

Can an American city be human without the Church?

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Joel Kotkin, the executive editor for the newgeography.com website, has released a new book entitled *The Human City: Urbanism for the Rest of Us*.

In an article he wrote entitled, “How to Make Cities Livable Again, Kotkin,” begins with this: “Throughout history, urban areas have taken on many functions, which have often changed over time. Today, this trend continues as technology, globalization, and information technology both undermine and transform the nature of urban life. Developing a new urban paradigm requires, first and foremost, integrating the traditional roles of cities – religious, political, economic – with the new realities and possibilities of the age. Most importantly, we need to see how we can preserve the best, and most critical, aspects of urbanism. Cities should not be made to serve some ideological or aesthetic principle, but they should make life better for the vast majority of citizens.”

Michael Barone, the senior political analyst for the Washington Examiner and a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, wrote of Kotkin’s book, “Kotkin shows how cities developed as religious, imperial, commercial and industrial centers. And he shows how what planners disparage as suburbs and sprawl emerged a century ago as natural parts of the city — and are now the home and workplace of the large majority of American city dwellers.”

Kotkin states in his article, “Today, urban thinkers barely reflect on such considerations (that great cities developed around their religious culture), particularly those concerning religion or the role of the sacred, which has been historically critical to creating the moral order that sustains cities. Indeed, some have argued that higher degrees of secularism are essential to the creation of a more advanced and progressive society.”

The United States is indeed changing. Its cities are focusing much of their energy into their downtown areas, and Tulsa is no exception in following the paradigm of developing the urban core to include more housing. As Kotkin points out, there is nothing wrong with it – but it’s not the only model. The suburbs are still by far a more popular place where the majority of people prefer to live.

While it is true that it is getting more difficult to find a place to build a church, or in many cases, a place where a city will even allow a church to be built, it is also true that a church is more likely to be allowed in the suburbs than in the urban core.

As I have pointed out in previous articles, churches are the last building type that most urban planners think about. The secularism and progressivism that Kotkin spoke of is creeping into virtually all realms of government, and the result is the neglect of an important facet of American culture as it deepens its beliefs in socialism.

Too extreme an accusation, you say? Consider this. There was a time not long ago in America that a hardcore socialist (actually two) could have ever made it through the presidential primaries. Yet it has happened because, if you can believe the polls, the American people are embracing socialism. Perhaps they are doing so because they are looking for social justice, or even because they don't understand what it really means. And many of these Americans would say that they were Christians.

Kotkin writes of the time in Russia after the Bolshevik revolution: "The new Communist rulers sought to build their urban areas by obliterating the civic past – not too unlike, as we'll see, the redevelopers in the West during the '60s and the '70s. Stalin, for example, demolished the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, which had been completed in 1882 after 40 years of construction. In its place, the Soviet regime constructed the new Palace of the Soviets. Thousands of other historic buildings also went down under Bolshevik edicts. "In reconstructing Moscow," proclaimed Nikita Khrushchev in 1937, "we should not be afraid to remove a tree, a little church, or some cathedral or other."

Is that the kind of society we want to become? Is it too ridiculous to believe that it could never happen here? Communism is still rejected by the vast majority of Americans, but the same progressivism and secularism that Communism is made of seems to be gaining acceptance.

The church has been at the center of the foundation of virtually all of America's cities. The moral culture it infused into its city life, whether it be urban core or suburban, are still critical to our nation's well-being. The church needs to be present in all parts of our cities, without interference by government.



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