

Institution: University of Exeter
Unit of Assessment: Theology and Religious Studies
Title of case study: Theology, the environment and urban planning policy
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Timothy Gorrings research examines issues in urban planning and transition towns from a theological and ethical perspective. It places moral, spiritual and aesthetic values alongside economic and physical considerations at the heart of the planning process, and provides analyses of movements seeking environmental and social change. Gorrings has presented and discussed his research in policy-shaping fora, and as part of interactions with churches, charities and campaigning groups including the Transition Network, who form the main beneficiaries of his work. His research has had international impact beyond the HE academy, influencing the work of urban planners and shaping public education about the urban environment, especially in regard to ethical, spiritual and environmental considerations.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The planning of urban environments entails a range of technical and physical skills, but it also requires informed and critical reflection on the values and ethics that such environments should embody. This is particularly the case in view of the current need to re-envision our cities in the face of ecological pressures, among which climate change is especially significant.</p> <p>It is this challenge of thinking theologically and ethically about the form of the city that is addressed in Timothy Gorrings research, which has taken place within the context of a wider Departmental focus on the engagement of theology with issues of public and ethical concern. This focus includes the study of not only urban planning but also subjects including farming, human rights, criminal justice and environmental ethics. Gorrings in particular has been at the forefront of such research since his appointment to Exeter as Professor of Theological Studies in 1998.</p> <p>Gorrings first monograph on theology and the urban environment, <i>A Theology of the Built Environment</i>, was published in 2002 by Cambridge University Press and was submitted to RAE2008 (3.1). Described by John Vincent in a review for the <i>International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church</i> as ‘a brilliant, creative, sustained, wide ranging and enormously erudite contribution to the current debates about “the City” and “the Urban”’, this monograph formed the subject of a week-long conference at the University of Virginia in 2006, in which Gorrings was invited to participate. The monograph has also informed the development of a specialist undergraduate module, ‘Theology and the Built Environment’, which involves visits to a variety of urban environments and discussions with public officials involved in the planning process. Additional research in this area led to the publication of two articles in peer-reviewed journals and a chapter in an edited volume (3.2; 3.3; 3.4), and culminated in the publication by Cambridge University Press in 2011 of a second major monograph by Gorrings, <i>The Common Good and the Global Emergency: God and the Built Environment</i>, which is being submitted to REF2014 (3.5).</p> <p>In 2010, Gorrings was awarded a major AHRC grant for a two-year project examining the role of values in responding to major social change. The project focused on the Transition Network, which promotes sustainable living in local communities (3.7) and is particularly strong in the South-West of England. Gorrings has been involved with the Network since very near its inception, and he has also assisted with its establishment in the United States. A monograph based on the findings of the project is due to be published by Gorrings, likely with Polity Press. Gorrings and Rosemary Beckham (employed as researcher since Michael DeLashmutts departure to the USA) have written an account of Transition for Churches, published by SCM in October 2013. In addition, Beckham is writing two journal articles on Theology and Transition. Stewart Barr from the School of Geography, who jointly held the grant, has one journal article published (3.6) and a second in preparation. A postdoctoral research assistant, Justin Pollard, worked with local Transition groups, seeking to understand their approach to social change and the values that sustain them, and is also due to produce two journal articles.</p>

3. References to the research

Evidence of the quality of the research: peer-reviewed for academic journals or by anonymous readers for CUP; submitted for RAE or REF assessment (as indicated for individual items below).

1. T. Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002) [peer-reviewed; subject of a conference in the USA; strong reviews; submitted to RAE2008]
2. T. Gorringer, 'Living Toward a Vision: Cities, the Common Good, and the Christian Imagination', *Anglican Theological Review* 91.4 (2009) 521-37 [peer-reviewed journal]
3. T. Gorringer, 'Salvation by Bricks: Theological Reflections on the Planning Process', *International Journal of Public Theology* 2.1 (2008) 119-135 [peer-reviewed journal]
4. T. Gorringer, 'Aesthetics and the Built Environment' in *Aesthetics After von Balthasar* ed. O. Bychkov and J. Fodor (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008) 216-233
5. T. Gorringer, *The Common Good and the Global Emergency: God and the Built Environment* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011) [peer-reviewed; submitted to REF2014]
6. S. Barr and P. Devine-Wright, 'Resilient Communities: Sustainabilities in Transition', *Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability* (2012) 1-8

Grants awarded to Gorringer to support his research in this area are:

7. T. Gorringer (PI), M. DeLashmutt (CoI) and S. Barr (CoI), 'The Role of Values in Underpinning Constructive Social Change: The Churches and the Transition Town Movement', AHRC, 2011-13, £226,582

4. Details of the impact

- **Informing international policy debate and practice in areas of urban planning**
- **Shaping public awareness of ethical issues relating to urban planning**
- **Highlighting need for urban planning that takes the environmental crisis seriously**

Gorringer's research has impacted upon policy and practices in urban planning at both national and international levels. The Director of Planning and Growth Management for the Metropolitan Council of Minneapolis-Saint Paul, Minnesota (population: three million) and author of a sustainable development plan for the area, writes of 'the deep intellectual and personal debt I owe to Professor Gorringer for his valuable contribution to my work as a city planner'. Referring to the early influence on his thinking of Harvey Cox's famous *The Secular City*, the letter continues: 'But as the years and decades passed, I never found within the realm of English language academic theology anything comparable until I discovered Gorringer's *Theology of the Built Environment*...which I regard as superior in wisdom and insight to Cox's work insofar as it evidences a deeper grasp of both the Christian theological tradition and city planning theory and practice' (5.1). This publication (see 3.1 above) has also been cited by J. D. Simm of the University of Nottingham and HR Water in a paper on flood risk management which argues that even such practical and essential construction projects as flood defence systems should be shaped by aesthetic as well as functional considerations (5.2).

Research by Gorringer has further helped to shape public awareness of ethical issues relating to urban planning, impacting in particular upon church communities both in the UK and abroad. In 2009, Gorringer gave a public lecture on his research into ethics and aesthetics in planning and public policy (see 3.1-3.4 above) as part of the 'Radical Abundance: A Theology of Sustainability' conference held at the Trinity Institute, New York. The lecture, which was followed by a question and answer session with the audience, was streamed live to viewers throughout the United States, and is now available to view on the Trinity Institute website (5.3) – where it received 463 viewings in February 2009 alone – together with articles responding to the issues raised. A review of the lecture has been posted on the 'God's Politics' blog maintained by 'Sojourners', a USA-based organisation for faith-based social action, and Gorringer's research in this area has also been the subject of debate on numerous other blogs, including that of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship,

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an Atlanta-based movement with approximately 1800 affiliated churches (5.4). An adult education course based on Gorrings research into theology and the built environment (see 3.1 above) has been devised, and has the aim of raising public awareness of Christian perspectives on urban issues (5.1). The course was first run at St Mark's Episcopal Cathedral, Minneapolis, in 2012. In the UK, reviews and recommendations of both Gorrings 2002 and 2011 monographs (see 3.1 and 3.5 above) have appeared on the websites of both the Arthur Rank Centre, which supports rural communities and churches in the UK, and Christian Ecology Link, which seeks to foster links between the UK's Christian churches and environmental movements.

Gorrings research (see 3.5 above) has additionally served to highlight the need for the environmental crisis to be taken seriously within urban planning. In March 2013, speaking at a seminar for Operation Noah, a UK organisation promoting responsible Church engagement with issues of climate change, Gorrings launched the Ash Wednesday Declaration which, jointly-authored by Gorrings and informed by his research, has been signed up to by all the major churches and commits them to action on climate change (5.5). A member of the Board of Operation Noah, commenting on Gorrings involvement with the Declaration, states that: 'Tim went away to produce a first draft statement which the group then discussed. It condenses a great deal of careful theology into an accessible one-side document. The final version follows exactly Tim's outline, and the vast majority of his wording. He was an essential factor in its publication [and] Operation Noah is fortunate in having Tim's support as a substantial theological and academic resource' (5.6). Discussions of and responses to the Declaration, which has received the support of Archbishop Rowan Williams, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Oecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and church groups from Australia, the USA, and continental Europe, have since featured widely in both national and international media, including the *Telegraph*, in an article that has attracted 314 reader comments (5.7), the *Guardian*, the *Church Times*, the *Church of England* newspaper, *Independent Catholic News* and the *National Catholic Reporter* (USA). The declaration has also been discussed on the websites of Eco-Congregation and the European Christian Environmental Network, as well as in the blog of *The Tablet*. It has further provided the basis for recent campaigns including, most notably, the attempt to persuade Christian churches to disinvest from fossil fuels, and in this way has had significant impact upon ecclesiastical investment bodies and their decisions (5.6).

This research has also stimulated public debate, especially among church congregations, about the importance of sustainability. In 2011, Gorrings delivered Operation Noah's Annual Lecture, speaking on the subject of whether climate change, and its connection with the global economy, was a matter for Church confession – a lecture that was significant in paving the way for the development of the Ash Wednesday Declaration the following year. A response to the lecture was given by Christine Elliot of the Methodist Church in Britain (5.8). Additionally, in 2012, Gorrings led workshops on his research into sustainable economy at the Christian Ecology Link annual conference, the theme of which was 'Spiritual Capital and Sustainable Living', and, in 2013, he gave a paper entitled 'Towards a New Economics' at a theology seminar organised by Operation Noah and attended by around 50 people, including clergy and members of the public as well as academics.

Research led by Gorrings into the role of values in major social change (see 3.6 above) has impacted significantly upon the development of the Transition Network, prompting thought among church communities and other public organisations about responsible attitudes towards climate change. Gorrings research project on this subject (see 3.7 above) included a 'Values in Transition' conference, held at the University of Exeter in May 2012, which brought together academic scholars and members of the Transition community for discussion and debate about Gorrings research. A report on the conference by members of the Transition community has featured on the Transition Town Totnes website, and a public discussion of the social vision underpinning the movement, including contributions by Gorrings, has taken place on the blog of the national Transition Network website (5.9). In 2009, Gorrings was invited to present his research as keynote speaker at the Christian Ecology Link annual conference, the theme of which was the Transition Network, and, at the 2010 conference of the National Justice and Peace Network, he led workshops on Transition Towns and the future of food. An interview with Gorrings, in which he discusses his research in this area, featured in the August 2013 edition of the *Church Times*, the leading Anglican newspaper for clergy and church members. Gorrings research has also

influenced the development of Transition-inspired initiatives in the USA (5.10).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Excerpt from correspondence on file, from the Director of Planning and Growth Management for the Metropolitan Council of Minneapolis-Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA.
2. J D Simm, 'Sea wall or sea front? Looking at engineering for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management through different eyes' (Floodrisk 2008), available at: eprints.hrwallingford.co.uk/227/ (accessed 05.09.2013)
3. Lecture given at Trinity Institute, Trinity Wall Street, available at: www.trinitywallstreet.org/file/604 (accessed 05.09.2013)
4. Blog post about Gorrings's 2002 monograph by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship available at: cbfportal.wordpress.com/2008/08/18/book-review-theology-of-the-built-environment/ (18.08.2008; accessed 05.09.2013)
5. Ash Wednesday Declaration available at: www.operationnoah.org/ash-wednesday-declaration
6. Excerpt from correspondence on file, from a bishop who is a member of the Board of Operation Noah.
7. Article in the *Telegraph* discussing the Ash Wednesday Declaration available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/9098421/Pollution-goes-against-Gods-will-say-church-leaders-in-Ash-Wednesday-message.html (22.02.2013; accessed 21.10.2013)
8. Gorrings's lecture for Operation Noah and response by Christine Elliot available at: www.operationnoah.org/annual-lecture-2011 (accessed 05.09.2013)
9. Blog discussion of the values underpinning the Transition Network available at: www.transitionnetwork.org/blogs/catrina-pickering/2011-09/what-you-think-about-adding-inequality-transition-network-purpose (accessed 05.09.2013)
10. Reference to Gorrings's research in Transition-inspired US project available at: www.genesisfarm.org/program.taf?_function=detail&id=102 (accessed 05.09.2013)