

**Adequate & Affordable Housing for All**

Research, Policy, Practice

Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto  
455 Spadina Avenue, Suite 400, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2G8 Canada

# From housing to homemaking: Worldviews and the shaping of home

**Brian Walsh**Toronto Christian Resource Centre, Regent Park,  
Christian Reformed Campus Ministries, University of Toronto**Introduction**

In his foundational essay in cultural geography, *House Form and Culture*, Amos Rapoport waged battle against any and all determinisms when it came to understanding human habitation. Whether that determinism be rooted in climate, building materials, available technology or was economic in character, Rapoport insisted that housing reflected larger socio-cultural dynamics. He wrote, “Given a certain climate, the availability of certain materials, and the constraints and capabilities of a given level of technology, what finally decides the form of a dwelling, and moulds the spaces and their relationships, is the vision that people have of the ideal life.”<sup>1</sup> This vision, or *genre de vie*, or *worldview*, comes to expression in the built environment broadly conceived and the house in particular.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, Timothy Gorringer argues that “all housing embodies an anthropology and therefore a view of society.”<sup>3</sup> As such, the built environment both expresses and shapes life in terms of a moral order, and can be seen to be spiritual in character. Indeed, Gorringer will go so far as to argue that “profound, creative, grace filled spiritualities produce grace filled environments,” whereas “banal, impoverished, alienated spiritualities produce alienating environments.”<sup>4</sup>

This paper, written first in the context of a two worldviews policy adopted by the Housing New Zealand Corporation,<sup>5</sup> and then revised in the midst of the red-brick public

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<sup>1</sup> Amos Rapoport, *House Form and Culture* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 47-58, 73-78.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy J. Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, Redemption* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 109.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> This paper has its origins in a conversation hosted by the Housing New Zealand Corporation policy department in Wellington, February 18, 2004. Over the last number of years Housing New Zealand has adopted a “two worldviews policy” with regard to the different housing needs, aspirations and requirements of the two most dominant communities in New Zealand – the Maoris and the Pakeha (or Europeans). Policy analysts at the Corporation kindly invited me to write a paper that would investigate the relation of worldviews and housing further. I am indebted to my Kiwi colleagues both for the opportunity to write this paper and for the helpful conversation that the presentation occasioned.

housing apartment blocks of Regent Park in Toronto,<sup>6</sup> is an exploration into the relation of worldviews and housing. How is housing an expression of worldview? How does housing shape worldview? What might be some implications of the worldview/housing relationship for the development of housing policy?

I begin with a story from Canada's recent past.

### **Worldviews, Prayer and Constitutional Conferences**

Some years ago, a high level discussion between the Prime Minister and provincial Premiers of Canada with the leaders of the aboriginal communities got bogged down. Just after Prime Minister Trudeau had banged his gavel and was calling the meeting to order, a native leader arose to inform the Prime Minister that the session must begin with a prayer led by one of their elders. But before the prayer could be sung, there needed to be a rather lengthy introduction describing the role of the elderly in native communities. And then after the prayer, accompanied by loud drumming that echoed throughout the conference room, the native leaders insisted that the peace pipe must now be lit and passed around the room to all participants. Throughout all of this, the Prime Minister's patience was being tried, but he remained gracious.

The meeting hadn't even begun and the schedule was already forty-five minutes late! But then during the first speech of the morning, one of the native leaders reminded the government that the landmass of Canada had been given to the aboriginal peoples by the Great Spirit and that they had a responsibility to care for this gift as an inheritance to their children and their children's children. At this point the Prime Minister's patience ran out and, interrupting the speaker, he exclaimed that this interjection of religion into a political discussion about land and constitutional rights was totally out of order and would only serve to grind the discussion to a halt. We have been down that path before, he insisted, and after years of religious wars in Europe a liberal consensus had emerged that relegated such spiritual beliefs to the private realm of life, divorced from and unrelated to, public discourse. We can simply make no progress in our attempt to settle land claims and treaty relationships if the aboriginal peoples are going to keep on bringing in the Great Spirit as the very foundation of their claims. Down that path there is no resolution only shouting at each other across the great religious divide.

The native leaders sat in silence for a moment, totally dumfounded by this outburst. If the Great Spirit is ruled out of order, then aboriginal views of land will never be understood or heard by the ruling authorities. Not unlike the Maori, Samoan and other Island peoples of New Zealand, the Cree, Inuit, Ojibwa, Micmac, Nishga and other tribes of Canada, understand themselves in close relationship to the land. "Without our land," one leader has said, "we could no longer exist as a people. If our land is destroyed, we too are destroyed. If your people ever take our land, you are taking our life." Or as another put it, "To us ... the land is just like a mother to us." "The land is our blood."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> From January to June of 2004 I was honoured to serve as "Theologian in Residence" for the Toronto Christian Resource Centre in Regent Park. Regent Park is one of the first mass public housing projects developed in Canada and has been a site of both intense community and profound brokenness, violence and impoverishment.

<sup>7</sup> Quotes from Justice Thomas R. Berger's *Northern Frontier/Northern Homeland: Report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1977), pp. 94-95. I make no pretense to having expert knowledge of aboriginal worldviews or the crisis of the aboriginal peoples of the Americas, Australia or New Zealand. The choice of this community to illustrate the issues raised in this paper arises out of both the New Zealand context in which the paper was first written and in solidarity with my aboriginal neighbours in Toronto.

This understanding of land is deeply rooted in the worldview, myths, symbols and way of life of the aboriginal peoples. And if the political leaders of Canada are to understand the real meaning of aboriginal land claims, then they will need to go beyond questions of market values and recompense, indeed, beyond questions of maintaining the reservation system, and even beyond questions of supplying basic housing to the reservations, to the more foundational questions of the way in which our aboriginal neighbours, the original inhabitants of the land, understand, feel about, and experience their relationship to the land. And that will require a listening to prayers, songs, stories, and rituals that goes beyond the tried patience of the Prime Minister at that constitutional conference.

I begin with this story because it illustrates so well the dynamics of worldviews and how they shape human life, discourse and experience of both place and home.

## **The Shape of Worldviews**

### ***Houses and Homes***

Housing, of some sort, and according to some kind of definition, is foundational to the experience of home. While a community of squatters under a bridge may well have an important experience of home under that bridge, the insecurity of that environment, the lack of any secure tenure in that space, and the sheer inhospitable character of the space makes home-making, in any sustainable sense of the word, impossible. Housing is necessary for the experience of home. Indeed, this is why the United Nations identifies the need for adequate human shelter – housing – as a fundamental human right.<sup>8</sup> Where people are shelterless, their rights are being denied.

But housing does not necessarily make for home. Houses can be bought or rented on the market. Homes can be neither bought nor sold. One scholar has said that “home is a relationship that is created and evolved over time; it is not consumed like the products of economic process. The house is a tool for the achievement of the experience of home.”<sup>9</sup> And this is why indigenous Hawaiians have advocated for a richer approach to homelessness than shelters and public housing. They have advocated something called ‘ohana housing. The ‘ohana seems somewhat akin to the Maori notion of the marai which is composed of people “connected by ties of love and loyalty, duty and obligation.” And ‘ohana housing attempts to engender and encourage such communal relatedness by recalling “that ‘home’ is more than a roof over one’s head and ‘residing’ more than a matter of having a place in which to eat and sleep.”<sup>10</sup>

### ***Inhabiting Worldviews, Answering Foundational Questions***

Home, then is more than accommodation (a hotel or a shelter can be that) and something profoundly more than an economic commodity. Michael Walzer describes home as “a dense moral culture within which [people] feel some sense of belonging.”<sup>11</sup> Such a “dense moral culture,” together with its concomitant sense of belonging, is precisely what a fully functioning worldview provides in human life. And only when one’s housing can be experienced in the terms

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<sup>8</sup> Article 25, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, United Nations, December 10, 1948.

<sup>9</sup> Kimberly Dovey, “Home and Homelessness,” in I. Altman and C. Werner, eds., *Home Environments* (New York: Plenum Books, 1985), p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> Judith Modell, “(Not) In My Back Yard: Housing the Homeless in Hawaii”, in Jan Rensel and Margaret Rodman, eds., *Home in the Islands: Housing and Social Change in the Pacific* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), p 201.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 16.

of one's worldview, indeed, only when one's housing is, in important respects, *shaped* by one's worldview, can housing become home.

That we would find certain resonance between the idea of worldview and housing is not at all surprising. The way, in which the notion of worldview has emerged in cultural anthropology, sociology of knowledge and religious studies has been as a way to understand the ways in which human beings shape their world into a home, a site of inhabited meaning.<sup>12</sup> A worldview provides one with a world to live in. Peter Berger puts it this way, "Any particular life-world is constructed by the meanings of those who 'inhabit' it."<sup>13</sup> Worldviews – that is, these life-constructing and directing meanings – are not ideas that are held but worlds that are inhabited. Indeed, Berger will say that sharing a worldview provides a community with a 'sacred canopy', a mythic cover of protection for life, under which the day-to-day business of making homes, shaping community and sustaining life together can happen.<sup>14</sup>

A worldview, then, is a vision *of* life that says that this is the way the world works. That means, however, that a worldview necessarily also functions as a vision *for* life that gives direction for normative and life-giving ways to live.<sup>15</sup> A worldview shapes those who live in its embrace so that they develop certain habits, certain habitual ways of living and relating to each other and the world. And these habits are the stuff of habitation. Worldview-rooted and directed habits shape our places of habitation so that they become home.<sup>16</sup> For example, if the world is understood as mother, land is the lifeblood of the community, animals are experienced as both kin and spiritual helpers, and the forces of nature are seen in terms of the balance of the medicine wheel, then people will endeavor to inhabit this world in ways that make sense within that worldview.

Worldviews provide answers to ultimate questions that seem to bear some anthropological universality.<sup>17</sup> All cultures, all peoples, all religions and foundational cultural perspectives answer at least these four questions:

**Where are we?** What is the nature of the world? Is this a safe or an insecure place to be? Is land a gift of the Great Spirit, a commons managed by the community, a commodity for sale on the open market? Is our life here a temporary way station in a larger cosmic process or is this world and this life all we've got? Is the world a place of inherent tensions or primordial peace? How is the world ordered? Is this world experienced as home for human beings? How do we relate to non-human creatures that share this planet with us?

**Who are we?** What does it mean to be human? How do we relate to each other cross-culturally, cross-ethnically? How are gender and generational relations negotiated? What is the role of men and women, children and the elderly? How do we relate to our ancestors? What is

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<sup>12</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the history of the idea of "worldview" see David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, Hansfield Kellner, *The Homeless Mind* (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Anchor, 1969).

<sup>15</sup> See James H. Olthuis, "On Worldviews," in *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science*, ed. Paul A. Marshall, Sander Griffioen, and Richard J. Mouw (Lanham, N.Y.: University Press of America, 1989): 26-40.

<sup>16</sup> There are fruitful analogies between the notion of worldview and Pierre Bourdieu's idea of *habitus* that I will explore further in a co-authored work with Steven Bouma-Prediger, *Beyond Homelessness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming), ch. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Middleton and I first developed these questions in *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984).

meaningful labor and who should do it? What makes for human flourishing and well-being? If humans are home-makers, what does fully human habitation look like?

**What's wrong?** How do we account for the brokenness of life, for evil, for anti-social behavior (as determined by the worldview)? Where do we meet that which most severely threatens our sense of order, security and well-being? What is it that most profoundly renders us homeless?

**What's the remedy?** How do we find a path through brokenness, chaos and insecurity so that life can be secure and whole again? Where and how might we find homecoming?

If “where we are” is in the land that we experience as our mother, a world of profound harmony in which animals, plants, stars, moon, sun, and wind are amongst “all my relations,” and we find our fundamental identity in being children of the land, kin to the animals, and members of a clan, then homemaking will require that we maintain this sensitive balance amongst the relations. Human homes cannot be divorced from animal homes, nor should they be constructed in a way that renders our animal kin homeless. Indeed, “what’s wrong” in the world is that human beings overstep their bounds, act in arrogance rather than humility, thereby destroying the balance of the wheel of life. Moreover, some human beings, through colonial violence and control have stolen our land, separated us from our mother and incarcerated us on reservations of their own making. We have been rendered homeless not just because of our own arrogance but also because of the arrogance and genocidal intentions of others. The only remedy then will be to return to the land, reconnect with the Great Spirit, strengthen the ties of family and clan bonds, restore the ancient rituals, and remember anew the ancient stories.

This then would be a worldview that sees the world, and specifically the land that for generations sustained the aboriginal peoples, as a homeland. Undoubtedly, something of this sort of a worldview has affinities with indigenous peoples throughout the world. And, at least in the Canadian context, there have been devastating consequences of the loss of this worldview in the aboriginal community. Losing the land has quite literally meant that the aboriginal peoples have faced profound homelessness. Not only are many native people on the streets in the cities, even more are languishing on reservations – bored, with nothing to do, no place in which they can live out their indigenous worldview. Indigenous knowledge and native languages are lost; the structures of clan and tribe have collapsed. Alcoholism, substance abuse, violence and suicide are rampant. It is not surprising that native peoples are disproportionately represented in our prison system. Many say that there isn't that much of a difference between the reserve and prison – both are forms of incarceration.

Homecoming for this community then can not merely mean the provision of government housing on reservations and native public housing or shelters in the cities. Housing is indispensable, but it is not enough. But more importantly, prefabricated three bedroom dwellings shipped from the south can never begin to appropriate the experience of home on the trap line, in the long house or in the traditional community. Indeed, there is something about these poorly constructed prefabricated structures that actually militates against any sense of homecoming. Nor do circa 1960 public housing apartments in urban centres meet aboriginal needs. These may be habitations, but they seem to provide no space for the fostering of the habits that give aboriginal communities their identity. This leads to another dimension of worldviews and of homemaking.

### ***Home as Storied Place***

Houses become homes when they embody the stories of the people who have made these spaces into places of significance, meaning and memory. Home is fundamentally a place of

connection, of relationships that are life-giving and foundational. And that connectivity includes the past – homes are shaped by memory. John Berger talks about the mortar that holds a home together (or occasions its collapse, we must add) as memory. “Home is represented not by a house, but by a set of practices.”<sup>18</sup> And these practices that have formed the habits of homemaking are themselves shaped and rooted in shared stories. A place becomes a home when it is suffused with memories of important transitions, events and experiences. It is not surprising, then that Elie Wiesel says that forgetfulness is always the temptation of exile. “The one who forgets to come back has forgotten the home he or she came from and where he or she is going. Ultimately, one might say that the opposite of home is not distance but forgetfulness. One who forgets forgets everything, including the roads leading homeward.”<sup>19</sup> Once the stories are forgotten, there is no home to return to because there is no place, or even potential place, that could be shaped by those stories.

The New Zealand phrase, “he’s totally lost the plot,” seems to me to be instructive here. Losing the plot functions here as being off your rocker, lacking sanity, losing one’s sense of direction and identity. That is precisely what happens when a people lose their memory, when they become storyless. This is tragic under any circumstances, but all the more tragic when the amnesia is a defense mechanism either against the ridicule of the present or the pain of the past. And just as good therapists help clients to reconnect their life stories, to reclaim hidden memories, because without such reconnection, emotional health is not achievable, so also do people in times of cultural and historical crisis need to reassess, and perhaps reclaim, their founding stories.

Moreover, if it is true that home is always a storied place, then a people without a memory, without a story, is rendered homeless, regardless of whether they are housed. And a house can only become a home when it is suffused with and transformed by the memories of those who inhabit that place. But this confronts us with a problem that we will need to return to later. On one level we have the problem of how a built structure – a house – can be home for a family or community when that structure is a generic dwelling with no sense of memory or story. Indeed, how can aboriginal peoples in Canada ever make “home” in a dwelling that is little more than a prefabricated shelter or a homogeneous complex of public housing? Can this space easily be transformed to house the memories, myths, founding stories and worldview of an aboriginal people? The answer would appear to be no. But this isn’t just because the building is too neutral of meaning, too generic. Indeed, I would contend that no built structure is generic.

Buildings communicate. They are, in the language of architecture, “legible.”<sup>20</sup> They can be read and they communicate, in their very built form, the worldview of the architect or the society that has built the structure.<sup>21</sup> Buildings – all buildings, but certainly housing – tell the

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<sup>18</sup> John Berger, *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos* (NY: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 64.

<sup>19</sup> Elie Wiesel, “Longing for Home,” in Leroy Rouner, ed., *The Longing for Home* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), pp. 24-25.

<sup>20</sup> Eric O. Jacobsen, *Sidewalks in the Kingdom: New Urbanism and the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), p. 106.

<sup>21</sup> “There is ... a sense in which every building cannot but tell us something about its function and the kind of society that gave rise to it.” Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1997), 130. This architectural legibility, however, needs to be placed in the context of a wider sense of what Albert Borgmann calls the “eloquence of reality.” *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 118-119. If natural reality has no voice, no eloquence, then any notion of the legibility of the built environment will necessarily be thin and weak. Harries puts it this way: “But to hold that there is nothing that transcends human beings and speaks to them, that reality is itself mute and meaningless, means nihilism. If there is

story of the builders. While prefabricated buildings seem to be generic and certainly have limited legibility, they nonetheless speak of the modernist worldview that was at the heart of their design. If homes are machines for living in, as Le Corbusier said, and we attempt to design “one single building for all nations and climates,”<sup>22</sup> then it is not surprising that modernist architecture applied the criteria of mass production, standardization and uniformity to housing.<sup>23</sup> But there is nothing generic about this housing. Rather, the eschewing of historical reference and symbolism and the commitment to function over adornment that we see in modernist architecture – especially in Bauhaus, Brutalism and the International Style – proclaims loudly a particular industrialist, rationalist and narrowly-defined progressivist vision of history. Indeed, we could say that these buildings, in their very form, symbolize a particular worldview, embedded in a particular cultural story or myth.

The problem is that this story, this worldview, is deeply at odds with the vision of life that has animated aboriginal culture for many generations. The issue isn't that the built environment in which our aboriginal neighbours had to live was too generic and devoid of meaning to sustain a robust aboriginal community and self-identity, it was in fact a built environment that spoke a language that was both alien and alienating to such an aboriginal identity. These buildings conveyed an industrial and modern mentality and worldview and they could never be the site of home for a people deeply committed to a non-industrial, and traditional vision of life and mythology. Another way to say this would be that modernist architecture, and especially publicly supported and constructed housing took a homogeneous ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to housing that assumed that people were all the same and their housing needs were essentially all the same.<sup>24</sup> But this homogeneous standardization – rooted in the arrogance of a modernist worldview – failed to understand deeply enough the diversity of communal housing needs, rooted in the diversity of communally shaped worldviews and grounding narratives.

This leads to a third dimension of worldviews, namely, the way in which they are embodied and carried in symbols.

### ***Symbolic Power of Home***

It is ironic that a modernist architectural tradition that eschewed the ornamentation of facades nonetheless could not avoid the symbolization of its own built environment. Not only do tall, Internationalist Style bank towers symbolize the phallic power and energy of the corporations that are housed in them, but the modern house – whether it be the detached house in the suburbs, the elegant terraced housing of the UK, or the gated communities and

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to be an alternative to nihilism, it must be possible to make some sense of and learn to listen to the language of things” (p. 133). I have addressed these themes further in an article jointly authored with Marianne Karsh and Nik Ansell, “Trees, Forestry and the Responsiveness of Creation,” *Cross Currents* 44,2 (1994): 149-162.

<sup>22</sup> Le Corbusier cited by David Ley, “Modernism, Postmodernism and the Struggle for Place,” in John A. Agnew and James S. Duncan, *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p.47. Gorringer describes this kind of standardized approach to domestic architecture as the “McDonaldization” of housing. *Theology of the Built Environment*, p. 110.

<sup>23</sup> Gorringer writes, “Mass housing represents an institutionalized, regimented, view of human nature,” and goes on to comment that “mass produced housing leads to mass produced lives.” *Theology of the Built Environment*, pp. 100, 102.

<sup>24</sup> Commenting on the infamous Pruitt Igoe complex in St. Louis, Peter Hall writes, “The cold brutality of the architecture made the blocks feel bleak and comfortless, and alienation, loneliness, and stress became common experiences.” *Cities of Tomorrow* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 238. Cited by Gorringer, *Theology of the Built Environment*, p. 99.

condominiums of North America – all bear distinctive symbolic meanings. The Victorian home was a display of the virtues of polite society, the boundary between public and private space, the “castle or fortress offering protection against the cruel world outside.”<sup>25</sup> Indeed, in industrial society “the house stands out primarily as a symbol of social status.”<sup>26</sup> But that status is determined primarily in terms of tenure (which indicates the class status of the inhabitants – are they renters, home owners, under public subsidy, etc?), locality (which part of town do you live in?) and dwelling type (what kind of building is this? detached, semi-detached, flat, council apartment, etc.?)

Home functions symbolically, and bears by means of its symbolicity a narratively shaped worldview in two ways – by the symbols that adorn the home, and by the home itself. A space is transformed into a place, I have suggested, when it is imbued with meaning rooted in memory – that is, when the place tells a story. And stories are carried in human life by symbols. A cross in the hallway, family wedding pictures on the mantle, an altar to the ancestors, totems at the entrance way, a television in the centre of the living room, the ‘head of the table’, the ‘master bedroom’, the dream catcher with the little pouch of tobacco in the front hallway. All these function as symbols that remind the inhabitants of the founding story and guiding worldview that makes this place into home. Home, then, is a site of culturally meaningful and shared symbols.

But the home itself, we have seen, is symbolic. The 1991 Waimanalo Task force on the Homeless in Hawaii laid as its theoretical foundation the idea of “the built form as object of social organization, as symbol of social and cultural belief systems, as a means by which the individual defines the self, and as a means of social production and reproduction.”<sup>27</sup> Only by understanding the symbolic character of home and the way in which different kinds of built environments symbolize different home-constituting memories and ways of answering foundational worldview questions will we be able to address a diversity of housing needs with sensitivity and integrity. Douglas Porteous and Sandra Smith write that “home is a second body, which is seen as a symbol of self and self-identity. Home shapes you and, in turn, is shaped in your image.”<sup>28</sup> This brings us to the fourth and final dimension of worldviews and the shaping of home.

### ***Praxis and putting Worldviews into Built Action***

It was Winston Churchill who said that “we shape our buildings and then our buildings shape us.”<sup>29</sup> Buildings both “reflect the values of a community and they also influence them.”<sup>30</sup> James Howard Kunstler puts it this way: buildings ‘behave’ - they “possess anthropomorphic qualities that reflect human qualities and aspirations which we, in turn, project onto them – a reinforcing

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<sup>25</sup> Mike Hepworth, “Privacy, Security and Respectability: The Ideal Victorian Home,” in Tony Chapman and Jenny Hockey, *Ideal Homes? Social Change and Domestic Life* (London and NY: Routledge, 1999), p. 21.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> Cited by Judith Modell, “(Not) In my Back Yard,” p. 197.

<sup>28</sup> J. Douglas Porteous and Sandra E. Smith, *Domicide: The Global Destruction of Home* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), p. 54.

<sup>29</sup> Cited by Jacobsen, *Sidewalks in the Kingdom*, p. 111.

<sup>30</sup> Jacobsen, *Ibid.* <sup>30</sup> Rapoport describes the relation between housing form and cultural behaviour as follows: “It is implicitly accepted that there is a link between behavior and form in two senses: first, in the sense that an understanding of behavior patterns, including desires, motivations, and feelings, is essential to the understanding of built form, since built form is the physical embodiment of these patterns; and second, in the sense that forms, once built, affect behavior and the way of life.” *House Form and Culture*, p. 16.

feedback loop.”<sup>31</sup> The built environment is one of the most enduring ways in which we put our worldviews into action. If worldviews have the kind of foundational homemaking qualities that I have suggested, then it is necessary that worldviews take on cultural embodiment in the built environment, especially homes.

Environmental and educational philosopher David Orr sees in the built environment a strong pedagogical power. If buildings ‘behave’ in certain ways, and demonstrate certain ‘legibility’ then perhaps we “must begin to see our houses, buildings, farms, businesses, energy technologies, transportation, landscapes, and communities in much the same way that we regard classrooms. In fact, they instruct us in more fundamental ways because they structure what we see, how we move, what we eat, our sense of time and space, how we relate to each other, our sense of security, and how we experience the particular places in which we live.”<sup>32</sup> Whether one lives in a traditional longhouse, a split level in a North American suburb, a public housing apartment in Toronto, or a farm in Kentucky will profoundly shape how you experience the world, whether you feel secure there, whom you relate to, and how you move from place to place. But each of these dwellings, each of these expressions of the built environment is itself an expression of the vision of life, overarching narrative, worldview and guiding symbols of those who had the power and authority to build these sites of habitation.

### **Worldviews, Houses and Homes: Summarizing the Model**

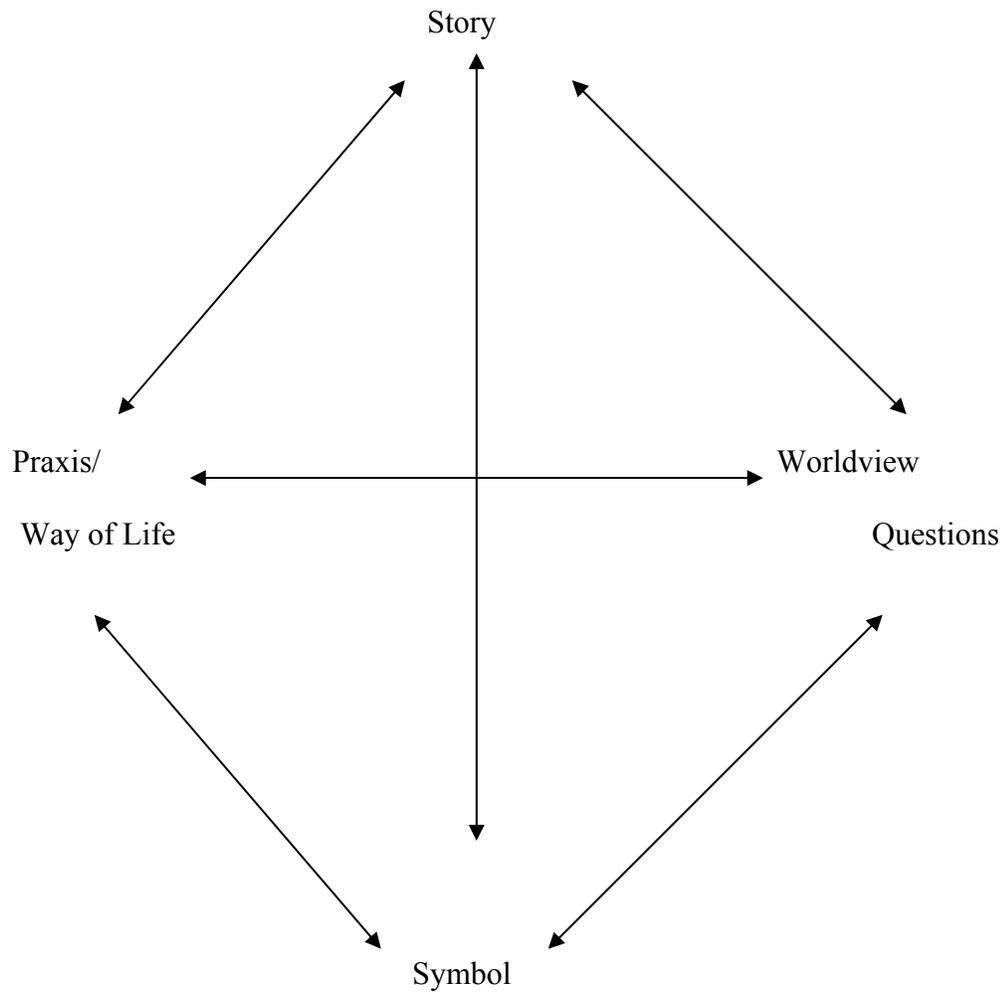
The model that I have sketched out is essentially a four-part explication of how worldviews are structured and work in human life. Worldviews answer ultimate questions that are at the heart of human life, in terms of a grounding and directing narrative or myth that is encoded in symbols and embodied in a way of life, or praxis.<sup>33</sup> And the model could be diagrammed as follows:

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<sup>31</sup> James Howard Kunstler, *Home from Nowhere: Remaking our Everyday World for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), p. 136. In her introduction to *Home in the Islands* Jan Rensel makes the same point: “People shape their living spaces, which in turn influence how they live their lives and help them to perpetuate the cultural structures that produced them.” (p.7)

<sup>32</sup> David Orr, *The Nature of Design: Ecology, Culture and Human Intention* (NY, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 31.

<sup>33</sup> This model was developed in collaboration with N.T. Wright and found its first articulation in his book *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). I have addressed the theme of worldviews further in *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*, co-authored with J. Richard Middleton (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1995); and “Transformation: Dynamic Worldview or Repressive Ideology?” *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 4.2 (Autumn 2000).



Deeply formative, sacred, even mythic memory provides the template on which ultimate answers are given to ultimate questions. These answers and questions are narratively based and encoded in symbols that give them powerful and visual presence and memory, and then shape the praxis of the community that is embedded in this story, confronted by these symbols and view the world in terms of these kinds of ultimate answers. But the model is actually more dynamic than that. There is a reciprocal relationship between all of the components of a worldview. For this paper, I will focus on the reciprocity between story and praxis. As we have already seen above, it is not just the case that we live our lives and shape the built environment in terms of our grounding stories. The built environment in which we live also shapes those stories.

### **Houses and Homes Again**

From the 1920's to the 1960's Robert Moses realized his vision for the modern city as the chief planner for New York. Pursuing an aggressive agenda of "urban reform" Moses made New York City into a metropolis of modern architecture that got increasingly higher on the skyline and was criss-crossed with ubiquitous freeways. This was a city for cars and if that meant that freeways had to cut through extant and cohesive neighbourhoods, well, so much the worse for

those communities. Some things need to be sacrificed in the name of that most powerful of all modern myths – the myth of progress. One cannot live in New York without confronting the worldview, together with its urban symbols, of Robert Moses. Morris Berman says that “his work still surrounds us, and his spirit continues to haunt our public and private lives.” Mourning the loss of his own neighbourhood, Berman says that he “felt a grief that, I can see now, is endemic to modern life ... All that is solid melts into air.”<sup>34</sup> Not to put the matter too finely, from Berman’s perspective, the vision of Robert Moses rendered him and many other New Yorkers homeless.

What happened in New York has been repeated around the world in varying degrees. If houses are constructs rooted in worldview, then what happens when the structures of the built environment change and a person or a community finds themselves in an alien built environment, one that is not just very different from what they are used to, but one that even more devastatingly undermines their own worldview? What happens if one finds oneself in housing that not only is alien, but seems to be destructive of your most grounding worldview? One feels groundless, out of touch, disoriented and homeless. In short, one suffers from a worldview crisis. One runs the risk of “losing the plot.”

Consider recent research on Samoan migrations from their island homes to city life in Hawaii. Not unlike other indigenous peoples around the world, Samoan life is deeply embedded in kinship relations and responsibilities that go far beyond the immediate family and even blood ties. I understand from my reading that a traditional Samoan village has a concentric structure revolving around a *malae* or sacred ground in the centre, with a secondary ring of houses (*fale*) with a large guest house near the centre, a chiefly house (*maota*) that would command a view of the wider village, and then other smaller huts and cook houses radiating out from this centre. The wall-less construction of Samoan houses together with the open public nature of the central *malae* creates a culture of oversight and supervision. Indeed, the young unmarried men and women sleep in different places under the watchful eye of the whole community, but especially of the chief and his wife. There is here “a kind of collective strategy for controlling behavior by providing an audience for it, an audience whose approval mattered a great deal to the performers.”<sup>35</sup>

Not unlike the Inuit of Canada, traditional Samoan life transpires in a public arena with the more private aspects of experience strongly discouraged both by the absence of walls and by powerful norms of social life which keep people in constant social interaction. In contrast to the walled houses of the Europeans (*palagi*), the primary feeling in a traditional Samoan village was openness, movement between houses and shared space. But what happens if the very symbolism of the wall-less house is taken away and a Samoan is removed from her community? Where does she look, living in a two bedroom apartment in a 16 story public housing complex in Hawaii? Where will she receive instruction and support as a parent? Who will even see her if she is in difficulty? And with walls around her, where will her gaze rest? Without the open discourse amongst neighbours, where will she hear the stories that will make her life meaningful, and give her a perspective from which to understand the world? Of course, her gaze will be directed to the television set. “The television targets individual attention away from the broader social interaction of the *malae* and disrupts normal patterns of family communication and socialization.

<sup>34</sup> M. Berman, *All that Is Solid Melts Into Air* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1982), pp. 294-295.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Franco and Simeamativa Mageo Aga, “From Houses without Walls to Vertical Villages: Samoan Housing Transformations,” in *Home in the Islands*, p. 179.

Within the *palagi*-style living rooms, the television is the focal point of an implicitly identified viewing area....<sup>36</sup> As if the transference from a village without walls to a boxed in apartment wasn't enough to assault her identity and threaten her worldview, here is the television just full of an alien vision of life, narratives that would shape her grounding story and memories differently, and advertising that is captivating her children's imaginations with images that go far beyond the images and symbols that they would have encountered at the *malae*.

What are the consequences of this change in built environment, this shift in way of life from the *malae* to the city? Essentially this woman is rendered sheltered, but fundamentally homeless. And without that homemaking context of shared worldview and community life, things begin to fall apart for the Samoan Diaspora. Mom's who always had role models around them for the discipline of their children are at a loss, left alone without any social supports. And young men, used to being together, but under the watchful eye of the village, and especially the chief, still find that they need to be together, but now in the destructive form of Samoan youth gangs. It may not be New York but it's the same result – all that is solid melts into air.

And those who find themselves charged with the responsibility to shape policy and provide housing for Samoans, Maoris and other Pacific peoples find that providing certain kinds of housing will shelter this population while stripping them of home. And that just isn't good enough. The crisis of homelessness *is* a crisis of affordable housing. It *is* a crisis of a lack of appropriate shelter for vulnerable people. But it is much more than a crisis of shelter. It is a crisis of *homelessness*. And if we are to take seriously our responsibility to our neighbours, if we are to take seriously the right to *home* as inalienable for all people, then we will need to attend to how houses become homes. The suggestion of this paper is that worldviews are constitutive to homemaking.

I will conclude with a few summary theses:

1. Generic housing, modeled on standardized designs and built with industrial efficiency can never satisfy the human longing for home.
2. Paradoxically, such generic housing appears to be without any worldview reference, but in fact proclaims loud and clear that this is the housing of a modernist worldview, hegemonically imposed on people for whom this housing could be nothing but demoralizing, debilitating and dispiriting.
3. Responsible housing policy will take seriously the divergent worldview needs of the target population and will either,
  - a. Endeavour to build housing that is generous and malleable enough that different worldview communities can make these buildings into their own, appropriating them in terms of the community's worldview, or
  - b. Work with the community to develop housing and public spaces that are especially sensitive to their worldview needs.
4. Such a housing policy will make consultation with the community and the development of sensitivity and respect for worldview diversity a primary concern.
5. Ensuring that people can make their home in our communities, and not just be housed, is a fundamental matter of social justice. It is the right of people not just to be housed, but also to be at-home. And that means that diverse worldviews must be understood, respected and protected by the wider community.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.181.

6. Worldview sensitive housing can be developed in either concentrated communities or scattered throughout the broader community, but it is imperative that we avoid any ghettoization or construction of a de facto apartheid of worldview communities in our midst.
7. Worldview sensitive housing is committed to hospitality. That means that such housing happens in the context of broader concerns about the common good, civility and neighbourliness. So, just as the New Urbanism is correct in calling for more mixed use neighbourhoods, we should strive for mixed worldview neighbourhoods where our neighbour's difference is known, welcomed, celebrated and given real space in the shaping of our shared built environment.