

Cambridge University Press

0521814650 - A Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, Redemption

T. J. Gorringe

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A THEOLOGY OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Tim Gorringe's is the first book to reflect theologically on the built environment as a whole. Drawing on a wide range of both theological and social-scientific sources, Professor Gorringe explores Christianity in its urban settings, focusing on the use of space, design, architecture and town planning to make a theological critique. After considering the divine grounding of constructed space, he looks at the ownership of land, the issues of housing, town and country, and the city, and then considers the built environment in terms of community and art. The book concludes with two chapters that set the whole within the framework of the environmental crisis and asks what directions the Church should be looking for in building for the future. This unique book will challenge not only theologians, ethicists and sociologists of religion but also church teachers and professionals.

TIM GORRINGE is Professor of Theological Studies at Exeter University. He is the author of many books including *God's Just Vengeance* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), and *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

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for
Ruth and Mo

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Would that all the Lord's people were prophets
Numbers 11.29

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Preface

For nearly a millennium and a half after Aristotle, economics was understood as a sub discipline of ethics. In the nineteenth century this connection was severed, with disastrous consequences for both people and planet from which we are only just beginning to retrieve ourselves. The case was not so bad for architecture and town planning, though even here brutalist and technocratic understandings of the human spread their poison almost everywhere. Wittingly or unwittingly every design for council estates, every barrio, every skyscraper, every out of town supermarket, expresses a view of the human, embodies an ethic. As I have noted in another context, ethics is the conversation of the human race about its common project, about where it is going and why it wants to go there. There are life affirming, but there have also been many life denying, ethical systems. Recognising this, the authors of Deuteronomy called their fellow countrymen to choose between two ways, a way of life and a way of death. We know only too well that there are ways of life and of death in the built environment.

Though they certainly did not get everything right, the authors of Deuteronomy took their stand on belief in the liberating power of the God of life. Five hundred years after they wrote Jesus of Nazareth endorsed that stand. Reflecting on what he stood for, John put into his mouth the words: 'I am come that they may have life, and have it in all its fullness.' Christianity, and therefore theology, has to be concerned with architecture and town planning because it seeks life in all its fullness.

No theology can dialogue solely with its own tradition, solely with other theologians. I have learned hugely from John Turner, Colin Ward, Nicholas Habraken, Christopher Day, David Harvey, whose class on Capital I was part of in Oxford, Richard Sennett, Peter Hall and Lewis Mumford. Mumford's contribution in particular calls for reassessment, for he wrote as a unique kind of ethicist, centrally concerned with the built

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Preface

environment and, as Rudolf Bahro noted, he was a genuinely prophetic figure. It is imperative Christians learn from him.

This book began with an invitation to address religious education teachers on the ethics of the built environment, and the material in it has been shared with clergy and laity in Britain, Germany, Norway and Canada. Whatever its inadequacies, I have found people eagerly engaged with the theme, and I am grateful for the many challenges these audiences provided. Iona Gorringe has been a constant companion in reflecting on the built environment on countless journeys in Scotland and England, and her enthusiasm for the project has always been profoundly encouraging. Readers will quickly become aware of my debt to Hugo Gorringe, and in particular his work on the constructed space of Dalit communities in South India. He has kept me supplied with a constant supply of relevant articles. I am grateful for Kevin Taylor's faith in the project at Cambridge, and also to Norman Shanks, for allowing me to offer this piece of work as my Mainland Project for membership of the Iona Community.

The book was begun in Dundee and finished in Exeter. Here Arthur Hannabuss and John Escott have exemplified the unpretentiousness and skill of vernacular building which I urge as, in part, an answer to our present discontents. No two people could make clearer both the limits of what conventionally we call 'education', and the profundity of a true education, the product of countless generations of skill, commonsense and craftsmanship. Without them the book could quite literally not have been written, as there would have been no roof under which to write it.

The book is dedicated with affection to an architect and a drama teacher and theologian who are a source of inspiration in this area as in others.

TIM GORRINGE

Exeter

Feast of St Benedict 2001