



The garden and the city

In view of the city

The city in the Bible

The description of the city in the Bible often has an ordinary geographical meaning: a safe haven surrounded by walls and within its confines a host of activities (see Numbers 21:27; Joshua 10:20; Jeremiah 1:18; Matthew 8:33). The city was obviously a part of the normal geographical pattern of a developing society. The spatial concentration of people on one spot caused the city to play an important role in trade and commerce. The building of cities was essential for the growth and sound development in economic and social respects. Wrong elements and warped ideas also have a chance to develop in the city; the beginning of the Bible is very clear in that respect. Cain, the murderer, established a city which in later years became the focal point of progress: tent building, music making, and metal working had their roots in that urban culture; Jabal, Jubal, and Tubalcain were the pioneers of new production methods. Their father Lamech, with his bragging diatribe, gives us an impression of the delusions of grandeur that accompanied the progress of that urban society. In a certain way the city bears the "sign of Cain:" it is a symbol of human prowess, of vulgar egoism, of perverse morality, and of a humanistic ideology of progress.

This is shown with still sharper contours in Chapter 11 of Genesis, where we read how mankind thought to build up its own strength by sticking together, and how therefore the design of a city was drafted, with a tower as focal point and as symbol of their own human greatness. The culture of Babel, initially started in Cain's city, found its ungodly climax in the fact that man wanted to be like God and even reach into heaven. The divine curse which became the plight of these assaulters of heaven was not brought upon them as a result of building a city-with-a-tower in itself, but rather as a consequence of man's refusal to subdue and develop the whole world as he was called to. This human sense of autonomy clashed with God's work of redemption for the entire world.

The punishment that thwarted the completion of Babel's tower did not educate the people to better things: Sodom and Gomorrah became the new symbols of a perverted urban culture. In later history that function was taken over by such cities as Nineveh, Babylon, and Rome.

No condemnation of the city

From these parts of Scripture one could possibly conclude that the Bible contains a general condemnation of city life. However, that is not true. As stated before, the Biblical cities often have no more than a strictly geographical meaning: they were places where people lived and worked together. In any place where people get together, wrong concepts and behavior patterns can develop, and therefore sin has great opportunities in the city (Psalm 55:10; Proverb 29:8; Hebrews 2:12; Matthew 22:7). But in that respect cities are not different from any other form of settlement. Besides, one must not overlook the positive side. The city can most certainly be a blessing as the center of culture-in-obedience (Deuteronomy 16:18; Proverbs 11:11; Isaiah 1:26; Zechariah 8:3; Hebrews 11:10). Therefore, one need not necessarily become nervous when this topic, "the city," is introduced. The advantages as well as the disadvantages of an urban culture must be kept in mind.

This also applies to politics. A political party, too, whose members have a predominantly nonurban background, should keep in mind the great importance of metropolitan culture, since that is the driving force behind much of society's development. A party which claims to have a message for all

of society and for governmental policymakers in particular, should keep an eye on the city — an open and critical eye, that is. Holy Writ does not speak about the city in a one-sided manner.

The city of God

Babylon, Nineveh, and Rome notwithstanding, glorious things are often said about the city. Although deplorable conditions in urban culture are not overlooked, the fact remains that Scripture does not use derogatory language to describe the city as such. The Bible even mentions that God will build the cities of Judah. Christ's redemption also applies to city culture. It is even so that the geographic centre of religion, the temple city, is the city of God (Psalm 46:4; Psalm 48:2; Psalm 87:3; Isaiah 60:14; Ezekiel 48:35; Matthew 5:35; Hebrews 12:22). In this way the city is even introduced as the symbol of the new heaven and the new earth. Abraham looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10). God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city (Hebrews 11:16). Mount Zion, the city of the living God, and the heavenly Jerusalem are mentioned in the same breath (Hebrews 12:22). The Hebrews are admonished to seek the city which is to come (Hebrews 13:14).

It is especially the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible that speaks about the city with unremitting insistence. The city is the dwelling place of the saints (Revelation 11:2; 21:2; 22:19). The last chapters give a particularly vivid picture of the New Jerusalem. That city is man's final destiny; the completion of God's plan of salvation for mankind.

No blueprint

We must state here that the book of Revelation speaks in symbolic language about the new earth. Therefore it does not provide us with a blueprint of urban architecture for this era. On the other hand, it would be a loss if the fact that the Bible considers the city as a religious cultural centre and the new Jerusalem itself as the symbol of God's redemption, were not taken into account in a Christian cultural view. Man cannot live without the city. He is woven into it with many threads, and in the city of God he will find his final destiny.

Klaas Schilder's view

An idea which is of utmost importance for our topic can be found in the writings of the Reformed theologian, Dr. K. Schilder.¹ Of course, we should not expect deep studies from this author about big city problems or about urban architecture. Yet, in a very original manner, he was able to place a number of Biblical concepts in front of us, which may help us to obtain a positive insight into urban problematics. Superficial reading of the end of the Bible could lead one to the assumption that the continued Biblical line from Garden to City implies that the city is the ultimate geographic perfection of the spatial dynamics which have developed since the Garden of Eden. It would follow, then, that the city is man's final destiny also in this era. It is too hazardous, however, to base such conclusions on that assumption. Schilder immediately brought to the fore the fact that the new city of Jerusalem is surrounded by a garden. Therefore, one cannot propose "from Garden to City," but at best "City and Garden." In those two concepts there is neither contrast nor subordination.

Subsequently, the author clarifies that within this context both the city and the garden have a unique meaning all their own. The city, the New Jerusalem, represents the congregation of the Lord, the new humanity, which lives together in well-organized harmony. The garden — or more accurately, the tree of life — refers back to the situation in paradise which now returns to the New Jerusalem. Thereby is indicated that the covenant of works, entered into in the beginning, shall be fulfilled in the end. Schilder is less clear when he continues:

"And, whereas every aspect of community in an unspoiled world organizes itself in a natural unfolding of the patriarchally governed life, therefore that first human couple, Adam and Eve, would also gradually grow and develop in the direction of a city format."

Apart from certain ambiguities in expression, the suggestion is made here that a continued cultural development must lead to the formation of the city as the geographical form of organization. This,

to me, seems somewhat speculative. Schilder's first idea about the city as the representation of the new mankind appears to be more in harmony with other parts of Scripture (for example, Isaiah 26:1; Galatians 4:26) than his second.

Yet there are particular parts of the concluding chapters of Revelation which are of importance for the development of our theme "the city."

- In the first place, it is apparent that the mandate given to all people at the beginning of history, as it is included in the covenant of works, remains valid until the end. Urban architecture should therefore be aimed at creating an environment in which everyone can perform his normative task as well as possible. In that manner the city can be a suitable place where everyone can function properly with regard to his calling under the covenant of works.
- In the second place, the symbolical use of the concept "city" means that one need not approach the city full of misgivings. Quite to the contrary. The city is an ordinary place where people live and work together. Of that, the Bible gives us many examples.

Thus, while the Bible does not give us a blueprint for the city, the meaningfulness of Scriptural givens for the urban form and style of life cannot be denied. There are such things as the need for harmony in urban lifestyle, the function of the city in developing cultural life, the space and dwelling environment in the city, the protection afforded by the city, spatial organization, and freedom. We will have to come back to this.

Harvey Cox's view

The liberal theologian-sociologist, Harvey Cox, also offered a most important development of views on the city and its culture.² He came to very positive conclusions with regard to the city and city culture, conclusions which have been enthusiastically received by many. According to Cox, modern civilization is characterized by the rise of urbanization and the collapse of traditional religions. Especially in the modern metropolis man has become aware of how relative all kinds of religious concepts really are, surely in view of current scientific and technological progress. The modern city dweller has in reality become a cosmopolitan: the city has grown to the very ends of the earth. Cox calls this process, in which man comes to bear increasingly greater responsibilities for his environment, apart from traditional norms, secularization. This secularization proclaims that we can no longer hold onto the traditional philosophical interpretations of Christianity in a hapless attempt to preserve those perceptions and to restore to them their central position in life. Instead, modern Christians should support this secularization rather than condemn it. Modern man should immerse himself in the new world, the city of man, and never look back. Urbanization, in fact, provides the conditions under which secularization can thrive. By urbanization Cox means a new societal environment for which the variety of lifestyles and the loss of traditions are characteristic. Urbanization therefore contains a high degree of social tolerance and of anonymity.

The author then introduces the term "technopolis" to indicate that the basic pattern of modern society has been formed by bringing together those technological and political factors in which this new world outlook has been rooted. According to Cox, the Biblical message does not pass by these new developments. For example, the transition from "*strangers and sojourners*" to "*fellow citizens and members of the household of God*" (Ephesians 2:19) indicates that the New Testament church has its source of nutrients in the urban climate.

One of the special features of modern urban living is its depersonalization and anonymity. According to Cox, this depersonalization of urban life is an essential element in the social structure of the modern city; it is necessary in order that the modern urbanite may protect and sustain himself. Any attempt to introduce the Christian idea of *koinonia* (the close-knit brotherhood) as a social pattern in urban life, is a mistake. Anonymity has nothing to do with a lack of Christian love. Not everyone who lives close by is our neighbor. He becomes our neighbor when he is in need of our help. Amidst the great many occupants of large apartment buildings, anonymity is the only way in which personal privacy can be protected. By this anonymity man becomes really free of the Law; it is the Glad Tiding which makes man aware of his right to choose in freedom.

In that respect the urbanization process, according to Cox, heralds the liberation from the ill-fitting bonds of a traditional culture: the city of man is a secularized city. Yet this city is not in conflict with the Kingdom of God. The city is a present-day manifestation of God's Kingdom. According to Cox, the coming of the kingdom demands a radical severance from the past. For that, the city of man creates the conditions. The city dweller functions, then, as a moving force of social action and revolution. Within that context the church in the city of man is called upon to fulfill the role of God's avant-garde: the church is a servant which takes up its armor in the struggle for the wellbeing and the health of the city of man.

Assessment

After this short (and therefore incomplete) summary of Harvey Cox's line of thinking, a few notes must be made. In the first place, the concept "secularization" as used by Cox has a completely different meaning from what is traditional among Christians. According to Cox, secularization means: a process of growing freedom and independence, in which conventional opinions are indeed discarded, but in which the Bible still functions as a guide, albeit not as the principal ground and foundation. In a way Cox gives a theological basis for the modern outlook on life in an urban setting, based on a point of departure that seems rather moralistic. His approach to action within urban culture is devoid of a true Biblical foundation and is built on little else than a few words of Scripture taken out of context. His vision of God's Kingdom, which via the liberation from and the shedding of traditional patterns shall be manifested in the city of man, is based on a revolutionary theology whose basis has certainly not been derived from the Bible. Harvey Cox lacks a true conception of the history of salvation. Hence his use of Scripture is man-centered and restricted to the use of examples, whereby not the honor of God, but the benefit to mankind, prevails.

In that regard, Schilder's theological thinking was much more comprehensive and dynamic. His conception of the covenant of works as one that encompasses all the activities of man even after the fall, offers a meaningful perspective for our thinking about the city. As such it is of great importance for our theme. The city must be subservient to God's plan of salvation for this world, a plan that eventually will lead to the new city with its streets of gold and its pearly gates. In a subsequent article I shall try to make a positive appraisal and to confront some different political views.

No blueprint

I reiterate the notion that the Bible provides no blueprint of the ideal city. In the Bible we find the city as an ordinary geographical description of a certain way of living together; it has many advantages, but also many darker sides. The fact that the New Jerusalem is introduced in Revelation as a symbol of the perfect society after Christ's return is in my opinion a valid reason to believe that cities of our present society can be used as examples: society can use the city as a mirror. However, a detailed study of the city-like structure of the New Jerusalem still does not produce a blueprint for our present-day city. The Bible is no handbook for urban architecture. But that fact does not prevent religious convictions and ideologies from being meaningful for the shaping of the city.

An example of that we find in Nova Huta, the new city which was developed as a model city in Poland after the communists assumed power. This city, with its parks and many recreational and cultural facilities, was meant to serve as a tangible symbol of the ideal society that would grow out of communism. The prospective residents of this city were selected on the basis of their ideological persuasion. A similar example of Marxist-dominated urban architecture can be found in the well-known "Karl Marx Gardens" in Vienna. The integration of rural and urban architecture in China during the Mao Tse Tung era is equally a mirroring of the ideological vision on the city and its surroundings. Hence the slogan: "Let a hundred roses flower in the Garden of Eden." It expresses the sentiment that the perfect Marxist society knows no conflict between urban and rural lifestyles.

Many urban designers have a tendency to do their work with the mentality of those changing the world for the better. In itself there is, of course, nothing wrong with such a desire. However, in actual practice the decision-making process touching on urban design goes through so many bureaucratic and political channels, that there is seldom any recognizable individual influence left.

I wish to focus more on the criteria for policymaking with respect to the city. What motives do, or should, play a role in the government of the city, and to what extent does the proper functioning of the city depend on them? Let us therefore take a closer look at some of the normative elements germane to the nature of our judgment.

The city: condition and example

The city is the dwelling place and the working place for many millions of people. As centers where a great variety of people live together, cities present themselves as geographical unities. This means that the city is the place where uncounted numbers of people have to realize their office as stewards in God's Kingdom. Therefore urban life must not involve the pursuit of individual or group egoism. Of course, this is valid for any kind of human settlement, but, in comparison, the city offers endlessly greater opportunities.

Unfortunately, the living conditions in many cities have deteriorated badly. Many developments are responsible for this decay: large-scale developments, the divorce between living quarters and the work place, traffic congestion, pollution, crime, and the lack of recreational facilities, to mention just a few. Consequently, many city dwellers live with a sense of alienation, of being lost in a huge crowd, feeling uncertain, lonely, and helpless.

Notwithstanding the poor living environments of some urban districts, however, the city may not be dismissed as unacceptable or substandard, because it also offers splendid opportunities to develop cultural potentials in economics, technology, science, and art. The city therefore has real potential for the renewal and opening up of society.

Mitscherlich has offered an extensive analysis of the inhospitality of the modern city. Many large cities with their senseless uniformity and their obvious lack of a clearly distinguishable heart do no justice to the multiplicity of real life. Such cities cause their citizens to feel a loss of identity; the city dweller suffers a chronic sense of restlessness due to the lack of a real "home." This causes all kinds of aggressiveness and irritation. Therefore, Mitscherlich rightly pleads for more creative planning, more apparent contrasts, and an urban form-giving that allows dwellings and inhabitants to repose in harmony with their environment.³

It is clear enough by now that many of the conditions necessary for proper functioning are absent in the modern pattern of an average city. Drab living quarters, apartments that aren't soundproof, traffic problems, and crime hardly permit anyone to feel at home in the city.

Therefore, imaginatively designed, contrasting city quarters, properly adapted traffic systems, and attractive housing construction help to create an enjoyable living environment. The citizens and the city administration must be prepared to foot the bill for such developments. Allowing poor developments to prevail on account of financial considerations will cost dearly; it will result in the deterioration of standards and, consequently, of the cultural level of its population. Therefore, it is essential that every possible positive aspect of the city be vigorously pursued.

Besides offering conditions, the city also functions as an example. The city should offer such a good climate that man does not lose sight of the meaning and importance of his existence and mandate.

Massive concrete living quarters and rows of grey apartment buildings can hardly be considered good examples of urban variety and recognizable individual styles. The city should offer protection to the family unit, as well as opportunities for social interaction and cultural development. The city should not cause an equalization of society, a uniformity of lifestyles, but rather promote creativity, variety, and beauty.⁴ In that respect the marvelous description of the New Jerusalem in the last book of the Bible provides a helpful guide when contemplating modern urban design.

It must be clear by now that the city is more than a collection of lifeless buildings. The city is a living organic unity that has the calling to display justice and harmony in a world that is marred by the egoism of groups and individuals. It can also bring renewal and spiritual enrichment — through the introduction of new living experiences and cultural encounters, for instance. The city, then, is a

source, offering man many possibilities, helping him to develop his potentials. Therefore there is every reason to regard the city positively as the bearer of culture in our time.⁵

Directions for the city

The urban living climate mirrors the culture of a society.⁶ That means that when we observe increased poverty, danger, and the formation of ghettos as the characteristic of many cities, it is obvious that our society is in dire straits. Of course, it is of utmost importance that the city function as a bearer of culture, among other things, through the application of an effective urban policy. This would include a change in direction, moving away from the large-scale approach, the spatial massiveness, and the impersonal city structure. Maintenance and enhancement of urban functions, promotion of spatial variety, opposing spatial equalization, reintroducing small-scale development, and individual recognition — those are key factors for the formulation of metropolitan policies.

Alas, one notices that, especially under the pressure of a postwar preoccupation with growth, many city quarters and urban districts have been built with only economic considerations in mind; human qualities were made subservient to outright materialistic priorities. Consequently, matters like responsibilities, respect for human dignity, and stewardship were lost. As a result, the industrialized nations are facing increasing urban poverty. For many, the city is still a place to live, but it is not a home.⁷ Large-scale development and massive home construction are counterproductive to well-balanced living conditions for which a cozy closeness and a clearly recognizable and historically grown identity are essential.

Therefore, the following criteria are important as guidelines for a responsible urban policy:

- Man is created by God as the "crown of creation," and in all his occupational activities he must be given room to properly fulfill his mandate. This does not only apply to his calling in the family, in the church, or on the job, it also applies to the wider circles of societal life, including social contacts and recreation. Alienation and isolation caused by poor urban planning must be prevented as much as possible.
- Everybody must have the opportunity to perform his duties as a responsible and free person, irrespective of personal power, status, income, race, or sex. The urban climate must not hinder the carrying out of this calling but, rather, enhance it. Therefore urban facilities must be equally accessible to all.
- The urban socioeconomic climate, especially working conditions and the housing market, must not allow egoistical motives, extortion, or speculation to prevail. Instead it must be conducive to the responsible exercising of one's stewardship; every person must have the opportunity to use his talents to the honor of God and for the benefit of his neighbor. In this context the protection of the economically weaker ones should have high priority.
- The quality of housing in an urban setting must allow family and social life to flourish by providing opportunities for recreation, study, contemplation, and work. The wishes of the housewife should be taken into account as an important source.
- Urban architecture must not be aimed at following the trend of an impersonal technology and massiveness, but at such forms of living together that allow one to recognize his neighbor and to recognize God's hand in the beauty of nature.

In short, urban policies must create a climate in which everyone can properly realize his cultural mandate. As a bearer of culture, the city can develop its potential as a trailblazer.⁸

The Christian democratic point of view

In a recently published study, the CDA (Christian Democratic Alliance) discussed similar urban problems.⁹ Some attention should be paid to their findings. The CDA report rightly states that due to the severe limitation of available space in Holland, relative to the size of the population, the use of available space must be subject to a fair and just policy. In the report, the CDA mentions a

number of aspects: stewardship, solidarity, division of responsibility, and justice. The reporters give the following contents to those concepts:

Stewardship is the calling of man to develop and replenish the earth. This includes proper care of the entire creation, whereby the protection of weaker elements must be given sufficient attention.

Solidarity is the second CDA concept. All people should be given the opportunity to develop their potentials and reach their destination. Again, attention must be paid to those in society who are most vulnerable.

Division of responsibility is the third concept. Individual as well as societal institutions must be able to carry out their own responsible task, independent of the political choices made by the government. Thereby the allotment of available space, more than anything else, is a public concern, whereas the actual management and use of space allows for more influence of the initiative and individual input of the citizens.

Justice, according to the CDA report, is a careful balancing of interests, allowing certain values to prevail and offering special protection to the weaker elements.

These concepts of the CDA have a certain attractiveness, certainly inasmuch as they run parallel to the criteria I had formulated myself. But a number of questions remain. Being invited by the CDA to speak at a study conference, I made the following remarks about the subject.¹⁰

It is a positive step that a number of concepts are formulated in the report as criteria for a Christian democratic urban policy. However, in the report these normative concepts — stewardship, solidarity, justice, and responsibility — are weakened by the added remark that "...we must never cease to search for the meaning of those concepts." Such a process results in a very unimpressive vagueness. Furthermore, there appears to be no coherence between these concepts. In my opinion, it would have been wiser to choose a solid central guiding principle and, on the basis of that principle, to make specific applications to particular spatial problems. I would then have interpreted space management and urban policy as the means to develop a country with all its regions and cities in the best possible manner, so that the resulting environment allows each person to carry out his own God-given calling to the greater honor of the Lord. That guiding principle does indeed include concepts like stewardship, solidarity, justice, and responsibility, but it tends more toward renewal or, if you wish, reformation, and it prevents us from making ad hoc applications to solve particular problems. From this guiding principle, it would in my view, be easier to tie in with the responsibilities and jurisdictions of government agencies — for example, in balancing conflicting interests in the necessity of making agriculture respond to environmental concerns.

A few more notes on the CDA concepts regarding spatial management. The concept: solidarity is too shallow in my opinion, and, as a criterion for government policy, it is even questionable. It does not become clear what the meaning of this concept is relative to the criterion of justice. Furthermore, the responsibility concept needs clarification.

According to the report, the allotment of space based on considerations of stewardship and solidarity is to be considered a matter of public concern, whereas private interests should be more involved in its further application and use. That is too static an approach to any liking. Spatial management and urban policies concern themselves with the calling to find the ever-shifting and changing balance between available space and the volatile needs of the population.

Allotment and use cannot always be clearly distinguished. It would therefore be better to formulate specific tasks for governmental responsibility, such as stimulating orderly development, creating conditions conducive to a harmonious growth, and establishing criteria to curtail undesirable processes.

After this confrontation with a different, albeit somewhat parallel, political viewpoint, I hope to deal with the official report on "the city" published by the Scientific Council for Government Policy.

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¹ K. Schilder, *Wat is de Hemel?* (Kampen: Kok, 1954), pp. 178-182.

² H. Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

³ A. Mitscherlich, *De onherbergzaamheid van onze steden (Our Inhospitable Cities)* (Hilversum: Brand, 1967).

⁴ See especially P. Bos, "Mensecologie en Ruimtelijke Ordening; een Hypothese," in *Regionale Economie*, L.H. Klaassen, editor (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1972), pp. 246-290.

⁵ See P. Nijkamp, "Waarden en waarheid in de ruimtelijke wetenschappen, *Radix*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1981), pp. 2-19.

⁶ See T. Lemaire, *Filosofie van het landschap* (Bilthoven: Ambo, 1970).

⁷ See B. Ward, *The Home of Man* (New York: Norton & Co., 1976).

⁸ See also P. Nijkamp, *Herfstij der Vooruitgang* (Groningen: De Vuurbaak, 1980).

⁹ *De ruimte en wij, wij en de ruimte*, Wetenschappelijk Instituut voor het CDA (The Hague, 1981).

¹⁰ See the report of the conference, "Ruimtelijke ordening," Wetenschappelijk Instituut voor het CDA (The Hague, 1981), p. 7.