

**GORDON MATHESON ADDRESS TO THE GLASGOW AND WEST OF SCOTLAND BRANCH OF THE COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS – 2nd February 2016**

Ladies and gentlemen

Shalom, peace be with you. A very good evening. And thank you for the kind invitation to join you here in Newlands South Church of Scotland.

I consider it an honour and a pleasure to have been asked to talk at this meeting of the Council of Christians and Jews, an organisation dating back in Britain I believe to 1942 - a deeply dark period of European war and anti-semitic holocaust.

I wish from the outset to particularly honour CCJ-founders: Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz and Archbishop William Temple for their visionary leadership and heroic goodness. And I want to pay tribute to each of you for your ongoing commitment to combating intolerance; and promoting understanding, goodwill, fellowship and cooperation - in fidelity to the demands of your Christian or Jewish faith.

In Europe today there thankfully are no governments that systematically pursue a policy of religious genocide, equivalent to the horrors of Nazi Germany. But there are dark and powerfully divisive forces at work in today's world. Every night on the news we hear of culture clashes, religious extremism, the impact of bloody wars, terrorist attacks, and mass migration of refugees and asylum seekers. We don't live in Nazi Europe, thank God. But we need organisations like the CCJ, arguably more than at any time since the end of the second world war. What you do, and what you represent, really matters; because what goes on in this world, not only theoretically and spiritually, but very directly affects our society, and can threaten our cohesion if we don't stay awake.

Chair, in preparing for this speech I came across the inspiring 1925 address by the Jewish Cambridge scholar, Herbert Lowe to the Presbyterian Church of England General Assembly in which he said: "The love of God and love of man are the foundations of our faith and of yours. We have a vast heritage in common...We recognise that we are put on earth to serve each other...When we consider the framework on which our creeds are built the wonder is not that our views of life are similar, but that we should have been so long in discovering the similarity, the wonder is that centuries of ignorance and hatred should have intervened between us. I am convinced that our partnership in the fight against oppression and injustice and race-hatred can be successful, and our efforts can never be blessed until we learn to respect the standpoint of each other." Hear, hear. Or should I say 'amen' to that.

I think anyone who hears those words is struck by their clarity and power. Whatever differences there are between us, we have so much more in common than divides us, and we have a responsibility, one to the other. This clearly resonates with the spirit and mission of the CCJ. And as the immediate-past leader of this city, it all makes perfect sense to me too. Afterall, cities have moral foundations and purpose. And I don't just mean the obvious in the case of cities like Glasgow which developed from ecclesiastical settlements. Although that history is important and should be treasured. I mean something more essential. St Mungo or Kentigern came to Glasgow from somewhere else, saw it was good. Settled here. And went about building a sustainable community. That's the story of all of us, whether we moved here in our lifetime, or our forebears made that journey for us.

The very essence of urban living is the assumption of responsibility one for the other. By choosing to live side by side we endorse our neighbour. Our dependence is mutual, we prosper symbiotically. That, in essence, is the moral purpose of cities. And it has political implications.

I get tired of what too often seems to be the default narrative about cities. Namely that they are crime-ridden middens that are bad for the soul and voraciously consume the world's resources. This in contrast to a nostalgic image of a bucolic idyll; where the pastor was in his parish, the Lord was in his manor, and the labourer, albeit ignorant and struggling to get by, knew his place.

Although not new even then, this is an image notably promulgated by moralising Victorians; at the same time, incidentally, as they happily grew rich off the back of an industrial and urban class. It is a old, received perception of urban life which persists, but is defeatist and unjustifiably negative. It is not the city I know. Cities are good and remarkable places.

No wonder humanity has become an urban species. A couple of years ago, for the first time in human history, more than half the world's population were living in cities. By 2050 that is estimated to increase to 75%. Cities are the cultural and economic powerhouses of humanity. Cities are home to universities and hospitals and schools, and places of worship. Cities build museums, theatres, sporting arenas and parks. Cities have roads, and sanitation, and transport and media hubs.

Cities innovate and make things, create jobs, pay taxes, attract visitors and foster a shared sense of civic identity and pride. A city is somewhere you go to become yourself. Cities allow diversification to happen and specialisms to develop. In so doing, individuals grow and expand their minds, and a complex commonweal is advanced.

Cities are fundamentally liberal, by which I mean they are diverse and accepting. You can't have so many people in the one place unless there's more than a little live and let live.

Why do refugees head for cities? Because there are opportunities to get on - of course. But also because they are safe havens - there will be others like them in that city. Plus, and this is important, there are loads of other different people in a city who are not like them but are used to hearing languages they don't expect to understand, and seeing people with different skin colours and lifestyles. A metropolis is cosmopolitan.

Indeed, there is a growing school of international thought that the best way to sustainably grow national economies, more effectively tackle ingrained inequalities, and reconnect local communities to the democratic process is to devolve power from central government to city regions.

Bruce Katz, vice-president of the Brookings Institution, in his seminal text, *The Metropolitan Revolution*, compares central government to a distant, often clueless relative who nonetheless controls the family money.

We see evidence of this 'metropolitan revolution' in the development, for example, of the northern powerhouse in England. And, closer to home, one of the initiatives from which I take most satisfaction from when I was city leader was the signing of the £1.13 billion City Deal.

This will fund 20 major infrastructural projects in Glasgow and across Clyde Valley, from Inverclyde to N. Lanarkshire, including an airport rail link.

The City Deal investments will leverage an estimated £3 billion of additional private sector spend, and, crucially, will create 29,000 net new jobs.

I subscribe to the view that it is city regions that drive the national economy. However, in Scotland there are counterveiling forces.

It is frustratingly ironic that a policy response in England to additional powers for the Scottish Parliament is devolution of power and resources to English city regions. Whereas in Scotland, Holyrood is highly centralising as part of a 'nation-building' agenda.

This is sometimes beguilingly presented as 'community empowerment': the by-passing of city hall in order to give more control to very local groups and neighbourhoods.

This local agenda is a good thing and in my experience is being pursued by local government across Scotland, independent of government dictat. The growth of community budgeting and Area Partnerships in Glasgow is just one case-in-point.

But to contrast or juxtapose community empowerment and city devolution is disingenuous. The two are not exclusive. On the contrary, they should be advanced together.

To argue otherwise is, I fear, an example of double-speak aimed at distracting from the diminution of the status of local and city government, while all the while drawing real power and resources to the centre. All hail Caledonia.

Just one of many examples is last week's call to create yet another national agency to deliver childcare in Scotland.

Let me be clear. I have supported devolution all of my adult life. Churches and faith communities played a key part in the work of the Scottish Constitutional Convention that led to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament; incidentally, a convention in which the current party of Scottish government refused to take part. I campaigned for a Yes-Yes vote in the 1997 referendum.

But the devolution I believe in isn't about transferring powers between an overbearing Whitehall and a centralising Holyrood. Democratically accountable power should sit where it can optimally advance the commonweal. In many cases that is at the metropolitan city level.

I am an un-apologetic cities man. The contribution of cities to human innovation and well-being is overwhelming and the more we recognise that in Scotland the better.

But I'm not blind to inequality and injustice in the city. Far from it. I hold in check the temptation to substitute the delusion of a rural idyll with that of an urban nirvana. We were, afterall, kicked out of Eden sometime ago.

But here too the notion of a moral purpose of cities is relevant, indeed is compelling. It is only by reflecting on the duty we have to our neighbours and the mutuality of urban life - the 'moral purpose' of my title - that we are able to recognise the extent to which our urban union is imperfect, and so do something about it.

Including disproportionately diverting national resources to tackle concentrations of poverty in cities like Glasgow.

It offends the commonweal whenever poverty of income and opportunity lives side by side with great wealth.

Such exclusion undermines the moral compact which is at the heart of city life. It is also a wasteful economic drain for our country and a threat to our unity and security. The masses after all huddle together for mutual benefit.

As Pope Francis said during his recent visit to New York: "God is living in our cities.

"Big cities bring together all the different ways which we human beings have discovered to express the meaning of life, wherever we may be.

"But big cities also conceal the faces of all those people who don't appear to belong, or are second-class citizens. In big cities, beneath the roar of traffic, beneath "the rapid pace of change", so many faces pass by unnoticed because they have no "right" to be there, no right to be part of the city.

"They are the foreigners, the children who go without schooling, those deprived of medical insurance, the homeless, the forgotten elderly".

This isn't a counsel of despair. Such exclusion is not the inevitable nature of city life, but, I would contend, offends the very idea of civitas. It inspires some to enter politics to change society for the better, while others commit to faith-based social action.

As Christians and Jews how could we be other than city people. God is where his people are. He lives among us. Or as the psalmist has it: 'For the peace of Jerusalem pray. May all who love this city prosper.' (Psalm 122)

I look forward to hearing from you during the Q and A, open-contribution session to follow. And I consider it an honour to have been asked to address you this evening. I wish you every success with your endeavours. Thank you all.

And let Glasgow flourish, by the preaching of his word and the praising of his name.