

## **The Theological Spatial Turn on Built Environment: A Case Study on the "Hong Kong 2030+"**

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### **I. The Spatial Turn in Theology**

This paper will first walk through the spatial turn in theology in the past decades, starting from the relational view of place on earth with God and human beings; to a theology of built environment grounded on the divine spatiality of the Triune God in relation to human beings on earth; to the planning and development of built environment as a religious process in experiencing God on earth; and finally to the spirituality of cities.

### **II. A Relational View of Place**

We start the journey with John Inge's relational view of place which, I consider, could orientate us, as a Christian faith community,

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in the right direction for understanding the intrinsic nature of built environment from the theological perspective. John Inge's approach is Biblical by focusing first on the Old Testament narrative of the dynamic interactions of the Jewish people with God in a land, that is, in John Inge's words, essentially it is a "story of God's people with God's land" in the context of a three-way integrated relationship of God, His created land and human beings "bound in covenantal love."<sup>2</sup> Place as revealed in the Old Testament narrative is the spatial dimension whereas human beings could receive and response to God's revelation of which is a primary Old Testament faith.<sup>3</sup>

John Inge's continues his Biblical approach pointing out that the incarnation of Jesus in the New Testament narrative implies that "space has been "Christified" by the incarnation whereas "places are the seat of relations or the place of meeting and activity in the interaction between God and the world" as well as "a fundamental category of human and spiritual experience." The spatial locus for such a dynamic relationship with God has been extended to all space and is no longer confined to the Holy land and Temple.<sup>4</sup> The Old Testament faith of integrated relationship among God, land and human beings is reaffirmed in the New Testament narrative:

...places are the seat of relations between God and the world. God relates to people in places and the places are not irrelevant to that relationship but they are vital, on this account, as the seat of divine human encounter. The same holds true, as we might expect, for the relations of people to one another in places. This is a conclusion that follows directly from the incarnation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Durham E-Theses Online: <<http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1235/>>, Durham University, 2001), 85-86.

<sup>3</sup> Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 104.

<sup>4</sup> Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 94-95.

<sup>5</sup> Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 103-4.

Such a Biblical concept of relational view of place is a leap forward from the convention wisdom of the relationship among God, human beings and the land, largely focusing on the managerial role of human beings in up-keeping the gifted land and resources from God for a flourishing life. This 3-way relationship gives equal importance to the intrinsic dynamic relationships among God, human beings and place, including with no less importance, the "internal" coherent relationships among human beings at the community level in the image of Triune God. John Inge stresses that places are the spatial dimension for human's sacramental encounter with God on earth and are God's theatre for activities. Human beings inhabit in the built environment as a "community-in-place" in order to ensure a transformation process leading to a God-centered world.<sup>6</sup>

Following his theoretical exposition of the relational view of place, John Inge suggests that there is a need for concerted actions from the Christian faith community including the church "to live out a witness in the service of God and humanity." Accordingly, John Inge's painstakingly points to some practical ways for accomplishing his vision of a God-centered world largely by focusing on enriching humanity in built environment through community building, strengthening neighborliness, maintaining place identity and cultural continuity as well as venturing into community economy growth model.<sup>7</sup> His concept could be summed up in his own words that "a proper Biblical attitude to place will entail acknowledging that a relational view of it, which is inextricably bound up with both God and humanity, is essential" as follows:<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 224-25.

<sup>7</sup> Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 217-28. Among others, John Inge makes reference to the "community economy" concept as one possible new direction in working against the prevailing global economic growth model which brings with adverse environmental and ecological impacts. This implicitly sheds light on the alternative paradigm for community development which particularly warrants further examination.

<sup>8</sup> Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 85-86. This is slightly modified from the diagrammatical representation by John Inge highlighting his concept of community-in-place.

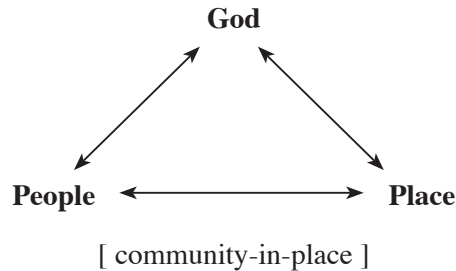


Fig 1: A 3-way Triangular Relationship of God, Land & Human Beings

### **III. A Triune Divine Spatiality Theology of Built Environment**

The journey now comes to one important milestone, that is, T.J. Gorringer's theology of built environment which is anchored in Karl Barth's divine spatiality concept. Karl Barth rides out the crosswinds of the then widely accepted Christian doctrine that God is a-spatial and eternal, while His creation including human beings is spatial and temporal bound. Instead, Barth disparately postulates that the Triune God is spatial and indeed has His own space. T.J. Gorringer has highlighted that "Barth's account of the divine spatiality is explicitly Trinitarian" and the origin of all space is originated from this Trinitarian relations<sup>9</sup>:

...Barth has understood omnipresence primarily through relationality, not through God's creative and sustaining power. As triune, God possesses space. God in turn gifts space and time to us. Space is the form of creation in virtue of which, as a reality distinct from God, it can be the object of God's love.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> T. J. Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 43.

<sup>10</sup> Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment*, 43.

So the Triune God is no longer "to be understood simply as the negative of our experience of space and time."<sup>11</sup> While John Inge has drawn our attention not to lost sight of the 3-way relational view of place with human beings and God, T.J. Gorringer, as will be demonstrated below, postulates that the divine spatiality of the Triune God would naturally lead us to a theological reflection of our human experience in our space, that is, human spatiality, in the context of God's dynamic engagement with human beings in creation, incarnation and redemption in space and time.

Before we could further deliberate and fully appreciate T.J. Gorringer's theology of built environment, it is deemed a necessity to bring in Elizabeth J. Callender's theology of spatiality of the Trinune God at this juncture which, I conceive, could bridge up the missing link between divine spatiality and human spatiality on earth in Gorringer's theology of built environment. In this connection, Elizabeth J. Callender's exposition of the divine spatiality in the theology of Karl Barth has particularly addressed how the spatiality of human beings is encompassed by the divine spatiality, that is, how the spatiality of human beings is related to and be enlightened by God's intrinsic divine spatiality. Elizabeth J. Callender has demonstrated that the Triune God's spatiality exists relationally in His three distinct modes of being, that is, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (God's "inward" distance). God's spatiality "entails mutual presence in ordered relation and distinction" to human beings too. Thus, the creative spatiality of God the Father, the reconciling spatiality of God the Son and the redeeming spatiality of God the Holy Spirit respectively presents to human beings "through His concrete acts of creation, reconciliation and redemption" (God's "outward" distance). God through His grace present Himself in the spatiality of human beings which is given and blessed as all space is originated from the Trinitarian spatial relations. This spatiality on earth including built environment should therefore be "a function of the creature's creation in God's image" in the sense that it is "a condition

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<sup>11</sup> Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment*, 47.

of the creature's readiness to be encountered by God," to be "enabled by the Spirit" as well as with no less importance, to respond to God's revelation on earth. In gist, Elizabeth J. Callender's exposition has implicitly highlighted that a flourishing spatial experience of human beings on earth including in built environment should not be an entirely physical experience, but a spiritual experience imbued with the presence of God, recognizing His ultimate sovereignty of the human space and built environment as well as His grace for substantiating a continuous flourishing human spatial experience.<sup>12</sup>

With the benefits of Elizabeth J. Callender's exposition of the relationship of divine spatiality and human spatiality, we would be in a better position to appreciate T.J. Gorringer's theology of built environment. T.J. Gorringer is more assertive and explicit in suggesting that the planning and development of built environment imbued with ethical values in the image of God is a necessary condition leading to a flourishing human spatial experience. He conceives that God the Creator who creates space and brings order out of chaos is the origin of all constructive planning for a sustainable and livable built environment. God the Reconciler Jesus Christ, through his incarnation, brings peace and justice on earth such that reconciliation against alienation and domination should be properly pursued and reflected in the built environment of human beings, thus ultimately leading to a nourishing life giving community in the spiritual sense. And God the Redeemer, the Holy Spirit who is the incubator and facilitator of human visions and creativity is the inspirer of planning visions striving for a more sustainable and livable built environment.<sup>13</sup> He painstakingly argues that the ultimate focus and concerns of the built environment from the Christian perspective are therefore not purely

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<sup>12</sup> E. J. Callender, *A Theology of Spatiality: The Divine Perfection on Omnipresence in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Doctor of Philosophy Thesis, University of Otago, 2011), ii and 241-44.

<sup>13</sup> Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment*, 48-49 and T. J. Gorringer, "Salvation by Bricks: Theological Reflections on the Planning Process," *International Journal of Public Theology* 2 (2008): 101.

technical solutions in meeting human's physical needs effectively and conveniently, but also ethical values in nourishing spiritual needs of human beings. In this context, Gorringer advocates that sustainability, inclusiveness, justice, empowerment, situatedness, diversity and enchantedness are those obvious values that warrant adequately and properly expressed in the built environment for a flourishing human spatial experience, leading us to what he terms "towards Jerusalem."<sup>14</sup> Gorringer concludes this theologically inspired vision on our future built environment by saying:

Imagination, order and justice are, then, the keywords of a Trinitarian theology of space and the built environment in which the relational event which grounds all reality, God, seeks correspondence.<sup>15</sup>

Gorringer has further supplemented that the realization of the order planning of God the Creator is in material the perusal of and the expression of common good for human beings in the built environment. Given that human beings are constituted by relationships, the idea of common good is recognition of the necessary interdependence of human beings and the shared values good for all to be pursued in common. And the development of built environment conducive to the structuring of life-giving and human flourishing communities for the accomplishment of common good is the primary concern of God the Reconciler. Nevertheless, Gorringer does not lost sight of our complex world and highlighting that the identification and consensus building of common good in today's complex and diversified communities of a wide range of cultural, economic and political beliefs would be difficult, if not impossible. Thus Gorringer expediently suggests the identification and consensus endorsement of the "common bads" that would have adverse impacts on everyone could be an expedite and easier achievable solution to gear up a society

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<sup>14</sup> Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment*, 241-61.

<sup>15</sup> Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment*, 49.

moving towards the common good, that is, by avoiding the obvious ills of a society such as environmental impacts, traffic chaos etc.<sup>16</sup>

Citing the world population explosion, climate change and world resource depletion as examples of imminent global emergency challenges, Gorringer advocates for a critical reflection of our conventional economic growth paradigm, which largely assumes an unlimited thirst for consumption; values individual preference and personal achievements; is comfortable with unlimited inequality; and even is indifference to differences in rewards. The human greed is the root of maximizing economic gains and unavoidably has created undue pressure on our ecosystem, in which we are "collectively get trapped in life-denying form of behavior" and is against the perusal of the common good. An alternative paradigm of economic growth which recognizes resource limitations and ecological impacts as well as promotes limited inequality and shared values in the planning and development process of our built environment is necessary. This demands, Gorringer emphasizes, a fundamental change in human mindset, "a change so deep that is essentially religious whether we call it that or not." It is indeed a return to God who is the ground of all beings for identification of the true nature of the common good, rather than mistaking to the power or the market as the common good.<sup>17</sup>

Incidentally Pope Francis echoes Gorringer's views in his Encyclical Letter on Care for our Common Home. Pope Francis, citing Patriarch Bartholomew, points to us the ethical and spiritual roots of our global environmental challenges which require not only technical solutions, but also demands a change of humanity. There is a need "to replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing," as well as "eliminating the structural causes of

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<sup>16</sup> T. J. Gorringer, *The Common Good and the Global Emergency: God and the Built Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 16-17 and 24-26. As an illustration, the common good covers all values articulated by the UN declaration of human rights including housing, food, health, education, work etc.

<sup>17</sup> Gorringer, *The Common Good and the Global Emergency*, 21-39.



the dysfunctions of the world economy and correcting modes of growth which have proved incapable of ensuing respect for the environment." The economic growth conducive to flourishing human communities must be accompanied by authentic social and moral progress; otherwise it will simply turn against human beings.<sup>18</sup>

T. J. Gorringer's theology of the built environment is essentially theologically informed ethnics of planning, providing alternative visions and values desperately needed for a critical reflection, review and new direction of the planning and development process of the built environment. Given that the planning and development process of built environment is values driven, Gorringer considers Christian doctrines, including theology, which implies values has a role to play in such planning and development process, or in Gorringer words, a genuine "salvation by bricks" facing the global emergency environmental challenges.<sup>19</sup> Gorringer stresses that the ethics for building our built environment "rest on the fact that God is spatial in Godself"; and the values for the redemption and reconciliation of our built environment must be emerged from an understanding of the God's Trinitarian divine spatiality:<sup>20</sup>

...The values that we seek in the built environment emerge from this understanding of God; in the light of them we both evaluate what has been done and envision what we want to do further.<sup>21</sup>

Gorringer's renewed theology of grace in the context of built environment further proclaims that God's gifted created space to human beings calls forth their gratitude in return, in the sense that their response to God's grace should be reflected in "finding gracious and grateful ways of

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<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter : *Praise be to You: On Care of Our Common Home* (24 May 2015), <[http://m.vatican.va/content/francescomobile/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://m.vatican.va/content/francescomobile/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)>, paragraphs 4, 6 & 9 (accessed October 1, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> T. J. Gorringer, "Salvation by Bricks: Theological Reflections on the Planning Process," *International Journal of Public Theology* 2 (2008): 98-118.

<sup>20</sup> Gorringer, "Salvation by Bricks," 100-101.

<sup>21</sup> Gorringer, "Salvation by Bricks," 101.

living" in the built environment, almost the genuine way to "salvation by bricks." This demands not only human beings' repentance in spiritual sense but also concrete actions in developing our built environment which is conducive to a life-wide positive change in mind and body for the "truly sustainable ways of living." Gorringer is also pragmatic and optimistic in this process of genuine "salvation by bricks." The patterns of truly sustainable ways of living are attainable, he conceives; and are intrinsically the lowest common denominator of the common good. The built environment is the spatial dimension for a holistic change of all aspects of human life probably beginning from the economy to the culture.<sup>22</sup>

Similar to John Inge, Gorringer recognizes well that his theologically informed ethnics of planning must be applicable in the reality in order to achieve its ultimate vision of genuine "salvation by bricks." Gorringer has therefore attempted to apply the theme of grace in planning and development of the built environment focusing on practical land use planning issues (including public space, settlements, transport, housing etc.) as well as on the intrinsic nature planning process and architecture. He has highlighted the five necessary hallmarks of a gracious planning process including firstly, promoting the development of poetic and symbolic environment in meeting human's aspirations (say in terms of cultural and historical identity) rather than a purely efficient and organized sterile environment; secondly, facilitating justice in the process ensuing "richness and beauty of the whole" probably through participation and consensus building; thirdly, respect human scale in the sense of resilient to nature and livable in today's planning terms; fourthly, giving high regard to sustainability considerations (such as adherence to the precautionary planning guidelines of presumption against development); and lastly, enhancing community building to echo with the ultimate vision of the gospel.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Gorringer, *The Common Good and the Global Emergency*, 287-90.

<sup>23</sup> Gorringer, *The Common Good and the Global Emergency*, 120-25.

In this admirable attempt, Gorringe had opened up a new direction stressing the importance in exploring the effective means and ways to execute the visions and concepts as expounded in the theological spatial turn in reality, taking account of the contents, mechanisms and rationale of prevailing planning and development process in actual built environment.

#### **IV. Built Environment "as" Theology and Theology "in" Built Environment**

Our journey could not be a complete one without visiting another milestone made by Sigurd Bergman. Sigurd Bergman also fully recognizes the dynamic relationship of the environment with God. He conceives that the planning and development of our built environment should be grounded "on a fourfold love: of the environment, of neighbour, of God, and of oneself," respecting at heart the human's instinct of "making oneself at home" in this urbanization process. He has particularly demonstrated the importance of the place-making process in cultivating and maintaining place identity having regard to the historical and cultural context in the planning and development process in order to satisfy this human instinct of "making oneself at home." While Sigurd Bergman complements theologians' efforts in working out specific theologies of the built environment like T.J. Gorringe's theology "of" built environment in the deliberation of God's presence in the built environment, he has also enlightened us the two other separate ways of understanding the built environment from the theological perspective: firstly, the built environment be regarded "as" theology; secondly, doing theology "in" the built environment.

The former approach of interpreting built environment "as" theology would make no distinguish between theology and the context as well as between God and the world. Given that the incarnation of God on earth spatially and temporally, the nature and built environment are essentially a part of God's being and acting on earth. The built

environment is a genuine "locus theologicus" to be perceived and understood as a space, both spatially and temporally, where God acts and is experienced.<sup>24</sup> Thus,

God acts and is experienced, not only in time and history, but also in space and on Earth. Buildings, whether they represent sacred or so-called non-sacred architecture, could then be interpreted as revelations and as "vestigial Dei," as God's built traces in creation.<sup>25</sup>

The latter approach doing theology "in" the built environment aims at arriving "discursive interpretations of the God of Here and Now within the built environments." Such human beings' created space in the built environment, both sacred and non-sacred space, should be treated as the vehicle of doing theology in the built environment by planners, architects and development-related practitioners in searching for a sustainable, just and livable built environment for human flourishing.<sup>26</sup>

No matter which of the above two approaches one follows, Sigurd Bergman considers that the ultimate mission is a commitment to strive for a sustainable and livable built environment for human flourishing. There should be no distinction of sacred or non-sacred space in built environment as they serve as an integrated whole of a built environment conducive to human flourishing. Therefore urbanization and its dynamic should be understood as a religious process and the planning and development of the built environment by development-related practitioners are to some extent religious activities that warrants the study from the theological perspective to experience and discovery the "God of the Here and now."<sup>27</sup> This escalation of the inherent nature of planning and development of built environment to the level of a

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<sup>24</sup> Sigurd Bergmann, "God's Here and Now in Built Environments: Introductory Remarks on Architecture as Theology," in *Theology in Built Environments – Exploring Religion, Architecture and Design* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction, 2009), 12.

<sup>25</sup> Bergmann, "God's Here and Now in Built Environments," 10.

<sup>26</sup> Bergmann, "God's Here and Now in Built Environments," 12-14.

<sup>27</sup> Bergmann, "God's Here and Now in Built Environments," 12-14.

religious process bears similarity to T.J. Gorringer's interpretation of the same process as a never completed process of "building Jerusalem, the city of justice, peace and beauty" on earth.<sup>28</sup>

### V. A Vision Inspired by God

Philip Shelldrake is even more explicit in stating that "cities have a vital role in shaping the human spirit for good or ill" and "our understanding of what enhances the human spirit shapes the environments we build" too.<sup>29</sup> He proclaims that "the meaning and future of cities globally is one of the most critical spiritual as well as economic and social issues of our age" so that "it is vital to construct some kind of compelling and spiritual vision for cities – both as social communities and as built environment."<sup>30</sup> He promotes that our future cities should be conducive to spiritual enhancement imbued with an integrated urban vision of "extended sacramentality" and "balanced eschatology" in the planning and development of our built environment, emphasizing those urban virtues need to be nurtured in our built environment like hospitalities, solidarity, frugality and mutuality among communities in a city so as to reflect rightly the "inner life of God-as-Trinity – the mutual exchange within God in whose image humanity is created."<sup>31</sup> The "extended sacramentality" concept recognizes well the potential of God's presence in and His transformative and redemptive power of our built environment, thus seeing the joy and hope of communion with God and if denied of such potential, understanding our experience in the built environment is doomed to be "a narrative of

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<sup>28</sup> Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment*, 19. He has cited Numbers 11:29 - "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets" as the superscription for his book on a theology of built environment.

<sup>29</sup> Philip Shelldrake, *The Spiritual City: Theology, Spirituality and the Urban* (Oxford/Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 3.

<sup>30</sup> Shelldrake, *The Spiritual City*, 195-96.

<sup>31</sup> Shelldrake, *The Spiritual City*, 180.

emptiness and meaningless" given the inherent human limitations and finitude in city space. The concept of "balanced eschatology," on the other hand, accepts the perpetual human need to counter the "prevailing failure of humanity" in the spirit of God.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed T.J. Gorringer is not hesitating at all to comment on the hubristic attempt of modern urban planning and urban social theories which heartily believe in human autonomy, rationality, perfectibility and concerted efforts in achieving a genuine human flourishing built environment.<sup>33</sup>

Cities represent the hubristic attempt to build an ideal place for full human development, equilibrium and virtue, the attempt to construct what God wants to construct, and to put humankind in the centre, in God's place.<sup>34</sup>

Elaine Graham has rightly highlighted that Gorringer's theology of environment is influenced by the social theorist Henri Lefebvre, yet Gorringer "would not be convinced by Lefebvre's manifesto's dependence upon a model of human self-actualization."<sup>35</sup> This boils down to one fundamental and significant attribute all along embedded in the theological spatial turn stressing the importance and necessity of recognizing and maintaining a relationship of the built environment with the Triune God as a prerequisite for advancing a genuine human flourishing environment, though in different tones and emphasis. As

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<sup>32</sup> Sheldrake, *The Spiritual City*, 201-209.

<sup>33</sup> Elaine Graham, "On Finding Ourselves: Theology, Place and Human Flourishing," in *Theology and Human Flourishing: Essays in Honor of Timothy J. Gorringer*, ed. Mike Higton, Jeremy Law and Christopher Rolland (Eugene, OR: Casade Books/ Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011), 272.

<sup>34</sup> Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment*, 19.

<sup>35</sup> The above mentioned theological spatial turn in the past decades is not an isolated academic exploration in religious study but is on par with and is influenced by the spatial turn in social theories. While this is not within the scope of this paper to elaborate on this dynamic academic interactions, readers could refer to Elaine Graham, "On Finding Ourselves: Theology, Place and Human Flourishing," in *Theology and Human Flourishing*, 266 and Elaine Graham and Stephen Lowe, *What Makes a Good City? Public Theology and the Urban Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2009), 49-66. See also Peter Saunders, *Social Theology and the Urban Question* (London: Hutchinson, 1984).

already demonstrated in this paper, John Inge's Biblical approach draws our attention to the relational view of community-in-place and God; and Gorringer's theology of grace in built environment to the relationship of the divine spatiality of the Triune God with human spatiality on earth; Sigurd Bergman's religious process of built environment to experience and discovery God of the Here and Now in the context of a fourfold love relationship of the environment, of neighbour, of God, and of human beings; and Philip Shelldrake's urban virtues to reflect rightly the images of God-as-Trinity securing His transformative and redemptive power of our built environment. The shared belief behind is certainly a no confidence vote on human beings' "limitations and finitude" as well as a heartily invitation of God's presence in and His transformative and redemptive power of our built environment from the theological perspective. Philip Shelldrake's advocacy of the spiritual city is indeed an ultimate call from this theological spatial turn for the need of the divine paradigm in the planning and development of our future built environment.

Nestor O. Miguez's theology of urban space evolved from his experience in the Latin American context leads us to a more in depth understanding and justification on the need of this divine paradigm in planning and development of our future cities, and with no less importance in what ways. Perhaps given the Latin American social-political context, it is understandable that Miguez condemns human beings' inherent spiritual corruption both at individual human level and the prevailing world system as a whole, in terms of their praising economic greed as the primary virtue and applying it as the growth engine of all human activities. This human spiritual corruption for maximizing individual economic benefits has naturally become the primary driving force in shaping the present corrupted and unjust world political-economic order which in turn has to a great extent shaped our built environment largely geared towards technically effective and efficient for economic gains. In such a way, other life-enhancing aspects necessary, but of lesser or little economic returns, for a genuine flourishing human experience in built environment are at high risk of

being given lower priority consideration or even be ignored. The quest for economic benefits has largely become an end for all human activities instead of other life enhancing objectives. Based on his inspiring interpretation of Rom. 8:18-22, Miguez suggests that this bondage to corruption of human beings and the world is inherently a deviation from the creation and intention of God. This naturally has caused that "things are not what they were created to be" and have become "vanity, futility." Under this circumstance, the built environment of a city is planned and adapted for the market production aiming at maximizing economic gains which in turn shapes the lives and built environment of its inhabitants entirely not in line with the creation and intention of God, thus could never be a conducive human flourishing environment for advancing the spiritual needs of human beings.<sup>36</sup>

Yet Nestor O. Miguez recognizes that human beings are entitled to exercise their freedom to act or not in their activities including building their own built environment according to their inherent human nature, learned knowledge and instinct desire venturing into the future as they have predicted or unpredicted, good or bad. And God is however not demanding every correct step in the way forward of human history from human beings, but is always prepared to give multiple ways of "giving love responses and renewing creative relationship amid the changing scenarios caused by our activity, and that of the whole creation." It also follows that "God does not act out a preconceived plan, but maintains a dialogue with humanity that takes into account the diversity of situations and human responses:"<sup>37</sup>

That is why it is necessary to think that in the divine paradigm, the whole task of planning must maintain a momentum of dialogue and openness, with persons, peoples, and cultures (forms of family, habitus, class issues and sectors, and so on), but also with the built and natural environment. God's action in history takes into account human planning

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<sup>36</sup> Nestor O. Miguez, "A Theology of the Urban Space," *Anglican Theological Review* 91 no. 4 (Fall 2019): 571-72.

<sup>37</sup> Miguez, "A Theology of the Urban Space," 564-65.



and expectations, but also the unplanned events that produce unexpected results. Through history, God hears humans' answers, sees our activity, discerns our goals, and takes them seriously. But not only that: through the prophets, through the visions of the faith community, through unannounced happenings and promised fulfillments, through the action of the people or the claims of the weak, God also takes the initiative, proposes alternatives, invites new involvement of human beings in our own salvation. That is the way of grace, a grace that does not depend on human agency, but neither disallows human synergy.<sup>38</sup>

So as Christian faith community, Miguez concludes that we are tasked to act in faith along with God under "a vision inspired by God" and be guided by our commitment to life flourishing environment that is conducive to the hope and love that could be guaranteed by the "promised reign of God." While Miguez identifies the inherent human corruption as the root of the our corrupted built environment that demands God's transformative power for a change in the right way;<sup>39</sup> Gorringe calls for a fundamental change in human mindset so deep that is indeed a return to God who is the ground of all beings for identification of the true nature of the common good, rather than mistaking to the power or the market.<sup>40</sup>

In a nutshell, the theological spatial turn in the past decades is largely calling for a return to "a vision inspired by God." The practical implication is indeed a call for a paradigm shift in pursuing what is a human flourishing spiritual city in urban planning and social theories. Sigurd Bergman has explicitly stated that such a theological approach bears the ultimate aim to challenge "the broad and interdisciplinary

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<sup>38</sup> Miguez, "A Theology of the Urban Space," 565.

<sup>39</sup> Miguez, "A Theology of the Urban Space," 577-79 and 564-65. Nestor O. Miguez stresses the importance of human beings in maintaining a constant dialogue with God and nature in the planning and development of their built environment – the paradigm shift from the plan of salvation to the dialogue of salvation.

<sup>40</sup> Gorringe, "Salvation by Bricks," 101 and Gorringe, *The Common Good and the Global Emergency*, 34.

field of urban studies to reflect more deeply on the human dimensions of its practice and theory."<sup>41</sup> This challenge, together with Gorringe, is indeed the same prophetic voice for commitment and actions for the Christian faith community to participate in enhancing humanity in our contemporary built environment:

The challenge is far greater: reflecting on theological criteria for built environment implies at the same time a commitment to contributing to an environment that is worth living in for all human and other beings. A theological aesthetics of architecture always implies also an ethics of a just and sustainable environment for all to live in.<sup>42</sup>

With the benefits of such a review, Sigurd Bergman claims that we could then hopefully be enlightened with new insights to develop "new perspectives on what spiritualities, religion and the elaboration of Christian images of God" for planning and development of our future life enhancing built environment.<sup>43</sup>

The theological spatial turn is more than just inspiring theoretical reflections of Christian faith seekers, they are action-oriented with passion and enthusiasm for bring a positive change to our built environment. As have been demonstrated in above survey of the theological spatial turn, they all have proclaimed the need of a genuine human flourishing built environment upon their theological reflection of the prevailing planning and development process of our built environment, and with no less importance, often come up with alternative visions and strategies for an alternative and better human flourishing built environment from the perspectives of Christian faith community. Gorringe even puts the burden of achieving the genuine "salvation by bricks" on earth on the Christian faith community.

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<sup>41</sup> Sigurd Bergmann, "Making Oneself at Home in Environments of Urban Amnesia: Religion and Theology in City Space," *International Journal of Public Theology* 2 (2008): 70-72.

<sup>42</sup> Bergmann, "God's Here and Now in Built Environments," 14.

<sup>43</sup> Bergmann, "God's Here and Now in Built Environments," 13.

Almost as a prophetic voice in the contemporary world, Gorringer advocates that we, as a Christian faith community, has a "critical ethical duty" and are in the best position to lead and be involved in the planning process for the planning, development and evaluation of built environment to advance Christian values that we cherish for human flourishing and life-giving in God's grace.<sup>44</sup> In this connection, he certainly has made a loud and clear prophetic call in modern Christian ethics, thus breaking "the strange silence on the built environment in the Church."<sup>45</sup>

## VI. Spirituality in Urban Planning

This advocacy for an alternative life-enhancing spiritual city is not a lone voice in the Christian faith community. After her critical reflection on the nature of prevailing planning of our built environment from the non-religious perspective of urban planning practitioners, Leonie Sandercock has highlighted that the heart of landuse planning, among other urban, social, community or environmental planning, should fundamentally be a work centered on a faith in humanity and on our hope and believe in our contribution to the human spirit. She continues reminding us not to forget that the human spirit is constantly at a stage of moral struggle between good and bad as follows:

The human spirit at the heart of planning engages every day in a dance of faith and hope, engages in a struggle to moderate greed with generosity, to conjoin private ambition with civic ambition, to care for others as much as or more than we care about ourselves, to think as much or more about future generations as we do about our own, to thoughtfully

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<sup>44</sup> Gorringer, "Salvation by Bricks," 110-11. Quoting Moltmann, Tim Gorringer particularly pinpoints that the church could be a critical and active partner in the planning and development process of life flourishing built environment.

<sup>45</sup> T. J. Gorringer, "Town Planning: a Theological Imperative?" *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 123 (November 2005): 16.

weigh the importance of memory alongside the need for change, to greet a newcomer in the street rather than ignoring her, or worse, insulting him, or telling them to go back where they came from.<sup>46</sup>

It is therefore obliged to recognize the spirituality that may be embodied in planning works; and the focus on spirituality is not necessarily be interpreted as bringing religion into planning in the actual world.<sup>47</sup> In Leonie Sandercock's words:

I think of spirituality as a way of being as well as a way of knowing, informed by certain values that then underpin ways of acting. The values can be named as respect, caring, neighborliness; a concern with building connections between people, building a caring human community from whatever fragile starting point; a notion of service to others. These are all old virtues, discussed by philosophers as well as theologians for thousands of years but dismissed in the neo-liberal city, which has revived enlightened self-interest as its moral code.<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps Sandercock's ideas on spirituality need to be fully appreciated in conjunction with her suggestion for, in her words, a "no less than a paradigm shift" of the conventional urban planning and development process. The technically-based rational and comprehensive approach of conventional urban planning, which claims to be values neutral in serving the public interests, has indeed proved to be value-biased and largely state-led in the real socio-political urban context. This approach is simply incompetent in understanding and addressing the aspirations and needs of today's multi-cultural and highly diversified communities fairly in global cities. In response to this challenge, Sandercock asks for a more communicative, interactive and centered on people planning

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<sup>46</sup> Leonie Sandercock, "Spirituality and the Urban Professions: the Paradox at the Heart of Planning," *Planning Theories and Practice*, vol.7, no.1 (March 2006): 66. The author is indebted to and inspired by Philip Sheldrake's introduction of the ideas of Leonie Sandercock in Philip Sheldrake's book, *The Spiritual City: Theology, Spirituality and the Urban*, 138-43.

<sup>47</sup> Sandercock, "Spirituality and the Urban Professions," 66.

<sup>48</sup> Sandercock, "Spirituality and the Urban Professions," 66.

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approach with a view to be more sensitive to and caring of the values, wisdoms and diversities of local communities.<sup>49</sup>

Sandercock's call for focusing on those old virtues for advancement of humanity and planning with a longer term vision of giving life beyond the here and now is therefore spiritual. This is actually a proclamation of different ways of understanding and then developing of our future built environment. Only by re-orientating urban planning of our built environment towards this spirituality focus rather than merely on efficiency and convenience, we could have a better chance of realizing life flourishing and humane built environment which is the fundamental faith of urban planning on humanity and positive social changes.<sup>50</sup> Sandercock's contribution is significant as it represents the critical reflection of professional urban planners who are advocating for a new approach of next generation planning and development of our built environment in order to ensure that their planned built environment could be genuinely life enhancing in the wake of rising concerns on accommodating diversity, ensuring sustainability, maintaining cultural identity and continuity as well as building connections among pluralistic communities of our global cities. The solution has to go beyond the conventional wisdom of technical, functional and efficiency considerations, but to focus on spiritual aspects that could conducive to the cultivation of a connected, caring and integrated community in a life-flourishing built environment. This new approach of next generation planning and development largely shares the visions and values underpin the return to "a vision inspired by God" advocated by the theological spatial turn as mentioned above, though with different reasons behind as aforementioned.

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<sup>49</sup> Leonie Sandercock, *Cosmopolis II - Mongrel Cities of the 21st Century* (London and NY: Continuum, 2003), 209-11.

<sup>50</sup> Sandercock, "Spirituality and the Urban Professions," 65-66.

## **VII. A Framework for Execution of Visions and Concepts**

Having walked through the spatial turn in theology in the past decades, the author now attempts to develop a working framework for guiding the planning and development of human flourishing and life enhancing built environment in the reality by making reference to the aforementioned key visions and concepts as expounded in the aforementioned theological spatial turn in the past decades. First of all, this paper has demonstrated that the relational view of place on earth (including built environment, with no distinction of sacred or non-sacred space) with the spatial Triune God and human beings is the foundation stone for the formulation of the core theology of built environment evolved in the aforementioned theological spatial turn. The Triune God is the ultimate source for transforming and sustaining our built environment for a physical and spiritual flourishing life experience where we would encounter and be enabled by God. The fourfold love relationships of environment, neighbor/community, God and human beings, as suggested by Sigurd Bergman, has refined such a relational view by highlighting the significance of community building to complement a life flourishing experience in our built environment. In the planning and development process of our built environment, we thus have to recognize our limits and then willing to maintain constant dialogues with God the Creator who is the source for genuine order and good planning of our future built environment. We have to look upon God the Reconciler Jesus Christ for the blessing and courage of promoting justice and peace in our community; and we ask God the Redeemer Holy Spirit for inspirations and visions in improving the liveability of our future built environment too. Of utmost importance, the planning and development of our built environment should be perceived as a religious process under the visions inspired by God. The ultimate planning vision is building "spiritual cities" where we value the advancement of humanity and spiritual attributes, instead of overly leaned towards maximization of economic return and efficiency in our current cities. Figure 2 below serves to illustrate the core visions

and concepts of the theology of built environment highlighting the relationships of environment, neighbor/community, God and human beings necessary for sustaining physical and spiritual flourishing experience in such "spiritual cities" as expounded in the theological spatial turn in the past decades:

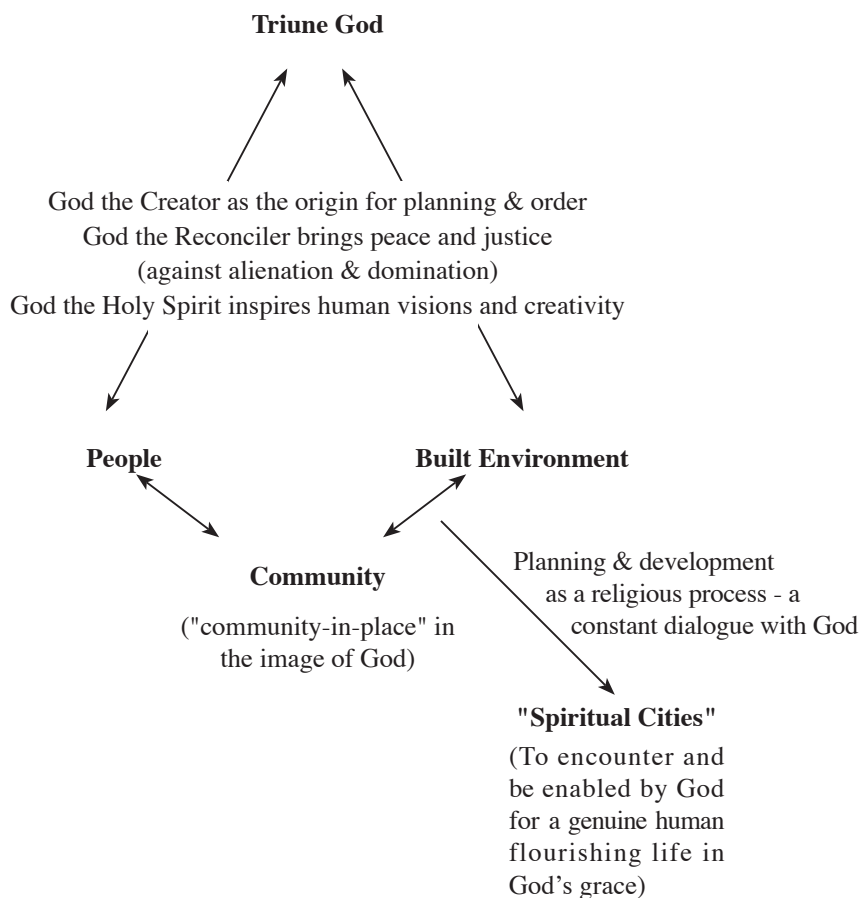


Fig 2: A Fourfold Love Relationships of Environment, Neighbor/Community, God and Human Beings for Sustaining Physical and Spiritual Flourishing Experience

This ultimate planning vision of building "spiritual cities" on earth, giving priority consideration on human beings' spiritual and humanistic needs, is inherently an action-orientated and prophetic call of the theological spatial turn. Indeed in essence, this call is a cry out of the moral and spiritual crisis of our built environment. It is a moral call for finding "gracious and grateful ways of living, farming, trading and building" as the only way of salvation.<sup>51</sup> In today's planning terms, this is an advocacy for a paradigm shift of the conventional urban planning from giving overt priority consideration on maximization of economic returns and efficiency to alternative visions of giving priority focus on the social and humanistic aspects of human beings, in particular community building and empowerment, in the planning and development of sustainable and liveable built environment now and in future. Or in T.J. Gorringer's words in religious sense:

The God in whom we believe is abroad in the whole universe but does not intervene to stop tragedy. The Triune God calls us, rather, to live by grace. To do that in relation to the world we build for ourselves, in justice and beauty, will be a key factor in whether or not humankind has a future.<sup>52</sup>

### **VIII. Priority Planning Considerations and Objectives in the Planning and Development Process**

To complement the execution of this advocacy for such a paradigm shift in the reality, the theological spatial turn has also made practical suggestions on those social and humanistic aspects that warrant priority consideration in the planning and development process of our built environment. Table 1 below is an attempt to sum up these priority planning considerations and objectives:

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<sup>51</sup> Gorringer, *The Common Good and the Global Emergency*, 288.

<sup>52</sup> Gorringer, *The Common Good and the Global Emergency*, 290.



- The planned and developed built environment as human beings' constructed space on earth in God's image should be conducive to experience and discovery the "God of the Here and now" resulting in a genuine flourishing life.
- Human beings should duly recognize nature/human's limitations and their inherent inclination towards corruption. They should have trust in God's transformative power of human mindset to pursue genuine common good for human flourishing built environment in God's image and grace.
- There is a need to undertake a critical reflection of the conventional growth models and to explore alternative growth models which would not overly geared towards maximization of economic returns and efficiency but could give due attention to human dimensions in the planning and development process.
- The planning and development of such flourishing built environment requires not only technical and economic solutions, but also demands social and moral progress accompanied by a change of humanity.
- The future sustainable and liveable city should be the spiritual city that is conducive to a quality physical and spiritual healthy life, not to be scarified in the name of facilitating economic growth of a city.
- We should take all concerted efforts to respect place identity and collective memory in place making of urban space in order to sustain cultural and historical continuity which are significant spiritual attributes of a city.
- The planned built environment must be proven sustainable, resilient to nature and green in the planning and development process to ensure a even better quality urban life for us now and for our future generations (admitting human's limitations and constraints facing the Mother Nature, rather than as an unlimited growth opportunity).

- Of utmost importance, the built environment should be conducive to the cultivation and empowerment of a caring, inclusive, diverse, just and joyful community as well as the nourishment and promotion of urban virtues hospitalities including solidarity; frugality and mutuality in the community.

Table 1: Priority Planning Considerations and Objectives Advocated by the Theological Spatial Turn

To sum up, the aforementioned working framework comprises the core visions and concepts of the theology of built environment as illustrated in Figure 2 and those social and humanistic aspects that warrant priority consideration in the planning and development process of our built environment as summarized in Table 1. This working framework could serve as a useful and comprehensive reference for us to focus on the key visions and concepts of the theological spatial turn that are considered to be vital for achieving a genuine life flourishing built environment in the reality. In doing so, we must however not mechanically apply this working framework into a straitjacket for the planning and development process in reality including assessment and evaluation of plans and projects. Given that the urban planning and development process of built environment nowadays would allow public participation and consensus building in varying degrees, the author suggests that one application of this working framework is able to equip us, in particular the Christian faith community, with the core values and visions of the theological spatial turn for a meaningful participation in the urban planning and development process with a view to advancing the genuine life flourishing built environment in God's grace in the local context. In what follows, the last part of this paper is an attempt to assess the "the Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030" (the "Hong Kong 2030+") by making reference to the aforementioned working framework as a yardstick.

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## **IX. From Visions to Implementation: A Case Study on the "Hong Kong 2030+"**

Hong Kong is spearheading her longer-term landuse planning in meeting the challenges ahead with the promulgation of the vision driven, pragmatic, action-oriented "the Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030" (the "Hong Kong 2030+"). The "Hong Kong 2030+" primary serves as a strategic development blueprint at the territory level for steering the long-term sustainable development of Hong Kong.<sup>53</sup> I am obliged to emphasize that this assessment by making reference to the aforementioned working framework is not intended to be a comprehensive and critical review of every aspects of "the Hong Kong 2030+". The instant analysis instead takes a sympathetic and practical approach in accepting the givenness of what is already going on in the reality, that is, the "Hong Kong 2030+" as the given strategic planning blueprint to shape future Hong Kong. Under such circumstances, this analysis intends to be a theological reading of our future city as proposed under the "Hong Kong 2030+" by discovering whether for whatever reasons, this strategic blueprint is incidentally imbued with any of those essential attributes conducive to the building of a human flourishing and life enhancing built environment as expounded in the theological spatial turn; and if those attributes exist, to give some further thought on what should be done from the Christian faith perspective to facilitate their implementation in the planning and development process of our built environment.

As expected, the "Hong Kong 2030+" is very pragmatic in emphasizing the need for enhancing Hong Kong's economic growth and embracing new economic opportunities. Under the "Hong Kong 2030+", the ultimate planning vision is to advance Hong Kong to be a liveable, competitive and sustainable "Asia's World City" and the

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<sup>53</sup> Hong Kong's town planning system comprises a strategic development strategy at territory level and statutory and non-statutory development plans at local district level. For details, please see "Hong Kong: The Facts - Town Planning," <[https://www.gov.hk/en/about/abouthk/factsheets/docs/town\\_planning.pdf](https://www.gov.hk/en/about/abouthk/factsheets/docs/town_planning.pdf)> (accessed 1 October 2019).

overarching planning goal is to champion sustainable development in meeting Hong Kong's present social, environmental and economic needs as well as future aspirations.<sup>54</sup> To achieve this overarching planning goal, the strategy recommends Three Building Blocks, which are indeed three planning goals respectively on quality liveable built environment; continual economic growth and enhancing environmental capacity.<sup>55</sup>

Building Block 1: Planning for a Liveable High-density City

Building Block 2: Embracing New Economic Challenges and Opportunities

Building Block 3: Creating Capacity for Sustainable Growth

The recommended actions and policies under these Three Building Blocks will ultimately be developed into a conceptual strategic spatial framework for Hong Kong's built environment to steer and guide Hong Kong' planning and development at district and project levels now and in future. Given that its ultimate planning vision and the overarching planning goal are economic orientated and growth driven, I conceive that the planning goal under Building Block 2 of the "Hong Kong 2030+" inherently stands out to be more significant and prominent among the three Building Blocks. Building Blocks 1 and 3 thus serve to complement Building Block 2. The Building Block 2 therefore takes the position that Hong Kong as a highly urbanized global city all along thrives on a service-related economy; and her economic growth in future will require adequate infrastructure support and land production not only to strengthening this service-related economy but also be prepared to advancing to a knowledge-based economy.<sup>56</sup> Those new opportunities identified include taking the challenge of the emerging opportunities in creative industries and re-industrialization as well as

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<sup>54</sup> Development Bureau and Planning Department, *Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030*, Forward; 1 and 20.

<sup>55</sup> Development Bureau and Planning Department, *Hong Kong 2030+*, 21-22, 36, 44.

<sup>56</sup> Development Bureau and Planning Department, *Hong Kong 2030+*, 36.

grasping the development potential in Greater Pearl River Delta Region and Belt and Road regions taking Hong Kong's location advantage. It is therefore to some extent, the land production demand estimated under Building Block 2 to provide adequate developable land and space to sustain the economic growth of prevailing pillar industries and services as well as to embrace new economic opportunities naturally becomes one of the major recommendations to justify the continual utilization of land resources for sustaining the needed economic growth and prosperity of Hong Kong.<sup>57</sup>

It is understandable that the "Hong Kong 2030+" is primarily targeted to facilitate the Government's prevailing policy in the context of strategic land use planning to champion the "Central District Values" that naturally takes priority consideration and utmost efforts in enhancing Hong Kong's economic growth, efficiency and prosperity in the coming decades.<sup>58</sup> It is certainly a product of a state-led conventional urban planning process that claims to be comprehensive, rational and professional as well as serving the public interest too. As expected and understandable, there is no sign of having undertaken the paradigm shift as advocated by the theological spatial turn to critically reflect on the conventional growth models and to explore alternative growth models which would not overly geared towards maximization of economic returns and efficiency and would give due attention to human dimensions in the planning and development process

Thus, there is every attempt and justification from maximization of economic return perspective for the "Hong Kong 2030+" to give little attention to the local agricultural sector in the name of growth and prosperity, bearing in mind the scare land resource in Hong Kong. Nevertheless even recognizing the contribution of local agriculture to

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<sup>57</sup> Development Bureau and Planning Department, *Hong Kong 2030+*, 47. It is estimated that additional 1200 hectares of land are required to meet the housing, economic uses and GIC/ open space/ transport facilities. This figure has triggered a heated debate in the community.

<sup>58</sup> Yiu-wai Stephen Chu, "Brand Hong Kong: Asia's World City as Method?" *Visual Anthology* 24 (2011): 47-50.

Hong Kong's economy is limited in tangible monetary terms (less than 0.1% of the Hong Kong's gross domestic product [GDP] in 2014), the "Hong Kong 2030+" is able to recognize its contribution to the Hong Kong community in terms of providing a fresh local food source as well as helping the attainment of long-term sustainability of Hong Kong. Accordingly, a series of physical planning and policy proposals are suggested to preserve Hong Kong's good agriculture land in the planning and development process. Among them, the innovative planning approach to preserve and integrate agricultural land in the planning and development of New Development Areas (NDAs) creating the urban, rural and nature integration in the built environment with a view to enhancing livability and environmental capacity is particularly one beauty of "Hong Kong 2030+."<sup>59</sup> Thus even under the constraints of the growth-driven vision and overarching planning goal of advancing Hong Kong to be "Asia's World City", the "Hong Kong 2030+" still makes an attempt in retaining the agriculture sector in Hong Kong's spatial framework from the perspective of enabling a more quality healthy life and sustainable built environment now and in future. Under the blessing of the "Hong Kong 2030+," the local agricultural sector, serving to some extent as a complementary mode of economic production, could continue to survive and grow in the highly urbanized Hong Kong for the well being of its people and sustainability of its future built environment. This certainly reflects a slight paradigm shift in the planning process, that is, giving more weight in considering the well being of people and sustainability of built environment of Hong Kong. It is also postulated that the concept of urban, rural and nature integration in the built environment, instead of the conventional pro-development concept of intensive and extensive utilization of land resources, is certainly more sustainable and resilient on environmental consideration. This could also minimize the conflicts encountered in the planning and development process and in the long run conducive to the

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<sup>59</sup> Planning Department, *Planning for Agricultural Uses in Hong Kong* (HK SAR Government, October 2016), <[https://www.hk2030plus.hk/document/An%20Inclusive%20and%20Supportive%20City%20for%20All%20Ages\\_Eng.pdf](https://www.hk2030plus.hk/document/An%20Inclusive%20and%20Supportive%20City%20for%20All%20Ages_Eng.pdf)>, 14-30 (accessed 1 October 2019).

cultivation of a more inclusive, diverse and harmonious community in our built environment. This largely echoes with the theological spatial turn demanding willingness to accept alternative growth models so as able to give more favorable attention to the human dimensions in the planning and development process as summarized in the aforementioned working framework. In the instant case, the "Hong Kong 2030+" is commendable, in resisting the temptation of for economic maximum in the Hong Kong context, to reserve Hong Kong's valuable land resource for local agriculture in order to secure a more sustainable and healthy future built environment for Hong Kong people.

The Building Block 1 of the "Hong Kong 2030+" claims that the planning and development of a liveable high-density compact Hong Kong could best contribute to the quality of life and well being of its people in the future. Hong Kong should continue to be developed as an integrated high density compact city with good transport connectivity and convenience. This is the sustainable and efficient form of development suitable for Hong Kong, particularly given the necessity in respecting Hong Kong's inherent constraints of scarce land resources with a huge population. To this end, the "Hong Kong 2030+" has given consideration to the possible adverse impacts of people living in such a compact high density development form and recognizes the necessity of a conducive built environment for promoting the health and well being of Hong Kong people to complement such a high density compact city form. Thus, the planning for a healthy Hong Kong is one of the planning goals under the Building Block 1 targeting to promote a healthy urban life style in our built environment. Essential planning principles and concepts facilitating the achievement of this planning goal are recommended for consideration and implemented at district planning and project levels, hopefully leading to the development of built environment that is conducive to a change in healthy urban life style. Such principles include the adoption of "active design" (that is, urban design to facilitate and encourage change in citizens' life styles and behavior) in promoting walkability and cycling (particularly taking the opportunity in new development areas); the incorporation of urban climatic and air ventilation considerations in alleviating heat

island effect and improving urban climate in the planning and design of our built environment.<sup>60</sup> On the provision of open space which is considered to be a vital component in ensuring a healthy city life, or even spiritual in a sense, in high density built environment, the "Hong Kong 2030+" stresses the necessity for a proper planning and design of public open space particularly, taking advantage of its enormous therapeutic qualities for people living in congested built environment. It is even ambitious in suggesting an increase of open space planning standards from the current standard of 2 m<sup>2</sup> per person to 2.5 m<sup>2</sup> per person.<sup>61</sup> To this end, the author observes that like the theological spatial turn, the "Hong Kong 2030+" understands the humanistic and spiritual needs of Hong Kong people in the compact and high-density built environment and has attempted to meet such needs as far as practicable by providing a better built environment that is conducive to a even better quality physical and spiritual healthy life.

Another planning goal under Building Block 1 of the "Hong Kong 2030+" is to develop an inclusive and supporting city.<sup>62</sup> This warrants appreciation from the perspective of developing built environment that is conducive to the cultivation and empowerment of a caring, inclusive and diverse community as suggested by the theological spatial turn too. There are admirable planning efforts under Building Block 1 to advocate the incorporation of socially inclusive planning and design in the planning process facilitating the development of a socially inclusive and supporting built environment, even though this attempt is limited in scope focusing primarily on an inclusive built environment for all ages, namely, youth, elderly and family without touching

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<sup>60</sup> Development Bureau and Planning Department, *Hong Kong 2030+*, 29.

<sup>61</sup> Planning Department, *Planning and Urban Design for a Liveable High-Density City* (HK SAR Government, October 2016), <[https://www.hk2030plus.hk/document/Planning%20and%20Urban%20Design%20for%20a%20Liveable%20High-Density%20City\\_Eng.pdf](https://www.hk2030plus.hk/document/Planning%20and%20Urban%20Design%20for%20a%20Liveable%20High-Density%20City_Eng.pdf)>, 66-67 (accessed 1 October 2019).

<sup>62</sup> Development Bureau and Planning Department, *Hong Kong 2030+*, 34.



on community empowerment, integration and inclusiveness. To achieve this planning goal of an inclusive built environment for all ages, physical planning and design principles like universal design, age-friendly design, active aging and aging in place concepts are recommended in the planning and design of our housing and community facilities in built environment. The innovative planning concept of "Mixed Development" consisting of a well mix of elderly and ordinary residential flats accommodating different generations in the same residential development is explored with a view to promoting intergeneration interactions and care.<sup>63</sup> Again, the author observes that the proactive adoption of socially inclusive planning and design to facilitate the development of a socially inclusive and supportive built environment under the Building Block 1 obviously tally with the visions and priority considerations of the theological spatial turn in community building as summarized in the aforementioned working framework.

Having said that, the "Hong Kong 2030+" should give more thought on how could the physical design of our city contribute to the nourishment of a more inclusive community for all ages, sectors and ethnic minorities that promote solidarity, frugality and mutuality in the community. Richard Rogers in mid 1990s' has already suggested the concept of "open-minded" spaces aiming at the designing urban space, such as parks, alleys and even streets, for facilitating different sectors and different walks of life of a society to linger, interact and integrate with mutual respect and tolerance with a view to cultivating a more inclusive and harmonious community in urban cities.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps this focus on community consolidation could be further explored

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<sup>63</sup> Planning Department, *An Inclusive and Supportive City for All Ages* (HK SAR Government, October 2016), <[https://www.hk2030plus.hk/document/An%20Inclusive%20and%20Supportive%20City%20for%20All%20Ages\\_Eng.pdf](https://www.hk2030plus.hk/document/An%20Inclusive%20and%20Supportive%20City%20for%20All%20Ages_Eng.pdf)> , 28-29 (accessed 1 October 2019).

<sup>64</sup> Richard Rogers, "Lecture 1: The Culture of Cities," BBC Reith Lectures 1995: Sustainable Cities, transmission: 12 February 1995 - BBC Radio 4.

and pursued in the Hong Kong context from the perspective of the theological spatial turn.<sup>65</sup>

The "Hong Kong 2030+" also recognizes that physical planning and design of built environment alone would not be sufficient for the achievement of an inclusive and supportive built environment. Thus there are facilitating government policies such as increase provision of adequate and appropriate youth development facilities and opportunities; upgrade and review the planning standards to improve the quality and provision of elderly services; setting up conveniently located elderly service hubs for one-stop health and community facilities; addressing the different housing needs and requirements of all ages are also highlighted in this territorial development strategy as they are the necessary facilitating software support.<sup>66</sup>

The planning and design of a unique, diverse and vibrant Hong Kong is another planning goal under Building Block 1 of the "Hong Kong 2030+."<sup>67</sup> It is understandable that following the trend of other global capitalist cities, very high-quality landmark buildings as icon buildings at strategic locations in Hong Kong are welcome and promoted for building a global city image. Such urban icons usually in the form of modern high-rise commercial buildings of exceptional architectural features serve as one significant attribute of Hong Kong's global city's image in exhibiting its prosperity and strong economic capacity. Other than promoting such iconic buildings, the

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<sup>65</sup> One successful example is the Superkilen urban park in one of Copenhagen's most diverse neighborhoods. The park is planned and developed using what they call "extreme participation" as a strategy to engage residents around the park in the planning and development process. This ultimately has secured an inclusive park environment that is conducive to integration and engagement. For details, please see <<https://superflex.net/tools/superkilen/image>> (accessed 1 October 2019), The Kwun Tong waterfront promenade is a successful local example.

<sup>66</sup> Planning Department, *An Inclusive and Support City for All Ages* (HK SAR Government, October 2016), <[https://www.hk2030plus.hk/document/An%20Inclusive%20and%20Supportive%20City%20for%20All%20Ages\\_Eng.pdf](https://www.hk2030plus.hk/document/An%20Inclusive%20and%20Supportive%20City%20for%20All%20Ages_Eng.pdf)>, 14-30 (accessed October 1, 2019).

<sup>67</sup> Development Bureau and Planning Department, *Hong Kong 2030+*, 28.

"Hong Kong 2030+" has also highlighted that the preservation and enhancement of Hong Kong's unique imageability and identity at local district level, which have been evolved through a long time and have evoked strong feeling and identity among the local people, is of equal importance. The "Hong Kong 2030+" has undertaken a preliminary stock-taking exercise of those districts and streets with long history and unique character, including those specialized in different trades as well as those imbued with unique local character or townscape qualities. Concrete actions including comprehensive territorial stock-taking character studies, district-wide or area-based design plans are recommended to preserve and enhance such local characters and identity, both in urban and rural Hong Kong, in the planning and development process of our built environment.<sup>68</sup> It is remarkable that the "Hong Kong 2030+" is able to provide concrete recommendations and actions to sustain cultural and historical continuity as well as collective memory of community at city and local district levels. This direction is indeed in line with the vision and priority planning consideration of the theological spatial turn to respect place identity and collective memory in place making of urban space in order to sustain cultural and historical continuity which are significant spiritual attributes of a city from the perspective of theological spatial turn.

There is always an inherent conflict between the continual quest for land resources in meeting development needs and the consequential adverse impacts on the environment in the planning and development process. The Building Block 3 of the "Hong Kong 2030+" recognizes this inherent conflict and attempts to address it by introducing the new concept to consider creating development capacity and enhancing environmental capacity in tandem:

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<sup>68</sup> Planning Department, *Planning and Urban Design for a Liveable High-Density City*, 36-56.

...We (*the Government*) seek to create development capacity, and at the same time, to enhance our environmental capacity for the sustainable growth of Hong Kong.<sup>69</sup>

The concept in gist promotes that planning efforts to create development capacity for meeting development needs, says in terms of land production and land reservation, should in tandem give thorough environmental biodiversity and conservation considerations with a view to proactively creating, enhancing and regenerating environmental capacity for securing a sustainable growth in the planning and development process. The existing planning practice in the past merely requires the minimization of adverse impacts to our natural environment and if impacts exist, the provision of adequate mitigation measures against such impacts be identified in the planning and development process. This existing practice is no longer considered to be adequate in securing a promising sustainable built environment in the future under the "Hong Kong 2030+." Instead, a more proactive and forward looking approach demanding in parallel planning efforts and appropriate measures to enhance and regenerate the environmental capacity be integrated in the planning and development process in meeting our development needs is necessary for the claim of a genuine sustainable growth.<sup>70</sup> In a nutshell, Building Block 3 of the "Hong Kong 2030+" advocates the enhancement of environmental capacity in tandem with the increase in development capacity is necessary for securing a genuine sustainable and future-proof Hong Kong. Accordingly, a smart, green and resilient development strategy is recommended to be permeated at all levels of planning and all aspects

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<sup>69</sup> Development Bureau and Planning Department, *Hong Kong 2030+*, 44. The words in bracket are inserted by the author for clarity; and the words underlined for emphasis.

<sup>70</sup> Planning Department, *Environmental Protection and Nature Conservation* (HKSAR Government, October 2016), <[https://www.hk2030plus.hk/document/Environmental%20Protection%20and%20Nature%20Conservation\\_Eng.pdf](https://www.hk2030plus.hk/document/Environmental%20Protection%20and%20Nature%20Conservation_Eng.pdf)>, 1-2 (accessed 1 October 2019). Environmental capacity refers to the ability of the physical environment to sustain human activities and biodiversity under the "Hong Kong 2030+."

of the built environment. This new planning concept of enhancement of environmental capacity echoes well with the vision and priority planning consideration of the theological spatial turn that planned built environment should be proven sustainable, resilient to nature and green in the planning and development process, thus admitting at the very outset the limitation of Mother Nature. I also tend to argue that this concept of creating development capacity and enhancing environmental capacity in tandem, if accepted and implemented thoroughly in Hong Kong's planning mechanism and system, has the potential of triggering a "no less than paradigm shift" in Hong Kong's urban planning process leading to a long term positive impact on the future of Hong Kong. This is to some extent an indication of the mindset change of Hong Kong urban planners: an awareness and acceptance of human's limitations and constraints in facing the Mother Nature such that land resources are not an unlimited opportunity for sustaining economic growth.

Having said that, this concept of enhancement of environmental capacity, I conceive, seems to remain as a high sounding planning principle even at strategic planning level of the "Hong Kong 2030+" and needs to be further explored in what ways to take forward this concept effectively in concrete planning context and projects. For instance by adopting this concept thoroughly in the evaluation of land production options for meeting social and economic needs, what should be our priority be given to the development of brown field sites versus to develop an artificial island by reclamation upon comparing respectively the potential for environmental capacity enhancement by developing the former and the significant environmental impacts of extensive reclamation?

By now, I hope my analysis has revealed that even in the given context of planning for a competitive "Asia World City" that inherently demands overt priority consideration on maximization of economic returns and efficiency, the "Hong Kong 2030+" has demonstrated its admirable attempts in striking a balance between economic and humanistic considerations tactfully by recommending visions and planning actions for building a conducive built environment for

achieving a healthy city life; enhancing liveability and life quality; promoting green and resilient development strategy; respecting local history and character; cultivating inclusive and harmonious community as well as respecting nature as far as practicable. I have demonstrated those recommendations incidentally echoes with some visions and concepts expounded in the theological spatial turn which is ultimately orientated towards a genuine human flourishing and life enhancing built environment, though it is certainly far from perfect. Given that the "Hong Kong 2030+" is by nature a strategic blueprint at the territorial planning level for guiding future development, the successful accomplishment of these recommended planning visions and actions would depend very much on to what extent they are thoroughly carried out upon implementation at district planning and individual project levels. This balance between economic and humanistic dimensions in the "Hong Kong 2030+" could easily be tilted towards favoring the economic returns at the expenses of the aforementioned humanistic visions and aspirations at the implementation stage at district planning and individual project levels.

As mentioned before, Gorringer demands that we, as a Christian faith community in the wider society, has a "critical ethical duty" to lead and be involved in the planning process for the planning, development and evaluation of built environment to advance Christian values that we cherish for human flourishing and life-giving in God's grace. The author however observes that this theological spatial turn has not given explicit deliberations on the concrete ways or tactics on implementation of their visions and concepts in the real world situation. There are significant critical assessments of real completed development projects by making reference to their visions and concepts. So a gap, the author conceives, exists from visions and concepts to their implementation in the context of real world day- to-day planning and development of our built environment. For development-related professionals daily involved in Hong Kong's planning and development such as urban planners, architects etc, their primary concern would be the implications of this challenge of

theological spatial turn particularly in terms of its implementability in the actual world context. Could and how this visionary working framework for the planning and development of human flourishing and life enhancing built environment be realized in the reality and in what ways? Or it remains to be a high sounding academic or visionary proclamation of the Christian faith community?

As a pragmatic starting point of promoting those visions and concepts imbued in the "Hong Kong 2030+" with potential for building a flourishing and life-enhancing spiritual Hong Kong as advocated by the theological spatial turn, I would postulate that we, as a Christian faith community in Hong Kong accepting the givenness of the "Hong Kong 2030+" at this juncture of socio-political context, should proactively participate in the planning process at all levels through the established procedures and mechanisms for public participation in Hong Kong with a view to closely monitoring and adding our supporting voice in ensuring their faithful and timely implementation at all planning levels and development projects. The aforementioned working framework comprises the core visions and concepts of the theology of built environment as well as those social and humanistic aspects that warrant priority consideration in the planning and development process of our built environment has proofed to be a useful and comprehensive working framework for our participation in such a process. This tactics, I consider, is practical and implementable in taking forward the visions and concepts of the theological spatial turn we treasured for building human flourishing and life-giving Hong Kong's built environment in God's grace, having regard to the Hong Kong's socio-political reality. As a conclusion, I hope the aforementioned practical tactic could shed some light on bridging up the gap between the visions and concepts of the theological spatial turn and their implementation in the real built environment context, taking the Hong Kong as a trial example. Hopefully this paper could catalyzes more researches be initiated to explore further the various effective means and ways of implementing such theological spatial visions and concepts in concrete local and global built environment context.

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper is inspired by the insights accumulated in the theological spatial turn on built environment in the past decades in particular the visions and concepts to be pursued in the planning and development process of our built environment with a view to striving for a genuine human flourishing and life-enhancing built environment in God's image. This theological turn is practically oriented and proclaims a critical review and a paradigm shift of the planning and development process of our built environment, ultimately demanding for priority consideration on humanistic concerns rather than on maximization for economic returns and efficiency. A working framework is formulated by making reference to the key visions and concepts as expounded in this theological spatial turn for guiding the planning and development of human flourishing and life enhancing built environment.

Hong Kong is spearheading her longer-term landuse planning in meeting the challenges ahead with the promulgation of the vision driven, pragmatic, action-oriented "Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030" (the "Hong Kong 2030+") serving as a strategic blueprint for the long-term sustainable development of Hong Kong. This last part of this paper will first demonstrate that some planning visions and recommendations under the "Hong Kong 2030+" coincidentally echo with some key visions and concepts expounded in the theological spatial turn of built environment. This paper argues that in respecting the givenness of the "Hong Kong 2030+" to be Hong Kong's strategic planning blueprint, our proactive participation in Hong Kong's planning and development process to advocate the faithful and timely implementation of such visions and recommendations could be an expedient and effective way in facilitating the earlier arrival of a genuine human flourishing and life-giving Hong Kong built environment.



## 撮 要

本文先行探討當代神學轉向城市空間的議題，思考如何構建合乎上帝形象並為社會羣體帶來真實豐盛生命的城市環境，及在規劃發展我們的城市時更應倡議的願景及概念。最終這進路批判了現行城市規劃及發展的理念及過程——只著重經濟發展效益及最大回報，因而需作思維轉換，轉移至優先關注人性需要。

香港發表了《香港 2030+：跨越 2030 年的規劃遠景與策略》（《香港 2030+》）作為香港持續發展的策略性長遠規劃藍圖。本文第二部分展示《香港 2030+》其部分建議，大致符合當代神學在城市空間思考所倡議的願景及概念；本文同時指出在既定的《香港 2030+》策略性規劃藍圖的框架下，我們透過積極參與規劃及發展過程倡導落實這些建議，可以是權宜及有效的實際策略，為香港社會羣體帶來上述豐盛生命的城市環境。