Living Towards a Vision: Cities, the Common Good and the Christian Imagination

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I want you to imagine that instead of being here, in New York, you are in Italy, walking the 32 miles from Florence to Siena, which you can do comfortably in a day, and even more comfortably in two. As you approach the city you climb quite steeply and then you pass, on your left, the great Dominican church in which St. Catherine of Siena is buried. You are now within the walls, and ten minutes walk brings you to the Campo, the famous marketplace which constitutes the city's heart. The Campo has been called 'one of the most successful uses of space in any city.' Formed where the three hills of Siena meet it is roughly amphitheatre shaped. In the fourteenth century, when it was created, it was large enough for the whole citizen body to meet, whether to hear a sermon, celebrate a feast, or witness an execution. It was the place where food was distributed during famines. No one was allowed to bear arms in it. It was 'a physical expression of the ideal of good government, of substitution of love for city in place of loyalty to faction.' Building regulations ensured harmony without uniformity. The private palaces which bordered the Campo were completed by the Public Palace, which had the highest tower, thus symbolising the priority of the common good over any individual fortune. The creation of the Campo was the crowning work of the re-design of the city by a group of lay magistrates from whom the nobility were rigorously excluded. They took their ideas very largely from Dominican theology, and thus especially from Thomas Aquinas, at the heart of whose understanding of community lay the idea of the common good. Aquinas had learned from Aristotle that the good life is a life in common. 'Even if the good is the same for the individual and the city,' Aristotle had written, 'the good of the city is the greater and more perfect thing to attain and to safeguard. The attainment of the good for one person alone is, to be sure, a source of satisfaction; yet to secure it for a nation and for cities is nobler and more divine.' Aquinas glossed this in Christian terms by arguing that God is the common good of all things and all reality, even stone, 'loves the common good of the whole more than its own par-

ticular good.' The city fathers employed an artist, Lorenzetti, to paint an allegory of good and bad government in the room in which they met to deliberate. Justice and the Common Good, both of which derive from the Holy Spirit, are the heart of his vision. Under good government arts, education, relationships, and piety flourish; under bad government all is destroyed. Under good government the countryside feeds the town and the town rewards the country; under bad government the crops rot and the people starve.

Florence and Siena were bitter rivals in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries but what they share, comments David Mayernik, 'is that they saw their urban forms, and especially their skylines, as directly representing the hierarchy of their collective civic values. This is truly remarkable to us – who have effectively surrendered our cities' skylines to chance and developers for the last hundred years and more, surrendering thereby any opportunity to make them speak in other than economic terms… Cities that speak must be designed, and …their forms can speak eloquently… both in plan (walls, streets, and squares) and in profiles or skyline.' For that to happen we have to know what to say, and 'what our cities have to say is all of our responsibility to decide, or else it will be decided by default.'

I do not begin with Siena because I have any hankering after Christendom, or any nostalgic view of the medieval past, but because what we find there is an urban and rural environment shaped by a Christian imagination. What does that mean, and how does it happen? Back in 1974, thinking already of the need to live more in tune with our natural environment, Gary Snyder called for a revolution of consciousness which would be won by seizing key myths, archetypes, and eschatologies. Our Scriptures are just such a set of myths, archetypes, and eschatologies which can fire our imaginations as we think about the way we live, the cities, towns and villages we want to build, and the way in which we farm, just as they did for those Sienese magistrates six or seven hundred years ago. In moving from faith to action – building a new world – the mediating terms are imagination, vision, courage, and determination. We find all these in Siena in spades. Those city fathers are part of the great cloud of witnesses mentioned in Hebrews 11 and they challenge us to an equal vision, courage and determination. We have to ask how we do the same in our idiom, in the context of a much more plural society, and in quite different social and economic conditions.

The Christian imagination is grounded in our Scriptures, both the Hebrew bible and what is usually called the New Testament, though I prefer to call them the Messianic writings, the writings which witness to Jesus Messiah. We find many different emphases and points of view in these writings but all agree that, as Hebrews puts it, 'in these last days God has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he created the ages.'(Heb 1.2) The struggle to understand that fact led to the emergence of what we know as 'the doctrine of the Trinity,' which is, for Christians, the grammar of God's engagement with all that is not God. The doctrine is a koan which represents the faith that God creates all things, reconciles all things, and redeems all things, the faith that the being and end of all things is encountered in the bringing of order out of chaos, in the reconciliation of persons and communities, and in hope that God's glory will finally irradiate all things. Because that is the case it follows that everything that we do as Christians, including our politics and our fashioning of the world, should be shaped by that hope.

Church is the community which lives out of this vision and this hope. It is true that worship and praise of the Triune God is that which is most distinctive about this community but this does not make it primarily a community of piety. The word 'ecclesia' used in the Greek NT translates 'quahal' – the meeting of the tribes of Israel to debate policy and action. 'Ecclesia' itself was originally a political term, the meeting of the free citizens of Athens to do the same. The Church worships God but it does so as part of that people which left Egypt on the journey from bondage to freedom. It is still on that journey. Its primary task is to witness to the God of hope, to live from the visioning of Scripture, in regard to every task that confronts us, for the founts of our faith, Scripture, know no division between sacred and secular, no separation of powers.

In their insistence that God called for justice and mercy the prophets of Israel had what today we would call a 'holistic' vision of reality and saw human behaviour as bound up with the flourishing or failing of the natural world. Because there is no knowledge of God, says Hosea, 'Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish… even the fish of the sea are perishing' (Hos 4.3). Today in many places of the world, including the Gulf of Mexico, this is a bitter truth. Knowledge of God is the instruction of torah – a vision of what it is which makes human life possible and fruitful. 'Without Torah,' says Ton Veerkamp, 'any society goes to ruin… the ruin of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah was the product of a deep seated anomie, living without Torah.' Jared Diamond's book *Collapse* is a commentary on this truth. Diamond considers a number of societies, both ancient and modern, where social and ecological rules were wilfully overlooked. The ancient societies are now under the sand. He warns us that this will be true of Montana and London in the near future if we do not look out. Torah is not religious mumbo jumbo, as secular rationalists imagine, but fundamental reflection on justice and survival, on what makes human flourishing possible. Torah is not the letter which kills but the Spirit which makes for life, the effervescence of the divine imagination in us.

What I want to do in this lecture is think about the implication of Torah, instruction, for our day, or to put it in the terms the church articulated, to think what it means to live within the pattern of life indicated by the divine Trinity in respect of the world we fashion, the built environment. I am trying to answer three questions:

- To ask how we will build a relationship with the Earth and with one another wisely, justly, and in ways which are sustainable and in balance with the web of life on the planet.

- To understand the interdependence of rural and urban, and

- To ask how our cities in their infrastructures, residential spaces, architectures, and overall economy of life need to change in order to meet this goal.

In each case I shall take my cue from Scripture, and I begin with a text from Leviticus, namely Leviticus 25.3:

Six years you shall sow your field but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land.

I read this as a command not to overexploit our resources to death. In *A Sand County Almanac,* Aldo Leopold traces the problems of his County back to over-wheating. Whole cultures, such as Ur and Sumer, disappeared for the same reason. Over-wheating is a metaphor for an irresponsible society which lives beyond its means. By contrast the Sabbath command is about learning practices of respect, what today we call living sustainably, or building resilience. What does it mean?

We all know that we are exceeding the earth's carrying capacity, living in bio-deficit. For every one to live like a Londoner we need three planets; like a citizen of Los Angeles, five planets; like a citizen of Dubai, ten planets. We have unsustainable buildings like the Sears tower in Chicago which uses more energy in 24 hours than an average American city of 150,000 or an Indian city of more than 1 million. We have a situation where New York City uses as much electrical energy as the whole continent of Africa. We know that the richest cities contribute most to worldwide environmental degradation because of their dependency on an unsustainable level of resource use. We know that the most fundamental resources, water and food, are limited. Our generation and the next two also face a unique set of problems. First, the world we have constructed and which has given us so much, is dependent on cheap energy, more specifically on oil. A growing body of independent oil experts and oil geologists have calculated that oil production either has peaked or is about to. They argue that technological advances in oil extraction and prospecting will have only a minor effect on depletion rates. Peak oil does not mean that the world is suddenly going to run out of oil as your car runs out of petrol if you do not fill it up. What it does mean is that we reach the point where cheap, easy to get oil is exhausted. When that happens then every successive year will see an ever-diminishing flow of oil, as well as an increasing risk of interruptions to supply.

Second, climate change. The biosphere is a cycle in which 'every plant yielding seed,' as Genesis puts it, transforms carbon dioxide, produces oxygen during photosynthesis, and in turn uses up oxygen and releases carbon dioxide. This cycle has been disrupted in the past two hundred years by colossal man-made discharges of carbon dioxide, as well as the other greenhouse gases. Currently we are adding six billion tons of carbon to the atmosphere each year. The result is a hotter planet. The impacts of global warming include desertification in various parts of the world, but especially in China where two-and-a-half thousand kilometres turns to desert each year. A report by the U.S. Snow and Ice Centre in Colorado in December 2008 notes that the Arctic ice is melting much sooner than anyone had predicted. The results of such changes are unpredictable. At worst whole ecosystems could unravel, something which is already beginning to happen in Alaska, where the Greenhouse effect is amplified by the positive feedback of sun on ice. There has been a rise of six degrees centigrade in wintertime temperatures there. A corresponding rise in the whole earth would mean the end of us.

'Barring manna from heaven,' writes Charles Landry, reflecting on these facts, 'it is safe to say that civilization will not survive in its present form. This is not to make an ideological point. There's just not enough planet to maintain culture as we now know it.' Ted Trainer of the University of New South Wales writes: 'There is a widespread assumption that a consumer-capitalist society, based on the determination to increase production, sales, trade investment, 'living standards,' and the GDP as fast as possible and indefinitely, can be run on renewable energy… But if this assumption is wrong, we are in for catastrophic problems in the very near future and we should be exploring radical social alternatives urgently.'

What then should we do? What is the meaning of the Sabbath commandment in relation to these facts? In the first place it is, as Herman Daly, now at Baltimore, has been arguing for more than thirty years, a move from a constant growth economy to a steady state economy. That in turn cannot happen without profound cultural and spiritual change, a change which, as he recognises, means prioritising the common good. A different economy means finding alternative energy sources in wind energy, wave energy, and solar. It means rethinking transport so that we are not dependent on the car because trains and buses are more or less ten times more efficient at moving people and freight than cars. All this I take from the Sabbath command. But how, specifically, does it apply to our cities? An answer given by the most hopeful development in the U.K. at the moment, the Transition Town movement, is to adopt an energy descent plan, similar to plans worked out by the Post Carbon Cities programme in this country in cities like Portland, Oregon, Denver, Colorado, and many others. The question posed is how people will feed themselves, and what kind of jobs they will do, beyond peak oil. It is not about going backwards – heading back to the 1880s, let's say, or even the 1780s. 'The idea of energy descent,' says Rob Hopkins, the initiator of the Transition Town movement, 'is that each step back down the hill could be a step towards sanity, towards place, and towards wholeness… Energy descent is, ultimately about energy ascent – the re-energising of communities and culture – and is the key to our realistically embracing the possibilities of our situation rather than being overwhelmed by their challenges.' The transition movement has gone viral because it is preeminently both practical and hopeful. It does not look for answers in technologies which may or may not materialise; it does not pin its faith in great leaders or politicians of any shade. It pins its faith on ordinary people – you and I. If I may say so, we in Britain, like people all over the world, are thrilled by your new President, but our solidarity and hope is in ordinary Americans. Here, if I am right, the transition town movement differs from the post carbon cities programme, which targets local authorities, or the Clinton Climate Initiative, a group made up of the world's forty largest cities. It differs, too from some forms of bioregionalism in that, although it shares many of its practical goals, and has common roots in permaculture, it does not insist in quite the same way on earth based spiritualities. Its primary appeal is to common sense which, Karl Barth always used to say, was the favourite gift of the Holy Spirit. The transition movement is not a Christian initiative, and I have no desire to colonise it, but I have to say that it is profoundly consonant with the Christian imagination which understands God to work always at the depths and amongst the small and insignificant and which, strangely, is always sceptical of Messiah complexes – that, I think, is the meaning of the so-called 'Messianic secret' in the gospels.

I want to turn now to a second text, Numbers 11.32, which has been key to my thinking about the built environment for many years. It is an ironic text which depicts Moses, in the wilderness, worn out by the task of management. He complains to God, who gently informs him that he does not have to do everything himself. Seventy elders are selected for training and undergo their course. When they have got their certificate they prove it by 'prophesying' – in other words, playing their full part in the leadership of the people. But to the scandal of the seventy who have got their certificates two people who have not undergone training also start to prophesy. 'Shut them up!' the elders say to Moses, but he replies: 'Would that all the Lord's people were prophets.' How many leaders does a city of a million need? Charles Landry asks. '1, 10, 100, 1,000, 10,000? Indeed 10,000 still represents only 1 per cent of the population. A city of a million should have a football stadium worth of leaders, as the good and successful city is made up of thousands of acts of tenacity, solidarity, and creativity.' Another way of putting this is to say that for our towns and cities to survive and flourish we need a reinvention of democracy, where people are empowered to be the agents of change. But this is exactly what happens in the Transition movement, where groups form around food, transport, energy, housing, health, but also heart and soul, exploring the moral, cultural and spiritual realities which make change possible, addressing the realities of consumer addiction, and looking for strategies to break the spell of hopelessness which the great challenges of climate change and peak oil often induce. The transition movement is not an anti-movement, but a pro movement, responding to challenges in faith and hope. So often we can think – the problem is that people are so stuck in materialism, so addicted to consumerism, so wedded to the pleasures of their holidays and cars and centrally heated homes. We are like Elijah: We say to God; 'Everyone is worshipping Baal and I, I alone am left.' (1 Kings 19.19) But for the transition town movement, like Jesus with the crowds in the New Testament, the ordinary person, with all their fears and prejudices, is not regarded as the problem but as the solution. There is faith in people's creativity, energy, and courage. Christianity has a very proper emphasis on human sin – on the pride which builds unsustainable structures; on the sloth which just lets it be; on the lies by which we deceive ourselves. But we forget too easily that, as Paul puts it, where sin abounded grace abounded more exceedingly (Rom 6.20). There is grace abounding. That is what Moses also saw in the story in Numbers. Grace is known in the extraordinary re-energising of community that transitioning brings. As groups work together to vision their future and to take steps towards it real democracy, perhaps we could call it Jeffersonian democracy, takes shape. Robert Bellah in *Habits of the Heart* and Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*, find the roots of our malaise in a lack of solidarity. Solidarity is one of the translations of the Hebrew word *hesed*, usually translated as faithfulness or loving kindness, and the most important root of the New Testament word *charis*, grace. For Landry it is the repetitive acts of kindness which form the texture and glue from which social capital grows, which are the nervous system of the lived city, which make a place enchanting, which put grace into our spaces. By contrast, he says, 'The internal logic of the unfettered market reveals a limited story of ambition and no ethics or morality. It has no view of the 'good life,' of social mixing, of mutual caring or nurturing the environment… Like a veil the market system shrouds our consciousness while plumping up desire and consumption. The market logic has a tendency to fragment groups into units of consumption and enclaves and, in so doing, to break up social solidarities.' He thinks we are on the verge of a major shift of paradigm, where the Enlightenment prioritisation of the individual and therefore of choice, is replaced once more by a more social vision where public goods are emphasised. Landry is a secular humanist, but from a Christian perspective what he is writing about is sin and grace. And here we come to another absolutely central Christian theme.

In the biblical view community is prior to the individual. We are the body of Christ and members of one body. Bellah recalls John Winthrop, in his sermon *A Model of Christian Charity* delivered in Salem harbour before landing in 1630: 'We must delight in each other, make others conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labour and suffer together, always having before our eyes our community as members of the same body.' How does that affect the built environment? Well, the successful regeneration of Barcelona was bound up with a perception that public space is the heart of the city and that 'citizenship is closely related to participation in the public space and rhythms of the city.' Precisely that perception lay behind the creation of Siena. 'Creating spaces of communication and gathering in order to foster conviviality and to stage performances was key, as was attempting to find an equilibrium between the natural and the built environment.'

Good cities cannot be driven by the logic of the market or rational utility maximizing. What makes a city good is, we discover once again, having the common good at their heart, not just in their welfare programmes, but in their transport, their urban design, the maintenance of their parks, their tree planting. Rob Hopkins is passionate about productive trees. Totnes, the first Transition town in Britain, has been planted out with fruit and nut trees, which are both beautiful but also a source of food in ten or twenty years time. I shall say something about the relation of town and country in a moment but let us not forget that every creative city is full of urban gardens. The governor of the Bank of England currently keeps bees on the roof of the bank in the very centre of the city. Until recently urban nurseries, vegetable plots, allotments, were part of the vital economy of city living and they need to become so once again.

So community is at the heart of a successful city. But community is not homogeneity. 'All who believed were of one heart and soul' we read in Acts 4.32, but we immediately go on to Ananias and Sapphira and then to the conflict over Stephen and then to the conflict over circumcision which needed the first church Council to sort it out. A healthy community is not frightened of difference of opinion, but is open to debate and contest and indeed thrives on it. The contest is about what options are or are not compatible with a vibrant city life, and indeed with planetary life. Church has always been about this sort of contest. A friend and mentor of mine, who held a Parish Meeting to discuss all matters of human concern every Wednesday in his church was once approached by someone who said of his church: 'Is this the place where you have arguments?' Well, yes it is. But not arguments for the sake of it, not a talking shop, but, as Karl Barth said of Romans, arguments about the very marrow of human civilization. Such arguments have to inform our urban design if we are once again to have beautiful cities, for, strange to say, meaning is key to beauty. The idea that form alone is sufficient is a nineteenth century myth.

I now turn to my second issue, which is the relation of town and country and I turn to Genesis 2.15: God put human beings in the garden to till and keep it.

The word 'garden' (gan) here is, of course, a metaphor for the whole earth but this vision of the earth is as a garden. We should not take from this some 'back to nature' ethic but at the same time we need to recognise that farming remains the foundation of all human culture.

Human beings were put into the garden to till and to keep it. The verb translated 'till' here is the verb 'abad,' one of the most important words in the Hebrew bible. It means to work or to serve. It is not only human beings who do this, but God as well. 'I have not made you serve,' says God in Isaiah, 'but you have made me serve with your sins.' (Is 43.23) The noun from it is *ebed*, servant, fundamental for the theology of second Isaiah and taken up by Jesus in Mark: The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10.43). Serving, in Scripture, is fundamental and farming, serving the earth, serving the whole human community, is likewise fundamental as an account of what it means to be human.

The verb 'to keep,' *shamar*, is likewise fundamental. It is the word invariably used for keeping God's commandments. It is the root of the word Cain uses in reply to the divine question: 'Am I my brother's keeper?' To keep in this sense likewise goes to the very heart of human identity. To be truly human is to keep my neighbour; it is to keep the commandments and thus to keep the gift, God's earth. Keeping the earth, in fact, is the practical application of keeping the commandments.

Since the Neolithic revolution most humans have been engaged in growing food, and this was true beyond the middle of the twentieth century. Only in the past fifty years has the balance tipped towards urbanization and industrialisation. Still, world wide, two and a half billion people work in agriculture, so it is still the world's largest single source of work and, in biblical perspective, the paradigm of all human work. This does not mean that I am despising the city. Town and country live in a necessary dialectic. The Hebrew word for city, 'ir', means 'a place of stir'. This may just be a way of characterising a busy market but I prefer to think of it as pointing to towns as the place where human creativity, both industrial, economic, political, and cultural takes flight. Historically, says Fernand Braudel, town and countryside 'obeyed the rule of 'reciprocity of perspectives': mutual creation, mutual domination, mutual exploitation according to the unchanging rules of co-existence... the towns urbanized their countryside, but the countryside 'ruralized' the towns too,' as urban fortunes were spent on land. This ought to be obvious but over the past forty years a hubristic perspective has been taken by many city theorists which has not acknowledged the dialectic. This needs to be redressed.

What is the significance of this for our towns and cities facing the related challenges of climate change and peak oil? The transition movement looks to identify not simply watersheds, like bioregionalism, but foodsheds: self reliant, locally or regionally based food systems which can feed their urban communities. So far only medium sized cities, like Bristol of 400,000, and Nottingham, of 280,000 have become transition towns – identifying where their food will come from after peak oil. But how about Transition New York? Why not? Two years ago I spent some time in upstate New York and was shocked at how depressed farming was. Transition New York, in vibrant relationship with its rural hinterland, could mean the social and ecological regeneration of the whole region. Rather than a globalised world we need to prioritise local food systems, local investment models, and local work. Wendell Berry makes essentially the same proposal. 'The only sustainable city', he says, 'is a city in balance with its countryside: a city that would live off the net ecological income, of its supporting region, paying as it goes all its ecological and human debts.' That of course at once brings us into conflict with the present model, because WTO rules precisely prevent you from doing that. So as Daly insists, a reimagining of the economy is called for.

In Leviticus, at the end of the instructions for the Jubilee Year, we find a prohibition of idolatry. The rejection of other gods, says Ton Veerkamp, is 'not an expression of religious intolerance but of the practical irreconcilability of conditions in a society that tries to follow the orders of the sabbath and redemption in the context of the property accumulation typical of the ancient Near East.' The same irreconcilability exists today between the ruling discourse which wants constant growth, and the discourse which understands justice as inter-generational.

Jesus re-frames the economic teaching of the Hebrew bible, alluding to the choice between 'two ways' in Deuteronomy, in terms of the choice between God and Mammon. This means a choice 'between a society based on never-ending profit making and a society based on equal sharing so that nobody needs to be anxious about his life.' No one can serve two masters… You cannot serve God and Mammon'(Matthew 6.24). Like the authors of Deuteronomy and of Leviticus he anticipates an economy of sharing: his whole way of life is opposed to the laws of the market. That is the meaning of the story of the sharing of bread and fishes in Mark 6. Sharing means freedom based on equality. This is lived out in the early community where Luke tells us there 'was not a needy person among them'(Acts 4.32), thus fulfilling Deuteronomy 15. Ulrich Duchrow comments beautifully: 'In this way Jesus came alive among them, not by virtue of their using their property as their own, to maximize personal profit and accumulate property, but by the community living together in such a way that there was no hardship among them. Jesus' resurrection means – economically speaking – life in community without need.' Something like this alternative is what justice means in the sphere of capital, an alternative imagination which calls into being an alternative society. Just so did Paul imagine ecclesia as the seed bed of a new humanity, a society where the justice of Torah was taken seriously and worked out. For him it was a question of a world made new through reconciled relationships. What this means, of course, is that to let justice roll down as waters we need to take ecclesia seriously, and to let the understanding of community, and of what is absolute, learned there, infect our economic, and indeed all our other understanding.

I turn now to my third question: How do our cities in their infrastructures, residential spaces, architectures, and overall economy of life need to change in order to meet the goals of resilience. In this respect I turn to another text from Leviticus, 23.39: 'On the first day (of the fiftieth day of the seventh month) you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God.'

I gloss this verse with the word of William Morris, who said, 'Have nothing in your house but what is beautiful and useful.' Note that Morris does not prescribe what is beautiful or useful – you can decide that. But the beautiful is not an add-on to justice: it is part and parcel of it. The divine Trinity, the Christian tradition teaches us, is the source of all beauty. God is beautiful, God creates beauty and God calls us to beauty. Earlier cultures knew this. The sense of beauty 'used to be so strong that pre-industrial common people could not make a spoon, a cart, a boat, even a house look ugly. To do so would have been a crime against themselves' says Christopher Day. The beauty of ordinary things, he recognises, came from the lived experience of grace:

Everything, from reaping the corn to blessing the meal or carving a chair, was an action giving thanks for God's creation, an artistically satisfying activity. All they made and did was essentially functional: there was no time, energy, or space to make anything without a practical purpose; beauty and utility were inseparable. Today we find the reverse. Beauty and utility are widely regarded as separate streams: we all need utility, but beauty is considered to be an indulgence, peripheral to our main concerns in life.

That is a mistake. Human life cannot flourish, cannot embody shalom, without beauty. Whether your home is a trailer or an antebellum house, a log cabin or Monticello, beauty and simplicity will be a mark of your living according to Torah, in obedience to the God who calls order out of chaos. Similarly the prohibition against sowing a field with two kinds of seeds, or wearing a garment of two kinds of materials in Leviticus 19.19 is about a particular kind of integrity. So Christopher Day argues that polyurethane coated wood feels hard, smooth, and cold and does not breathe. It looks like wood but it is a lie and is bad food for the human spirit. 'If you want to bring children up to be honest it is not going to help if their environment is full of lies.' Harmony, or integrity, in our surroundings, Day argues, is no mere luxury. Our surroundings are the framework which subtly confine, organize, and colour our daily lives. Harmonious surroundings provide support for outer social and inner personal harmony. What applies to our homes applies equally to our cities. 'Cities,' says Landry, 'need to be emotionally and psychologically sustaining, and issues like the quality and design of the built environment, the quality of connections between people and the organizational capacity of urban stakeholders become crucial, as do issues of spatial segregation in cities and poverty.' 'The net effect of beautiful, well designed, high quality physical environments is that they feel restorative, more care is taken of them, feelings of stress and fear of crime is reduced, and social mixing increases, as does hope, motivation and confidence in the future and thus well being… By contrast, ugly environments increase crime and fear of crime and lead to stress, vandalism, untidiness, feelings of depression, isolation, loneliness, worthlessness, a lack of aspiration, and a drained will. The consequence is a self-reinforcing negative cycle, the likelihood of less employment, reduced social capital, and less social bonding…' What is crucial to re-learn is the lesson of Siena, that the design of such places is not up to the experts we call planners or architects, but that our planners and architects are servants of the common good. For this to happen, in Britain and I suspect in the U.S. as well, a whole new approach to property is needed. In Siena no person, no matter how wealthy, how prestigious, how powerful, could say: this piece of land is mine, I can build what I like. What was built was subordinate to the common good. Great palaces line the Campo, as great skyscrapers line our city streets and squares, but none was allowed to overtop the Palazzo Publico, which symbolized the common good. 'Ancient planners put all their talent into the building of the communal nucleus – inns, churches, city halls,' says Victor Papanek. 'The rest of the settlement followed by itself. Modern designers are forever concentrating on the rest of the city. But without an organic centre nothing can be held together'.

The decision as to what constitutes the common good is the stuff of democracy: we argue for it, passionately. We contest the shape of the future. In that argument we bring our convictions, our faith and hope to the table. Then as now there are many accounts of faith and hope, because then as now there were gods many and lords many. As Christians we bring imaginations fired by our stories, our Scriptures, our understanding of the Triune God, calling for a more just, egalitarian

and more beautiful world, fashioned in the divine image as we ourselves are. As Joel prophesied, we dream dreams and have visions. We dream of a world which is not enslaved to consumerism; of a world where the image of God is respected in the economy; of a world where common meanings are written in to our townscapes and homes; of a world where the production of food is taken from the corporations and restored to the community; of a world where the boredom of mass production is unknown; of a world where the giftedness of all reality is respected and where we humans do not pretend they are 'masters and possessors of nature' but live in harmony with it. These dreams are the substance of our ethics. They are not empty dreams, but like the dream of Martin Luther King they can be realised, become flesh in our cities and communities. These dreams are our road map into the future. They are what we bring to the table in our conversation with our fellow citizens as to the direction in which we should all be moving. They are our contribution to the creative future God intends for God's world.

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