

A Christian Counter-Movement to Neoliberalism: A Rapid Response

These comments are a Rapid Response to [‘A Christian Counter Movement to Neoliberalism’ by Alan Roxburgh, *Journal of Missional Practice*, Issue 11, Winter 2019.](#)

I read Alan’s article with interest – but possibly more of a sense of optimism (naivety?) than is expressed here.

Here’s where I’m coming from as I respond - My community has experienced the worst ravages of neoliberalism. We have taken the full brunt of austerity measures and are experiencing acute as well as relative poverty - much more noticeable street homelessness, food poverty and people struggling with crises in mental health. We also have heightened levels of immigration competing for social resources.

I have very little good to say about neoliberalism. But I do have something more positive to say about how I have seen churches here respond. (I’m getting at a distinction between ‘The Church’ and ‘churches’ which was a bit of a concern as I read) I have seen counter cultural responses to neo-liberalism in the most ordinary churches – it’s just not something that is pointed out regularly enough: Church members who pick up financially for each other, share homes, provide childcare, support others outside of failing systems (I see this best in the poorest churches and amongst immigrant congregations – our African Portuguese congregation are years ahead in terms of ‘intentional community’). I, myself, have been part of the ‘black market’ economy within the church! Both of our communities have sold and bought houses to each other way below market rates, given and shared cars, used capital as a common good, lived communally so those on low incomes can stay local...as East-End people we have “ducked and dived”.

Something of our experience has already been told in [this journal](#). - five years ago my sister Angie dreamt about Isaiah’s vision of a true fast and from that a Poverty Response project has grown from a small, ordinary church. This year our new Muslim mayor released the vast majority of Newham’s emergency homelessness fund to our church-led project (because it has found answers where there aren’t any to be had). What strikes me afresh as I read your paper is that I’m fairly confident that Angie’s dream could not have been realised without a very ordinary local church holding this vision and resourcing the birth of this project. It gave its buildings and capital, but more than this, it continually remembered the Christian hope as it met together week in week out. It’s far from achieving the overthrow of capitalism, but the church, where faith is enfolded, reminds people in a stinking, sinking system that there is a way to remain human. There’s a way to live well. I think it also holds a sign up of a different way to be a society.

Others can correct me, but I’ve not seen Christians manage to sustain long term transformation of their community without the practices of communal faith that keep re-centring them, that is without being ‘church’. I know you mean to critique ‘The Church’ and yes, at that level it hasn’t provided an alternative story that has stood out against that of our capitalist culture - but

among its ranks, paradoxically, are communities providing exactly this counter-culture subversive message, providing prototypes of a different way of being a society in the West. It's hard to talk about the problem with The Church without implying churches are a lost cause. But they are different, aren't they?

Granted what I see, what gives me optimism is small stuff. Grass-root. Unspectacular. Yeast.