

RESEARCH REPORT 2:

# RELIGION & THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT



## An Environment for Fresh Thinking

Our founder James McCord said every aspect of CTI was designed to be an environment conducive to fresh thinking on our global life together in religion, society, and nature.

There are three enduring aspects of CTI's research environment that foster such fresh thinking.



### **CTI is an environment where theology takes risks.**

*Theology today has to earn its place in contemporary academic and public life, and CTI keeps earning a place for theology in its engagement with other fields on pressing topics. Theology takes risks when it opens itself to other disciplines and addresses issues of wider significance. But CTI proves that theology is often truest to itself—and often more interesting as well—when it is willing to take those risks.*

—Professor Gerald McKenny

### **CTI is an environment where theology builds bridges.**

*The Center builds bridges of knowledge and understanding that enrich scholarship and inform public thinking on global concerns. I continue to draw inspiration and creative challenges from the unique contributions unfailingly stemming from this indispensable space for advanced theological and interdisciplinary research.*

—Professor Daniel Schipani

### **CTI is an environment where theology renews service.**

*CTI helps me think better about contemporary issues. Thank you, CTI, for provocation, inspiration, and intellectual community. I give to CTI because of gratitude for the many ways in which it renews my sense of service to students, fellow researchers, and wider public audiences.*

—Professor Esther Reed

It is an honor to introduce this series of Research Reports from the Center of Theological Inquiry. They distill the fresh thinking of our research groups on a range of global concerns. Here you will see theologians taking intellectual risks, building bridges of understanding across disciplines and religious traditions, and renewing our service to the academy and public life.

William Storrar, Director

# RELIGION & THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT



This series of Research Reports is designed to go public with the latest research from CTI, through an online, open access format. While scholarly books and articles are highly valued and important, they can be difficult to access for those outside university contexts, especially for those living in the Global South. There is a need for what is called ‘gray’ publishing, which makes research available more quickly, even before it has made its way to the scholarly journals and university publishing houses. CTI’s new series of Research Reports is meant to achieve this goal.

Research Report #2 is written by Murray Rae, a professor of theology at the University of Otago in New Zealand. Author of the book *Architecture and Theology: The Art of Place* (Baylor University Press, 2017) Professor Rae is both an architect and a theologian. As is evident in the report which follows, Rae’s breadth of knowledge and theological acumen allow him to synthesize the work of the eight scholars and practitioners who took part in CTI’s Research Workshop on Religion & the Built Environment. We are grateful to Professor Rae for taking the time to provide this highly readable and learned essay, as well as for his theological wisdom and leadership throughout our workshop.

Joshua Mauldin, Associate Director

# Report on the Workshop on Religion & the Built Environment

Center of Theological Inquiry • 2020-21

Murray Rae

**C**reaturely existence requires a place for the creature to dwell. According to the account of creation offered in the opening chapters of Genesis, it is God who provides that place and God who furnishes the place given for his creatures to inhabit with all that is necessary for the flourishing of life. Uniquely among the creatures spoken of in the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, human beings are said to have been made in God's image and are given instructions about how they are to dwell within the place that God has made. They are to "be fruitful and multiply"; they are to "fill the earth and subdue it"; they are to "till and keep the garden" in which God has placed them. Human beings, made in the image of God, are given a vocation to share as responsible partners in the working out of God's purposes for the world. Later in Scripture we find the instruction to "build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce... Seek the welfare of the city... for in its welfare you will find welfare" (Jer. 29:5,7). The divine guidance given to humanity about how they shall dwell in the world that God has made includes an architectural mandate, a specific instruction to build.

That is the mandate that drew eight scholars to participate in the Center of Theological Inquiry's Research Workshop on Religion and the Built Environment, convened by its Director, William Storrar, and Associate Director, Joshua Mauldin, in the Fall and

Spring semesters of 2020-21. Ironically perhaps, given the attention to place that the workshop encouraged, the Covid pandemic precluded us from gathering in one place at CTI itself. Instead we established a meeting place online and across a range of time-zones—late at night for participants in South Africa and Germany and early in the morning for participants in New Zealand. Despite the limitations of the virtual meeting platform the group soon established an excellent rapport and enjoyed weekly meetings throughout both semesters in which members presented their works in progress. One of the great strengths of the CTI workshops is the fostering of interdisciplinary inquiry. Consideration of how we might build well in response to the divine vocation to seek the welfare of the city certainly requires the insight and expertise of a wide range of disciplines. Not all relevant disciplines were represented in the Workshop but the bringing together of theologians, architects, historians, and scholars of religion certainly produced a rich and stimulating exchange of ideas. There was also some diversity in the range of faith perspectives among members of the workshop which included both Christian and Muslim scholars. We found common ground, of course, in our shared heritage in the Abrahamic traditions of faith and in the conviction that there is much to be gained by bringing theological concerns and questions to bear upon our thinking about architecture and the built environment.

The research projects of the participants clustered around two broad themes: places of worship, and consideration of the ways in which built environments may serve the cause of justice and the well-being of all who live within them. The two themes are connected not merely because they are both concerned with the built environment. They are also connected theologically inasmuch as justice and well-being have to do with the right ordering of relationships in accordance with God's intention that the earth shall be a place of blessing for "all the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:3). The alignment of our human projects with that divine intent requires attentiveness to God, most especially through worship.

### Places of Worship

It is a theological truism that God can be worshipped at anytime and anywhere but this does not entail that the times and the places in which people may worship are merely incidental. Indeed a persistent feature in the evolution of human cultures has been the demarcation of particular times and places for worship. Across all human cultures, furthermore, humanity's greatest achievements in architecture have frequently been dedicated to the worship of their Gods. Why is it that while almost all of humanity's religious traditions, including those which erect images and statues of their Gods, understand the divine to transcend the earthly sphere and to resist confinement in any particular place, those same traditions build sacred places where it

is believed the presence of the divine can be experienced more reliably and more intensely than elsewhere? The reason, I suggest, is that while God transcends the earthly realm, human beings are embodied creatures who exist in space and time and whose experience of the divine is always located. Religious architecture got underway when human beings began to set up stones, altars, and shrines to mark in the landscape places where they had encountered the divine. They did not understand in doing so that the divine could only be found in that place or was tethered to it in any way. Rather, the altar or the shrine served as a reminder of the presence of God and a point of orientation in an emerging theological paradigm. This was true, for instance, of the altars built by Abraham as he journeyed from the land of his forebears in obedience to God's command. The altars built at Bethel, by the oaks of Mamre, and at Mt Moriah, serve as coordinates in the landscape reminding Abraham and his progeny of the guidance and the faithfulness of God. God does not need such markers in the landscape—"he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands" (Acts 17:23)—but human beings located in time and space typically do need visible and concrete reminders of the reality and the presence of God.

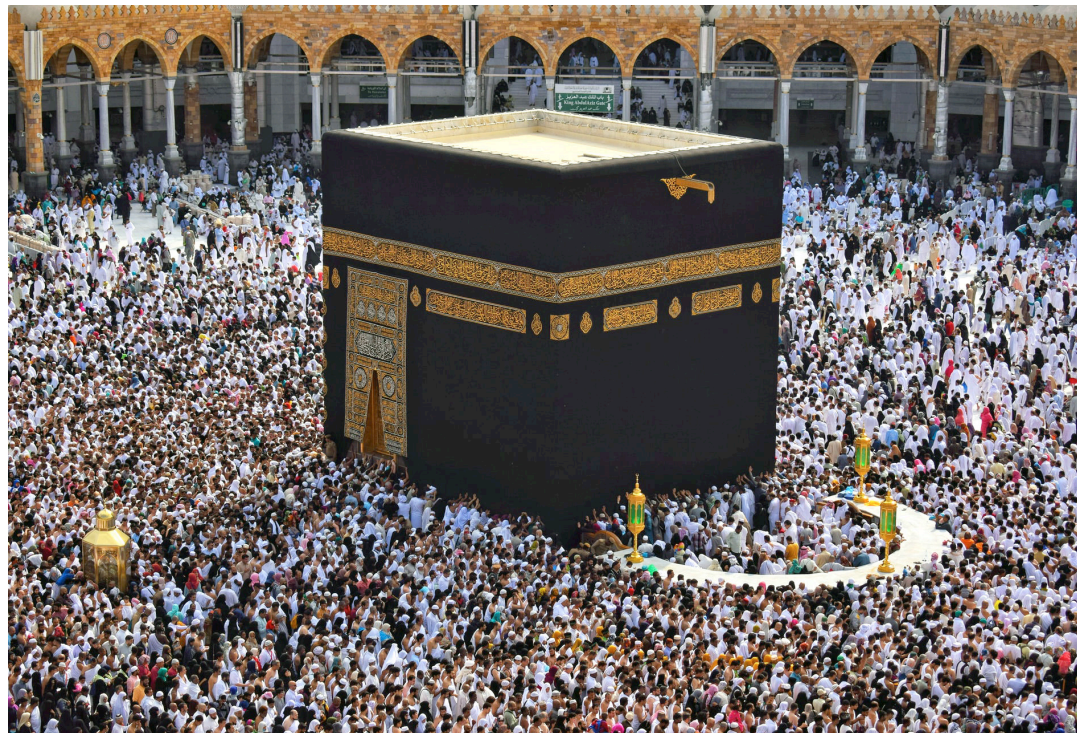
The theological importance of place and time is apparent in the injunction issued by God to the people of Israel. Repeatedly they are advised to 'remember the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of

the house of slavery'. Recollection of the very particular time and place of God's deliverance of his people from bondage serves as the decisive point of theological orientation for the biblical people of Israel. Similarly for Christians, the place called Golgotha outside the city walls of Jerusalem and an empty tomb in a garden nearby are places of decisive theological significance. For Muslims, Mecca is the place of paramount theological importance for it is the birthplace of the prophet Mohammed and, according to Islamic tradition, it is the place where the Qur'an was revealed to him. The great mosque of Mecca furthermore is believed by Muslims to have been built by Abraham and Ishmael and so has become one of Islam's holiest sites. Mecca thus constitutes a decisive point of theological orientation for Muslims and is the place to which they orient themselves whenever they kneel to pray.

The concern of Muslims to turn their faces toward Mecca when they pray is an important consideration in the design and orientation of mosques. Calculation of the appropriate orientation has been a chal-

lenging exercise, however, especially in the Arctic circle where the orientation to Mecca was traditionally calculated using Mercator maps. In virtue of the equal length of the lines of latitude in Mercator projections, whereas in reality they become shorter as they near the earth's two poles, the size of land masses is increasingly distorted in proportion to their proximity to the poles. Study of the mosques thus affected was the project brought to the workshop by Tammy Gaber, Associate Professor of Architecture at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Canada. The calculation of spatial orientation is not the only challenge for Muslims living in the Arctic Circle, however. The times for daily prayer at dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, sunset and nightfall, vary with one's precise location but more complicated still is the determination

PHOTOGRAPH: HAIDAN/UNSPLOASH



The Kaaba in Mecca

of the appropriate times for fasting during the month of Ramadan when Muslims fast from dawn until sunset. In some northern locations, there are many days when the sun never appears above the horizon and more still when it does not set. Muslims in such locations must find ways to observe the spirit of the law when the precise letter cannot be fulfilled.

During the course of the CTI workshop Gaber made a trip to Finland in order to conduct research on mosques designed by the celebrated Finnish architect Alvar Aalto. She discovered in the Aalto archives a treasure trove of drawings for various architectural projects in the Middle East. A striking feature of these projects was Aalto's inclusion of gardens as part of the building design. In a series of visits to the Middle East Aalto had been impressed by the prominence in Islamic architecture of cultivated gardens. While gardens serve the practical purposes of food provision, access to pharmacological resources, and aesthetic enjoyment, they are also a theological representation for Muslims of the eternal garden of Paradise. They are a reminder of creation ordered well according to God's purpose. We find the same imagery in the biblical tradition and in Jewish and Christian iconography. These traditions in art and architecture depicting the garden of paradise are salutary reminders of God's appointment of humanity to be stewards of his creation. Gardens serve also as places for contemplation and prayer.

The study of places for worship was also the focus of Nesrine Mansour's project. Mansour is an Assistant Professor in Architecture at South Dakota State University. Her research is focussed on the virtual representation of spaces for worship and how such spaces, accessible online, might facilitate experiences similar to a sense of the sacred that can be prompted by real houses of worship. Mansour's research topic was especially apposite as the Covid-19 pandemic prompted religious groups throughout the world to explore digital platforms for worship. The possibilities and the limitations of religion online have been widely discussed this past year. Mansour's project encourages consideration of whether the virtual construction or replication of built environments for worship and for other spiritual practices might assist in sustaining religious practice where access to real places of worship and devotion is limited or difficult.

In a project entitled "The City and its Gods" architect and historian Kyle Dugdale explored the ways in which our formation and use of place reveals who or what it is that we worship. In two fascinating presentations Dugdale explored how contemporary cities have replaced older with newer gods. While in Western cities less prominence is now given to sacred spaces conventionally understood, the modern city has sacralized other spaces like the shopping mall and the Apple Computer store. Dugdale demonstrated the point by juxtaposing the architecture and the iconostasis in a traditional Russian Or-



PHOTOGRAPH: PATRICE HAUSR/HEMIS.FR/ALAMY STOCK

Muslim taxi driver praying in the evening in a street of West Village, New York.

thodox church with the Apple Store on Fifth Avenue in New York. There are architectural devices in both contexts, especially the use of light, that encourage devotion—devotion to Christ in the first case and to the products delivered to the consumer by Apple Inc. in the second.

Juxtaposition was employed again in Dugdale’s second presentation, again to reveal the changing nature of the city’s gods. A stock ‘Alamy’ photographic image taken in 2009 depicts a taxi driver who has parked his taxi on a quiet street outside the Prince Lumber store in New York and laid down his prayer mat on the street beside the car.





Queue at the Apple Store

The mat is carefully oriented towards Mecca so that the driver can fulfil the requirements of Muslim prayer. The photographer has captured the moment when the driver touches his forehead to the ground in an act of devotion and submission. The episode takes place at sunset, the time of the Maghrib prayer. For New York taxi drivers this is also the busiest and most lucrative time of the day. This driver, however, has set aside the economic imperatives in order to devote his time to God. Ten years on, the streetscape has changed. It is no longer the site of Prince Lumber. The building has been replaced by “over 150,000 square feet of commercial space in three levels of retail and seven levels of office space.”<sup>1</sup> “Its street level is occupied by Starbucks Reserve’s New York Roastery, one of a select group of ‘theatrical, experiential shrines to coffee passion.’”<sup>2</sup> The surrounding streetscape has also been dramatically altered since the Muslim taxi driver found there a quiet place to pray. It has become an office and retail hub for giant tech companies, Google, its subsidiary YouTube, and Apple. Dugdale explains that “the site is also on the fibre-optic trunk that

runs up Ninth Avenue from 60 Hudson Street, one of the most important internet hubs in the world.”<sup>3</sup> The trunk line provides a different sort of connection to Mecca than the one indicated ten years earlier by the orientation of the taxi driver’s prayer mat.

Dugdale’s paper concluded with a second set of images, this time of people camping out through the night in close proximity to where the taxi driver knelt in prayer, but now the people in the photographs are waiting in line for the launch of Apple’s latest version of the iPhone. Dugdale’s attentiveness to the changing face of the built environment reveals the changing nature of our gods.

### **Justice and Well-being**

The opening chapters of the Biblical story in Genesis 1 and 2 tell of God’s creation of a world that is well-suited to the working out of God’s purposes and in which abundant provision is made for the flourishing of God’s creatures. The flourishing of creation is not however an already accomplished reality. As mentioned above, it is a project in which human beings are called to participate. Humanity is called by God to exercise dominion, to till the earth, and to be fruitful. That vocation establishes a responsibility to consider how our various human projects may

conform, or not, to God’s purposes for creation. This was the task taken up by several participants in the workshop on religion and the built environment.

It has often been observed that the biblical story begins in a garden and ends in a city. The vision of the new Jerusalem in the book of Revelation portrays a holy city in which God dwells with his people. It is a city in which there is no more suffering and pain for God will wipe every tear from the eyes of those who dwell within the city walls. (Rev. 21:1-4). It is a city in which creation will be restored; well-watered by the river of life, the tree of life will yield fruit in abundance once more. And it will be a city at peace; the wounds of the nations will have been healed (Rev. 22:1-3). This is an eschatological vision, a vision of a city yet to come, but, echoing the vision of the new Jerusalem in Ezekiel 40-48, this vision of the heavenly city in the book of Revelation serves in Christian imagination as a template for the earthly city. It establishes a biblical imperative to create cities of justice and peace, to bring an end to suffering, and to create built environments that allow creation to flourish.

The Bible has much to say about what makes a good city. A good city is one, the Bible suggests, in which the needs of

the vulnerable are attended to, hospitality is extended to the stranger, refuge is offered to those in danger, and justice and peace prevail. A good city is one in which the fruits of the earth are equitably shared and in which land is fairly distributed so that all have a place to dwell and all have the opportunity to sit under their own vines and under their own fig-trees, as Micah 4:4 puts it. The ways in which these goods may be realized in the built environment was a recurring theme during the workshop on religion and the built environment.

One of those whose work was focused in this area was Stephan de Beer, Director of the Centre for Faith and Community and Associate Professor of Practical Theology at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. De Beer is also a founding member of a National Homeless Network in South Africa and was for twenty years the leader of an ecumenical non-profit organization dedicated to community development and the provision of housing in the city of Pretoria. Thirty years after the constitutional termination of apartheid in South Africa, the multiple challenges involved in rebuilding an equitable, just, and peaceful society after generations of injustice, segregation, and oppression remain just as acute today as they were thirty years ago. The legal and political apparatus of apartheid may have been dismantled but there are other ways in which oppression, exclusion and injustice can become institutionalized. The institutionalization of injustice is readily ap-

parent, for example, in the way the urban environment has been reconfigured after apartheid. De Beer explains that,

As the apartheid rule started to crumble, dramatic shifts occurred in the urban form... Central and inner cities (with the exception of Cape Town) experienced a large-scale exodus of white people and white capital; and influx of black people—both young professionals and the migrant poor. What started to develop was a direct correlation between disinvestment from the inner city, abandonment of housing stock, and the influx of poorer black residents, on the one hand; and investment in booming suburban shopping mall developments and the proliferation of gated communities, on the other hand.<sup>4</sup>

In Pretoria and in other South African cities de Beer observes what has been called the ‘spatialization of injustice’. Economic deprivation, crime, exposure to sanitary diseases along with multiple other threats to human well-being are directly correlated to the state of the urban environment. In the face of such problems churches in Pretoria have become involved in a range of initiatives dedicated to the provision of decent housing in the city. They have been inspired by the theological imperatives found in the Bible “to rethink our notions of property, land, and resources,” and to emphasize “justice for the poor, redistribution of wealth, protection of the stranger, and care of the earth.”<sup>5</sup> Prompted by the



Thembelihle Village Pretoria

eviction of almost 1000 tenants from low-income housing owned by the city, the Yeast City Housing initiative, led by de Beer himself, was begun by six churches in 1998 with the aim of having “a yeast-like effect in the city through strategic investment in special needs and affordable housing, and the restoration of so-called ‘bad’ buildings without displacing people.”<sup>6</sup> From modest beginnings Yeast City Housing has now delivered decent affordable housing to thousands of residents,

including its most recent development that provides 733 housing units accommodating in excess of 2000 people. While it may appear that Yeast City Housing is just another social housing company, it maintains its foundational theological commitment to care for the poor and the marginalized and to a “holistic process of accompanying people from vulnerability, through healing and empowerment in caring communities, to the point where they are ready to occupy their own housing unit.”<sup>7</sup>

One of the residents of a YCH project explains that “Before we lived in Tau Village, I used to get home at 8:30 at night, after a long bus trip. I could not check my children’s homework, and they would put themselves to sleep before I got home.” De Beer explains that this woman “then speaks of how the housing unit she was able to access at Tau Village did a number of things for her: it enabled her to be within walking distance from the space in which she trades in shoes; it helped her to have grandchildren with her and to help them with their school work; it offered her the possibility of financial freedom, as it cut out transport costs; and she now has excess time in which to plan for and support her family more optimally. As she says, ‘Never mind it is small, it is next to my heart. It is home. I am free.’”<sup>9</sup> We may say, I think, that YCH is doing biblical work; it is imagining and helping to construct places

and people that enable the well-being and the flourishing that is intended by God.

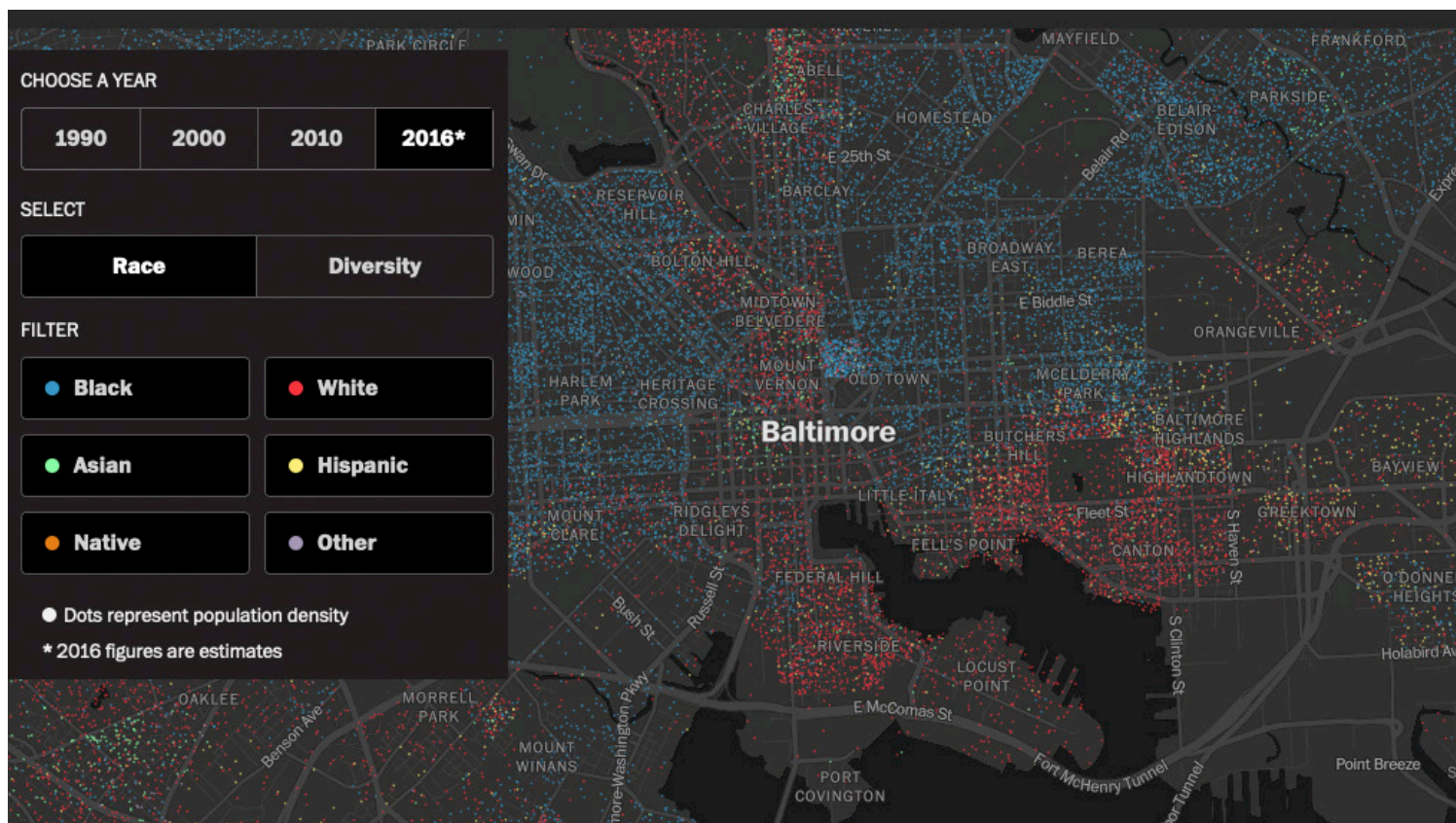
The pursuit of justice by attending to the nature of urban environments was also the concern of Elise Edwards. Edwards is both a theologian, teaching at Baylor University, and a registered architect. Her research is focused on the ways in which racial injustice is expressed in the built environment through segregation and other practices of exclusion and through the symbolic narratives expressed in public buildings. She approaches such issues from the perspective of a Christian and womanist theologian drawing upon the experience of black women. Such a perspective affords a prophetic critique of values and aspirations expressed in the built environment that serve the interests of a privileged few but discriminate against and marginalize others. Edwards is interested in promoting architecture that serves the common good. It can only do so, however, only if it is “commonly accessible and promotes inclusion of the most vulnerable and marginalized.”<sup>10</sup> Christian ethicist David Hollenbach writes that the common good “is realized when the members of society share in creating their life together. This good is truly common only when all members of society jointly create a common life together. It will be a common good only if all members also benefit from the good that has been created.”<sup>11</sup>

Concern for the common good in the built environment requires us to consider who gets to construct it, whose interests it serves and who gets to participate in its design. It requires us to ask what aspirations and values are expressed in the built environment and whether it includes or excludes those who are marginalized or vulnerable. Such questions align closely with the recurring biblical emphasis upon caring for the vulnerable, welcoming the stranger, and recognizing the gifts and contributions that all can make to the well-being of the community. Edwards also looks to the Christian doctrine of creation as a framework for assessing the degree to which architecture and the built environment align with God’s intent that justice and righteousness shall prevail (cf. Amos 5:24). She explains that the stories of God’s creation of the world in Genesis speak of “the ideal state of the world as it was created, the introduction of sin, and the emerging narrative of redemption. These stories also inform theological anthropology, doctrines that describe humanity, our nature, our work and vocation, and our reflection of the *imago Dei*.”<sup>12</sup> Theologically considered, human creative activity is to be understood precisely as a vocation, as a call given by God to share in the project of bringing creation to its intended goal. According to the narrative of Christian Scripture that goal is revealed most especially in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. God intends that the creature should have life. The resurrec-

tion signals the final overcoming of all that stands in the way of the life that God intends. Death is defeated as are the brutal powers of oppression and violence. Divine justice rather than the (in)justice of the crucifying powers is shown to be victorious in the end. In this “new creation” as Edwards puts it, the person wedded to “the old way of being—an egotistical self-concerned, apolitical, and individualist way of existing socially and spiritually in the world—dies and is reborn in the resurrection of Christ to become a loving person who participates in creation as a co-creator with God.”<sup>13</sup>

The challenge Edwards seeks to explore is how we might implement the reality of this new creation in the way we create our built environment. How might we create built environments that serve the well-being of all and that help us to overcome the evils of segregation, injustice, deprivation, and oppression?

A common example of injustice in the built environment is the racial segregation seen in many cities around the world whereby particular racial groups are concentrated in distinct parts of the city. Black communities in America, for example, are often concen-



Mapping segregation in Baltimore<sup>14</sup>

trated in areas of substandard housing, in neighborhoods that lack good quality public amenities and that have limited access to the range of facilities for healthcare, education, recreation, and so on that are easily accessible in wealthier, often white, neighborhoods. The amelioration of such conditions cannot be achieved solely by attending to the built environment, of course, but architects and planners can certainly assist in the provision of healthy, affordable homes, in the renovation of substandard buildings, in the provision of quality public space and community amenities, and in the design and construction of built environments that support and celebrate the diversity of cultures and racial groups that contribute to a vibrant and flourishing community. Architects and planners can also assist in encouraging participation in community decision-making about the shape of the built environment. The image shown here depicts racial segregation across residential areas in the city of Baltimore.

Baltimore is a noteworthy example because it is also a city where churches in partnership with other groups have led a major regeneration of black neighborhoods, improving housing stock and providing quality community facilities with the aim of making Baltimore “a better place to live, work, and raise a family.”<sup>15</sup>



One further aspect of Edwards's work is especially worthy of attention. Our built environments tell stories about who we are and about who we aspire to be. These stories are not neutral; they express particular values and particular concepts of the good life. Oftentimes they celebrate the narratives of the privileged and the powerful while excluding the stories of others. Attention has been drawn this past year to the problematic nature of some of the statues and monuments that adorn our cities. We have become more attentive to the shadow side of "heroes" from the past who have been immortalized in bronze and marble statuary or who have prominent features of the cityscape named after them but whose records in the slave trade, in battle, or in political life are now regarded as highly questionable. Debate continues about how best to address these problematic features of our built environments. Such examples should encourage us to be more attentive to the stories that are told through the built environment and to consider the extent to which they contribute to a theologically honorable account of human endeavor and of humanity's place in God's world.

The theme of justice in the built environment was also a focus of my own work on biblical understandings of what makes for a good city. One of the features of good community that emerges in the Bible is the value of diversity, the diversity of cultures and ethnic groups, and the diversity of gifts and talents needed to serve the welfare of the community. Paul's image of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12 supports this notion of the common good being served by a diverse community while in the story of Babel in Genesis 11 it was not the building of the tower but the drive towards homogeneity that appears to have prompted God's scattering of the people and the confusion of their languages. Elsewhere in Scripture the city of Jerusalem is envisaged as a city to which *all nations* will come and live in peace (Mic. 4:3-4), while at Pentecost people of many races and cultures gathered in one place and committed themselves to a common life.

The city of Christchurch in New Zealand was founded by English settlers who proceeded to construct in the landscape the story of their own culture and aspirations. A Neogothic Anglican cathedral was built



Christchurch Civic Building <sup>16</sup>

to be their place of worship. The Neogothic style brought with them from England was also used for the building of a university. Oak trees brought from “home” were planted throughout the city while the two rivers running through the urban landscape, previously known by the Māori names Ōtākaro and Ōpāwhao, were renamed the Avon and the Heathcote. Throughout this process the multiple markers of Māori habitation of the land were successively erased. The very English city of Christchurch offered little evidence that the landscape had once been home to a thriving Māori settlement and economy. In 2011, however, Christchurch suffered a major earthquake that killed 185 people and reduced much of the city to rubble. It became necessary to rebuild. More attentive now to the ravages of colonialism and the widespread erasure of Māori heritage and culture, the city planners forged an alliance with the local Māori tribe, Ngāi Tahu, and sub-tribe, Ngāi Tūāhuriri, and have subsequently involved a specially established Māori Trust in every stage of the rebuilding process. The Matapopore Trust is involved in the seventeen anchor projects that make up the Central City Recovery Plan, including the Justice Precinct, the Convention Centre, and the Performing Arts Precinct, and has been commissioned to ensure that Ngāi Tūāhuriri/Ngāi Tahu history and values are represented in all of these projects.

While the rebuild of Christchurch remains a work in progress, the city has a very different aesthetic now. Both the process and the product have been enriched by the genuine involvement of Māori and the recovery of their long history of habitation in the land. That which has long been obscured is becoming visible again. Ngāi Tūāhuriri and Ngāi Tahu are beginning to see their history and their values reflected in the buildings around them and in the landscape, and are enabled thereby to inhabit the city as their own. As Debbie Tikao, the Manager of the Mata-popore Trust, says, “In years to come, when my children’s children are walking through the city, they’re going to be walking through a place where they feel a sense of connection, where they can see themselves.”<sup>17</sup> Such inclusion replacing the previous erasure of Māori history and culture is surely a step toward the racial justice for which Edwards appeals, and toward the biblical vision of a city in which people will “all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid” (Mic. 4:3-4).

The possibility of finding a place to dwell where no one will make you afraid is one of the features of a city where the dignity of all is recognized and upheld. Exploration of the ways in which human dignity can be both fostered and restricted in built environments is the project being undertaken by Martin Rademacher from the Centre for Religious Studies at Ruhr University in Bochum, Germany. Against the backdrop of refugee reset-

tlement in Europe and immigration from the Global South, Rademacher investigates the struggles of migrant communities to build churches and mosques and to find places where they can gather in their respective communities. The availability of places for worship is a particular feature of a city that upholds the dignity of all including especially, in this case, the dignity of migrant communities. We are reminded of the biblical injunction to welcome the stranger, and of the theological conviction that every human being is a person made in the image of God and is deserving therefore of dignity and respect. The buildings in which people dwell, in which they shop and go to school, in which they meet with others, and in which they worship play a role in safeguarding the dignity and the worth of those who use them. Rademacher cites the architect John Cary who observes that “well-designed spaces are not just a matter of taste or a question of aesthetics. They literally shape our ideas about who we are in the world and what we deserve. That is the essence of dignity.”<sup>18</sup>

While there were several architects who were members of the CTI Workshop on Religion and the Built Environment most worked primarily in academia rather than as practitioners. The exception was Whare Timu, a Māori architect from New Zealand whose contribution

to the Workshop centered around a project in which he is currently engaged. In the mid-1970s a former prison inmate named Bruce Stewart began building a marae in the city of Wellington. A marae is a place of gathering for Māori. It is a place of belonging that includes facilities for meeting, dining, and sleeping and for a range of activities that sustain and pass on the culture and traditions of a particular tribal group. Stewart himself frequently remarked that “The Marae is my home; it is my place of work, The Marae is my kindergarten right through to my university; It is my museum, my church, my art gallery. It is where I was born and where I will be buried.”<sup>19</sup> But

Stewart was troubled that many young Māori, particularly those who had come from their home regions to the city, had lost contact with their marae and so also with their place of belonging. On land acquired from the Sisters of Compassion in Wellington who remain as neighbors to the marae Stewart began the task of building a marae that would also serve as a trades training facility and place of residence for young Māori, many of whom had served time in prison. The marae buildings were always a work-in-progress evolving and continually being extended over four decades. Stewart named the marae Tapu te ranga, “the sacred rising.”



Tapu te Ranga Marae

Tragically however in 2019 the marae was burnt to the ground, ignited by smoking embers from a campfire left by a visiting group. Stewart had died two years previously, but his family and the surviving community are determined to rebuild. Whare Timu is the architect they have engaged to guide the process.

Again there is a crucial relationship here between process and product. If the dignity and the mana of Stewart himself and of his extended family is to be honored and preserved then the family must be involved in articulating the vision for the rebuild and in every subsequent stage of the process. Such involvement is required by traditional Māori values like kotahitanga (partnership and collaboration), whanaungtanga (family connection and inclusion), manaakitanga (hospitality), wairuatanga (spirituality) and kaitiakitanga (stewardship). These values underpinned Stewart's original vision and remain central as the rebuild of the marae is undertaken.

These same values form the basis of a Māori Design Framework which Timu helped to write and which has been adopted by the New Zealand Institute of Architects as a template for the recognition and involvement of New Zealand's indigenous people in planning and shaping the built environment. The Design Framework is part of a wider commitment to overcome the legacies of racism,

injustice, and mistreatment that have been inflicted upon Māori through colonization and to restore the constitutional rights of the indigenous people established through New Zealand's founding constitutional document the Treaty of Waitangi. The rebuild of Tapu te Ranga marae is thus a particular expression of a broader imperative to seek justice. It is an effort by and for Māori to rebuild a place where they can flourish and stand tall.

The "Call for Applications" to participate in the CTI Workshop on Religion and the Built Environment noted that "the ways we construct and inhabit the built environment are now fundamental to human flourishing in an increasingly urbanized and globalized world." The various projects undertaken by participants in the workshop confirmed the veracity of this observation and demonstrated as well how much there is to be gained in the shaping of the built environment by drawing not only upon the expertise of those involved directly in constructing the buildings in which we live but also upon the wisdom of religious texts and traditions. It is those texts and traditions, after all, which offer the most sure guidance on what human flourishing consists in and to what end all our human projects ought to be directed. <sup>1</sup>

## RELIGION & THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT WORKSHOP MEMBERS



**Tammy Gaber** is Associate Professor at Laurentian University's McEwen School of Architecture in Sudbury, Canada. Her CTI project, "A New Cosmic Order of Orientation and Time: Designing Mosques in the Subarctic," explores the diversity, beauty, practicality, and versatility of mosques in the northern regions of Canada and Scandinavia. Her book, *Beyond the Divide: A Century of Canadian Mosque Design*, will be published in 2022.



**Nesrine Mansour** focuses on the intersection of architecture, religion, and media. An Assistant Professor of Architecture at South Dakota State University, she holds a PhD in Architecture and a Certificate in Digital Humanities from Texas A&M University and employs empirical research methods to assess the effect of light on the spiritual experience in virtual sacred spaces. At CTI, her interdisciplinary research project is "Religion and the Sacred Virtual Built Environment."



**Stephan De Beer** is Associate Professor of Practical Theology at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, where he directs the Centre for Faith and Community. In his CTI research project, "A Faith-Based Housing Agenda: Co-Constructing Flourishing African Urban Futures," he contributes a theological and conceptual framework for faith-based housing action in African cities, emanating from the Global South and shaped by insights from liberation theology, equity planning and radical geographies.



**Martin Radermacher** is Chair for the Study of Religion at the Center for Religious Studies at Ruhr University Bochum, Germany. His CTI research project, "Dignity and Atmosphere: Conceptual Approaches to the Study of Religion and the Built Environment," investigates how built environments foster and restrict the notion of dignity that is recognized as a fundamental value for many of today's societies and has deep roots in various religious traditions.



**Elise Edwards** is an Assistant Professor in Religion at Baylor University as well as a registered architect. Her research draws upon theology, ethics, architectural theory, and urban studies to develop theological, ethical perspectives on civic engagement, cultural and artistic expression, and justice. She focuses on cultural expressions by, for, and about women and marginalized communities. Her CTI project examines how racial injustice is expressed through the built environment and addresses what the Christian doctrine of creation offers for the task of interpreting architecture and public space.



**Whare Timu**, an architect based in Auckland, New Zealand, advocates simplicity, low impact, and natural solutions in design and planning. He has a deep understanding of the indigenous customs of the Māori peoples, applying his own knowledge of the the Māori worldview where applicable. Timu's CTI project is based on a real-life project of re-designing the Tapu te Ranga Marae in Wellington, exploring indigenous Māori design principles to understand how these can be adopted in developing alternative settlement patterns, as a form for creating intentional community.



**Kyle Dugdale** has taught history, theory, and design at Yale School of Architecture and at Columbia Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation. As an architect and historian, he is interested in architecture's claims to metaphysical significance and is particularly curious about architecture in biblical narratives. His essay is an extract from his CTI work in progress, *The City and Its Gods*.



**Murray Rae** is Professor of Theology at the University of Otago in New Zealand. After completing a Bachelor of Architecture degree, he worked as an architect in private practice before studying theology and philosophy. His research interests include theology and the arts, especially architecture, Māori engagements with Christianity, Christian ethics, and the work of Søren Kierkegaard. His CTI project explores what the Christian tradition teaches about how the built environment can contribute to the flourishing of the city.

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