

# **The City as Liturgy: An Orthodox Theologian Corresponds with Jane Jacobs About a Gentle Recon- ciliation of Science and Religion**

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*I ask the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan Methodios of Boston on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of his elevation to the episcopacy. I am very happy to participate in this volume, which is offered in his honor. He was the President of Holy Cross during my studies there, and I came to appreciate his exceptional leadership and spiritual guidance. May the Lord grant him many years in the service of our holy church in America.*

The American-born writer Jane Jacobs (1916-2006) was by far the single most important twentieth century thinker about cities and about the economic and social processes by which they emerge, are maintained, and either flourish or die. In particular, she was the most articulate critic of the policy known as “urban renewal” that was in place in the United States from 1949 to 1974, and that had the distressing effect of destroying the very neighborhoods it claimed to renew. Moreover, her insights about city life are inseparable from her expert application of the new science of organic complexity (the close cousin of chaos theory), which was first discovered by biologists from the 1930’s onward. Not only did she employ this epistemology to accomplish the transcendence of both Enlightenment and Modernist approaches to urban planning, but also already in her first monograph she insisted that these older veins of intellectual inquiry had in a more general way exhausted themselves. Her 1961 *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* as-

served the demise, through natural causes, of exclusively reductive approaches to the study of all living order, and thus of the Cartesian project.

If these had been her only intellectual accomplishments—city theorist, complexity theorist, and earliest herald of a truly scientific post-modern science—she would belong to the first rank of twentieth century thinkers. But in a contribution that is in its way even more astounding, in her urbanist and complexity writings she inadvertently laid the groundwork for a new cosmology that could accurately be described as “liturgical,” and she thus prepared the way for a gentle reconciliation of science and religion. In the light of her work, an Orthodox theologian might observe that science turns out to have discovered the cosmic pervasiveness of liturgy, while religion appears to the scientist as nothing less than the single most important natural matrix for human emergence.

In the spring of 1999 I first discovered the theological meaning of Jacobs’ work, and in particular of her freshman monograph *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. At the behest of my dissertation director, in a letter dated January 26, 2000, I contacted Mrs. Jacobs with my findings; her immediate response initiated a relationship that endured until her death in April of 2006.

This paper is, at bottom, an argument for a fuller reception by the academy and the public of Jane Jacobs’ intellectual significance—an argument motivated by loyalty to her as a friend as well as the certainty that what her work offers is of vital importance to the world, the Church, and the Academy. I will introduce briefly Jane Jacobs’ life, work, and vision of urban order; will comment on her significance for twenty-first century epistemology and cosmology; and will present a novel religious interpretation of her writing. Included here also is the letter mentioned above, together with her response.

In sum, I argue that in the light of Jacobs’ achievement both urban planners and theologians must understand the order of cities to be in a real sense “liturgical,” and that the entire Academy must recognize liturgy to be a universal category applying to some degree to all emergent systems. And although she remained a committed religious agnostic, to a degree that will surprise the reader, Jane Jacobs agreed.

### **JANE JACOBS: THE LIFE AND WORK**

In April of 2006, readers and thinkers across a wide range of disciplines mourned the passing of Jane Jacobs, an urbanist, economist, public activist, journalist, and com-

plexity theorist who in more than fifty years of writing and organizing had achieved legendary status among devotees of the city. Having led the fight that killed the Lower Manhattan Expressway that would have destroyed New York City's Greenwich Village, she shortly thereafter emigrated with her husband, daughter, and two draft-age sons to Canada to escape the Viet Nam War. Upon discovering that her new residence in Toronto lay in the path of a planned inner-city highway that would have devastated the entire city, she galvanized local opposition and killed that, too. But it was her earlier failed campaign to save New York's old Penn Station that secured the strength of the historic preservation movement in the United States, and it was her leadership in this fight, together with her 1961 monograph, that established her nationally as *the* preeminent voice in thinking about city life.

As an author and public intellectual Jane Jacobs made a tremendous impact. Written in related but diverse disciplines, each of her five main books is a kind of cult classic in its respective field. And each—*The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961),<sup>1</sup> *The Economy of Cities* (1969), *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (1984), *Systems of Survival: A Dialogue on the Moral Foundations of Commerce and Politics* (1992), and *The Nature of Economies* (2000), has remained continuously in print.<sup>2</sup> To summarize briefly the insights of these books is perhaps necessary here: *Death and Life* applied complexity theory in what is now universally recognized as the definitive study of city order—in 1961!; *The Economy of Cities* explained why the great Western foreign aid programs would fail to catalyze real development in the Third World, and proposed an alternative approach to aid later corroborated by the work of Muhammad Yunus—in 1969!; taken together with the latter work, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* and *The Nature of Economies* effectively supplant Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* as the foundation texts of economic science (something to which only a very few economists are now catching on); and, *Systems of Survival* re-grounds social ethics in a provocative way by arguing that public morality must be governed not by a single set of principles, but rather by three distinct though interdependent sets of ethical injunctions.

Three of Jacobs' five main works were written in Toronto, and indeed she attained Canadian citizenship in 1974. She lived in the Spadina section of Toronto until her death in 2006 at the age of 89. During her last years, her residence at 69

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<sup>1</sup> Each of these books was published in New York City by Random House.

<sup>2</sup> I am leaving to one side, for the moment, her last completed work, 2004's *Dark Age Ahead*. Essentially an essay on personalism, it is less well understood than her other works.

Albany Avenue attracted a steady stream of pilgrims—urban theorists of one stripe or another who sought either her counsel or her blessing. She was also asked at one juncture to speak with development economists from the World Bank, although she hadn't much success in explaining her vision of how to combat globally poverty, it seems.

In my 2003 doctoral dissertation *The King Returns to His City: An Interpretation of the Great Week and Bright Week Cycle of the Orthodox Church*,<sup>3</sup> I argued that Jane Jacobs' meditations on cities, social ethics, and economies hold indispensable keys for any Orthodox approach to urban, political, and economic order. This is partly because she was the first to apply the science of complexity theory to these problems, and so was able to describe them without recourse to distorting reductions. Complexity theory, also referred to as or closely allied with the study of complex organic order, takes a scientifically holistic approach to the fields it studies, without collapsing into vagueness or emotionalism. Before an Orthodox theologian can attempt to "baptize" economics or social ethics, he ought to have an empirically grounded economics and social ethics with which to work; I contend that Jacobs has re-founded economics and urban studies, and so significantly meditated on social ethics, that her contributions will come to be regarded as deeply foundational. And because she does all this with a language that is best construed as "liturgical," her significance for Orthodox theology is redoubled.

### **URBAN RENEWAL: DESTROYING THE CITY TO SAVE IT**

Jane Jacobs's first book was her most significant. As an associate editor at *Architectural Forum*, Jacobs had been tasked with the urban renewal beat, giving her the chance to observe project planning and building across the entire United States. Her reactions became an article, which in turn elicited the support of the Rockefeller Foundation in the writing of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Still in print today almost fifty years later, it opens with the refreshingly direct lines, "This book is an attack on current city planning and rebuilding," and continues

It is also, and mostly, an attempt to introduce new principles of city planning and rebuilding, different and even opposite from those taught in everything from schools of architecture to the Sunday supplements and women's magazines. My attack is not based on quibbles about rebuilding methods or hairsplitting about fash-

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ions in design. It is an attack, rather, on the principles and aims that have shaped modern, orthodox city planning and rebuilding.

Put briefly, the “principles” animating city planning in America from the 1950’s to 1970’s grew out of rationalist and Cartesian approaches to order, and the “aims” derived from what Jacobs summarized as the “Radiant Garden City Beautiful” aesthetic—the notion that a City could be recast as a kind of genteel park through the construction of gleaming towers above artfully sanitized groundscapes.

These two influences—one scientific, one aesthetic, but both products of Enlightenment rationalism—converged in historic legislation, the 1949 U.S. Urban Renewal Act. This Act of Congress remained in force until 1974 and was the single most fateful piece of legislation ever for the shape, prosperity, and health of American cities. It authorized federal, state, and local authorities to undertake ambitious and expensive projects in slum renewal. Over 300 American cities felt its impact, and over 2,000 neighborhoods were rebuilt, the majority of them inhabited by African Americans.<sup>4</sup>

As Jacobs recorded twelve years into the process, the “rebuilding” of a neighborhood was typically quite traumatic. Existing residents in a neighborhood that had been classified for “slum clearance,” were evicted, left to find for themselves their next residence. “Urban Renewal” quickly came to be known in the black ghetto as “Negro Removal,” as thousands of black homes, churches, businesses, clubs, shops, and restaurants were demolished with almost no compensation to those affected (since most of these residents were poor and thus renters, their financial loss was calculated to be minimal). Together with this, necessarily, went the destruction of the elaborate family, church, and social networks that had been the chief wealth of the poor Negro in the North. In their place went federal housing projects inspired by the urban vision of Le Corbusier—a vision that has been summarized accurately as “towers in a park,” but which in practice amounted to “towers in a sea of concrete,” and which became known, more sinisterly, simply as “the projects.” As “the projects,” urban renewal bore the strange fruit of unprecedented urban pathologies that made the term “inner city” synonymous with heinous gun violence, drugs, illegitimacy, and intractable poverty.

Wholly owned and controlled by distant federal bureaucrats, it seemed both rational and charitable that these new towers should be reserved for the very poorest

<sup>4</sup> See Mindy Fullilove, *Root Shock: How Tearing up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It* (New York: One World/Ballantine, 2004).

of the urban population. Indeed, income tests were imposed so that any who made significant economic progress, would be forced to leave. Combined with the prior expropriation of black businesses and the fact that their social networks had been sown to the four winds, these residential income requirements sentenced black and white Americans in renewed neighborhoods to impoverishment and social dislocation that were unprecedented in American history. The income restrictions spelled permanent internal exile for an entire racial and social class, since they would henceforth be legally blocked from reestablishing the stable family and social ties that urban planning had annihilated.

Jacobs' book received instant critical acclaim. It was seen by the public at large as a compassionate and lucid account of the ills of urban planning methodologies. Millions of readers felt in its pages the cry of the wounded American city. Yet it would not be until decades later that its observations about the true nature of city order made their way even imperfectly into governmental planning and private development policies—a delay in “reception” that has caused incalculable harm to the people of America, and to the racial and cultural climate here.

By the 1990's, federal housing officials at the Department of Housing and Urban Development were reversing course, once again evicting thousands of African American families, but this time granting the residents federal housing voucher support, and doing so in order to clear the high-rise projects that had become synonymous with, because they were in fact a major cause of urban pathology. At their demolition, the towers—intentionally cut off as they had been from the tissue of the surrounding city—were mourned by no one, thus ending one chapter in a tragic episode in the history of American cities that in many ways still continues. Although presumably well-intentioned, urban renewal had been the single greatest attack on the dignity and welfare of black Americans since the end of slavery, and it must be added to the long list of assaults to which Americans of African origin have been uniquely subjected in the United States—including exile, slavery, segregation, hate crimes, misguided welfare policies, and racial profiling. Urban renewal, conceived as an act of pure philanthropy, is however, the only item on that list which remains mostly unrecognized for its traumatic impact, and thus is harder to heal.<sup>5</sup>

It wasn't only African Americans, however, who were affected, nor can the mistakes of urban renewal be limited to housing policy. In its broad scope, as we shall

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<sup>5</sup> The exception is Fullilove's *Root Shock*.

see below, renewal treated the city brutally and diminished the lives of all its residents and of citizens in the country as a whole.

### A NEW SCIENCE

The vast and vastly expensive process of uprooting, demolishing, and rebuilding American cities was guided by assumptions about what constituted city order. Early twentieth century planners felt that a city should be a kind of work of art, its structure visible at a flash from the air and its shape imposed by a single will, that of the planner. This shape, moreover, should be frozen in time, or change only with the permission and according to the vision of the planner.<sup>6</sup>

The planners behind urban renewal generally saw the city as a problem in pre-quantum, pre-relativity physics; for them, the City was dead matter to be manipulated by the reasoned plans of a single will, for the benefit of a unitary gaze. Urban planners had also learned to interpret the city as a collection of static and interchangeable parts. Whether these parts were human or material, planners sorted them by category and assigned them appropriate geographical locations. Whole city districts were labeled “residential,” “commercial,” or “retail” and cleared of non-homogeneous uses; persons were sorted according to whether they were high, low, middle, or middle-low or middle-high, income, and then economically non-homogeneous people were banished from “inappropriate” sectors of the rebuilt city. Zoning codes and urban renewal schemes were intended to drain away the chaotic aspects of cities, replacing it with a clear, rationalist order.

It was exactly as if an entomologist, confronted with a valley of butterflies, had decided that the butterflies’ behavior was chaotic and irrational, and that to flourish the butterflies first must be organized under glass in neat rows according to species. But such a butterfly collection, however it might satisfy the human desire for a certain type of order, and however much it might advance one aspect of human understanding, is necessarily death to the butterflies themselves. Urban renewal was really no more sophisticated, in either its conception or its application, than this.

And yet urban renewal was practiced for more than two decades by respectable men, who deafened themselves to the cries of human suffering caused by their policies because their science demanded it. What was this science? It is on this point

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<sup>6</sup> See Tim Patitsas and Stavroula Conrad, “The Current Planning Process: Its Roots and Results,” at <http://www.patternlanguage.com/townplanning/timpatitsas.htm>. Viewed September 18, 2008.



that Jacobs' *Death and Life*, already brilliant as a meditation on city life, rose to universal intellectual significance. Her book not only attacked a policy, it explained and in fact justified the epistemologies that made that policy appear sane to its practitioners, while revealing a new epistemology that had outclassed those which preceded it.

In its closing chapter, "The Kind of Problem a City Is," *Death and Life* presents a history of science that had become known to Jacobs during her tenure at the Rockefeller Foundation. Warren Weaver, the director of natural sciences research for two decades there, had laid out in his 1958 valedictory address the shape of the new class of order by contrasting it with two other types of order discovered earlier - "problems in simplicity," and "problems in disorganized complexity."<sup>7</sup>

Weaver's address distinguished three distinct epistemological approaches, each valid in its own right, but each applicable only in certain cases. Science had first learned to handle problems involving two variables directly related to each other; next, it had learned to handle problems at the opposite extreme by addressing seemingly limitless numbers of random variables; and finally, from 1932 onward, the life sciences had led the way to the formal discovery of a new class of order involving a middle-range of variables. The most important aspect of this third class of order was not the moderate number of variables it involved, however, but that in this class the variables were all *interrelated* and "show[ed] the essential feature of organization."<sup>8</sup> Weaver implied that virtually all scientific phenomena could be handled in one of these three ways: "problems in simplicity" through reductive approaches; "problems in disorganized complexity" through statistical mechanics and probability; and "problems in organized complexity" through recourse to the study of processes, catalysts, relationships, and reactions.

Each class of order is empirically real; each can be used to design technologies and systems that interact predictably with the natural world. But whereas in the first two classes of order nature can be conceived of in mechanical terms, and the scientific observer can safely regard himself as an outsider, these assumptions do not apply in the case of organic order. There, the object of study is in some sense a subject, too, possessing a wholeness that is greater than the sum of its parts. Also, there the observer cannot hope to comprehend his subject unless he is in some sense comprehended by it. Perhaps the chief limitation of the Enlightenment is that it places all its

<sup>7</sup> Warren Weaver, in *The President's Review, Including "A Quarter Century in the Natural Sciences" by Warren Weaver, from The Rockefeller Foundation Annual Report, 1958*. (New York: The Rockefeller Foundation, 1958), 7-15.

<sup>8</sup> Weaver, 13.

confidence in mechanistic classes of order, ignorant of the possibility that another, more sophisticated class, might exist.

This is exactly, Jacobs inferred, what had transpired in the minds of American urban planners. For her opponents, cities could be understood through recourse to either simplistic or statistical methodologies that had been developed in the dawn of modern science.

Faced with the apparent chaos of the living, breathing, pulsing city, and especially with cities that contained large numbers of exotically (to them) poor, immigrant, and black individuals, they reacted with the imposition of classic scientific models of order. Guided by these models, they classified, sorted, and shook up the city until it could be recast into a facsimile of a proper Cartesian map—a map devoid of change, life, and freedom. Urban dwellers became just so many insects to be corralled and mounted in “proper housing.” The passage in 1949 by the United States Congress of the Urban Renewal Act had lent the full weight of federal governmental power and funding to the nationwide application of such deadly hermeneutical constructs.

It was precisely on the point of science and epistemology that Jacobs in 1961 was able to outclass the urban renewal planners. Motivated by a genuine love for cities, and by the desperate unheard cries of African and other Americans, Jacobs countered that cities were more like biological organisms than machines, and that to order them as though they were exclusively problems in disorganized complexity and simplicity was by definition to kill them. Wherever planners had treated the living city as though it were inert, their hermeneutical mistake became self-fulfilling: Jacobs describes their impact as the “witless murder” of American cities. She pointed out that “renewed” and rationalized areas of major cities were chronically unsafe and dysfunctional. City order, she argued, had in reality more to do with webs of human relationship and intricate commercial networks than it did with gleaming architectural structures. Partly through her influence, the Urban Renewal Act of 1949 was finally allowed to die in 1974, and planners and policy makers turned slowly toward a renewed appreciation of the city street, the mixed-use neighborhood, and the stable social network.

In effect, Jacobs had employed the discovery of non-linear order by biologists to render obsolete the reductionism of Enlightenment-style Cartesians, as well as the naïve progressivism of modernist city planners, thus blowing the ideological cover

for the depredations of the whole brutal, violent, and hubristic scheme of Urban Renewal.

Another of Jacobs' major contributions to epistemology is her insistence that the planners who had so cruelly misunderstood cities, failed to do so precisely because they did not particularly care for cities in the first place. The implication, here and elsewhere in her work, is that you can't know something unless you love it first, whenever organic order is concerned. Part of the "being comprehended by the subject" mentioned above, is that one must be overcome by at least some measure of empathy with it. Because she intends this literally, as a matter of methodology, as much as anything else she has to say this conclusion sounded the death knell of the Enlightenment or ideal observer approach to the world.

### RECEPTION OF THE NEW SCIENCE

Because the wider Academy had been so respectful of the reductionism championed by the science of the Enlightenment, and had also been so willing to adopt statistical mechanical approaches once those became available, it might have received the Weaver Report as an opportunity to commence an era in which holism, too, became intellectually respectable, and would be seen to be an indispensable perspective on a wide range of problems in the social sciences, the humanities, and even the arts. Biologists had sloughed off the misleading essentialism that had tried to define "life," turning their attention instead to life *processes* that in their operation exhibit and effect a wholeness that is ineffable yet observable.<sup>9</sup> Their successful attention to organization and complex webs of interrelations might have inspired wide sectors of the Academy. Any discipline that had found that reductive and statistical approaches, while helpful in part, seemed also to involve some distortion of the phenomena they were used to study, might have taken the lead.

Instead, discoveries in *inorganic* non-linear order, so-called "chaos theory," have captured the academic and public imagination. From the 1950's through the 1970's discoveries in non-linear order by mathematicians, physicists, meteorologists, and a

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<sup>9</sup> Many aspects of the new holism would look familiar to the Orthodox Christian theologian. For example, while the processes—or activities - of an organism, can be made available to our knowledge, its "nature," remains mysteriously hidden. For the biology behind this (not the Orthodox theology), see H. A. Simon in Ernst Mayr, *The Growth of Biological Thought: Diversity, Evolution, and Inheritance* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 53.

host of scientists in other disciplines converged to the point that researchers across the hard sciences began to notice that the Cartesian fragmentation of sciences in the academy had begun to reverse itself.

These findings, while exciting, useful, and cosmologically significant, have if anything clouded the significance of organic complexity. When chaos at last sprang into public consciousness in 1987 with the publication of James Gleick's *Chaos: The Making of a New Science*, there was no mention of the foundational contributions that biologists had made to the study of non-linear order decades earlier. Wide areas of the academy have remained retrograde in their application of non-linearity, including practically all the humanities (theology among them) and the entire range of social sciences. To the extent that they employ non-linear methodologies, they do so independently and sporadically, and with no clear picture of how they relate to simplistic and statistical methodologies, nor of the revolution in mind made so explicit in *Death and Life*.

### **AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE WORK OF JANE JACOBS: THE CITY AS LITURGY**

This paper, as I said in the introduction is an extended and impassioned argument for the fuller "reception" of Jane Jacobs' work. Loved by many urban planners, she has nevertheless not been applied in the way she had hoped (her principal wish was that urban planners would make recourse to complexity science in order to reinvent the science of zoning). She is not yet widely recognized as having re-founded economic science.<sup>10</sup> Nor has she inspired the humanities and the social sciences as she ought to have with a common and renewing vision of the importance of the scientific study of organized complexity. To these three non-receptions, led me now add two others, one theological and one cosmological.

There occurred two crucial moments in my theological understanding of Jacobs, both centered on *Death and Life*. The first occurred during a crushingly difficult question on my doctoral comprehensive examinations about the sacramental theology in Catherine Pickstock's brilliant volume, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*. Unable to answer the question and wracking my

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<sup>10</sup> For the case that she has, see my article, "St. Basil's Philanthropic Program and Modern Micro-lending Strategies for Economic Self-Actualization," in Susan R. Holman, ed., *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 267-86. See also, "The Future of Macroeconomic Science: Liturgical and Complex," in *The King Returns*, 417-91.

mind for an answer, the wholly unhelpful thought came like a flash that that which Pickstock decries, the intentional transmutation of both time and relationship into frozen space in the Cartesian project, was exactly what Jacobs had attacked in *Death and Life*. It seemed that what I might add theologically to the work of *Death and Life* was a fuller emphasis on the use of “time” as an actual raw material in building. But when I returned to *Death and Life*, I realized that Jacobs had made the centrality of time abundantly clear.

But then, disappointed that my insight had not been as insightful as I had hoped, I leaned back in my chair and noticed again the title of the work—*The Death and Life of Great American Cities*—and at a flash it all became clear: For Jacobs, cities were, on many grounds, best conceived as vast liturgical celebrations, cycling through death and life in a wondrous openness to the future and to the unknown, gradually generating the differentiation-through-interdependence of the human person as they do so. Pickstock had argued something similar in *After Writing*, but intended metaphorically rather than scientifically.

Allow me to insert here the letter I composed more than six months later, in which both this first and the later theological insights are related:

January 26, 2000

Dear Mrs. Jacobs,<sup>11</sup>

These past six months I have been considering the question you pose at the end of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, about the kind of problem a city is, in connection with a doctoral thesis I am undertaking for the department of Theology at the Catholic University of America. I am trying to place the New Urbanism in a broader philosophical and theological context through a study of the modern antipathy toward liturgy.

I would like to offer two arguments for your consideration. First, that your opponents in the Radiant Garden City Beautiful tradition generally see the city as a problem in pre quantum, pre-relativity physics, and that their methodology and hermeneutic are scrupulously Cartesian. For them, the City is dead matter to be manipulated by the reasoned plans of a single will, for the benefit of a unitary gaze, while nature is a dumb garden to be manipulated cutely. Second, I would argue that your own approach can be described most accurately as liturgical. If I am reading you correctly, then the city is best understood as

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<sup>11</sup> This letter and her response are on file in the Jane Jacobs Papers at Boston College.

being itself a kind of liturgy - a dialogical movement, a radical orientation of openness to the unknown, built around recurrent cycles of death, rebirth and risk.

Time was the first factor which suggested this interpretation. The cartesian worldview (which was consciously intended to supplant the liturgical) is based on several assumptions, such as the possibility of absolute objectivity, the need for a unitary perspective, and the obsession with *visual* order.<sup>12</sup> But it is determined above all by its abhorrence of time, as a means to avoid death. Cartesianism in politics seeks the eternity of the state, and in science it seeks the possibility of knowledge outside the time-constrained parameters of personal relationship. The passage of time inevitably brings death, and so cartesianism consciously chose to trade time for space, as when the student-teacher relationship is supplanted by a textbook, or when a decaying empire attempts to grab more territory. In our cities, the attempt has been to spatialize all the functions of human life across vast distances, with no regard to how they relate in time, or the time it takes to traverse these spaces.

Much of your argument in *Death and Life* can be summarized with the statement: Time is one of the necessary raw materials which intelligent planners utilize in building a city; our current planners are utterly in denial about the existence or potential goodness of time, and are therefore creating anti-cities. Each of the four generators of city diversity relates in some way to time, and you describe the slum as any community which is travelling backward in time. This denial of time, as much as anything else, makes me suspect that your opponents are anti-liturgical cartesians. They have converted our cities into giant cartesian maps of "human life", but with no regard for time. (Isn't that what is really meant now by "transportation" - the mad attempt to dominate infinite space in zero time? And isn't the inability to treat time consciously as a raw material the last glaring flaw in most New Urbanist development, with its, at times, denatured feel? Even the "five-minute walk" we tend to conceive as so and so many feet of distance.)

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<sup>12</sup> The summary in this paragraph of the Cartesian project, as well as most other ideas about the Cartesian city in the letter, are taken almost entirely from Catherine Pickstock's *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998) which I had read only in part (thus the difficulty on the exam) before writing Jacobs. Had I not read Pickstock's account of the relationship between time and space in the Cartesian project, I would have missed entirely the theological meaning of Jacobs' work.

But besides time, there are so many other missing elements from the cartesian perspective, which you identify and champion. Rejecting the monistic will and single personed view, you show instead how the city is built up by many actors freely relating and contributing their own dreams and visions, how it is a drama, a dance, a rhythm of daily sidewalk activity. It is effected in love for beauty and celebration, in generosity and “love capital.” This “work of the people” (the classic and original definition of “liturgy”) is the wonder of the City, and seen from a complete perspective, it resembles nothing so much as it does the picture of liturgical life, with its openness to the unknown and the miraculous, its exuberant and playful willingness to sacrifice and share, its sacred regard for time and the seasons, its web of relations and voices, its love of beauty for its own sake, and its humility about future developments.

Even the title of your book, *The Death and Life*, appears to me now as a clear message about the City’s nature, for liturgy is fundamentally the cycle by which we acknowledge the interconnectedness of death and life, and the value of embracing the first early and often in order to increase the second. Let the cartesian planners attempt to avoid death and uncertainty by freezing time, and the result will be a necrophiliac’s paradise - urban taxidermy inflicted on a grand and distressing scale, “Necropolis” made real in the very attempt to unbuild it. The idea of the cartesians and other sophists is always the same, to divorce knowledge from the limitations of time and relationship, to make it serve the claims of individualistic power, by converting it to dominated and classified (zoned) space. And the rationale is also fixed: fear of the many small deaths inherent in life and growth, a fear of “drift.”

There is another “liturgical” element, besides those mentioned above, which you describe, and that is the one effected in the process of adding new work to old.<sup>13</sup> The unavoidable waste - of new businesses failed and of general trial and error - in this process, I interpret as “bloodless sacrifice”, and I understand the wonder of new goods and services produced in this exuberant risk as a kind of eucharist. Citiness, in terms of this defining process at the heart of import replacement, not just in the form of its layout in space-time, is a peaceful liturgy.

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<sup>13</sup> I was referring here to *The Economy of Cities*, with its groundbreaking definition of “economic development.” Later, I would understand that the very moment of innovation as she describes it there is a kind of incarnation of created logoi into new products and services—again, a type of Eucharist.

My conclusion is therefore that not just or even especially religious cities, but *all* import replacing cities are liturgies. And this is true “really,” not merely by way of religious interpretation. It is actually the best description we have of this most complex form of human life, with its constant surprise, death and rebirth, openendedness, its requirement of sacrifice and its intentional utilization of time, and being formed by the plans of many.

When I first read *Death and Life* in early 1996, I likened your approach to cities v. the failed approach of the dominant American planners, to the difference between biology and pre-quantum physics. Roberta Gratz<sup>14</sup> apparently had the same impression, and proposes “urban husbandry.” This is an excellent conclusion. I envision builders having to fill out “environmental impact statements” on the time and use interaction of their proposed structure with neighboring uses.

However, I think liturgy is a better and truer model of the kind of problem a city is. First, because plants’ capacities for innovation are random, and they can be managed more or less by a wise gardener, while in a city the “plants” garden themselves. Liturgy speaks of the human element, of plans and dreams, of many voices, of the conscious choice and risk of sacrifice, and of public service. In fact, the seasonal cycle of botany is itself a reflection of that Ur-basis of every liturgy, the movement of the planets and the stars. Besides, people are not plants, and there really is something miraculous about economic and civic life.

Your description of a city structure as “bonfires in a field” points to the element of warmth and vitality in both ancient and modern liturgies. Those fires are the light of love and sacrifice, assembled in a coherent chronotopic rhythm.

Mrs. Jacobs, as a great admirer of your writings, I ask for your opinion on my interpretation of cities. The struggle between the New Urbanism and Modern Urbanism is on a deeper level the struggle between liturgy, with its respect for time and dying, and Descartes and modernism, with their fear of both. Perhaps the truest answer to the question of “What kind of a problem the City is,” is “It is a problem in liturgical life.” If this is a good description of cities and of the struggle over planning theory, then seeing this clearly could really assist a movement that is struggling with its philosophical self-definition. It would

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<sup>14</sup> I had in mind Roberta Gratz’s *Cities Back from the Edge: New Life for Downtown* (Washington: Preservation Press, 1998).



also form a coherent impetus for the New Urbanism more consciously to recover time as a raw material in building.

My thesis advisor here at Catholic, Dr. Robin Darling Young, asked me to contact you, to see whether you find this reading of your books at all sympathetic. I would be grateful for any opinions you might offer.

Sincerely,

Timothy Patitsas, Ph.d. (cand.)

In other words, cities are fundamentally liturgies, not figuratively or metaphorically, but literally so, scientifically so. Two weeks after sending this letter, I received the following reply:

Feb. 12, 2000

Dear Mr. Patitsas,

Thanks so much for your astonishing and enlightening letter of January 26 - - enlightening because everything you say is presented in a light novel to me yet seems so clear and valid; and astonishing because it is so novel. I've never before thought of these matters in connection with liturgy. (I'm not religious and never felt an attachment to the Presbyterian church in which I was brought up, where liturgy was all but absent in favor of long pedestrian sermons. But my husband and I took our children to the small Episcopal church in our New York neighborhood where services were almost entirely liturgical, which - - in spite of the fact that I remained unreligious - - gave me the satisfying, in fact inspiring, feeling that I was a link in a long, sinewy, living human tradition of being.) I mention this to show you from one point of view how unprepared I was for your thoughts; yet also, from another point of view, entirely unawares prepared for them.

I agree with you that time is precisely what is absent from the Cartesian view of the city and that this means almost everything important is left out: trial and error, risk and dreams, birth, death, success, failure, celebration, regret, relationships . . . the whole chain of being. You've put it beautifully. Like you, I see this fatal fallacy in much of New Urbanism too, in spite of New Urbanists' aims to jettison it. The movement is hopeful in its attention to what has worked in existing and past cities and to learn from that. But they too leave out time

by trying, in spite of themselves, to create environments essentially finished and complete. Because of this, I suspect the most valid and beneficial results of the movement will not be its ambitious projects, but instead will be the movement's influence on opportunistic acts of infilling, rebuilding and renovation. In fact, that beneficial influence is already happening, and I find this hopeful, heartening and important - - much more so than the showpiece projects.

Do you know Stewart Brand's book, *How Buildings Learn*? It hasn't gotten nearly the attention it deserves. I think it's the best architectural book I've read. Also, it's probably no accident that Brand has become engrossed with time; his current book, *The Clock of the Long Now*, is interesting but the real meat of time as the essential dimension in construction is in the earlier one.

Next month, Modern Library is publishing my latest book, *The Nature of Economies*. Reading your letter, I was startled to realize how aptly your insights express just what I've been groping for.

By this time you must be aware that my answer to your question about whether I think cities can usefully be understood as manifestations of liturgy is Yes. I think that's a splendid idea and as you say, "really" so, not merely as an analogy.

I might add that you are so much the best interpreter of my work that I'm aware of, that you are actually showing me what my own books mean in a way I hadn't grasped! Furthermore, in such an important and central way.

I hope that when your thesis is finished you'll send me a copy. And again, thank you more than I can say for your enlightening, astonishing letter.

Sincerely,

Jane Jacobs

This new and yet ancient—see, for example, both Fustel de Coulanges' *The Ancient City* and St. Augustine's *City of God* - understanding of cities as liturgies will be relevant for the consideration of how religious identities are constructed in urban contexts, as well as for the study of the formation of urban sacred space.<sup>15</sup> Seeing a primordial religious category like liturgy so ubiquitously present in the work of a contemporary (and religiously agnostic) author like Jacobs establishes profound

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<sup>15</sup> Most of the ideas in this and the next paragraph were suggested to me by a dissertation reader, Olga Meerson of Georgetown University, and by my dissertation director, Robin Young, currently of Notre Dame.

linkages among mythic, revealed, and modern urban concerns and theories. Pickstock, without whom I would not have seen that cities are, in the science of Mrs. Jacobs, literally liturgies, also gives a post post-modern account of the city as “liturgical” in *After Writing*, although I am not sure if she intends this literally, or how a term like “literally” would even apply in the specialized discourse of counter-deconstructionism.

Jacobs’ “city-liturgy” model will for post-moderns like us be more religiously significant than could a recovery of the ancient view of the city as liturgical, because her vision does not make recourse to faith and is thus open to the non-religious. It is a vision of the city that grows out of science, and indeed of those most religiously intriguing modes of science, chaos and complexity theories.

### THE RECONCILIATION OF SCIENCE WITH RELIGION

The cosmological significance of Jane Jacobs’ insights is rooted in her meditations on epistemology—i.e., in the fact that she did take the new science seriously, and wasted no time in its application. Very soon, with the publication of the book mentioned above, I was to think more completely about exactly how consistent her cosmological vision had become.

Jacobs’ letter to me included a puzzle, the puzzle as to in what sense I had anticipated something she had only been “groping for” in *The Nature of Economies*. When I read it, it turned out to be a book not about city order, but about economic and natural order. Yet it argued that the development of life through evolution owed more to symbioses and cooperation than to “survival of the fittest” Darwinian competition, as the universe unfolded and continues to unfold in a vast cycle of death and life, exuberant cooperation, and emergence from the nothingness of ultimate generalities to the beauty of differentiation. Moreover, when we seek which human traits might equip us to participate in this cosmic dance, qualities like aesthetic appreciation, awe and veneration, and the moral sense are central.

The matter of the liturgical nature of the cosmos can be expressed more simply still, abstracting from the kind of evidence asserted in *The Nature of Economies*. In cities in particular, Jane Jacobs and I had agreed, the holistic order discovered by the new science of complexity looks and feels like liturgy. But if cities are innately “liturgical” precisely to the extent that they are organically complex, and yet are also simply one among many organically complex phenomena, then logically it follows that all these other phenomena might also, in their way, be liturgical. In every

emergent system, organisms emerge from the abyss by mastering cycles of “Death and Life.” Cosmic order resembles liturgy.

When we curl this analysis around to religion—to note that it, too, is both organically complex and centered in ritual, something wondrous happens: Instantly, and without violence, science and religion are reconciled. Science at once appears to have discovered the cosmic ubiquity of liturgy in all systems of complex order, including in religion itself. And Religion takes its place firmly within nature as the normally indispensable matrix for the emergence of human complexity, both intrapersonal and interpersonal.<sup>16</sup> Science is no longer merely the Great Deconstructor of wholeness and meaning, and Religion is not necessarily the oppressive superstitious fantasy it was thought to be by the Enlightenment project.

Fittingly, such a reconciliation permits a certain strife to remain. Ought religion to be the final and ultimate vehicle for human emergence, or might we discover or create others? One thing is clear: if we do discover such matrices they, too, will be both organically complex and in some way liturgical. Can religion safely say that science by definition leaves the realm of faith untouched, and thus that its status as a threat to religious belief can be ignored? But a religion saying this must pause when it reflects that the science of wholeness has, in a sense, begun to touch the face of God, and that it may have much to teach religion about both ethics and doctrine.

When I would speak to Mrs. Jacobs about the identity of science with religion in the years to come (and my total conversations with her were very few over those years—less than fifteen), her desire was to test this thesis more closely. I think it only slowly dawned on either one of us, just how significant this was. She once challenged me to consider whether religion was really nothing more than a system designed to deal with man’s fear of death and ultimate annihilation. On one occasion, in the context of her writing *Dark Age Ahead*, she mentioned that she felt one of the few positive things religion had to offer to civilization was the threat of eternal punishment for those who sabotage civilization through wanton acts of selfishness. I think that I myself remained something of a mystery to her, because religion was for me as much about beauty as about truth or goodness, and although Jane Jacobs was an artist in her writing and in her life, she always preferred to know how things

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<sup>16</sup> I have in mind here, above all, Roy Rappaport’s *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Rappaport, also a committed agnostic, makes the case quite strongly that religion is necessary for the emergence of the human species, and of its major attributes.

work, and that the inner workings of things not be concealed by superficial prettiness.

Except for one exception, that would have been the end of our conversation on the issue of religion. I had been inspired by another of Jacobs' books, *Hannah Breece: The Story of a School Teacher in Old Alaska*. In it, a grateful native Alaskan community had given the subject of the true story, Mrs. Jacobs' great aunt Hannah Breece, their most precious possession as Orthodox Christians, an icon sent especially from Russia, after she had spent a summer teaching their children to read. At the reception held for Mrs. Jacobs' at the Canadian embassy in Washington the night before she was to receive the Vincent Scully Prize in Architecture at the National Building Museum, I gave her an icon to thank her for all she had given to the world in teaching us to read the language of organic order.

A few years later in the fall of 2003, when I called Mrs. Jacobs from the St. George Monastery in Denver where I had been staying, she mentioned that she was working on a book entitled *Dark Age Ahead*. In the context of a discussion about why civilizations fail she said one more thing. "You know that icon you gave me? It's on the side of the right. And I don't mean the political right." Indeed, later that Christmas when I visited her again in Toronto in order to give her a copy of my doctoral dissertation, I walked past her study and saw that the icon, in the style "Theotokos of Yaroslav," was leaned next to her typewriter: She wrote both *Dark Age*, and what she would complete of the book she was working on at her death, in the company of that image.

None of this is to make of Jane Jacobs, strong-minded and certainly more moral than I am, an unwilling apologist for Orthodox Christianity or any religious faith. Perhaps it is to say, however, that certain things are too beautiful, and are beautiful in just the right way, not to be true? It seems to me, as it has to most people who have loved someone, that the emergence of a human person is simply too strong for even death to permanently reverse.

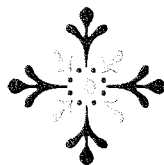
Religion and science are both products of human emergence. But only religion has the strength to assert that what emerges, *matters*—that in certain cases emergence is infinitely irreversible. In this sense, religion is more materialistic than science, and more serious.

## CONCLUSION

Jane Jacobs made vital and brilliant contributions to several fields, contributions so rich that as yet none of them, I would argue, have been fully assimilated by the wider academy.

The interpretation of Jane Jacobs' work on city order as being liturgical will be of special interest to city planners and other theorists of the city in that Jacobs gave it her personal sanction in letters and conversations with this writer from January of 2000 until her death in April of 2006. She regarded it as more than a helpful metaphor, but, towards the end of her life, as somehow the truest description of what she had been about throughout her entire career of thinking about cities.

Moreover, in her very first work, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs' use of complexity theory had already attained a very important, if unconscious cosmological significance. There, Jacobs unintentionally prepared an astoundingly simple and until now unrecognized reconciliation of religion with science, one that gives Orthodox Christianity, with its profound liturgical cosmology, a place of special importance in the emerging world conversation about the future of the human person within the universe.



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