1. Introduction

Architecture, especially architecture built for religious purposes, both reflects and defines the values of the community. The plainness of a Mennonite meeting house, for example, expresses the plainness of life and speech of the community; the exuberance of a baroque Swiss church reflects the sophistication of that worshipping group. These micro-issues, however, are less significant for the purpose of this symposium than the macro-features—what approach does the structure express towards religious experience, towards the community itself, towards ethical concerns?

This summer I visited the new children’s memorial at Yad VaShem Museum on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem. It is a profoundly evocative memorial: intensely personal, filled with grief and hope. The effect is accomplished architecturally. The visitor first confronts a symbolic group of broken stone pillars, then descends into a black space, where all senses are on edge because of the void. And then, as visitors move into what is a modest area, they are made to feel in a boundless space through points of light being reflected through prisms like stars, \textit{ad infinitum}. Each visitor is utterly alone. But names are read liturgically in a continuous monotone, so that one is caught up in the ethical dilemmas of the West’s inaction towards National Socialism in the 1930s.

As a young architect I visited the great Aztec city of San Juan Teotihuacan, with its pyramids to sun and moon, its vast structures with altars for human sacrifice, and its enormous religious precincts that could absorb the whole community. Bathed in bright sunlight, the ruins of this brilliant but brutal civilization still evoke the grandeur and the mass organization of its daily life. It stands at the opposite end to Yad VaShem—the one intensely private, the other public; the one driving...
home the tragedy of early death and prompting the question how a just and merciful God could allow the Holocaust, the other celebrating a bloodthirsty god who demanded human sacrifice as appeasement.

My point is that architecture is created in a social and historical setting; it reflects and defines the values of the community. Very occasionally it may even transform the society in which it is set. The architecture of ancient Judea reflects the religious and ethical cross-currents of the social world of Judea in the first century. It also contributes to the shaping of the social world of early Christianity. I will argue that these examples can shed light, sometimes by analogy and sometimes by contrast, on the values of early Christianity. Though we know nothing precisely—or perhaps I should say precisely nothing—about the architectural forms in which Christianity expressed itself in the first century, and even into the second, I will adopt the usual view that its meetings and other functions occurred in a household setting.

This fact is significant for the ethical values that emerge in first century Christianity. Architecture, or more broadly the buildings in which one lives and works and worships, help to determine how we behave, how we feel, what we think important. And those same values related to behaviour and feeling and thought also shape the buildings we use. So there is an inevitable cross-fertilization between our buildings and our values, our values and our buildings.

This is especially true of religious architecture, which is all about cultic acts—the dealings between humans and the supernatural. These acts usually involve mutual obligations, obligations of gods towards humans, and obligations of humans towards gods. Cultic acts express these mutual obligations, and they usually express them on an architectural stage or in an architectonic setting. The question then that I am posing is the nature of the relationship between this religious “stage” and the ethical norms of the devotees. How does the community act religiously? And how do its structures constrain and encourage its actions?

2. Data

a) The Ruler Cult

Ancient Judea is a complex province, reflecting the agenda of the