ABSTRACT

TOWARDS A THEOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH AN AREA OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION: THE CASE OF THE CORNWALL ESTATE

The question addressed by this study is as follows:

In areas where there are deep-rooted patterns of multiple deprivations, what are the implications for the theology and practice of mission afforded by a theological perspective on particular human social space?

The study is in the field of contextual missiology and takes a practical theological approach to the subject of ‘place’. By drawing on theological and social scientific understandings, the study presents a tri-spatial conception of place in terms of created-place, normative-place and Jesus-Space (or redemptive-place). Redemptive-places, which can be understood in terms of a hybrid- or third-place, are presented as a potential way of understanding how mission might be conceived of as participating in the transformation of places.

The focus of research is on a specific, bounded, residential area situated on the southern edge of a British city. Like many such ‘estates’ built from the mid-1930s onwards by the British government as part of a major nation-wide slum clearance programme, the Cornwall Estate has experienced chronic and serious multiple deprivations.

Qualitative research methods are employed as a way of investigating the material, social and spiritual spatial characteristics of the Cornwall Estate with a view to understanding the nature of the relationship between the social-spatial arrangements of power and the lived experiences of deprivation. Ethnographic methods are then used in two particular case studies to investigate the boundary characteristics that describe the normative arrangement of place within the estate (as either ‘hard’ or ‘soft’) and the possibility of transforming these spatial arrangements through the formation of redemptive places. The conclusion includes a series of proposed ‘mission practices’ which specifically engage with the hard boundary characteristics that sustain strong binary arrangements of place, as a way of formulating hopeful responses to deeply-entrenched patterns of urban deprivation and marginalisation.