

Space

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Abstract

Two issues are explored in this article: the way in which "space" has been theorized in relation to the "sacred", and the use of contemporary cultural and social theories of space in the development of a methodology for locating religion in places, objects, bodies and groups open to investigation. After a brief recollection of the spatial contributions of van der Leeuw and Eliade, attention is given to the theoretical and methodological insights of Jonathan Z. Smith, Veikko Anttonen, and Kim Knott.

Resumo

Este artigo discute duas questões: a que se refere ao uso do conceito do "espaço" em relação ao "sagrado" na teoria; e a relativa ao uso de teorias culturais e sociais do espaço no desenvolvimento de uma metodologia para localizar a religião em lugares, objetos, corpos e grupos abertos à investigação. Depois de uma breve resenha das contribuições espaciais do van der Leeuw e do Eliade, discuto as idéias teóricas e metodológicas de Jonathan Z. Smith, Veikko Anttonen, e Kim Knott.

How has "space" been understood in the study of religion? How has it been theorized? To what strategic methodological use has it been put?

Despite earlier Christian missionary interest in the relationship between religion and geographical space, it was not until the late eighteenth century that the two were formally engaged in the scholarly project of "Religionsgeographie" by Gottlieb Kasche, and a rational, non-confessional geography - of which the environmental and social study of religion would be a part - by Immanuel Kant.¹ Despite this developing disciplinary focus, little significant

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1 C. PARK, Sacred worlds, pp. 9-11; M. BÜTTNER, Survey article, In: *Religion*, p. 86-119. For further discussion of geographical studies of religion, see L. KONG, Geography of religion, In: *Progress in Human Geography*, pp. 355-71, and L. KONG, Mapping "new" geographies of religion, In: *Progress in Human Geography*, pp. 211-33.

reciprocal interest by scholars of religion in space, place and geography was witnessed before the twentieth century. The content of Jacques Waardenburg's anthology of the first hundred years of the non-theological study of religions suggests that early scholars of religion gave no special credence to space, place, locality or geography, though relevant at the time to philosophers and anthropologists.² It was some fifty years on, with the publication of van der Leeuw's "Religion in Essence and Manifestation", that the subject of sacred space began to enter the theoretical vocabulary of the study of religions.³ His series of homologies - home, temple, settlement, pilgrimage site, human body - and linked synecdoches - hearth, altar, sanctuary, shrine and heart - have subsequently been formative in identifying key terms for a scholarly discussion of the location of the sacred.

It was with the work of Mircea Eliade that sacred space really became a subject of theoretical and critical enquiry, with its meaning, characteristics and functions subsequently being examined and typologised.⁴ His ideas have provided a frame of reference for scholars of sacred geography, whether followers or critics. His axioms - of sacred space as other or set apart from ordinary, profane space, as the 'Center' or *axis mundi* through which communication between different domains is possible, and as the manifestation of the 'Real' (or hierophany) - have become foundational for scholarly articulations of the meaning and power of the sacred in space and time.⁵ In the American context, for example, Eliade's axioms provide the starting point for both Belden C. Lane's phenomenological enquiry into the poetics of American sacred landscape and, latterly, for Chidester and Linenthal's subversive, critical approach to the contested nature of 'sacred space' in general and American sites in particular.⁶

It was not only on Eliade's contribution that these authors built but on the ideas of Jonathan Z. Smith who, in 1971, noted the limitations of his senior colleague's theory in a lecture

2 J. WAARDENBURG, *Classical approaches to the study of religion*.

3 G. VAN DER LEEUW, *Religion in essence and manifestation*.

4 M. ELIADE, *The sacred and the profane*. For discussions of the study of sacred place, see J.P. BRERETON, Sacred space. In: *The encyclopedia of religion*, pp. 526-35; K.Knott, Spatial theory and method, In: *Temenos*, pp. 153-84.

5 M. ELIADE, *Sacred and Profane*, p. 26.

6 B. C. LANE, Landscapes of the sacred, p. 15; D. CHIDESTER and E. T. LINENTHAL, eds, *American sacred space*, p. 17.

entitled "The Wobbling Pivot".⁷ He queried Eliade's focus on the Center at the expense of the periphery, and went on to elucidate his own useful dichotomy between two "coeval existential possibilities", "a 'locative' vision of the world (which emphasizes place) and a 'utopian' vision of the world (using the term in its strict sense: the value of being in no place)".⁸ He developed these two cosmologies in his later essay "Map Is Not Territory" as an imperial map of the world which seeks "to overcome incongruity by assuming the interconnectedness of all things", and a utopian map which reverses the locative, "perceives terror and confinement in interconnection, correspondence and repetition" and seeks to escape to a new world.⁹ Smith's maps contribute in two ways to spatial theory and method for the study of religion, first, by taking a meta-spatial conception (map) from its geographical context (territory) and applying it in a cosmological one, thus providing a different lens through which to analyse different types of worldview, and secondly, by evoking the idea that place is more than a natural or material space. It is lived first and foremost in hearts and minds, and is socially organised. Physical spaces, whether "sacred" or "profane" may follow; they take shape on the basis of cosmologically and socially constructed maps of the world.

In his 1987 book, "To Take Place", Smith dislodged theory on sacred space from its previous base in a phenomenological conception of the sacred and re-engaged it with social and cultural constructionist approaches from anthropology and sociology. At the heart of this study was his answer to the questions "What if space were not the recipient but rather the creation of the human project? What if place were an active product of intellection rather than its passive receptacle?".¹⁰ "Human beings are not placed, they bring place into being", and they do this - at least in the case of sacred places - through ritual.¹¹ Ritual, that creative process whereby people make a meaningful world that they can inhabit, "is not... a response to 'the sacred'; rather, something or someone is made sacred by ritual".¹²

7 J. Z. SMITH, The wobbling pivot. In: *Map is not territory*.

8 J. Z. SMITH, The wobbling pivot, p. 101.

9 J. Z. SMITH, Map is not territory. In: *Map is not territory*, pp. 308-9.

10 J. Z. SMITH, *To take place*, p. 26.

11 J. Z. SMITH, *To take place*, p. 28.

12 J. Z. SMITH, *To take place*, p. 105.

For Veikko Anttonen, another theorist of the sacred, space - particularly body and territory - is more than just the product of sacralization: It is central to the generation of the "sacred" as a category boundary.¹³ Body and territory are not only "domains of experience whose social meanings are symbolically construed", but - owing to our mind/body interaction - "are cognitively organised at the preconceptual level".¹⁴ Their value for the utilisation of the "sacred" as a category boundary, however, derives not just from their foundational nature, but also from their inter-relationship, their "co-extensiveness as bounded entities".¹⁵ Anttonen proposes the importance for cognitive category formation of the notions of "inside" and "outside" and a third space between them, the boundary. The human body has both an inside and an outside, the latter being co-extensive with the inside of the territory which it inhabits. The boundaries between body, territory and beyond become culturally-dependent cognitive markers for distinguishing between entities on the basis of their value as well as for establishing rules for their engagement and transformation: "Human beings have the dispositional property to invest the boundary-points of categories of for instance time, space and the human body with special referential value and inferential potential. This capacity is activated in places set apart as sacred."¹⁶ The "sacred" as a category boundary both separates different domains (such as body from territory, male from female, person from animal) and binds them together. "It is generated as a boundary in situations when the focus of a community or a person shifts from the inside to the outside" or vice versa; and ritual is the principal cultural process for managing it.¹⁷ In this cognitive theory of the sacred, the mind, working unconsciously with embodied notions of space and consciously with whatever cultural tools are available to it, is seen as giving significance and meaning to natural and social boundaries.¹⁸

13 V. ANTTONEN, Rethinking the sacred, In: *The sacred and its scholars*.

14 V. ANTTONEN, Rethinking the sacred, p. 41. Anttonen makes use of the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in arguing for the conceptual significance of body and space.

15 V. ANTTONEN, Rethinking the sacred, p. 41.

16 V. ANTTONEN, Identifying the generative mechanisms of religion, In: *Current approaches in the cognitive study of religion*, p. 31.

17 V. ANTTONEN, Rethinking the sacred, p. 43.

18 V. ANTTONEN, Space, body, and the notion of boundary, In: *Temenos*.

Both Smith and Anttonen developed theories of the relationship between space and the sacred which also had methodological value for the study of religions. My task, in "The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis", was different in so far as it was my deliberate intention to develop a spatial methodology for locating religion, particularly in "secular" places, things, communities and objects.¹⁹ Whilst this also required the theorization of a field of religious-secular relations, which I shall not discuss here, it chiefly involved extrapolating tractable "tools" from cultural and social theories of space.²⁰ Using, in particular, the work of Lefebvre and Foucault, with contributions from de Certeau and postmodern geographers such as Massey and Shields,²¹ I developed a set of terms for analysing the location of religion: (1) the body as the source of space, (2) the dimensions of space, (3) the properties of space, (4) the aspects of space, and (5) the dynamics of space. These analytical terms - which together form a spatial methodology (as distinct from a set of practical methods) - enable the close examination of a place, object, body or group by means of its spatial attributes. Starting with the foundational role of the body for our experience and representation of space, in particular with signs of the body inscribed in the object of our investigation, the methodology then requires a consideration of its physical, social and mental dimensions.²² The next step involves a study of its spatial properties, that is its diachronic extensiveness and synchronic interconnections, its configuration (the way in which the research object or place is formed by its constituent parts), and its power relations. The final stages entail a consideration of the dynamic aspects of the object or place, first by means of its spatial aspects - the way in which it is practised, represented and lived - and, secondly, by means of the processes of production and reproduction that form it and allow it to generate new spaces.

A methodology for the study of religion based on these spatial elements requires a series of analytical steps. It is an interpretive process which can be used systematically, though its

19 K. KNOTT, *The location of religion*.

20 For a discussion of religious-secular relations, see K. KNOTT, *The location of religion*, pp. 59-93.

21 H. LEFEBVRE, *The production of space*; M. FOUCAULT, Of other spaces, In: *Diacritics*, pp. 22-7; M. DE CERTEAU, *The practice of everyday life*; D. MASSEY, Politics and space/time. In: *Place and the politics of identity*, pp. 141-61; R. SHIELDS, *Places on the margin*.

22 For a full account of this spatial methodology and its origins in the work of Lefebvre and Foucault, see K. KNOTT, *Location of religion*, chapters 1, 2, and 5, and K. KNOTT, *Spatial theory and method*, pp. 156-66.

various elements can also be applied in isolation. It has the effect of opening up the object of study to in-depth enquiry whilst at the same time taking seriously its interconnections, whether diachronic or synchronic. As such, it enables a thorough contextualisation of religion. In being reconceived in contemporary theory as dynamic, "space" is no longer merely the passive container or backdrop for human activity that it once was. It is thoroughly enmeshed in embodiment and everyday practice, in ritual, knowledge and discourse, and consequently it is enmeshed in religion no less than in other areas of social and cultural life. Opening up "space" to closer scrutiny and identifying some of its constituent elements is an important stage in the process of turning spatial theory into a workable methodology that can then be applied to various religious scenarios and cases.²³

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²³ See K. KNOTT, *Location of religion*, for application to the case of the left hand.

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