on 'The Housing of the Poor' was set up. The Prince of Wales participated as one of the sixteen commissioners who also included Lord Salisbury, Bishop Walsham How, then Bishop in the East End and Cardinal Manning.

It is astonishing that contemporaries professed themselves so ignorant of the plight of the slum dwellers since the rookeries formed a great horseshoe around the city from St Martin in the Field and St Giles to Clerkenwell and Whitechapel.

The 1880's were also a time of recession and there was evidence in London of colony collapse. In 1887 a large crowd moved down Whitehall and invaded Westminster Abbey. They mingled with the congregation, 'the more manly of whom' as The Times reported, 'quietly exercised their influence to restrain the most shameless'. There were hostile shouts about 'capitalists'; Canon Rowsell attempted to argue with the demonstrators and outside H.H.Hyndman spoke of a day when a flag bearing the motto 'each for all and all for each' would fly above the Abbey while the doctrine of revolution would be preached within.

The crowd dispersed peacefully and returned to Trafalgar Square. But then the army was called in, and in the resulting fracas over 100 people were injured.

The decade also saw the beginning of a more thoroughly scientific attempt to map social distress. Charles Booth's famous poverty map was first exhibited in Toynbee Hall and Oxford House in 1888. It used a colour code from yellow for respectable to black for 'seats of vice'. The map was recently re-published by the London Topographical Society.

The picture revealed was less sensational than that of Andrew Mearns, but it still shockingly depicted a London in which the average life expectancy for the gentry and professional classes was 55 but for the artisans of Lambeth it was 29.

Some progress was made in dispersing the city. However, by the beginning of the 20th century the problem of overcrowding was still acute. 45% of the inhabitants of Finsbury for example lived as whole families in one or two rooms.

In the face of this city of dreadful night and the threat of colony collapse some urban reformers, under the influence of anarchist ideas, dreamt of an alternative society of voluntary co-operation; living and working in small self governing commonwealths. The Garden City movement is one of the fruits of this tendency. A rather different route into the future was laid out by le Corbusier whose vision was more authoritarian and centralist.

Much has been achieved but what is our vision of the city now? Progress could be nullified by colony collapse, brought on by minds that are not able to value bio-diversity and holism sufficiently to be able to deal with political and human realities because they are minds encased in a system of abstractions and measurements and of defensive bureaucracy appropriate to the management of machines.

Sophocles long ago said that 'The City is People'. A clarity about the need to humanise the city; to see it as much more than an obstacle to be navigated by motor vehicles on their way elsewhere; such a vision is essential as we develop the new awareness vital for a sustainable many sided life. We need a human life centred urban environment.

The essential task of the city, according to its great American historian, Lewis Mumford is 'to provide the maximum number of favourable opportunities for large populations to intermingle and interact, to interchange their human faculties and aptitudes as well as their economic goods and services, to stimulate and intensify by frequent contact and collaboration many common interests that would otherwise languish.'

In the new information order the more mechanised and automatic are the economic operations, the less need they have of the city's human abundance and cultural variety. The dealing floors could go anywhere but the stimulus of the human interactions cannot be replicated entirely by conducting our relationships via the computer screen.

There is much to be grateful for as we look around us and not least for this City of London Festival itself; for the abundance of marvellous music; for the Barbican Centre; the coffee shops and the restaurants.

Memory - Mnemosyne - is said to be the mother of the Muses and it is pleasing to note the recent attempts to enrich the living

memory of the City in the re-erection of Temple Bar and the restoration of the St Lawrence Jewry monument which has a new location just across the way from St Paul's.

The City is also filling up with residents again and there is an effort to liberate Cheapside from its recent captivity to office blocks and building societies and to restore its mediaeval character as a shopping centre.

The market is one of the vital institutions in city life. As the new shopping centre emerges from its scaffolding I wonder whether it will really serve the human interactions and responses on which the vitality and creativity of city life depend.

The other principal institutions of the classical European city are of course the palace; the temple and the university.

Guildhall and Mansion House are splendid variations on the palace theme. Then we have St Paul's but also the City Churches. What is to be their role in the new seven day a week city with its growing number of residents, impelled by the miseries of commuting, to live once more closer to work? This is a challenge.

The Big Society idea as I understand it is an attempt to reassess the relationship between the state, the individual citizen and the 'little platoons' whose importance in developing the possibility of a creative and democratic society is once more being appreciated.

You will remember Burke's dictum that 'to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle, the germ as it were of publick affections'. As the Prime Minister has said 'Big Society demands a broad culture of responsibility, mutuality and obligation.'

The massive expansion of state provision in the 20th century happened for very good reasons. Charity provision was unevenly spread and it was gradually accepted that basic services like health could best be provided on a universal basis.

But now there is a need to re-balance the contribution of the state and civil society. It is not simply a matter of removing controls and bureaucracy but of empowering community action.

London includes some of the richest places in Europe and some of the most vulnerable communities. The church is deployed in every part of this diverse social organism. Our community development workers for example were established across parish clusters with very high deprivation scores according to the 2008 index of Multiple Deprivation. These are areas which display a prevalence of social challenges - high levels of unemployment, debt and mental health issues; low levels of education and professional qualifications, confidence and community cohesion.

Our workers have been able to help local people identify their own needs and aspirations; take action to exert influence on the decisions which affect their lives; and improve the quality of their own lives, the communities in which they live and the societies of which they are a part.

As a result volunteers have been energised and given confidence to take action and get involved.

Part of our experience is, however, that there is a cost to volunteering and that charities, churches, and in my case mosques, synagogues and temples as well cannot simply expand their volunteering without also expanding the infrastructure to provide support, advice, training and crucially management of volunteers.

In the evaluation we have done of scores of projects over the past ten years, failures in management are the most common cause of ineffectiveness.

Where state support is crucial is in assistance to build infrastructure and capacity. This is precisely the area where fundraising and giving are so problematical. As Mohammad Yunus has argued in 'Building Social Enterprise', the key is in uniting framework and good will/passion. Good will and passion alone are not sufficient.

There are also useful allies in the business of channelling corporate social responsibility (CSR). Heart of the City, is an organisation based in the City of London which provides free support and stimulus to businesses not only in the City but in the surrounding boroughs [five of which are within the 10% of the most deprived local authority areas in England] to develop their corporate social responsibility programmes.

Communities of course are not only geographical but they are also networks and businesses are among the most significant

such networks.

In the last four years Heart of the City, funded by the Corporation, has advised 800 businesses, large and small. One thing has become clear, [and this is crucial to the message of the Big Society], that active participation in volunteering programmes can enhance the skills and competencies of employees in a way that assists the reputation of the business, staff recruitment, retention and motivation.

Aligning self interest and the common good has moved CSR in the best companies from a tick box add-on to a board level concern and a key part of corporate strategy.

But to return to our church buildings and to the City Churches in particular, the UK ceased to be a confessional state in 1829 and thereafter successive governments have rightly been committed to a free market in religious ideas. Frequently however, where public policy and the aspirations of faith communities coincide, there is a great potential for partnership.

This is true for all of the faith communities, but there are 16,000 parish churches in England. They constitute a countrywide network which endures in the inner cities and in rural areas where places of public assembly and service are in short and diminishing supply. There are now more parish churches than post offices and indeed there are already 20 post offices which operate from church buildings.

There is already a growing trend to return church buildings to their original function as places of worship and also places of assembly and celebration for the whole of the local community.

We are keen to work with Government and Local Authorities to develop a strategy for helping places of worship to be even more serviceable community hubs in addition to their primary purpose. We have had commissions in the past which have begun with the premise that the City Churches are a problem. We ought to recognise the way in which churches already serve the 'little platoons' as well as country wide connections. In the wake of the Big Society debate we want to make the Big Offer to contribute, not least in the City of London, to humanising the City and re-animating the local wards.

At a time of financial stringency when the green agenda is growing in significance it obviously makes sense to maintain and develop such a significant asset. It would cost billions to replicate the country wide social infrastructure that such buildings already represent.

Any assistance would of course depend on a proven determination to equip places of worship for wider community access, beyond the ranks of regular worshippers. But modest investment could yield large dividends and make a significant contribution to moving the Big Society from vision to reality.

As well as the market, the palace and the temple there is the university, which will be of ever greater significance in providing a platform for human interaction and creativity. Gresham College itself, in this year when we celebrate the role of the College 350 years ago, in incubating the Royal Society already provides a place where we can begin to answer the question posed between the wars by T.S.Eliot;

'Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge; Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?' And we might add where is the information we have lost in data.

The great question of the 21st century is: are we able to develop the holistic wisdom to build a sustainable human community on the basis of the knowledge and power that the discoveries of the 20th century have bequeathed to us? Gresham might develop further its capacity to reflect on the whole of London and the City's role in it, in conjunction with other institutions like the St Paul's Institute and Tony Travers' Centre at the LSE. One of the tests of a City that is looking to a sustainable future is whether it supports its cultural and academic institutions.

We face challenges of which everyone is aware, and not least the effects on London of the Age of Austerity.

Seen from much of the rest of the UK, Greater London, whose population exceeds that of Scotland and Wales combined, looks very rich and appears to be greedy, sucking in talent and resources. In reality of course, as well as some of the wealthiest areas in Europe, London is home to some of the most vulnerable communities.

The distress of the 1880's and the violence which attended it gave birth to a new attitude to planning in cities.

The 1980's were also a time of distress and violence not least in London. A riot with tragic consequences for a fine policeman, Keith Blakelock, broke out in October 1985 on the Broadwater Farm estate in Tottenham. A prize winning urban renewal project of 1970 had, with vandalism and crime, degenerated into a hard to let estate. The reality today is very different. Church and community groups in co-operation with the police and council officials have restored the estate and it is now an example of what can be achieved and a beacon of hope.

The 80's also saw the publication of Faith in the City. This report on British inner city life, produced by a group commissioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, caused an immense political furore. Archbishop Runcie, for whom I worked, was denounced as a Marxist, a charge so ludicrous that it greatly assisted the sale and extended the influence of the report.

It also led to the creation of the Church Urban Fund to support small inner city projects. As I look at London and ponder the lessons of the violent 1880's and the 1980's in the light of colony collapse, I do not believe that we should underestimate the achievements of the past century or speak in apocalyptic terms. However, the scale of the cuts made necessary by the profligacy of the recent past, not least in the City of London, make some such new initiative highly desirable. We need to re-articulate a vision of the city; diverse but harmonious and hospitable to all, as well as seeking to generate the voluntary will necessary to draw into the mainstream of our social and economic life those at risk from the curtailment of public benefits.

The early 20th century urban planner Patrick Geddes's produced a diagram indicating the fate of the city if these human imperatives are not taken seriously. It was his map of colony collapse which begins with the polis which grows into the diverse but sustainable metropolis. What can follow however is megalopolis hampered by its own excessive growth. The result is 'parasitopolis and pathopolis' and finally necropolis.

This is a moment for refreshing our vision of a truly human city and I am full of hope that, whatever the immense challenges of the coming years, London will emerge stronger than ever - offering her citizens both nourishing milk and honey, which is the delight in life.