

# A Christian Theology of the Built Environment

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, thank you so much again for coming out today for our discussion on Christian understandings of the built environment. I'd like to begin our time together in a bit of a roundabout way by quoting from one of the priceless pieces of children's literature, a work which won some of Britain's most prestigious children's book awards.

Regrettably, the author passed away about a month ago, and perhaps you know to which work I'm referring? Well, you're talking about Richard Adams. Richard Adams and I guess his seminal work, right?

And *Watership Down*. Wonderful. Indeed, the work is none other than *Watership Down*, which I hear is might, I believe, is coming out next year in some sort of animated form, maybe on Netflix? Or did they, well, another, a newer release. Okay. So *Watership Down* is the 1972 adventure novel that tells the story of a small group of rabbits who live in southern England.

Essentially, the novel, in a bit similar fashion to *Animal Farm*, anthropomorphizes the rabbit herd. And Adams does a brilliant job evoking the language, the culture, and the mythology of the rabbits as he describes their escape from the destruction of their war.

[ 1 : 15 ] And that's not really a spoiler because it happens right at the beginning of the book. So, don't worry. You can still watch it next year. So I think we have a fair number of us familiar with the story.

Now, supposedly, supposedly this lecture is not about children's literature, but about a theology of the built environment. As such, if I were to begin our talk today with a quote from *Watership Down*, as in fact I'm doing, would you have any notion as to what passage of the book I might be referring to?

For those of you who know it better than others. And in terms of spaces, environments, of course there's so much description of the southern, south English countryside that's lovely.

You can't be wrong. Well, you could be wrong. But in fact, you're at least guessing you can't be wrong. I haven't read the book, but is it something about the Warren?

Oh, there you go. Really? You haven't read it? Are you for real? No, I don't know. No, I don't know. And what's your name on, sir? Will. Will. Thank you so much. That's brilliant, Will.

[ 2 : 27 ] Okay. I wanted to move it along. Yeah, there you go, Will. Well, the built environment, right? A rabbit is going to build a Warren. Their herd is going to build a Warren.

And so does that bring to mind anybody, any of you others, what passage it might be from? What's the most particular aspect of their Warren? And also another Warren which they encounter.

No? Still early. So they have a beautiful, basically, communal hall in the center that they call the Honeycomb.

And I'll describe it by giving the quote right here. So this excerpt comes from near the beginning of the novel when the protagonist rabbit, Hazel, comes upon a foreign Warren.

Hazel had supposed that he and one or two of his comrades would be taken to see the chief rabbit in his burrow, after which they would all be given different places to go.

[ 3 : 32 ] It was this separation of which Hazel had been afraid. He now realized with astonishment that there was apparently a part of the Warren on the ground which was big enough to contain them all together.

He followed their guides and came into an open place. His whiskers could feel no earth in front and none was near his side. There was a good deal of air ahead of him.

He could feel movement and there was considerable space above his head. Also, there were several rabbits near him. It had not occurred to him that there would be a place underground where he would be exposed on three sides.

The size of the place must be immense. He was at one end of the largest burrow he had ever been in. Rabbits have their own conversations and formalities, but these are few and short by human standards.

In the great burrow, however, things happened differently. The rabbits mingled naturally. All over the burrow, both the newcomers and those who were at home were accustoming themselves to each other in their own way and their own time.

[ 4 : 46 ] So one artist's depiction here of either the great burrow he stumbled upon there or the subsequent honeycomb that he would build to replicate this. In his work, *A Theology of the Built Environment, Justice, Empowerment and Redemption*, Tim Gorin argues that for good or ill, all buildings, from the humblest garden shed to the grandest cathedral, make moral statements.

All buildings make moral statements. The great burrow, which Hazel discovers in the foreign warren, is unlike any burrow he has ever seen. Hold up ingeniously by surrounding tree roots, this burrow is massive, bigger than Hazel could ever have dreamed of.

In fact, it is so impressive that when Hazel leaves behind the foreign warren to continue searching for a new place for his own herd, he makes the decision that when his own herd finally finds a new home, they will most certainly try to replicate it.

So they do, naming it the honeycomb. And this communal space becomes the hearts of the community. It becomes the place where they do what rabbits do, when they not only feel entirely secure underground, but also have enough room to congregate as an entire herd.

They share stories, tell myths, and have a hopping good time. The honeycomb, then, becomes a space that communicates moral statements about the rabbit herd.

[ 6 : 21 ] This herd, unlike some of the rival herds, is one that finds its identity in community, intimacy, unity, and genuineness. The honeycomb symbolizes this identity, and it nourishes and sustains the very communal life of Hazel's herd.

Translated to the human world, the effect of the honeycomb upon the rabbit community is nothing new. The fields of architecture and urban planning, along with others, have long considered how the built environment affects those who dwell within the built environment.

Works like Jan Jacobs' 1960s, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, have been fundamental in spurring discussion regarding the intimate connection between the built environment and the life of communities.

Were we to enter fully into this discussion, we'd need a full course, or maybe a degree's worth of courses, to unpack the riches therein. Thus, today, rather than bite off too big a chunk, I will be so bold as to assume that most of us probably agree with Winston Churchill's nugget of wisdom.

First we shape our buildings, first we shape our buildings, and then our buildings shape us. First we shape our buildings, and then our buildings shape us. Assuming we, or at least most of us, are in agreement with Churchill here, I would like then to consider the question at the heart of Gorin's *Theology of the Built Environment*.

[ 7 : 49 ] He asks, What happens when we bring together the Bible and the writings of town planners, urban theorists, and architects?

This book is one tentative attempt to find out. However, before going any further in our lecture, the obvious caveat must be made that learners' exchange is for learners, right?

Speaker included, right? I do not claim to be an expert on the topic, and so I was both really excited but also a little intimidated that David Lay might join us.

Some of my own interests, of course, stem from two and a half years ago with my parents who came in from out of town, and Maria, we took the wonderful Regent Bus Tour, which I recommend for everybody in terms of exegeting Vancouver and beginning that discussion.

It was lovely. I highly recommend it. So, some of us are very likely authentic experts on the topic. I can only claim that I hope one day to become an expert on the topic of Christian understandings of architecture, urban planning, urban growth, cities, place, and space.

[ 9 : 03 ] And not necessarily professionally, although I'm starting to consider a roundabout way to things. But I think this expertise in this field is really valuable for the entire Christian body, the entire church.

In fact, my undergraduate degrees were in music and international relations. And so, do you see the connection?

Me neither, right? My region focuses on biblical Hebrew and Greek. All right. You might, one friend could call me either a true Jeffersonian in terms, I think, diverse interests, or just really confused. I think the latter. If you ask my dad. Well, then, you might say, from where does your personal interest in these fields stem? Isn't your focus at regional and biblical languages? Well, I'm glad you asked. Take one minute and think to yourself of your happy place. Close your eyes and imagine yourself in the environment where you are most joyful, most thankful, most yourself.

[10:13] Go ahead. And if you can't think of just one place, contemplate two or three. Okay? So, just one to two minutes here. Close your eyes and try to find your happy place.

Or if you've already thought of this, take a brief trip there. Do you see that place?

What are you doing there? What are you thinking there? And what does it look like? Is it a natural landscape of water and trees?

Is it a rural landscape of farmland and livestock? Is it a cityscape featuring museums or art galleries? As Kyle mentioned in my introduction, I'm a huge lover of travel.

I'm sure as many of you are. Especially as a language lover who finds life in cross-cultural and foreign language communication. And as such, I've been blessed throughout my life to travel to a number of the most spectacular natural sites on the planet.

[11:20] Including Maria and my honeymoon amidst the waterfalls, geysers, and hot springs of... I think it is. Well, I kind of gave it away with the hot springs.

Of Iceland. Yes. And this is, I believe, Gullfoss. The beautiful waterfall. Or Jettifoss. The powerful waterfall. And yet, when I conjure to mind my happy places, I nearly always see myself in urban or semi-urban environments, surrounded by a built environment that, to put it concisely, inspires. Can you name it? Identify it? If you've had the privilege to go there. It's some choice. Lincoln Center in New York City.

Give me two tickets to jazz at Lincoln Center and I am as happy as a clam. La Sagrada Familia. Antony Gaudí's still incomplete basilica in the heart of Barcelona. Begun, of course, in 1882, but still incomplete with his death pretty early on in the building process.

[12:36] And my latest favorite and one of my happiest places in the world, I think Maria would know. I haven't shared it with her yet. But, anybody know that one?

Yours truly. The new Halifax Central Library in Nova Scotia. Opened in 2014. Built by, I think, two different, well, cooperating Danish architectural firms.

So, either, it could be, maybe you love it as much as I love it, or you think it's monstrosity. But, I think most of us find it fascinating. In visiting these world-renowned built locales, I notice that my senses go into overdrive.

I am hyper-aware of the use of light, space, proportion, angles, materials, and colors. In fact, the one time that I went to one of my other great happy places, the Museo Guggenheim Bilbao, I spent five hours in the museum, only seeing about 50% of the actual art exhibitions, until I was kicked out at closing.

So delighted was I to walk back and forth, walk and re-walk and re-walk again, every corner of Frank Gehry's creation. I believe that my sensitivity to the built environment stems from days when my parents would take me as a kid to the spacious, welcoming, light-infused National Gallery of Art at home in Washington, D.C., where Marie and I are from, a locale where we still enjoy visiting with our parents, my mom, to this day.

[14:16] However, it was not until the last year and a half at Regent College that I began to reflect upon why I am so drawn to these built environments. What is it about them that always leaves me thirsting for the next trip back, just as soon as I leave the grounds?

In Tim Gorringer's words, the human soul cries out for the nourishment of beauty. The human soul cries out for the nourishment of beauty. And for me, experiencing built environments at Lincoln Center, La Sagrada Familia, Halifax Central Library, Museo Guggenheim, and the National Gallery deeply satisfies my soul.

And yet, in spending time marinating in the works of Gorringer and others, I have come to believe that I love these places and structures, not only for the beauty that I encounter in them, but also because there's a deeper Christian theological rationale at work in my appreciation of these built environments.

And it's to this theological rationale that we turn, focusing on Christian ideas of place, the city, and the built environment. So three main parts, place, the city, and leading up to the final discussion of the built environment.

I want to embark on this lecture first with Christian ideas of place, as these considerations underpin any discussion of the built environment. There are a number of fascinating reads on the topic.

[15:34] Two of those that I chose to focus on are John Inge's, forgive me with author's names, *A Christian Theology of Place*, and Leonard Halmarsson's *No Home-Like Place*. Halmarsson does well to point out that, for a long time, Christians have downplayed an understanding of place.

In assessing their own lives, most of us Christians will speak of our callings and vocations, but we don't nearly so often speak of our place or places.

We often regard place as irrelevant, at least I know I did through most of my Christian life.

Halmarsson argues that Christians are made to make a particular corner of creation, our home.

Place is not irrelevant. We are made for place. He draws this emphasis on the importance of place in the Christian tradition, from the understanding that the biblical story is not just about going to heaven when we die, it's about heaven and earth becoming one.

God's purposes in creation being fulfilled. As Christians, our pilgrimage through this barren land is ultimately about becoming, in the words of Isaiah 58, a well-watered garden.

[16:48] And as Christians look to herald Christ and advance this redemption, we don't escape the limits of place in doing so, but we embrace and enter them. In doing so, we follow the model of our Lord and Savior, who, in the Incarnation, entered place.

The infinite God in the historical narrative of Israel entered a specific region of the Middle East, hallowing and making sacred place, matter, and ordinary things like bread and wine.

We, then, as the church, serve as caretakers of this earthly creation. And the creation of the world in Genesis, if it is, as I would argue, following Ian Proven and others, John Walton, and light, if Genesis is, the creation is read in light of comparative ancient Near Eastern temple mythology, then Genesis 1-2 teaches us that we serve as priests in God's earthly temple, caretaking for that temple. The cosmos is God's temple. All earth is sacred place and space, and we are caretakers of God's good creation. John Inges, a Christian theology of place, written in 2003, 12 years before, 12 years before Homosun's work, touches upon many similar concepts.

Inges traces how Western intellectual tradition has long downgraded the importance of place, particularly in comparison with earlier Greek thought, emphasizing, and this downgrading has resulted in an emphasis instead of place on space and time.

[18:25] According to Inges, 13th century discussion over the extent of the power of God ended up opening the door to notions of infinite space and time, allowing for the emergence of concepts which underlie Newtonian physics, particularly the infinity of the physical universe.

Subsequently, for Galileo and Newton in the 17th century, places become portions of absolute space, having no significance, really, in their own right.

Inges goes into much greater detail, including breaking down Plato and Aristotelian notions of space and place. Suffice it to say that Inges' quotation of Martin Heidegger, the 20th century German philosopher, makes clear Inges' understanding of the demise of place.

So it's a long quote, but the demise of place really rings through. All distances and time and space are shrinking. Man, oh, and in 1971, he's writing this.

Man now reaches overnight by plane, places which formerly took weeks and months of travel. He now receives instant information by radio of events which he formerly learned about only years later, if at all.

[19:44] Man puts the longest distances behind him in the shortest time. Yet the frantic abolition of all distances brings no nearness. For nearness does not consist in shortness of distance.

What is least remote from us in point of distance, by virtue of its picture on film or its sound on radio, can remain far from us. What is incalculably far from us in point of distance can be near to us.

What is happening here when as a result of the abolition of great distances, everything is equally far and equally near? What is this uniformity in which everything is neither far nor near?

Everything gets lumped together into uniform distancelessness. What is it that unsettles and thus terrifies? It shows itself and hides itself in the way in which everything presences, namely in the fact that despite all conquest of distances, the nearness of things remains absent.

The nearness of things remain absent. The demise of place. Heidegger was writing again in 1971. Thank goodness he wasn't around for Facebook. Imagine his consternation.

[ 20 : 53 ] Fringe then, in quoting Heidegger, a sense of place was lost during modernity. And modern society would do well to recognize that our own Western culture has lost a sense of place. Preoccupations with the logic of space tend to suppress the feelings of place in its particularity.

The contrast of this loss of particularities, of place, with the biblical example is stark. In the Old Testament, biblical faith is found in belonging to and referring to that particular place which expresses and tells of the historicity of the community of Israel.

In Old Testament understanding, the promised land is always a place with Yahweh, a place filled with memories of life with Him. with promises and with His promises and vows and vows made towards Him.

In other words, the Old Testament narrative is rooted in the conception of a storied place. This affirmation of the importance of places further developed in the New Testament, above all, in the Incarnation.

Inge here quotes T.F. Torrance, the 20th century Scottish Protestant theologian. While the Incarnation does not mean that God is limited by space and time, it asserts the reality of space and time for God in the actuality of His relations with us and at the same time binds us to space and time in our relations with Him.

[ 22 : 24 ] For Inge, it's clear from the Incarnation that places are the seat of relations with God and as He moves in the world. The Incarnation asserts the importance of place in different form but no less important than the Old Testament.

So we see this emphasis both in Old and New. Although the Incarnation implies a movement away from an emphasis upon the Holy Land and upon Israel, it initiates an unprecedented celebration in Inge's word, an unprecedented celebration of materiality and therefore a place in God's relations with humanity.

Moreover, the conversion of Paul in the sense of being grounded in the particularity of place shares this similarity with Old Testament narratives and with the Incarnation. It's noteworthy that Paul's conversion occurred at a particular place just outside Damascus on a particular road or street.

While this study in place and space, what it has confirmed then is that Christian religion is not a religion of salvation from places. It is the religion of salvation in and through places.

A helpful reminder of this truth is pilgrimage. Marie and I are really hoping someday we have to do the pilgrimage to Santiago Campostela through southern France and mostly in northern Spain.

[ 23 : 54 ] Pilgrimage is a journey to places where divine human encounter has taken place. Places have story and sacred places are those places who a story is associated with God's self-revelation and with the lives of the holy with the saints.

These then are the places which attract pilgrimage. This emphasis on place before we go to the next section does not seek to undermine the fundamental Christian reality that true worship is as Jesus tells the Samaritan woman in John 4 in spirit and in truth.

It doesn't undermine this. Indeed, an emphasis on place can be made to turn in upon itself and can actually lead to idolatrous distraction if you go too far and overemphasize down the road of particularity of place.

But, if kept in a proper framework, an emphasis on place can enrich and deepen human sensibilities, bringing together past and present and living relationships.

Having established the importance of place in Christianity, we can affirm that in a discussion of the theology of the built environment, place is essential. Yet, before going to the second part of this lecture, I would like to ask one question here.

[ 25 : 12 ] And, I want to focus here on, in particular, the city. For me, it is the city that is the most essential area of the discussion of the built environment.

Why is this so? Of course, this is not to be exclusive and say the discussion is only about the city. Not at all. But, I think it is the focal point, at least in my own considerations.

And, as it's made clear in Alman Buzard's Why Cities Matter to God, the culture, and the church, the city is more important in the 21st century than ever.

This is simply because more people live in the cities than any other time in human history. Never before had a majority of the world's population been an urban population. But, this became true in 2011.

In fact, the UN Population Division study on world population suggests that by 2050, the world will be nearly 70% urban by 2050. And this is not just a numbers game as these authors make clear. [ 26 : 18 ] Cities shape the world. What happens in cities doesn't stay in cities but spreads. As the city goes, so goes the broader culture. And again, this is not to absolutize the effect of cities and not look at all at the rural environment.

But, nevertheless, power is concentrated in Washington, D.C., Ottawa, and Beijing. Television and film are focused in Los Angeles, New York, and Mumbai. Fashion, Paris, and Milan, technology, Silicon Valley, and Tokyo, etc.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, Genesis 1 and 2 speaks of God's calling humanity to continue what God had himself been doing in creation to create.

This creation was called for in the command to multiply, be fruitful, fill the earth, cultivate the garden, Genesis 1 and 2. For Am and Buzzer, this mandate was ultimately an urban mandate, a call to create settlements where people could live and work together to be fruitful, multiply, cultivate, and flourish.

I'm not sure if I entirely agree with them on this mandate was ultimately an urban mandate, but it's an interesting thought for sure. The significance of cities is certain.

[ 27 : 35 ] What is not certain is whether this significance is for positive and negative effect. Hence, I'd like to pause for a brief activity. Please write down, and I didn't bring pencil and paper, I didn't bring pencils, but I have paper.

Please write down the first 5 to 10 words that come to mind when you think of cities, brainstorm real quick for one or two minutes, and then share your responses with your neighbor.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Hopefully that spurs further conversation after the lecture and down through the weeks and months and years, right?

the significance of cities is certain what is not certain is whether the significance is for positive or negative effect as i said before the activity taking stock of your responses how many of you wrote down things that are positive in tone how many were mostly positive only about half so how many of the things you wrote down were negative or mostly negative ah interesting right and of course this is so uncultured and contextualized largely based on where we come from right indeed when thinking about cities we are all making judgments grounded in our own personal experience for myself having at some point either lived either in or near cities such as washington dc san francisco madrid and study abroad beijing when i used to teach in china and now vancouver i find myself inevitably drawn to the sights sights sounds flavors and pulse of the big cities but more important than my personal preference or necessarily yours is the biblical testimony what does the bible have to say about cities can you remember the first mention of a city in the bible yes genesis of course indeed in genesis 4 as rogeron and vincent point out in the city in biblical perspective genesis 4 right after came betrays and murders his very own brother abel god's grace is ushered forth in an offer to actually protect cain and subsequently the account of the building of the first city immediately follows you might want to go back and read it it's a bit shocking according to rogeron and vincent the fact that cain is a murderer who owes his continuing life only to the mercy of god imports a bit of ambiguity into the nature of the first city however in the tower of babel narrative narrative in genesis 11 a population that had no interest in serving as city builders for god and in honoring god build instead for themselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens in order to make a name for themselves right genesis 11 1 to 9 according to rogeron and vincent uh in light of the fact that this that cities were built by forced labor by slave labor at the time genesis 11 1 to 9 gives a very negative view of the city a place of human exploitation and human aggrandizement at the expense of god and other humans in genesis 18 and 19 sodom and gomorrah are established as basically a byword to epitomize the sum of human wickedness the old testament traditions about sodom and gomorrah invite readers to think profoundly about cities and what it is that makes them bad and good indeed other negative portraits of cities are found in the old testament including descriptions in song of songs lamentations and psalms where the city is described as a place of loneliness and frustration a place where truth and justice are corrupted right we could go on for a long way and yet in the old testament there are numerous examples to the contrary as um and buzzard highlight in the why cities matter book in numbers and judges the bible repeatedly

describes the city as a place of refuge the cities of refuge king david selected and developed jerusalem as the center of israel's worship and the capital location for political cultural and commercial life jerusalem was established as the city of david in second samuel but even more importantly it became known as the city of god furthermore various psalms in describing how god dwells in the holy place in his city paint a portrait of god as the ultimate urban dweller according to um and buzzard god is a lover of the city and he is concerned for its welfare in psalm 48 the people are asked to walk around the streets of jerusalem if you remember the language consider its walls consider its ramparts right uh the people are

[ 32 : 25 ] encouraged to marvel at the beauty of god's architecture detailing the various structures of the city and proclaiming to everyone and to the next generations that god made all of it and that he loves it all according to um and buzzard god's focus on and concern for the city continues in the new testament in luke jesus's ministry is set in and finds its goal in an urban context as the story is all shaped around jesus's journey to jerusalem as jesus moves toward jerusalem he experiences the full brokenness of the earthly city coming into contact with all that is wrong with cities marked by sin in all the gospels jesus was concerned to enter fully into earthly cities and be present and minister as god bringing hope and life to those who had been forsaken in acts it's clear that jesus christ has created a church that is bent toward geographical expansion that happens primarily in the cities from jerusalem to antioch and beyond as for paul he was an urban dweller whose life ministry writings and death took place in cities and as the result of his ministry as the result of his ministry uh there grew into birth right into being the wonderful network of vibrant city churches full of urban christians yeah well what are we to make of hebrews 13 14 which declares that christians have no lasting city but are to seek the city that is to come right and you recognize here of course first in hebrews but then you recognize language of augustine in the city of god right city of god city of man this dichotomy of sorts in agreement with our priestly caretaker vocation that we have already mentioned the fact that christians have no lasting city but are to seek the city to come in no way means that we are to ignore the earthly city to paraphrase tim keller and this is beautiful we are citizens of one city yet full-time residents of another our primary allegiance is given to a city from which we derive our most normative beliefs and practices the city of god and yet we live in our city of residences as full participants we do not live as natives taurus or travelers we are resident aliens by his grace jesus lost the city that was so that we could become citizens of the city to come making us salt and light in the city that is writes keller this truth is confirmed in the off-site in verse from jeremiah 29 in which the israelites are told even in exile to seek the shalom of the city and thereby find their welfare in other words if the city prospers and flourishes then the israelites were to prosper and flourish in their exile finally any biblical treatment of the city cannot forget to mention at the end revelation 21 perhaps the greatest affirmation of the city in christian understanding here we see the consummation of a new new heaven and a new earth in terms of a city the new jerusalem the new jerusalem is full of cultural masterpieces featuring walls and streets and inscriptions and fine jewels it has gates that are always open there's no temple in the city because all the city's inhabitants have been cleansed by the blood of christ in short as um and buzzard assert all that the city was ever meant to be but failed to be one day it will be in the new jerusalem the city is the expression for the full fulfillment of the garden of eden and that new city is our future home much more could be said about a christian

conception of cities of course including the sense of eschatology if you're interested in additional reading i suggest philip scheldrick's the spiritual city he gives a thorough account of the historical development in christianity of the notion of city he in fact clarifies that augustinian distinction between the city of god and the city of man highlighting that in augustine's understanding christians could contribute to the actual life of human cities by seeking the civic good and by collaboratively working to improve the human city scheldrick also discusses for instance aquinas's understanding of the city as the pinnacle of human community and human virtue so revealing what we've said in the briefest terms we can say that in a christian understanding place matters cities matter rooted in these truths what then is a christian conception of place making in the cities what is the christian theology of the built environment well as sean banesh points out in blueprints for a just city the role of the church in urban planning and shaping the city's built environment we should remember that as god designed the new jerusalem he is claims banesh in a sense an architect and urban planner banesh poignantly pens before time god was doing more than plotting out canyons and shorelines he was also drafting plans for buildings and then cities god is a god of cities as much as he is of the

wilderness and never-ending cosmos writes banesh for banesh the notion of god as urban planner comes distinctly to fruition in considering how good helpful hopeful and healthy urban design is an outflow of god's justice human flourishing of this sort we see in the new jerusalem of revelation 21 is tied directly into the quality of place in built environment particularly as these environments create for human flourishing by promoting justice and banesh notes in particularly the human need for stability security and accessibility in terms of living in communal spaces churches then are uniquely positioned to participate in this just structuring of our cities there are not too many organizations or institutions that have the pulse of a city quite like churches many churches do churches are rooted in neighborhoods which means that they are on the front lines of seeing the impact of both good and bad urban design and how it impacts congregants churches know what ails a neighborhood and what brings it hope and joy here banesh points to collective power over the process of urban urbanization arguing that citizens together need to assume and assert their right to influencing and forming cities banesh argues that the power of spaces whether for good or bad directly impacts how people live and function in the city and how people engage with one another and even how people how happy people are in the city all truths illustrated in water ship down and another of his banesh's books entitled exegeting the city what you need to know about church planting today he challenges churches to move beyond the rote question of what can we do to plant more churches and instead to emphasize the more holistic question how can the gospel best be expressed for human flourishing what do our cities and suburbs need for human flourishing for banesh it may be new churches of course but it might also be more relational interconnectivity greater social capital for all residents more bike paths better public transit higher densities perhaps lower densities better systems to welcome new immigrants more local businesses and fewer chain stores any discussion of the flourishing of modern day cities cannot avoid then the elephant in the room gentrification banesh recognizes the numerous vantage points from which to address the issue economics racial tensions community development housing gender sexuality immigration these are all entwined in gentrification and he calls christians to consider the effects of gentrification from below and posits the ever so significant question how do churches and ministry leaders navigate the terrain of gentrification to bring about a more gospel-centered human flourishing as every city and neighborhood is unique the church much must depend on coupling action with thorough investigation exploration and prayer for sheldrick in the spiritual city the matter of human flourishing involves the concept that a city should not merely help people to survive but encourage people to dream cities have a capacity to focus a range of physical intellectual and creative energies simply because they combine differences of age ethnicity culture gender and religion in unparalleled ways right children a successful city is thus thus i'm sorry a successful and inspired state of mind of the city offers a vision of human community that is capable of promoting coexistence and flourishing between strangers and uniting community the goal of city dreaming centers upon concerns of social inclusiveness altruistic citizenship opportunity and hospitality the good city the good city sheldrick writes the good city greets the stranger and welcomes the newcomer and welcomes the newcomer he calls for systems and spaces that are accessible hospitable and inclusive one example is port sunlight uk has anybody heard of port sunlight any of our british wonderful port sunlight uk a community created in 1888 by william lever a devout uh congregationalist and businessman who applied his christian ideals to his business life between 1899 and 1914 800 houses were built to house his workers a population of 3500 people the garden township had houses each block of which were designed by a different architect and public buildings uh open air swimming pool an art gallery a small hospital schools church and a non-alcoholic hotel showdown accounts that lever introduced welfare schemes and provided for education which promoted art literature science and music lever stater's aim in this community of port sunlight were to socialize and christianize business relations and get back to that close family brotherhood that existed in the good old days such is an incredible example of how cities should and must affirm the sacredness of people community and human transcendence finally if one is looking for some truly practical suggestions of how to implement the idea of human flourishing in the urban environment eric jacobson's sidewalks in the kingdom and the space between are wonderful in terms of delving into the nitty-gritty of architecture and urban planning and also in terms of filling out a theology of the built environment jacobson is concerned that we have ample cause sorry jacobson is convinced that we have ample cause to invest in our cities because in them we find our welfare we find our welfare in their welfare and sidewalks he points to two to six sorry in sidewalk he points to six markers of the city that helped us to focus on what is good and valuable in

our cities

these six markers are public spaces mixed use zoning beauty and quality in the built environment strong local economy mixed use zoning oh sorry and the and the presence of strangers so that is again public spaces mixed use zoning beauty and quality local economy the presence of strangers uh public spaces uh public spaces require us to share with one another and truly dwell among our neighbors more mixed use neighborhoods give people additional reasons to travel on or through public spaces by giving them interesting and useful destinations to which they can walk thereby increasing the possibilities of what he terms incidental contact between neighbors both appreciation of beauty and the ability to create beauty are god's given gifts and jacobson reminds us that people of all classes need beauty and dignity in their daily lives people of all classes need beauty and dignity in their daily lives strong local economies include locally owned businesses that offer a sense of deep identity and rootedness in a community and the six i forgot to mention initially critical mass is a term he uses critical mass refers to the density required to catalyze and sustain civic groups and interests such as a local theater or music groups uh jacobson has spent a lot of his time living in missoula montana and so he writes for instance of the sponsorship of the museum missoula's uh theater for the arts essentially and what that means in terms of the local community encouraging the growth of these six markers jacobson who has been on the congress for congress for new urbanism advocates a new urbanist approach to urban planning an approach that directly communicates the values of civility hospitality neighborliness and inherent worth that are inherent worth of the human being that are critical to any city the space between in the space between he looks like he looks at what it looks like to live as the church in the time and space between the garden of creation and the city of jerusalem what does that look like to live as the church in between these two bookends in answering this question he further develops his argument that community and geography are inseparably linked and he breaks down in wonderfully clear detail his argument for the advantage of mixed use pedestrian friendly neighborhoods that are built slowly over time even over multiple generations according to the idea of piecemeal urbanism over time in different parts and portions he even addresses the geography of sidewalks and curb radius in considering the values of place making he speaks of enclosures of building aspect ratios the leaking space of building design which leaking space just essentially refers to if you look at any major thoroughfare uh or so many in the united states and we just have you know fast food joint fast food joint uh retail giant and this leaking space in comparison between where these buildings are set and the actual road and sidewalk so enclosure aspect ratio uh leaking space and he argues that we too often fail to see the space space between the buildings indeed his title has a double sense to it right uh the time of the garden of eden and the new jerusalem the space between and also this actual physical space between buildings right he breaks down the terminology of embedded and insular churches embedded churches uh come up directly to the sidewalk projecting an ethic for him of hospitality insular churches like i know a mega church back in the dc area that i loved um are often set back by hundreds of feet of parking projecting an air of distance he also calls for churches to reconsider the parish model encouraging churches to consider their geographic footprints as relates to their call and ambassadorship in their own particular neighborhoods and usually here jacob is thinking of the neighborhood as defined within a 15 minute walk jacob raises questions of environmental stewardship and human health particularly as relate to questions of urban density and public transit uh he makes note that i think in new york city there is despite the fact that if you've been there most of the year you go there and you've been to vancouver and vancouver and you look for recycling in new york in manhattan and can you find it no you can't find recycling in manhattan so you think oh what are they doing in manhattan these neanderthals but in actuality because of the density in the way the living is set out and if you've ever lived in an apartment like marie and i have uh when we were these days we're so cold all the time because we live on the second floor of a four-story apartment when we first got married we lived on the 15th floor and we never had to turn our heat on ever right because just efficiency of space and electricity here and he notes that then in new york the average uh use of electricity is about 30 percent less than the national average for new yorkers so jacobson raises questions without even trying to do anything right um jacob raises questions of environmental stewardship and human health he also issues a call to reduce community extrammet via third places places like coffee shops and pubs that are neither home nor work allowing for welcome interaction between strangers every building makes a moral statement every design embodies an ethic before concluding and entertaining questions i have one final activity for you write down the first three to five suggestions that come to mind to further promote the

flourishing of vancouver okay and again this may not be bricks and mortar of the built environment but all these ideas that we've considered in our text and if you can and you might be as sketching on a disinclined as i am do your best to sketch one of these suggestions and maybe it's a bit abstract sketch if it's not brick and mortar so you you you so i'm essentially committing the most egregious sin of a former language teacher and giving you insufficient time to actually really discuss these things or use the language.

[ 51 : 49 ] Every building makes a moral statement. Every design embodies an ethic. Circling back to Tim Gorange, with whom we began, we see that a developed, robust theology of a built environment recognizes that place matters, that cities matter, and that messages communicated by the ethics of the built environment matter.

As we, the Church, seek to herald God's redemption in all areas of our life, anticipating the city of the New Jerusalem, questions of justice, hospitality, and equality, density, transit, and zoning. These are no easy questions. Yet we must be willing to engage in the conversation. Or else we will simply fall into an erroneous, Gnostic-like conception that places cities and the built environment do not matter.

And come on! In building a giant, accessible, warm, comfortable, Regent-like atrium to serve as the life of the community, Hazel's herd of hares knew what was going on.

So must we. Let us not be the Church of Elmer Fudd, outsmarted by that silly wabbit.

[ 53 : 18 ] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. So I think we have, sorry, about maybe five minutes for questions.

Yes, sir. We have some people in this group who have actually been involved in trying to get their neighbourhood onto the agenda.

Wonderful. But we have a mayor here. Yeah. He doesn't want to consult with neighbourhoods. Sometimes he doesn't even consult with the council before implementing a plan. And actively discourages that.

So what we've got is his interest in working with developers and bike riders. And so... It's not much different in Washington, D.C.

Right now, I guess. Well, you know, it's a great idea, but my son, who is an urban planner, actually left Vancouver because he likes to work with the communities that are being affected by the plant.

[ 54 : 23 ] There he has a chance to do that. And loves it and can put a network together faster than anybody else in his building. And it's the thing he really enjoys is let's do this together.

But a lot depends on the leadership at the top. I don't know if Cain actually had this problem. But, you know, you mentioned Christian involvement in this.

And I just wondered if you had some clues about how. Yeah, that's a wonderful point, right? This is... It's very difficult once we put it into the practicalities.

How many of you have sat in on Vancouver City Board Urban Planning Institute meetings? Have you as watched? Just one. Just one or two? And what was the feeling that you got from that experience?

I want to move on. Yeah. I think... Yeah, there's really no easy answers except to say that Marie and I took the food course with Janet.

[ 55 : 31 ] And Jeff and Wilkinson's delightful. In fact, not to go off topic, but if I were to draw my way to improve the city, it would be just additional urban gardening, including trellises and apartment landscapes.

We went to... Janet, what was the name of... Do you know the gentleman in Sydney with the incredible orchard? I don't... I don't... Yeah. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. But to say we've actually changed the food course so that now it's a weekend...

Yeah. It's in the city. Yeah. Yeah. But we went to this one man's basically suburban-like property that couldn't have been more than one to two acres, and yet it was just...

It was a smorgasbord of fruits, right? Bree and Maria were there. Incredible how they used the system. That's just a roundabout way, Sheila, to saying that in that chorus, we also encountered, you know, the...

Well, what do we do with the problems of the food system are so enormous, right? And perhaps it sounds a bit like a cop-out, but for me, one of the biggest epiphanies was, no, actually, when I'm taking the bus today intentionally or when I'm, you know, recycling or even people might know I carry around trash quite a bit because I'm waiting to find compost.

[ 56 : 49 ] And even in these small things, right, or attending a council meeting that seems impossibly, uphill, like, this is our spiritual act of worship. And I think just that releases our hands from the responsibility of necessarily being able to contribute to the result and breeze back a life of just joy and thankfulness.

Of course you want to see change, right? And that sounds really difficult with what your son is doing and then having to move, but yeah, hopefully he encounters more success. But I think a lot of it is that spiritual act of worship and then trusting that as the conversation gets out, hoping that change will, and this more and more, hope change will be on the way.

Yes? Yes. Our parish church was in its public place. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. We had a place there, I underestimated at the time, but now that I think of it, I thought I could push it more, it would be a place where we remembered the dead.

Mm-hmm. They were still with us. Mm-hmm. Modern city has, the cemetery is somewhere else, rather than mentioned, the big condos, the gale town, I mean, there's a little space in the building.

Yeah. Yeah. It's not a building. Mm-hmm. There are people who used to be here, or remember.

Yeah. It may be buried. Yeah. I mean, this is the, this disconnects us from the love, basically.

[ 58 : 17 ] Yeah. Why any, has anybody caught in darker, by your statement, or that's what they're, that's just not on the front. Not that I saw in the reading. Do you know it all, David Lowe? Oh. Yeah.

Yeah. You remember the great controversy with St. John's Hostess at UPC? Mm-hmm. Yeah.

People do not want death, they're dying, anywhere near them. Yeah, it's just this, our 21st century conception, right?

Out of mind, out of sight. Out of mind, out of sight. I mean, there's a beautiful place there now, but it took an awful lot of struggle to get that place. And I think like, in a place like Yaletown, oh, that would be powerful, but then, as all these books touch upon, and I only limited, we've mentioned, so much comes down to the market at the end of the day, right?

And then hopefully, there are, God willing, and blessed Christians in positions of authority, and perhaps on developing councils, or even developers themselves, that might remind ourselves that the market is not the ultimate consideration.

Yeah. I grew up in Windsor, Ontario, so I've got a great heart from the city of Detroit. If you just Google Christian organizations that have a sense of vision and calling for the renewal of Detroit, it's inspiring when some of the things happen.

[ 59 : 33 ] In Midtown Detroit, I know of a church plant going on in Midtown, somewhere around the Detroit Art Gallery, which I have visited frequently. Oh, wonderful. But yeah, you know, Detroit's just amazing.

You go about four blocks west of Woodward, which is the main north-south artery, and you're into all of the results of the 1960s riots, you know, the burned-owned blocks, just vacant blocks.

But some really creative, positive things like farming, experimental farming going on in some of the city blocks. But just, and some of the renewal going on is Christian people who have a renewal for a heart for the city of Detroit and are investing money and summing up with creative ways of getting in front of the Detroit going into the city.

And absolutely, I think that speaks just to the uphillness. You let your light shine, right? And then hopefully on a practical level, it opens conversations with non-believers who would probably be even more skeptical than we would, right?

Yeah. A local success story is the Vidi Biodiversity Museum. Something you might be aware of, but Vidi is about distance. And they knew to create this building not home for the university's biology but for the collections because they want to share the beauty of that picture.

[ 60 : 58 ] It's really a powerful and the building itself is the temple towards that. And you feel it when you walk in and you walk in and you walk in and you walk in and you walk in and you walk in. That is brilliant.

What a wonderful example. And David, did you have another question? Well, I was just going to reflect upon the place, the other side of the water from your slide, which I think both Granville Island and even more from my perspective coming east from that is a tremendous example of the kinds of positive values that are very effectively presented today because the south side of the first creek which was redeveloped in the American Society and the city-owned brand and the city-owned basically a big resort has those aesthetic dimensions which commonly appear in these books self-accessing water and so on.

But it also addresses an issue which is frequently not ours but you degrade it and that is the city for who? Who can actually occupy it?

When we look at that side of the world then you're talking at incomes which are probably more than most people in this room are ever likely to get to get into that.

The other side of the creek one third low income one third middle income one third higher income what a different model one what a model of really promoting diversity and different ages there's old folks retirement homes there's handicapped co-op and so it goes on.

[ 62 : 59 ] There was in fact a thesis done at Regents probably in the early 80s that looked at that landscape that asked is this the Christian of the landscape because it seemed to include so many positive values including of course design of nature.

So I mean there's a lot of critiques that we can quite correctly always raise but it's good to see some best practices and try to learn from those ways.

Sorry I think we're about at time as I got a face through the window. But thank you for I hope the discussion goes forth and continues amongst the rest of the church and in the neighborhood.

Thank you. Thank you.