



# Global Faculty Initiative

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by bringing theologians into conversation with scholars  
across the spectrum of faculties  
in research universities  
worldwide.**

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Preview Response

## **FLOURISHING / ARCHITECTURE**

Ian Robert Davis

Visiting Professor, Kyoto, Lund, Oxford Brookes Universities

Honorary Visiting Professor, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in Europe

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*Flourishing Communities Before And After Disasters?*

Volf, Croasman and McAnnally-Linz ask us to consider the essence of a 'flourishing life'. For almost fifty years I have been preoccupied in teaching, research, writing and advocacy with the needs of people engulfed in disasters and how attitudes, policies and appropriate architecture can enable surviving communities to recover with resilience and even flourish.

However, during my entire career I do not recall the word 'flourishing' ever being used in relation to disaster risk or recovery management, and I have certainly never used it to describe recovery intentions. Normally, more utilitarian words are in use, such as 'safety', 'restoration', 'reconstruct' or 'resettlement'. Thus, the theme of this paper raises an important question - whether in the extreme and dire circumstances of a disaster people and communities can flourish with '*life to the full*', as promised by Christ? (*John's Gospel 10 verse 10*)

My research in relation to disaster response and assistance sent me down a very different route than anything I had previously experienced as an architect in practice or taught in architecture schools. This has been a radical journey discovering en-route the need to challenge, re-think and reverse some deeply entrenched approaches.

Examples may include:

1. **Revising stereotypes** in ways that strengthen local "agency", e.g., '*Leg-Ups*' not '*Hand-Outs*'; '*First Responders*' always being family and neighbours, not the *Emergency Services* who arrive later; *Meeting Survivors Needs* rather than *Donors Needs*; Recognising '*Active Survivors*' of disasters not merely '*Passive Victims*'
2. **Rethinking architecture**, e.g., emphasizing *Local skills, traditions, labour and building materials* rather than *imported industrialised products and universal solutions*; *process rather than product*; *enabling or Facilitating Design* rather than actually *Designing*; *creating safe, sustainable dwellings that develop skills and generate livelihoods* rather than just *houses*
3. **Reversing policies**: e.g., *Relief* being all too often the enemy of *Recovery*; *Attending to the drivers of risk (Causes)* is the essential need rather than *addressing Unsafe Conditions (Symptoms.)*; '*Trust*' rather than '*Control*'; *Survivors*

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*assessing their own needs rather than outsourcing the process to external professionals*

4. **Requiring positive attitudes:** attending to emotion and virtues in interactional aspects of relationships, e.g., *Humility* in order to function effectively; *Enabling and facilitation skills* to build or strengthen the capacities of others; *Creativity* to make much out of little; *Listening* to learn from survivors and local officials; *Empathy* with vulnerable, suffering persons; *Integrity* in personal and corporate relationships; *good Humour*, even within dark situations; *Faith in God* to comfort, guide and direct.

If after a disaster, a community can rise from their trauma of loss and anguish and restore their shelters and settlements that they have assisted in creating, that are safer structures, that have generated much needed livelihoods, that offer greater comfort and dignity to their occupants and enhance their environment, then they will certainly have flourished.

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