



Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science



HOME AND FAMILY

Home and Neighborhood



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“Home and Neighborhood” is the last of a three-part series examining the pressures on the family in the contemporary world. With this issue, we move beyond the domestic sphere to include reflections on neighborhood, community, and the impact of the built environment on human relationships.

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BOOK REVIEW

The Tao of Architecture

STRATFORD CALDECOTT

Christopher Alexander, *The Timeless Way of Building* (Oxford University Press, 1979).

It is rare for a book on architecture and design to adopt the tone, let alone succeed in expressing the wisdom, of a spiritual classic like the Tao Te Ching (c. 500 BC). I am tempted to see such a book in *The Timeless Way of Building*, third in a series from Alexander's Center for Environmental Structure at Berkeley. The leading author of *A Pattern Language* (1977) which helped shape the New Urbanism, and *The Oregon Experiment* (1975), which described the implementation of these ideas at the University of Oregon, Alexander is one of the most influential designers of our time, a leader of the reaction against modernist tendencies that tie all design to the material functionality and a reductive attitude to the human person.

He sums up the philosophy of this book as follows. "There is one timeless way of building. It is thousands of years old, and the same today as it has always been. The great traditional buildings of the past, the villages and tents and temples in which man feels at home, have always been made by people who were very close to the center in this way. And as you will see, this way will lead anyone who looks for it to buildings which are themselves as ancient in their form as the trees and hills, and as our faces are." So, you see, the "timelessness" he has in mind is not an abstraction from time and history, as with modernism, but a settling right down into history and the bodily existence of the person (especially the "face").

The book is designed in keeping with these principles. It begins with the whole, not the part, and seeks a balance between complexity and simplicity in which Alexander sees the key to "life" – not merely biological life, but life in general, which he also calls the "quality without a name" and describes poetically as "a self-maintaining fire." The book is divided into three big, simple parts and then under brief paragraph headings that summarize the main principles and insights. You can read no more than that, he says, and still get the gist of his approach. In between these italic paragraphs, though, the designer or architect will find much guidance and inspiration.

Doorways, windows, halls, living rooms – and public spaces such as sidewalks, market squares,

parks – according to Alexander, all are governed by certain rules that determine whether they have “life.” Does the design of the doorway, for example, reflect a real transition between states characterized by a qualitative difference? Does it enable us to appreciate a movement taking place into or from the interior, with the changes that implies for the one who moves between the two? Dozens of such elements of our built environment are listed and explored in the earlier volume of the book series called *A Pattern Language*, in which Alexander and his colleagues develop in great detail the pattern language that applies to each of them. So equipped, the designer should be able to build anything from a college to a shed, from a harbor to a museum, from an intimate courtyard to a neighborhood, in a form that will delight the spirit and survive the centuries.

It’s not just that the success of the various elements and features depends on how useful they are to us. Alexander is concerned to show that the quality without a name is “objective” not merely subjective. It belongs to a bigger context, in which we certainly play a part, but not the only one. The underlying philosophy of this approach is one that overcomes a false dualism between subject and object, interior and exterior. The two belong to a unity, and imply each other. The risk is always that of falling into a kind of monism or pantheism, but Alexander ultimately avoids this.

Furthermore, the point of the *Timeless Way* volume is to show how the designer must transcend *Pattern Language* altogether. The rules of language and structure, of spontaneous organic growth, of algorithmic processes that operate unconsciously, of emergent order, would seem to enable a designer to create environments that are full of life, but of course the “language, and the processes which stem from it, merely release the fundamental order which is native to us.” The language will only “work” if we forget both it and ourselves, attaining a kind of “innocence” in the act of designing which is completely open to what will happen next. The language is far from useless, therefore. It is the pattern language that “frees you to be yourself, because it gives you permission to do what is natural, and shows you your innermost feelings about building while the world is trying to suppress them” (p. 544).

Stratford Caldecott MA (Oxon.), STD (hc), the founding Editor of *Humanum*, was a graduate of Oxford University, where he was a research fellow at St Benet's Hall. A member of the editorial boards of the international Catholic review *Communio*, *The Chesterton Review*, *Magnificat* (UK), and *Second Spring*, he is the author of several books including *Beauty for Truth's Sake*, *Beauty in the Word*, and *The Radiance of Being*.

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BOOK REVIEW

The Meaning of Place

CARLA GALDO

Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Baker Academic: September 1, 2011; 384 pages).

Where Mortals Dwell begins with a timely reminder – to be human is to dwell within a particular place. From the moment that we are, we are “implaced.” This apparently self-evident fact is threatened today, however, by a “crisis of place.” Globalized economic forces and political flare-ups fling people over borders and even into new continents seeking work and stability, while historic communities are eviscerated. Pocket-sized smartphones and unbroken internet access allow people to be virtually “in touch” with people, places, and events everywhere – everywhere, that is, except where they actually, literally, are. Standing as a backdrop to this is the all-pervading heritage of modern scientific thought, which enshrines abstract data while distrusting and disdaining lived experience.

In such a milieu, this book is a welcome contribution. Bartholomew's own voice comes through most in the introduction and the final chapters, as he strives to define “place” and suggests strategies to invite individuals and communities to dwell more intentionally in the concrete places where they spend their lives. Sandwiched in between these sections are chapters that review the treatment of place in Scripture, classical Western philosophy, and Christian theology from the early Church Fathers through contemporary thinkers. Friendly but passing treatment is given to thinkers who propose a sacramental approach to all creation, such as the Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann, and the Anglican William Temple. We must be attentive, he says, quoting Gerard Manley Hopkins, to “a world charged with the grandeur of God.” With such a wide swath of philosophy and theology to evaluate, however, an interested student of place might best use these chapters as a doorway into a deeper study of the original texts.

Scripture is given pride of place and receives the closest treatment, with nearly half the book's 300+ pages highlighting the centrality of place in both the Old and the New Testaments. His discussion of the theology of place in Genesis 1-3 shines with insight, and is good company for

Catholic studies of the same texts, notably John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* and Benedict XVI's *In the Beginning*. Of particular interest are his reflections on Eden as a cultivated garden, a cared-for place, rather than an untamed wilderness, which gives new meaning to the overall teleology of place in the Bible. While noting that an appreciation of rural life and natural places are key, Bartholomew emphasizes more than once that the overall movement of "place" in the Bible is from a garden to a city, the city of God as described in Revelation. The proliferation of urban landscapes cannot simply be dismissed as the "problem" in the midst of our current crisis of place; rather, problems proliferate amidst the unabashed commercialism of most cities, places that ignore the social/relational flourishing of the person.

Bartholomew's entire approach is thoroughly incarnational – the bodily reality of the human person is central because it is in and through one's body that one finds oneself in a place at all. He does not disparage the details of quotidian reality, but rather notes that it is in and through these realities that "placemaking" must happen. He gives suggestions for placemaking via gardening, farming, and community-structuring in cities, universities, and sprawling suburbs. His discussion of homemaking is a particularly welcome compilation of thoughtful suggestions from a variety of sources, including Wendell Berry and Calvin Seerveld. Homemakers must relearn the art of creating comfortable, livable, hospitable, and productive spaces, rather than striving to imitate the sterility of the catalog or show-room. He even makes a brief foray into birdwatching as a way of entering into the specificity of one's place. Bartholomew also touches on placemaking in the realm of ecological issues, and shows wisdom regarding the liberal/conservative divide among Christians. "A recovery of the biblical notion of creation order...would go a long way towards challenging this polarity. God's order applies as much to marriage and sexuality as it does to how we care for the earth" (p. 312).

Bartholomew makes brief remarks regarding how Christians today might begin to nurture their places more, and is a proponent of meaningful rather than utilitarian architectural spaces. Given a typical suburban church "campus" today, he repeats suggestions of creating a small multi-use town center rather than a huge worship space surrounded by acres of sprawling parking lots. He notes that the tradition of Christian pilgrimage is experiencing a remarkable vitality, even amidst declining church attendance. Pilgrimage is incarnational, creational, and sacramental – not only does it take the particularity of place seriously, it takes the embodied people who journey through time and space to reach holy sites seriously. Bartholomew recognizes, however, that the true challenge of the pilgrim is to deepen their day-to-day recognition of God in the midst of their lives once returning home: "Implacement ultimately means that by the Spirit we have the Father and the Son as our co-inhabitants. Such at-homeness is the key to being at home in our particular places in God's good but fallen world, and is the place from which we derive the vision and resources for birthing Christ again and again in his world."

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BOOK REVIEW

Towards an Economy of Love

PATRICK M. FLEMING

Wendell Berry, *Home Economics: Fourteen Essays* (Counterpoint Press, 1987).

Wendell Berry's writing, as evidenced in *Home Economics*, is knit throughout with the sense that the material world expresses spiritual reality. This is no minor feat. Flannery O'Connor said that one of the greatest difficulties of writing as a Catholic for an audience all but dead to the sense of God is that "for [her], the ultimate reality is the Incarnation, the present reality is the Incarnation, the whole reality is the Incarnation, and nobody believes in the Incarnation." And while O'Connor often portrayed the nihilistic consequences of a world without God, Berry – in his fiction and non-fiction alike – fleshes out a positive vision, a life composed of ordinary matter that reflects a spiritual reality and a spiritual decision: a loving economy.

Home Economics is a collection of fourteen essays by Wendell Berry, written from the early- to mid-1980s. As one goes from his Letter to Wes Jackson in 1982 to his Defense of the Family Farm and Does Community Have Value? in 1986, the reader witnesses Berry fleshing out an argument that he has been making for over forty years: namely, that "all things connect – that we are wholly dependent on a pattern, an all-inclusive form, that we partly understand" (p. ix).

For Berry, deepening an argument really does mean "fleshing out." *Home Economics* is ripe with story and statement, yet mostly barren of statistics. For the contemporary economist who prefers statistics to either story or statement, this may seem like a weakness. But that would miss the point. A central part of Berry's argument is not to be such an economist, much less such a human being: "[those who would say] 'my engineer's mind inclines less toward the poetic and philosophical, and more toward the practical and possible,' [are] unable even to suspect that such a division of mind induces blindness to possibilities of the utmost practical concern" (p. 65). The modern insistence on "being practical" is, ironically, impractical. Of course statistics can help: they can sometimes convince the obstinate, or at times awaken us to a pattern we might otherwise have missed. But to focus on them single-mindedly is to become blind to the practical significance of what cannot be measured, to the complex and permanent

patterns that are invisible to statisticians but nonetheless sustain us.

As Berry puts it, the pattern he seeks to describe is nothing less than the Kingdom of God (pp. 55, 60-1). He also calls it the Great Economy (p. 56). In either case, it is an Economy that encompasses us, encompasses everything, and serves as both a generous source of abundance and an exacting limit for any “little human economy” that seeks its daily bread within.[1]

Berry contrasts two of these “little human economies” through the pages of *Home Economics*: the industrial economy and “a loving economy” (p. 189). To describe them it is helpful to begin, like Berry, by speaking concretely about how each one cultivates or corrupts the human community that is the family farm.

The Industrial Economy

“If [the family farm] is failing among us, pretty much without being argued against and pretty much without professed enemies, then we must try to ask why it should fail... [And] the best place to begin may be with the fact that the family farm is not the only good thing that is failing among us. The family farm is failing because it belongs to an order of values and a kind of life that are failing. We can only find it wonderful, when we put our minds to it, that many people now seem willing to mount an emergency effort to ‘save the family farm’ who have not yet thought to save the family or the community, the neighborhood schools or the small local businesses, the domestic arts of household and homestead, or cultural and moral tradition – all of which are also failing, and on all of which the survival of the family farm depends.

The family farm is failing because the pattern it belongs to is failing, and the principle reason for this failure is the universal adoption, by our people and our leaders alike, of industrial values” (pp. 167-8).

For Berry, the industrial economy is both source and expression of a set of values – difficult to untangle from the air we breathe[2] – are based on at least three unexamined assumptions (p. 168):

- (1) That value equals price (“that the value of a farm, for example, is whatever it would bring on sale”).
- (2) That all relations are mechanical (“that a farm, for example, can be used like a factory”).
- (3) That the sufficient and definitive human motivation is competitiveness (“that a community, for example, can be treated like a resource or a market”).

Together these assumptions, and the kind of economy they inform, are inimical to the family farm and the pattern to which it belongs. The reason is simple: they exclude from consideration the natural and cultural sources which sustain the pattern of the family farm. By being excluded from consideration, these sources, both natural and cultural, are not valued; and by being de-valued, they may be destroyed at no noticeable cost. Berry writes, “[T]he thing that troubles us about the industrial economy is exactly that it is not comprehensive enough, that, moreover, it tends to destroy what it does not comprehend, and that it is dependent upon much that it does not comprehend” (p. 55, see also p. 45). In this way, Berry’s position is not susceptible to the charge of sentimentalism or nostalgia – a potential danger that he himself recognizes (p. 184). He argues, rather, that in the long run industrial values undermine the economy itself. They exclude from consideration the sources on which any “little human economy” (p. 64) depends for its existence and health.

Berry's critique of industrial values, in the context of the economy, thus harmonizes with Patrick Deneen's critique of liberalism in the context of politics.[3] Namely, the success of the liberal political experiment depends on pre-liberal or non-liberal institutions, like marriage and family, but the practice of liberalism tends to undermine these institutions, due to its anthropology of individualism, and its notion that human beings are separate from and opposed to nature. Liberalism thus contradicts itself, inevitably defeating the achievements it seeks to secure. One could replace the word liberal with "industrial" in the sentence above, and Deneen's argument would be at home in Home Economics.

For this reason, a student of economic history cannot but wonder if Berry goes back far enough in naming the culprit for the collapse of the pattern he loves. Eventually, of course, we go back to Adam (in the Garden, not Smith); but the industrial economy is historically and logically linked to liberalism. In Home Economics, Berry even acknowledges that industrialism is not the original source of disintegration. "Sometime between", he writes, "[Alexander] Pope's Chain of Being in 'An Essay on Man' and [William] Blake's 'London' the dominant minds had begun to see the human race, not as a part or member of Creation, but as outside it and opposed to it. The industrial revolution was only part of this change" (p. 70). In raising these questions, one cannot but look behind industrialism to the ascendancy of liberalism and, at least in "the dominant minds" of the Anglo-speaking world, the Lockean view of human relationships as contractual, self-constituted, and, thereby, disposable. Might these characteristics of liberalism be a deeper source of the collapse of the family farm and its pattern?

The Loving Economy

"At some point, late in the conference proceedings, they asked David [an Amish farmer] what community meant to him. He said that when he and his son were plowing in the spring he could look around him and see seventeen teams at work on the neighboring farms. He knew those teams and the men driving them, and he knew that if he were hurt or sick, those men and those teams would be at work on his farm.

Conditioned as we all are now by industrial assumptions, we must be careful not to miss or to underestimate the point of David's reply: It is a practical description of a spiritual condition. ... [E]conomy is not merely a function of community; the community and the economy are virtually the same. We might, indeed, call an Amish community a loving economy, for it is based on the love of neighbors, of creatures, and of places" (p. 189).

When using a term like "loving economy," the temptation to sentimentalism is always before the author. Berry avoids this trap by assiduously staying close to the world he has seen. He neither idealizes the community of the pre-industrial farm, nor takes up the technocratic fallacy (common among economists) that the right economic tinkering can provide our nation with constant material growth and social harmony, and each of us with good looks and above-average children.

The examples of loving economies put forth in Home Economics are several: the pre-World-War-II rural communities of Kentucky (pp. 152-61, 180-2), the Amish (pp. 177-8), and the legacy of the medieval economy, enduring but waning, on the Irish landscape of 1982 (pp. 21-48, esp. 33-4, 40-1, 46-7 inter alia). Yet more important for Berry are the never-to-be-official institutions of "marriage, family, household, friendship, [and] neighborhood," which serve as a kind of paradigm for a loving economy, each in its own way. In each of these "human enclosures," we live first as members, not simply competitors, and "escape the tyrannical doctrine of the interchangeability of parts" (pp. 121-2). And for marriage, at least, its true term mirrors that of

the Great Economy as far as humanly possible: “to the edge of doom” (p. 122, quoting Shakespeare).

Certainly, Berry at times describes these loving economies in contrast to the industrial one. The value of mothering and fathering in a household, like the value of topsoil in a farm, is not the same as its market price (pp. 62, 135); relations are based on “membership” not mechanics (pp. 122, 123); and competition is not considered the sufficient and definitive economic motivation (pp. 116, 126-7). But Berry goes further than describing the photographic negative. He is able to open fields of questions not normally asked, or said to count, in the industrial (liberal) economy. Some of these questions regard the proper scale of economic enterprise (pp. 33-4, 150) and the appropriate balance of technology with human skill (pp. 16-17). Others regard the significance of the Sabbath (p. 66) and bodily work (pp. 131-2) for a sound economy. Still others regard the just distribution of ownership, not just income, in a democratic society (p. 165). In raising these questions, Berry shares many of the premises and concerns that animate the “Small is Beautiful” economist E.F. Schumacher, as well as English Distributists like Chesterton and Belloc. As Berry writes, “The question of the survival of the family farm and the farm family is one version of the question of who will own the country... Shall the usable property of our country be democratically divided or not?” (p. 165).

For Berry, a loving economy is at bottom incarnational. It is founded on the unshakeable (and unshakeably Christian) conviction that for human beings the spiritual and the practical are, and should be, inseparable. That is, the “private” goods of God, worship, and community are neither private nor optional, but are insistently practical – “[S]piritual values that are now so inconsequentially associated with the idea of community [are] economic assets...and they [produce] economic results” (p. 187). Spiritual goods are practical. But the Incarnation means that the reverse is also always true: matter contains meaning. The economy is one part of a spiritual whole, and denying this entails a type of dismemberment. “A culture disintegrates”, Berry writes, “when its economy disconnects from its government, morality, and religion. If we are dismembered in our economic life, how can we be members in our communal and spiritual life?” (p. 169). A truly practical economy is not abstracted from its spiritual life, but culminates in the corporate worship of the community (pp. 180, 182). Similarly, if the highest principles and standards of a community are not to be “reduced merely to talk” (p. 169) the spiritual life of a community is and must be expressed in the economy.

The Great Economy

The most important thing for Berry about any human economy – industrial, incarnational, or somewhere in between – is that, in the long run, its success will be measured not merely by its own accounting, but by the accounting of the Great Economy (God’s Kingdom), whose balance sheet is more comprehensive, whose memory is longer, and whose proposition for the future is to endure forever (pp. 59-60). Thus, for students or professors of economics, the significance of Home Economics lies not in any particular theory derivable from Berry’s work (as to the valuation of natural or cultural “resources,” etc.), but rather in its premises, and the questions it is then able to ask: what economically counts, what constitutes economic health, and what can human beings really do to achieve it? Berry knows that these are unavoidably religious questions.

“nvariably, at some point, the reach of human comprehension becomes too short, and at that point the work of the human economy must end in absolute deference to the working of the Great Economy. This, I take it, is the practical significance of the idea of the Sabbath” (p. 66).

Berry’s Home Economics promises no technocratic solutions to our nation’s economic problems.

But in contrast to the frenetic activity of an economy that exists for the end of growing itself, Berry gives us an economy at the service of the person and the human community – which is to say an economy subordinate to “the real business of life, which is salvation,”[4] the health and holiness of the whole human being.

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[1] For Berry, nature certainly expresses this Great Economy, but it is also clear that nature, like humanity, is subject to it.

[2] In Home Economics, Berry does not blame the family farm’s failure on the greed or avarice of any one person, or even group. This may contrast with the apparent thrust of his 2012 Jefferson Lecture, in regard to “boomers” versus “stickers” (available online here: <http://www.neh.gov/about/awards/jefferson-lecture/wendell-e-berry-lecture>).

[3] Patrick Deneen, “Unsustainable Liberalism,” in First Things, Aug/Sep 2012 (available online here: <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2012/07/unsustainable-liberalism>).

[4] R. H. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998), p. 31.

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BOOK REVIEW

State of the Family

JULIE E. HELDT

Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: the Family Besieged* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.).

“The family is a haven in a heartless world,” writes author Christopher Lasch (1932-1994), a former professor of history at the University of Rochester, best-selling author, and social critic. Lasch, whose thinking is quite eclectic, is typically labeled as a cultural conservative, but one who is skeptical of capitalism and influenced by a Freudian flavored critical theory. From within these diverse perspectives, he sets out to give his readers a substantial historical analysis of the social-scientific study of the modern family’s erosion in America. In the preface, Lasch himself admits that, like his outlook, this is a book whose topic “resists assimilation to predigested positions” and does not consist of “ready-made answers and automatic loyalties” to either the political right or left.

Beginning in the 19th century, Lasch masterfully untangles and maps out over a century’s worth of extensive sociological and psychological literature on the contemporary family. He situates these observations in the context of expanding social institutions and their besieging of the family’s power and influence. Most of these “expert” findings he subtly presents as wanting in their understanding of the authentic nature and purpose of the family.

Throughout each chapter of the book Lasch marks a new assault on the family within modern history. In great detail he demonstrates that over time, public and professional attention turn evermore toward the family. As a result, the family becomes more and more susceptible to the dangers of this increasingly intrusive outside influence. As the sense of responsibility and leadership within the family wanes and grows dangerously more dependent on these public agencies, a state of further decline and destruction of the family’s well-being sets in. The reader can begin to see how the power that the individual family previously possessed was quietly overthrown by this movement of a gradually expanding field of experts whose development was forming alongside a newly centralized government and economy.

Overall, I would recommend this book to anyone in, or interested in, the field of social sciences

looking, specifically, for a history of the secular sociological and psychological diagnosis of the state of the modern family. This book might be of particular interest to those looking for a history that accounts for the modern family's relationship to industrialization, capitalism, and the increasing intrusion of experts and lawmakers into the family's inner workings. Lasch is successful in thoroughly covering a large body of literature concisely.

However, I was disappointed in the surprising lack of Lasch's own clearly articulated opinions. Not infrequently the book turned into a dry summary of the history of sociology and psychology. Lasch's unwillingness to make judgments and evaluations about this wide range of information made the work difficult to follow at times. Additionally, he seemed surprisingly fond of Freud and presented much of the intellectual history through a Freudian lens.

Finally, my only other criticism of the book pertains to its vague definition of the nature and purpose of the family. The title implies that it is distinct from society at large and an entity that ought to be a "haven" from the world. However, as the book progresses, it becomes unclear whether that is in fact what the author intends. On the other hand, John Paul II clearly taught that AZ "as the family goes, so goes the nation, and so goes the whole world in which we live." I do not think this distinction in understanding can be reduced to another example of circular cause and consequence like that of the chicken and the egg. However, if the family is a small unit within society itself, then the overall health and state of the family should be a good indicator of the overall health and state of the culture. If the world is indeed heartless, as the title implies, then perhaps the first place in need of reformation is, in fact, the family.

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Sprawling Solitude

PAIGE S. SANCHEZ

Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk Andres Duany, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (North Point Press, 10th Anniversary Edition, 2010, 294 pages).

This is the 10th anniversary edition of a book which has come to be seen as a classic and the manifesto of a movement known as “New Urbanism,” which deplores the failures of postwar planning and its consequences: childhoods spent in cars in the American suburbs while local communities and neighborhoods decline.

Chapter One begins with a helpful introduction entitled “What is Sprawl, and Why?” and identifies two models of urban growth: “the traditional neighborhood and suburban sprawl” (p. 3). The traditional neighborhood was the primary form of settlement and development in America through the Second World War, examples of which include St. Augustine, FL and Seattle, WA. It was a model inherited from Europe, where the characteristically American way of suburban living does not exist. The traditional neighborhood’s characteristics are “mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly communities of varied population, either standing free as villages or grouped into towns and cities” (p. 4). In contrast, the modern North American pattern of growth is said to “ignore historical precedent and humane experience” (p. 4). It is an invention and an “idealized artificial system” (p. 4). Sprawl is essentially self-destructive because it creates suburbs that cannot sustain themselves financially, consumes land, produces “insurmountable traffic problems and exacerbates social inequity and isolation” (p. 4).

The basic unit of suburban sprawl is the single-family house. Such homes provide excellent value for their price, but in the suburbs, they become isolated centers of solitude, creating a chasm between the private and public realm overcome only by the automobile. This has led to segregation of society by income, invented by developers who, “lacking a meaningful way to distinguish their mass-produced merchandise, began selling the concept of exclusivity: If you live within these gates, you can consider yourself a success” (p. 43). Such marketing based on the idea of “moving up” in the world identified by the home in which one lives actually ends by depriving a person, a family, and a culture of a place in which they can live deeply, and

even more deeply belong. (One wonders whether the rise and success of, for example, the HGTV Channel and DIY Network could have been possible outside the phenomenon of such a “suburban nation.”)

Chapter Seven, “The Victims of Sprawl,” seems to approach most acutely the fact that suburban sprawl has had an effect on the person, from soccer moms to teenagers and the elderly. Ironically, families often live in the suburbs because they believe life will be safer for their children; however, the suburbs yield teenagers who spend hours in front of the television and other technology until they can procure the coveted driver’s license which enables them to drive from party to party and thus opening them to the risk of drunk driving, resulting in 44,000 teenage deaths per year. “Where else do we accept some 120 deaths a day so offhandedly?” (pp. 119-20). At the other end of life, the suburbs also have a detrimental effect on the elderly. As driving skills diminish with age, many seniors feel they are “nonviable members of society” when they can no longer drive.

The book’s authors, who work in architecture firms, schools of architecture and city-planning practices, unquestionably care deeply about the issue of sprawl. The layman of architecture tends to care, if he is aware that he does at all, simply by virtue of the fact that he has to exist in the environments architects have worked to build. Thus, while the creation of the classic American town is currently illegal in most municipalities as a result of current zoning ordinances (and this certainly should be lamented), the subject matter of the book extends beyond the fields of architecture and city planning, since the dilemmas created by urban sprawl are rooted in profound questions concerning the nature of man and therefore of the environment man requires in order to thrive.

In other words, the first question that should be asked to make the suburban sprawl debate meaningful is: “What is it to be human?” and consequently, “How should one live?” Unfortunately, although *Suburban Nation* carefully and clearly presents the history of sprawl, the resultant decline of neighborhoods and many other important and related issues, it fails to pose these fundamental questions explicitly, and as a result, it often feels simply like a long complaint.

From the cradle to the grave, suburban sprawl seems to participate in and promote what emerges as the ontological lie that conceives of man as one who can be happy living separately and alone. The “McMansion” which enables man to have more room to house his “stuff,” one child, and a dog without the memory of a tradition, history, and community cannot fulfill man’s need for love, truth, happiness, and communion. Human life has an origin and a telos which a cul-de-sac simply fails to articulate or satisfy. While Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck correlate the rise of sprawl and the decline of the American dream, it would be even more provocative to connect the rise of sprawl to the reduction of truly human flourishing in today’s culture.

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BOOK REVIEW

Reconnecting the Community

JULIANA WEBER

John and Peter Block McKnight, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods* (San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2012 173 pages).

Proposing a partial antidote to consumerism, *The Abundant Community* presents an argument for changing the culture of one's neighborhood to a culture of service and old-fashioned citizenship, the pathway to true community, health, and well-being. McKnight and Block support their theory with statistics as well as practical suggestions on getting started. Those practical suggestions both elucidate the argument and incite the reader to act. Below, I have space only to summarize the bare bones of their argument.

A consumer is "one who has surrendered to others the power to provide what is essential for a full and satisfied life" (7). This includes a surrender of the definition of one's needs, and a consumerist market thrives on creating new needs and fulfilling them—for a price (17). Systems follow the same logic as this consumerist mentality. "What is attractive about systems is that they seem to make the world safer and under control" (29). They offer the predictability and standards of a science experiment (30), but they depersonalize society, encouraging us to wear shoes that do not fit us personally and to buy more of them all the time (35).

The self-organization of communities, by contrast, is always unpredictable and unmanageable, and yet things like potluck dinners still happen (74). Communities, as the authors define them, just focus on gifts rather than needs, and gifts are abundant. Once gifts are disclosed, we have an abundant community, even if some of the dishes requested for the potluck dinner do not arrive. Self-organization is hazardous, not systematic. And yet, we not only have enough, but such a dinner is more meaningful.

Presently, neighbors rarely find out one another's talents; independence has become all-important, necessitating purchases for every need and defining consumers by our ability to purchase. Children are raised by paid experts ranging from teachers to McDonald's, which serve their every need and simultaneously discredit the competency of a village to raise

children. It is no wonder, the authors argue, that our children miss sharing “in the wisdom, experience, and loving care of the people in their community” (21). Even our basic ability to care has been outsourced to professionals: We no longer tell our communities about our problems but rather our therapists, as though communities are not competent to care (37). And rather than finding acceptance from a community that values us for our gifts despite our conditions, we pursue more and more cures, constantly unsatisfied with our own selves (38). The market thrives on finding deficiencies in us (43).

Communities, on the other hand, thrive on our “humanity and our personal relationship” (43). Sadly, we no longer hope for support where there aren’t price tags, so these marginalized, broken and dysfunctional communities allow individuals to sink into isolation and loneliness experienced at levels and numbers never seen before. We have lost the “space where others have to accept us because we are family or a part of their community”, and we have let ourselves become “cases” to be solved (55). The authors contend, however, that “real satisfaction” is a “collective occurrence” and “can occur only through our relatedness” (57).

What the authors ask of community is “to create conditions where individuals and families can perform certain functions. These functions are to educate a child, [to] sustain a healthy body, [to] have a safe street, [to] participate in a local economy, [to] care for the land, [to] be smart in its relationship to food, and [to] welcome those on the margin” (63). These are the competencies found abundantly in every community, if looked for, and beyond that, every community has its own unique set of gifts.

We will never be satisfied until we realize that we already have enough: abundant gifts in our communities, abundant meaning in our lives, and certainly enough things (70). Capitalism creates prices (not value) and competition based on scarcity, but these authors emphasize: We have enough and we can’t afford not to cooperate—we can’t afford to compete all the time and everywhere (110). Intuitively, people know that “this vision, culture, and commitment [...] have the unique capacity to ensure much of their sense of well-being and happiness. This is the source of satisfaction that is complete in and of itself; it is not dependent on the next purchase” (24). Yet we have trouble living out this vision. On the practical level, all we need is to make our gifts and sorrows explicit within the context of hospitality and establishing a relationship (69).

The authors go into great detail over definitions of kindness, generosity, hospitality and so forth. What I found most intriguing, however, was their treatment of cooperation. Cooperation, the “joy” of women as the authors put it, is what our consumerist culture is so short on (86-87). Competition, on the other hand, something that the authors observe seems to cause men “joy”, is the hallmark of capitalism (87). The authors don’t begin to explore how changing gender roles or women entering the workforce (leaving neighborhoods empty during the day) might relate to this loss. Thus the authors miss the opportunity to place consumerism within a broader historical and sociological context, which would allow for a deeper analysis of the problem.

Apart from this, the authors are very concrete in their diagnosis and treatment of the current problem. For example, they wrap up the book with the key elements of a “connector”, a person who assembles communities and associations. We can all strive to become such persons: gift-centered, well-connected, trusted and trusting, with an eye for putting one neighbor’s gifts together with another neighbor’s need (133-135). Connectors believe that everyone has gifts he or she is waiting to give, thus allowing connectors to overcome fear of rejection (140).

Understanding the human person ensnared by consumerism and helping him free himself:

this is the tremendous insight, and the gift that McKnight and Block offer in this book.

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BOOK REVIEW

In the Face of a Dark New Age

DANIEL BLACKMAN

Jane Jacobs, *Dark Age Ahead* (Vintage Books, 2004, 241 pages).

Fr Vincent McNabb OP, *Nazareth or Social Chaos* (IHS Press, 2009, 82 pages).

Jane Jacobs was born in Pennsylvania, USA. Hers was a Protestant family living in a heavily Catholic neighborhood. She was a wife and the mother of three children, an anti-communist but with an alleged appreciation of Saul Alinsky, and an urban community activist and writer who championed a place-based, community-centered approach to urban planning and development, although she never held a professional qualification in town planning, nor did she claim to. In 1958, the Rockefeller Foundation invited Jacobs to be a reviewer of grant proposals, and awarded her a grant that year. Following the money usually makes for a good story. We know that from the end of World War II until the 1970s, American communities were submitted to widespread development and urban renewal programs that fragmented and destroyed whole communities, from Detroit to Philadelphia, to the south side of Chicago and the major cities of the northeast. We also know that the Rockefeller family supported such programs, along with strong support for new forms of hormonal contraception during the late 50s and 60s onwards, which enabled the sexual revolution and its attack upon marriage and family.

Dark Age Ahead is the last book published by Jacobs. Her thesis is that contemporary American society is on the brink of a new dark age. Why so? Because the five pillars of a society, according to Jacobs, are in serious decline. What are these five pillars? The family and household, higher education, science, the tax system, and self policing. For Jacobs, her understanding of these pillars and their slow demise are the hallmarks of a dark age.

Some parts of this book relate directly to the theme of home and neighborhood. Before we look at those, there are some preliminary points to make about *Dark Age Ahead*.

What does Jacobs mean by “dark age”? In her introduction, Jacobs claims that there have been numerous dark ages in the past, as many as there have been cultures that have disappeared,

and eventually even the memory of what has been lost disappears. One gets the impression from Jacobs that simply because a culture was, therefore it ought to have been. This reads like a slight idealisation of otherness by a contemporary western weltanschauung. Unfortunately, Jacobs sees post-Roman-empire Christendom as a dark age typified by religious fundamentalisms. Her portrayals of the fall of the Roman empire, the rise of the Catholic Church, western Christendom (where she supposes that “sexuality became highly suspect”), the crusades, the campaign against Albigensianism in southern France, the conquistadors, and the resistance of Catholic Ireland against Protestant England all read like journalism lacking accuracy and facts, tinged, at worst, with anti-Catholic sentiment. Jacobs also seems to be thinking of culture as *kultur* and *bildung* rather than *cultura*. We would do better to read serious thinkers like Ratzinger or Pera’s *Without Roots*, historians like Christopher Dawson and Warren Carroll, and philosopher Alasdair Macintyre for a clearer analysis.

With this out of the way, we focus on Jacob’s first chapter “Families Rigged to Fail”. Jacobs writes that the nuclear family of father, mother, and children, is the fundamental unit of society, whether rich or poor. The household is the fundamental economic unit of society, usually made up of the nuclear family plus any combination of lodgers, servants, tutors, and relatives. Jacobs also cites convents of nuns and monasteries of monks as examples of households, with their offshoot hospitals, care homes, schools, homeless shelters, soup kitchens, farms, and so on. The household, and so too the wider community and local government, takes on the tasks the family cannot do by itself.

With the industrial revolution and capitalism, there has been a mass exodus from the countryside and agrarian living, a move from the land to the large office or factory. The family and household stopped being a place of industry and creativity. The family has been disempowered. What of the farmland left behind? It is bought up by developers who use it intensely for urban sprawl housing developments or large-scale mass-market industrial farming. Jacobs calls for measured densification: using the land ever more intensely but diversely so that it is able to support itself as a fully-fledged community with small industries and firms, variation in housing styles, and community spaces. As such, suburbanism can be a transition phase towards some of the aspirations of the new urbanism and neo-agrarianism. But what of the families and whole communities who entered the cities?

In Chapter Seven, “Unwinding Vicious Spirals,” Jacobs tells us about the clearance of so-called slum areas during the Great Depression and war years onwards. People were re-housed in subsidized housing projects. Again, thanks to a top-down imposition, communities were broken up, and moved into large, atomizing housing blocks. The architecture was uniform, post-modern, and did not sit well with the surroundings or skyline of the area. They were unpopular, yet they remain. The BBC broadcasted a series called “The History of Our Streets” in 2012, documenting this phenomenon in London. Jacobs wrote that too much densification, such as huge tower-block apartments, actually leads to less diversity and richness. However, one Harvard economist has criticized Jacobs on this point, attributing the dramatic rise in real estate in the mid eighties to the lack of supply for the baby boomers.

Jacobs makes a third point: today the cost of housing is so prohibitive that more and more cannot buy and are forced to rent. The cost of rent continues to rise as families are at the mercy of private landlords. The cost of food, utility bills, and public transport goes up. Both parents need to work in order to provide for themselves and their children. This makes child-care and early entry into school a necessity. Children are separated from parents for longer periods of time. Parents have to commute to work, which can be miles away, facilitated by roads and cars.

In fact, Jacobs singles out the automobile as a bigger enemy to community than even illegal drugs and TV. Families spend more time apart from each other and from neighbors. Why? Because it means things no longer have to be within walking distance, close to the home. Work and recreation can be miles away where land and real estate are cheaper to obtain, the automobile industry benefits, and people are away from their communities, meaning local areas don't have the impetus to be self-supporting as things are only a drive away. Roads and highways are built to accommodate the increasing number of cars, roads which steam roll through neighborhoods, forcing the clearing of homes, open spaces, and local commercial zones.

Jacobs wonders what sorts of modern households will come about to meet the needs that families "rigged to fail" cannot meet. Her answer: "my intuition tells me they will probably be coercive. This is already true of the most swiftly multiplying and rapidly expanding type of American households at the turn of the millennium – prisons." We can add that the number of families with grown-up children still living at home out of necessity into their 20s and 30s is rapidly increasing. Fertility rates have been in freefall for decades and economic pressure is one reason. Young adults renting in shared housing with a mixture of friends and strangers is the norm. Cohabiting is the other new norm. We can also add that perhaps other sorts of arrangements come about for purposes that do not include supporting the nuclear family, but rather replacing it. Housing and town planning reflect and shape the demise of communities built on and around the nuclear family.

A more radical analysis and solution is offered by an Irish-born Dominican Fr Vincent McNabb OP (1868–1943). As Cicero Bruce writes in the introduction to *Nazareth or Social Chaos*: "McNabb was no apologist for the way we live now. In truth he repudiated it. He argued prophetically that, since the Industrial, French, and Scientific Revolutions, life in the West has lapsed into a stupor of economic confusion." McNabb, in several of his books, critiqued the modern city, precisely because of the terrible effects it had upon families. Costs of living, low wages, the price of rent or buying a house meant couples resorted to the mortal sin of contraception, or the heroic practice of marital continence. Jacobs cites abortion as the contemporary option.

McNabb and Jacobs also both criticize the city because of the sort of industry it gives rise to. McNabb laments and Jacobs notes the Western move away from agrarian-based societies, towards the ingenuity-based and the shadow world of finance. For McNabb, industrialism has led to secularism. Such a claim can be supported by contemporary sociological studies which show religiosity declines in the city compared to the village. As noted above, Jacobs says the agrarian era is past; suburbanism is here and may be a transition towards measured densification, so let's get on with it and make cities good places in which to live.

McNabb's solution, however, is to flee the city for the fields – not just individual families, but whole groups of families. It is a call to return to the agrarian way of living, not so as to restore agriculture, but "to restore families." Like Jacobs, McNabb calls for a measured but more intensive use of the land, with smallholdings rather than large farms, which use smaller amounts of land more diversely: "Nowhere – and certainly nowhere less than farming – is mass-production the same as intensive production" and "the smaller the holding the more productive it is." McNabb, and no doubt the reader, knows that upping sticks and buying a nice farm with some land is not possible for all, or even most. The final chapter of McNabb's book is "Fifteen Things a Distributist May Do", and is written for the person in the city who aspires to the fields. It's a practical first step.

A middle way between Jacobs and McNabb is that of the neo-agrarian movement and new

urbanism. Allotments and the grow-your-own movement are now popular in the UK as evidenced by TV shows like *River Cottage*, increase projects like Landshare.net, and towns such as Poundbury in England, Seaside in Florida, and Le Plessis-Robinson in France offer hope; even a busy city like London is seeing more shared-space thinking by increasing pedestrian areas and reducing road markings and traffic control systems. We can't all live like the Amish, nor would we necessarily want to, but there is surely a better way than the several hours commute each day, sitting in front of computers, and, more importantly, the city pressures brought to bear upon families.

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BOOK REVIEW

Humanizing the Built Environment

MARY SHIVANANDAN

Karl Besel and Viviana Andreescu (eds.), *Back to the Future: New Urbanism and the Rise of Neotraditionalism in Urban Planning* (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 2013).

Pope Francis, in the first apostolic exhortation of his pontificate, *Gaudium evangelii*, spoke of the significance of the city as both reality and symbol:

The new Jerusalem, the holy city (cf. Rev 21:2-4), is the goal towards which all of humanity is moving. It is curious that God’s revelation tells us that the fullness of humanity and of history is realized in a city. We need to look at our cities with a contemplative gaze, a gaze of faith which sees God dwelling in their homes, in their streets and squares (no. 71).

This book is “a contemplative gaze” at American cities, observing how they fall short of the “ideal” city and what steps have and should be taken to reverse course from ever expanding suburban sprawl, which negates the meaning of the city, in order to recover a more livable human environment.

The two editors and principal authors, Besel and Andreescu, both studied and/or taught at the University of Louisville in the nineties. This is significant because it was the restoration of Old Louisville that was a major influence on the rise of the new Urban Movement. It is not surprising that an account of this restoration is the centerpiece of the book in Chapter Five. From there, the authors work backwards to the original architects of the movement, Lewis Mumford and Jane Jacobs. They then move to the policies and situation following World War II, which saw the proliferation of suburban sprawl made possible by the automobile. They contrast it with earlier pre-automobile towns such as Alexandria, VA and Georgetown, DC. The remaining chapters detail case studies of new communities in Kentucky, Indiana and Florida which have consciously adopted the New Urbanism rules of diversity, mixed use, walkability and strategic green space. This review will follow a similar path, with a reflection at the end on what might still be missing in New Urbanism planning.

Louisville is one of the oldest cities in the South. It was a booming river town, acquiring its

own city government in 1828. In the 1880s, on the land east of the city, spacious Italianate, Queen Anne and Greek revival mansions began to attract the elite into what was called the Cherokee Triangle. From the outset, a variety of commercial as well as community-based businesses and institutions shared space with residential properties, including churches, grocery stores, taverns and other small businesses. When the Depression hit, foreclosures resulted in the division of the large houses into multi-family dwellings. The deterioration of the neighborhood continued with the flight to the suburbs after World War II so that by the 1950s it was in a steep decline.

Residents, wanting to preserve what was left of the neighborhood, formed the Cherokee Association and obtained designation as an historic district following the lead of Old Louisville. The latter had also suffered from the post-World-War-II flight to the suburbs and become crime-ridden. An enlightened activist restored ten houses in 1961. He was soon joined by others who established the Historic Preservation Area in 1975. Between the 1990s and 2000 home values doubled, new restaurants and coffee shops opened and crime dropped. Not only was a powerful relation between historic preservation and economic benefits shown but a significant market developed for traditionally designed communities that were more environmentally sustainable and closer to work, school and shopping.

Ideas do not usually spring out of thin air. The authors point to two theorists whose work has had a major influence on the New Urbanism, Lewis Mumford and Jane Jacobs. Mumford's monumental work *The City in History* won the 1962 National Book Award. Besel and Andreescu say it is still regarded as the "leading 20th century authority on cities" (p. 2). The village in the city was his ideal community on the lines of Cambridge, MA. The New Urbanists took from Mumford the concept of mixed use design, combining residential and commercial spaces, human-scale architecture, narrow streets, central common areas, greenbelts, medium to high density and walkability. Jane Jacobs for whom a major concern was reducing crime, and peace and quiet, espoused many of the same features, for example, she opposed large open spaces which attracted criminal activity. But she critiqued the New Urbanists, whom she saw as causing a new and different form of suburbia with their new communities. Whereas Mumford and the New Urbanists espoused theories and order, Jacobs hated theories and loved randomness. They came together on the characteristics and preservation of traditional neighborhoods.

Both abhorred the post-World-War-II suburban sprawl, which Mumford called "a low grade uniform environment from which escape is impossible" (p. 3). The architects of this flight were first of all Henry Ford who said, in 1922, "We shall solve the city problem by leaving the city" (p. 29); federal housing policies that lowered the down payment on a house from 50 to 20 percent to be repaid over 30 years, thus expanding home ownership to the middle class; and the federal Highway Act of 1956, which sought a quick get-away in the event of nuclear attack. The vision of Robert Moses, who directed public works in the city and state of New York from 1922 to 1968, prefigured some of these developments. His construction favored "the open road, the soaring towers, open parks, highways and beaches" (p. 3). He had little concern for the negative effect on inner city neighborhoods and the spread of urban sprawl. Mumford was one of the strongest opponents of Moses.

One of the traditional neighborhoods from which the New Urbanists took their principles of sustainable town planning was Georgetown in Washington, DC. It was held up as a model as it includes (1) diversity of incomes, ages and occupations; (2) mixed use residential and commercial spaces; (3) narrower streets; (4) inclusion of walkways; and (5) green space planning. Alleys are another feature of traditional neighborhoods, which New Urbanists favor because they have been shown to reduce crime and increase neighborhood interaction, in

contrast to cul-de-sacs whose isolation actually fosters crime. The pedestrian not the automobile must be the focus in any traditional-type planning.

The remaining chapters, authored or co-authored by others, describe various communities which have adopted these neo-traditional values. Among them are Park Du Valle, Louisville, home to mainly lower-income African Americans and West Clay Township, Carmel, Indiana appealing to higher-income Caucasians. Another case study is Gainesville, with residents drawn from nearby University of Florida. Chapter Eight details an initial study (research on these new communities is sparse) comparing a neo-traditional and conventional suburb. The residents of the neo-traditional neighborhood did report a stronger sense of community, scored higher on satisfaction with neighborhood, were more vocal in their pride, and walked and visited more with their neighbors. A major criticism was the lack of diversity, especially racial, ethnic and religious.

In surveying the commercial side of these new communities, Besel found that they have particular problems in attracting and keeping grocery stores and restaurants. Problems include “visibility and access problems, price of goods and lack of patronage by local residents” (p. 108). While professional services like healthcare, educational, government and non-profit entities thrive, residents prefer to drive to seek cheaper groceries with parking availability elsewhere. In conclusion, Besel and Andreescu see the need for addressing these problems with financial strategies, zoning laws and state encouragement if these promising new urban projects are to grow and flourish.

In Lewis Mumford’s view “the medieval city serves as the basis for the ideal city” (p. 7). Will these neotraditional towns approximate it? The cathedral or great church was central to the life of the medieval town, with a market usually close by. The church acted as the community center in front of which a large piazza held the crowds. While the market was occasional, church services were constant. A series of little cities grew up each with its own church, market and fountain, joined to each other by narrow winding streets. Decentralization and organic growth incorporating different historical styles were the order of the day. Mumford described this as

a mode of planning that met the requirements of life and yielded to change and innovation without being shattered by it. In the deepest sense of the word, it was both functional and purposeful, for the functions that mattered most were those of significance to man’s higher life. *

It remains to be seen whether such a model is possible in secular America. However, Besel and Andreescu have done a service in exploring the efforts of citizen activists, housing developers, urban planners, city mayors and new urbanism advocates to make American cities more human and livable.

*The Mumford Reader, ed. Donald L. Miller (Athens, GA: the University of Georgia Press, 1995), p. 124.

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BOOK REVIEW

Father of the New Urbanism

MICHAEL CAMACHO

Léon Krier, *The Architecture of Community* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2009).

I decided to abandon university, not to have kids, not to engage in building, but rather to think, to draw, and to generally find out what was so wrong with contemporary architecture and urbanism and how to right it . . . not because I felt I had a special gift in that direction, but because of an absurd realization that nobody else, not even those I most esteemed, seemed inclined to do what I imperatively felt had to be done.

This, in a nutshell, is the moving force behind the work of Léon Krier, an architect and urban planner who has built comparatively little but has had a large influence on the profession, especially in regard to contemporary urbanism. Krier is often pointed to as the intellectual father of New Urbanism, a current movement in urban planning that advocates for cities made up of close, walkable communities, in which places for living, working and leisure are built side by side and integrated with one another rather than partitioned into separate areas. Krier is well known as a strident critic of “modernism” and a strong supporter of a return to traditional principles in construction and design. *The Architecture of Community* presents an almost-complete collection of his writings, illustrations and designs from over the course of a lifetime.

Krier’s architectural sense is strongly informed by the community of his childhood. As he relates in an essay called “Why I Practice Classical Architecture and Traditional Urbanism,” he grew up in Luxembourg, “a small capital city of 70,000 souls” that was “a miracle of traditional architecture.” “My father’s tailoring workshop occupied the ground floor of the townhouse, and for my primary education I hopped across the street when hearing the school bells chime from our garden,” he recalls, in a sentence that captures neatly some of the principles of urban planning that Krier would later champion, such as diversity in building use and walkability in city planning.

On holidays, Krier would go with his parents and three siblings to visit beautiful locales in nearby Switzerland, France and Italy. Given the chance to pick the destination for one such

trip, Krier chose to go and see the “Radiant City” of modern architect Le Corbusier, in Marseille, France. Growing up, Krier had in fact been enthralled with modern architecture, despite – or, perhaps, because of – the fact that he had never actually encountered it except through books. He goes so far as to claim that “Le Corbusier had become for me a second messiah . . . I fantasized of white Cubist volumes adorning my favorite places . . .” But his visit to his messiah’s twelve-story concrete block of apartment units in Marseille, in all its “tawdry reality,” proved to be an “unavowable disappointment.” Krier points to this experience, together with the destruction of large parts of his hometown as a result of the war, as what alienated him completely from modernism. “I took it personally and decided to fight back,” he recounts, “not clearly knowing who the enemy was.”

The Architecture of Community represents, in part, Krier’s lifelong attempt to come to grips with this enemy. In fact, the book outlines both “a diagnosis and a cure, a critique and a project.” It is valuable not only as Krier’s attempt to get to the heart of what he senses is wrong with modernist architecture and urbanism, which he understands as a particular instantiation of what is wrong with modernity more generally, but also as an outline or general theory, in text and in drawing, of his own approach to architecture, what he calls the commonsense art of making places. In this regard, Krier’s book is as much concerned with first principles – the archai of archi-ecture, as it were – as with what concretely follows from them in the building up of our towns and cities.

A Diagnosis and a Critique Krier is careful to distinguish between modernity as a chronological concept, and modernism as an ideology. (While he does not expressly define what constitutes “modernist” architecture, we get a sense of what he means in his reproof that “Modernism represents the negation of all that makes architecture useful: no roofs, no load-bearing walls, no columns, no arches, no vertical windows, no streets, no squares, no privacy, no grandeur, no decoration, no craftsmen, no history, no tradition. Surely,” he continues, “the next step must be to negate these negations.”) At the same time, Krier thinks that there is something fundamentally “modern” that unites and underlies current “modernist” practices. The closest he gets to pinpointing what this may be is in his indication that it concerns “our understanding of the universe and of nature . . . whether we believe that progress and evolution have a finality or not.”

For Krier, then, modernity is perhaps best defined by a certain conception of change and of finality. More specifically, Krier accuses modernism of making change or innovation an end in itself, rather than a means toward a stable, finished goal. As a result, the planet we inhabit has become a perpetual building-site, rather than a solid and permanent home for mankind. We also see the elevation of industrial or utilitarian methods and imperatives to supreme principles trumping ethical or aesthetic categories. Finally, in what seems to me an insightful critique, Krier argues that modernity’s tabula rasa approach, its defining itself over and against tradition, as the negation of everything that came before, signifies a kind of reactionary move that in fact reveals a lack of autonomy – which is ironic, since autonomy is one of modernity’s most-cherished ideals. The goal of ever-new, never-ending progress, in contrast to the classical ideal of a completed maturity or finality, “corresponds to a negation of adulthood, to a childish dream of never-ending adolescence.”

Krier sees all of this manifesting itself concretely in the problems of modern urbanism and architecture. In regard to the former, Krier especially critiques the “runaway entropy” or “hyper-growth” which characterizes the typical city of today. The vertical congestion of the city proper, expressed in the omnipresent sky-scraper, finds its corollary in the horizontal dilution of the suburb, many buildings of which, as Krier points out in one illustration, are essentially sky-scrappers turned on their side, or “land-scrappers,” as it were. Both are “reifications of the

futureless frenzy” of modern society, and point to a fundamental loss of any positive sense of limit in city planning.

The second major problem Krier finds in contemporary urban practice is functional zoning laws, which create a segregation of sorts between what happens in the city, where we work, and in the suburb, where we live or recreate. These laws are expressions of a typically modern preference for “clear and distinct ideas,” for which Descartes finds an analogy in the abstract geometry of straight lines, which serve to divide things cleanly from one another. In this regard, zoning laws are “the technical and legal tool for fragmenting our social lives,” preventing the creation of true, or truly diverse, communities. In the structurally atomized society that results, more and more time and energy is spent simply in moving people and goods from one place to another.

In regard to modern architecture, Krier argues that the structural form of most buildings today, such as the skyscraper or the suburban shopping mall, indicates a confusion in architectural symbolism or type, one which in turn reflects a more fundamental confusion of the difference between what he calls *res privata* or *res economica*, on the one hand, and *res publica* or *res sacra*, on the other. According to Krier, economic activities are, or at least should be, essentially particular or “private,” in the sense that they are not at the center of what really unifies a community. The form of the building that houses these activities should be an architectural reflection of their place within society, in its size, for example, or its style. As Krier puts it, “single utilitarian functions [such as houses or businesses] quite simply do not constitute adequate typological material to create buildings of monumental significance.” “The utilitarian character of their obese volumes [today] humiliates the dignity and rank of public buildings,” such as libraries, schools, town halls or churches.

Finally, Krier contends that the very construction of modernist buildings, in their use of primarily synthetic materials and in their separation of load-bearing structures from external facing, exhibits “an ontological rupture between appearance and reality.” The end result of what is apparently a quicker, more economical practice is in fact, at least according to Krier, buildings that are more structurally vulnerable, with shorter overall life spans and higher long-term maintenance costs. At any rate, he says, cheap and ugly buildings tend not to have a long life expectancy: no one really cares to see them preserved, and people may even take active steps to see them torn down. Unfortunately, the current prevalence of synthetic construction materials and techniques means that traditional practices are no longer handed on in any official way. As a result, modernism continues to reinforce itself as the dominant architectural style, since what we can envision and build is *de facto* limited to what can be accomplished by synthetic means.

A Cure and a Project

What is Krier’s alternative? If at the heart of what is wrong with modernity is the ideal of never-ending progress, what Krier champions instead is limit or definition as a positive good. Indeed, it would not be going too far to say that Krier thinks that what is missing in modernist architecture and urbanism, if not in modernity as a whole, is a real and robust sense of form.

According to Krier, there is a defined and nameable typology (typos: mould, model, pattern) to architectural objects. Houses, churches or railway stations, like roofs or windows, have in general a certain “look” or “shape” to them, one that has been discovered and perfected over the course of history and that corresponds to both the needs of their use and their symbolic place within society. In Krier’s view, while there is room for differences and creativity in architecture, arising from the need to respond to the demands of one’s particular geographic

and historic locality, there is no inherent need to reinvent the wheel. “As is the case with all good things in life – love, good manners, language, cooking – leaps of genius are required only rarely. The poet does not excel by inventing new words or languages but when, by subtle arrangements of otherwise familiar terms, he reveals human predicaments in new and poetic ways.”

One of Krier’s basic points, then, is that traditional architectural designs and solutions work, in a way that most men and women find not only find satisfactory but beautiful. The latter is not something trivial: “excessive hunger will in the end kill the body . . . we have to ask ourselves what beauty-depletion kills in us.” The way in which the built environment impacts and influences us, while often unnoticed, is real, and according to Krier it is too public and too important a thing to be subject to experiment at the whim of modernist architects: “The city is not a laboratory.” Without some kind of grounding in typology, the composition of buildings will end up degenerating into what is ultimately an arbitrary arrangement of shapes and volumes. The use of synthetic materials only exacerbates the problem, insofar as they “make even abstruse, illogical structures stand up.” By contrast, on traditional principles, just as composition should be typological, so construction should be “tectonic,” or grounded in and attuned to the “logic” of the materials from which it is made. The forms of buildings should be derived, at least in part, from their matter, and the need to build this matter in such a way as to support the building’s mass. The arch or column is not only beautiful but needful, and beautiful not least because of its structural place within the whole. The result is an intrinsic connection, an “honest” relationship, between a building’s form and its matter.

For Krier, the idea of form has a central place not only in architecture but also in urbanism. In the first place, this regards the relationship between a city’s various parts. As we’ve seen, Krier argues for an architectural distinction between private and public buildings, akin to the distinction between prose and poetry. The former should be simpler, informed by a kind of “vernacular” style arising from the geoclimatic conditions and local materials of a place. The latter builds on this, expressing it in a more “classical” style, with a corresponding contrast in scale, dimension and artistic elaboration. In describing a plan he drew up for a school campus, Krier points out how, in contrast with the more “sober buildings” that house class or exercise rooms, “those with a more important civic function such as the library, assembly hall . . . and sports hall are distinguished by their larger volumes, higher ceilings, and more elaborate articulation.” The result is that “each building can be located . . . and identified with utmost ease because its individual building type can be recognized and understood at a glance, the architecture reflect[ing] its relative hierarchical and symbolic status” within the whole.

This idea of form, applied to the city, not only concerns the organic relationship between the parts and the whole, but also indicates a need for proper limit or definition. Rather than the city conceived as a “continuous open field populated by individualistic freestanding buildings,” Krier thinks of the city as an organism, which can only grow so far before becoming a monstrosity. Once it reaches maturity, it should increase through reproduction. Similarly, each city, as it grows, should become “polycentric,” composed of an ensemble of distinct city centers or “quarters,” each of which is relatively self-sufficient. The quarter has a size that is defined in reference to the human person, rather than in abstract metrics or in reference to the automobile: according to Krier, it should be as wide as a person can walk in ten minutes’ time. Each quarter should “comprise all urban activities, functions and uses,” by which it achieves a kind of “richness . . . based on the proximity of and dialogue between the greatest possible variety of private and public uses.” The urban quarter should be “autonomous with respect to . . . primary schools, daily grocery shopping and markets, and also in terms of employment . . . health services, and cultural activities.” So many quarters form a borough, which has its own autonomy in terms of secondary schools, more irregular shopping, administration, and the

like. A city is in turn composed of so many boroughs.

The proper way to achieve this kind of urban environment, without either artificially constructing a community, on the one hand, or resigning oneself to fate or market forces, on the other, is through the use of a master plan, which Krier likens to the constitution of a nation. It is simultaneously “an ethical and artistic vision” and “a legislative and public framework” for the development of a city or town. It would include, for example, the basic network of streets and squares and the size of various plots. Without indicating specifically what will be built where, it could plan for larger, more industrial buildings to be situated on the borders of the community, for example, where faster thoroughfares built for heavier traffic loads would also run. It would also specify such things as maximum building height and plot-ratio. Krier argues that building heights should actually be limited by a maximum number of floors (ideally, three to five), rather than numeric measurement. This would set a limit without imposing unnatural uniformity, since floor-to-ceiling height could differ from building to building. Because public buildings typically have higher ceilings, they would naturally have more prominence. It would also be an easy way to reduce overcrowding, since the higher a building can be built, the more expensive each plot becomes, which results in developers trying to get more out of each plot, leading to over-congestion.

Conclusion

It is hard to gainsay most of the principles which Krier lays out. The most obvious objections would be that he is not realistic, or that he is essentially stuck in the past. In regard to the first, Krier argues that the apparent “realism” of modern, utilitarian methods in architecture is not in fact more economical or more efficient, when viewed in the long run, and that these methods unnecessarily result in places of ugliness rather than places of beauty. As regards realism in urban planning, his response would perhaps be that we tend to concede too much to “fate” or “the way things are,” instead of thoughtfully imagining and implementing alternative solutions. In regard to the second objection, Krier argues that what has been subsequently historicized by modernity as “traditionalist” style or practice is traditional only in the sense of timeless (as opposed to most modernist architecture, which “has its sell-by date engraved on its front”), and that there is no reason why these timeless principles cannot continue to inform our practice of architecture and urbanism today.

One of the shortcomings of Krier’s work is that, despite his concern with first principles, he moves too quickly to a moralistic critique. Throughout the book, there are numerous variations on the theme that “a modernist bias harboring ideological and psychological blockages causes traditional solutions to be ignored, discarded, and even discredited.” Krier essentially accuses architects and urban planners of bad will, in their “determined and stubborn pursuit of wrong ideas” or their “willful degradation of the human environment,” instead of (in line with the whole thrust of his book) showing something of why these ideas have such a hold on us. At the same time, part of his point, I suppose, is that the “modernists” have essentially convinced themselves of an ideology that is at odds with the desires of men’s hearts. This is why, he claims, the general public tends not to understand or prefer modernist architecture.

More generally, Krier seems to overlook many of the complexities that go into architecture and especially into the development and growth of cities. Many of the projects which he has been involved with, such as the towns of Seaside, FL (featured in the movie *The Truman Show*) or Poundbury, UK, are planned communities in the wrong sense. They feel contrived, and most of the architecture which Krier has actually built conveys a similar sense. As true as the principles he elucidates may be, it would seem that they have to come to expression “from

below,” in an organic and incarnate way, in a specific time and place and people. Insofar as they are lacking to us today, then, insofar as they are not “in our bones,” so to speak, it may not be possible to give them adequate expression. Ultimately, it is not possible to engineer community through good architecture or urban planning. Although doubtless good architecture and urbanism has a shaping influence on good community, it must also, and firstly, arise from this community. If it is lost to us today, it will take time to recover it in any genuine way. In this regard, however, Krier does help educate us toward what it is we may be missing.

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Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

BOOK REVIEW

City of God, City of Man

CONOR B. DUGAN

Philip Bess, *Till We Have Built Jerusalem: Architecture, Urbanism, and the Sacred* (ISI Books, 2006).

Philip Bess, a professor of architecture at the University of Notre Dame, argues forcefully and winsomely in his essay collection *Till We Have Built Jerusalem: Architecture, Urbanism, and the Sacred*, that the city is the most proper form of community for human flourishing. Bess writes that the city is "the locus of the best life for human beings, including the life of specific moral and intellectual virtues." And Bess also makes the case that in the United States, especially since the Second World War, we have ignored this community in our design and planning at great peril to ourselves. In short, the way we build our cities and towns is at cross-purposes with our humanity. Bess proposes a better way: a new urbanism that is rooted in the truth of the human person and corresponds to the scale and patterns of the person.

Bess, who identifies himself as a New Urbanist, argues that we need to return to building mixed-use, walkable settlements. The world of suburban sprawl, which is characterized by people living, working, worshiping, shopping, and socializing, each in a different place, is unsustainable and, moreover, undermines the pursuit of the good. Even more significantly, Bess' book attempts to bridge a gap between the secular world and religious world. Bess is both a practicing Catholic and a successful, practicing architect. Thus, Bess is positioned well to offer a unique view on our predicament. Indeed, Bess has firm, but much needed, words for both the architecture world that is so suspicious of claims about the good (especially from religious believers) and the world of religion that too often demonstrates an "unreflective enthusiasm for suburbia and no understanding whatsoever of the virtues of the city."

The background of Bess' book is formed by a profound awareness of the incarnational nature of Christianity and its implications for design. The body matters. Place and space matter. Bess takes a decided stand against the functional dualism of modernist architects and contemporary Christianity. Bess writes that while "good design cannot 'cause' happiness . . . good design can be an occasion for and manifestation of happiness" and that "good design can

both foster and be an expression of community" (emphasis added). Therefore, how we interact with our physical and built environments matters much. Bess' essays are a wake-up call to Christians who can tend to reduce Christianity down to what then-Cardinal Ratzinger called "a packet of dogmas, a moralism." Christianity is, instead, a way of life that has something to say about everything: how we have sex, how our food is grown, and how we build our homes, offices, churches, cafes, cities.

All of this leads Bess to what he describes as a "genuinely modest proposal," but which is one of his more powerful ideas, namely, that New Urbanists and religious leaders work together to help create and develop humane towns and cities. Bess notes that "religious communities have been, and could be again, instrumental in the creation of towns and cities." Thus, Bess argues that "Christian communities today should consider taking a development role analogous to the London aristocrat[s]" of the 16th–18th centuries who "would contract with a developer to build . . . a square surrounded by housing." He then asks a series of questions that every American Catholic bishop would do well to consider:

Instead of building a church and a parking lot on our typical six to fifteen suburban acres, why could we not make a church building, a public (not private) square, perhaps a school, and the beginning of a mixed-use neighborhood? Why couldn't a church partner with a developer and use some of the proceeds from the development of its property to pay for part of the construction of its church building(s)? Why couldn't churches use this strategy to begin to integrate housing and commercial buildings into suburbia as part of mixed-use neighborhoods?

Bess is proposing the Church anew as the driving force of genuine culture, architecture, and community. It is an idea, which to quote Chesterton, has "not has not been tried and found wanting" but "been found difficult and not tried." For those of us who have lived in the stultifying suburbs of America, it is plea we can only hope our bishops hear and act upon.

None of this is to suggest that Bess is proposing a one-size fits all answer. While Bess is clearly arguing that "the architecture of the third millennium" should "serve the primary symbolic purpose it served in earlier eras—the representation, in orderly, durable, functional, and beautiful buildings, of institutions that enable and encourage us to live as civilized human beings," this certainly "does not preclude innovation in architecture." It does, however, require that the architecture of today flow organically from the architecture of the past. Architecture should also fulfill certain criteria including that it be an architecture of "physical and symbolic substance," that it be beautiful, durable, and made with skill. Here is where Bess' words are directed at the functionalist architects of our age who seem to build neither for heaven nor for earth but for convenience and ease.

None of this does justice to the panorama over which Bess guides his readers. These essays need to be read and contemplated. In reading and contemplating them, one is left with certain questions at which one hopes Bess' next book, and the responses of his interlocutors, will be directed. First, what is the relation between Bess' New Urbanism and Wendell Berry's powerful words about farming, the land, and rural communities? Are they complimentary, or mutually exclusive proposals?

Second, Bess rightly laments the sprawl of suburbia. Sprawl seems to be a largely American (and perhaps Canadian) phenomenon. If that is so, what does this say about the logic at the core of Americanism that tends toward this sort of built environment? I would love to see Bess engage, from the perspective of an architect, the powerful critiques of American liberalism put forward by thinkers such as David Schindler, Patrick Deneen, Jeremy Beer, and others.

Finally, Bess makes use of natural law arguments in these pages. I wonder if a more explicitly theological turn is needed to make his arguments more compelling. At one point, Bess writes, "that an incorrect understanding of the human nature has detrimental consequences for the making of our cities. If we misunderstand human nature, we will surely not make good cities." Can we understand the human person ultimately without knowing the person's origin in God and destiny in Christ? We know that we cannot. What does this then mean for New Urbanism? I am not sure, but I am excited to see how Bess and his fellow Catholic architects answer that question in the years to come.

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Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

EDITORIAL

Addressing the Human Environment

STRATFORD CALDECOTT

A British friend of ours once found herself living in a suburb in New Jersey, after emigrating with her husband when he landed an academic job in the area. During the day her spouse drove into the office and learned to adapt himself to a new work environment. She meanwhile remained at home with their four young children, unable to travel anywhere except on foot, as they could not afford a second car. Thus she confronted the awful isolation of living in an environment which during the day was completely devoid of human contact. Literally everyone in her immediate neighborhood commuted into work. Those with children left them in daycare centers. The elderly were in nursing homes, since their relatives could not spare the time to care for them.

The theme of “Home and Neighborhood” touches on, among other things, the limitations of the nuclear family in an economic environment which has undermined the meaning of the human home. Extended family members, such as grandparents and aunts and cousins, are inevitably left behind in a society as mobile as ours (and of course even the “nuclear family” has today been largely dissolved by divorce and unmarried parenthood). It also refers to the surrounding community of neighbors and friends. This wider community is traditionally part of what we mean by “home.” Writing as a Brit, I have always seen it as something that Americans are particularly good at. Englishmen seal themselves away behind high hedges and fences. I realize it is largely an illusion, but American suburbs look to us like parks, with their large, welcoming houses set amidst extensive lawns, the boundaries between each person’s property barely marked, as if privacy and even ownership mattered little. Until you confront, as our friend did, the reality of suburban living devoid of human contact.

More generally, the issues raised by urban living, whether in the centers of great cities, or in the “suburbs” that grow around them, or (alternatively) the shanty-towns, ghettos, favelas, and slums, are increasingly important now that, for the first time in human history, more than half of the world’s population dwells in cities. And as we know, that population is growing rapidly, as are the problems of extreme poverty in parts of the world threatened by war, political instability, economic debt, and environmental disaster. Any existing social problems are inevitably multiplied by the kind of magnification we are now seeing in our urban environments.

It is easy to lose sight of one's priorities, and every generalization will obscure a great deal of importance. Nevertheless, Pope Francis has picked out two aspects of the problem that may help us to narrow the compass of this particular issue and find some themes we can at least begin to confront.

In a long interview with Eugenio Scalfari,[1] the Pope spoke as follows. "The most serious evils currently afflicting the world are unemployment among the young and the solitude in which the elderly are left. The elderly need care and companionship; the young need work and hope. However, they have neither the one nor the other, and the trouble is that they no longer looking for them. They have been enslaved by the present."

Youth unemployment, solitude of the elderly: two problems in search of a connection, which he identifies as "enslavement to the present." It is a profound intuition, to which we will return. It links the young and the old, and the present moment in which they both dwell but which has become for them a form of slavery. This is not the "present" of our encounter with God in his *nunc stans*, his eternal presence. It is the false present that has shrunk down to nothing, and been rendered meaningless. In such a present nothing is really possible, no creativity can find an aperture. The present has become a closed box, or, worse, a solid particle inside which we are trapped, unable to move or breathe.

How did this happen? To whom are we enslaved? Who has taken away our liberty to love and to work? How do we break free?

Submerged in Suburbia

The "suburbs" originated as planned urban development. Not everyone could live in the center of town. Not everyone would want to. The center is, perhaps, the place you might go to work at the palace or court or main squares, or at the harbor perhaps, only to retreat whenever possible back to a comfortable villa and the delights of family life. It happened a long time ago, as a letter from a suburbanite to the King of Persia testifies in cuneiform in 539 BC. "Our property seems to me the most beautiful in the world. It is so close to Babylon that we enjoy all the advantages of the city, and yet when we come home we stay away from all the noise and dust."

Suburbs surrounding cities are today increasingly dominated by malls, gas stations, fast food outlets, entertainment complexes, and even office buildings. City centers have languished, high streets have suffered from the impact of the economic crisis, while information technology makes it possible for more people to work from home. By 2000, about half the population of the United States was already living in suburbs. But the suburbs themselves are being submerged by the forces that threaten even this ancient way of life: the forces of the megacity. Globally, whether in Tokyo or Mumbai or Rio, complex cities floating in sprawling slums are on the rise,[2] though the possible effects of rising sea levels and changing economic circumstances remain to be seen. In fact the whole direction of this trend is hard to predict, and so in our work we want to concentrate not on these but on some underlying principles that might guide our policies and responses.[3]

Concerns for the welfare of the people in search of work, but crammed into cities where neighborhood and the bonds of the extended family are easily dissolved, are reflected in the "New Urbanist" movement that developed in the US from the mid-1980s, inspired by earlier works by Jane Jacobs (*The Death and Life of Great American Cities*) and others including Christopher Alexander and Leon Krier. The 1993 Charter of the New Urbanism states: "We advocate the restructuring of public policy and development practices to support the following principles: neighborhoods should be diverse in use and population; communities should be

designed for the pedestrian and transit as well as the car; cities and towns should be shaped by physically defined and universally accessible public spaces and community institutions; urban places should be framed by architecture and landscape design that celebrate local history, climate, ecology, and building practice.”

Many of the books reviewed in the current issue of *Humanum* are influenced by this movement, which in places has been hugely successful and has undoubtedly contributed to the improvement of many lives. In England I will only mention one rather instructive example, sponsored by Prince Charles, the heir to the throne, whose advocacy of many of these principles and ideas (sustainability, community, tradition, along with organic farming and alternative medicine) is well known to those who have studied his charitable activities. What the Prince commissioned in this case, from Leon Krier and others of the New Urbanist circle, was an artificial village. But Poundbury in Dorset, near Dorchester, founded in 1993, is not an unmixed success. One should really call it an experiment, not least because it is still incomplete.[4]

Poundbury’s critics can be unkind. One of them writes: “You know where this falls apart. The heart of every English village is the church, the churchyard, the mossy gravestones. In Poundbury there are vicarages, alms houses, manor houses, but no churches. No church towers, no lead to nick [steal], no wilting flowers in jamjars, no Eleanor Rigby. It is a cynical attempt to recreate a new class structure, a new them and us, and if it succeeds it will be the end of England.[5]

This plays on the very real resentment some people feel towards the Royal Family and the remains of the English class structure, but it makes a particularly perceptive point. Though the Prince is well known for his advocacy of faith traditions, including Christianity, Poundbury is so far churchless and in a sense therefore soulless. You cannot create community merely by arranging spaces and access points and regulating the flow of traffic, if there is nothing to bring people together except shopping, or socializing with the class of person you aspire to be, whether in well-heeled gastropubs or on hoodie-haunted street corners. You need common projects, common aims, and in the end, common worship.

A Culture of Encounter

In an important article for *Nuntium* (the journal of the Pontifical Lateran University), written when he was Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Bergoglio addressed the cultural crisis of Latin America. In it he referred to a phenomenon he called “orphanage,” which I think applies far beyond the American continent to the entire modern world – and has particular relevance to the theme of the present issue of *Humanum*. It lies behind the comments made in the interview cited earlier.

“Uprooting has also grown along with discontinuity. We can place this in three areas: spatial, existential, and spiritual. The relationship between man and his vital space has been broken, as a result of the current dynamic of fragmentation and the segmentation of human groups. The identity dimension of man with his environment, with his land, with his community is lost. The city is being populated by ‘non-places,’ void spaces exclusively submitted to instrumental logic, deprived of symbols and references that contribute to the construction of communal identities.”[6]

The future pope goes on to emphasize the loss of spatial and temporal “belonging,” normally expressed in a shared memory and a common project, which help to establish a sense of identity as part of the community – cutting out at the same time those symbolic references or windows towards the transcendent that used to be present and without which there can be no

sense of unifying truth, or a common search for some underlying reality. “With the experience of orphanage and uprooting, women and men lose their points of reference within their place and time, the root from which they stand and observe their reality. Relativism emerges as the outlook of social life and political work.”[7]

The effect of this relativism is to intensify the individualism that already fragments us. “Individual interests have priority over common interests, the common good. Then they are divided into the various private interests that arise from a bad analysis of the reality in which they are living.”[8] At the same time, paradoxically, it homogenizes thought and eliminates diversity. Its disintegrating power “reduces people to their economic dimension, and the capacity for transformative action is reduced to the roles of consumers of merchandise.”[9] Here “transformative action” can stand also for cultural creativity. The underlying thought is that by being cut off from others, the essential relationality of the person is being attacked at root, along with our essential humanity, manifested in receiving and self-giving and therefore as creative participation in tradition.

From here Bergoglio moves to propose a “culture of encounter.” He is thinking globally, but what he says is directly applicable at the local level – not least because most encounters happen locally! What is required for a true encounter, apart from proximity? For Bergoglio it is essential to share a common ethics or at least a moral dimension, plus “the openness towards a destiny of plenitude that defines man as a spiritual being.” In other words, we need to be open to a relationship with our fellow man in charity and in hope.

This relationship is under attack whenever we pay more attention to our TV or computer than to our neighbor across the way, or when we move house so often we never have time to form a community. Today, there are still many places where the word “neighborhood” means yard sales and lemonade stands and barbecues. But elsewhere, many of us live in such a state of fear that our children are increasingly forbidden to walk to school or to play outside without supervision.

Liberation in the Moment

The key to liberation from the “slavery” imposed on both young and old is the same: a bursting open of the trap – which can only be done by the creative spirit of charity and mercy. It is not enough to “create jobs” in order to ensure that young people are able to preoccupy themselves peacefully with the enjoyment of consumer goods into the indefinite future. Nor is it enough to insist on better care – and more home-based care – of the elderly, whether controlled by the family (with the government in the background keeping an eye on things) or directly by the State. In any case, falling birthrates in some parts of the world suggest there will not be enough young people to support an economy that bears the burden of an ageing population. These things cannot be forced, but must emerge spontaneously from the love within families, a love that does not count the cost, and simply responds to personal need in the moment itself.

If young and old are suffering, because through lack of meaningful work and meaningful relationships they both receive the message that human life itself lacks all meaning other than the pleasure we can take from it, then we are on the road to civilizational suicide. That is surely not the case, for we have not been abandoned completely to our own devices. It is, however, one wake-up call among many others that have been given in recent years. And our built environment not only conditions our human interactions, but expresses, physically, the way that we as human beings are interacting. It is therefore up to us to make sure it expresses human solidarity, rather than inhuman fragmentation.

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