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Kate Jordan

ABSTRACT   In his 1954 poem, "Church Going," Phillip Larkin anticipated the end of religion and the ruination of Britain's churches. "What remains," Larkin asked "when disbelief has gone? Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky." In one respect, Larkin was right: the decline of traditional worship in the West did produce scores of redundant churches. But he was also wrong: the tendency to view abandoned churches as proof that ultimately "belief must die," misses the myriad ways in which faith has, in fact, simply reconfigured and produced new spaces. Such weaknesses in the Western-centric disenchantment model have been recognized in the social sciences, where scholars are increasingly looking toward the built environment to understand new alignments in religion and society. However, the field remains somewhat overlooked by architectural theorists and historians. This article explores religious practices from an architectural perspective, offering an overview of faith, space and place in the twenty-first century.

Introduction

To paraphrase Mark Twain, reports of the death of religion would appear to have been greatly exaggerated. In the early twentieth century, Max Weber anticipated secularization as the inevitable by-product of modernization but, though elements of Weber's model were prescient, the secular turn has followed an inconsistent trajectory; as it turned out, faith and worship were surprisingly resilient.[1] In the twenty-first century, religion continues to shape the built landscape at every scale: from remote hermitages to vast mega-churches; multi-million pound mandirs to temples in converted high street shops (Figure 1). Digital technologies are transforming the lived experiences of faith, with new social and ritual practices emerging in cyberspace. The notion of virtual worship as an alternative to traditional practices, shifted rapidly from the theoretical to the indispensable during the Covid pandemic: websites, video communication software, live-streaming platforms, and virtual reality offered the possibility of new sites, operating either in parallel to or entirely detached from material places of worship. In addition to the seismic shifts wrought by digital technologies, the influence of globalization; free-market economics; new materials and building techniques; logistics, population movement and climate change have produced new faith communities and building types.

      In exploring the terrain of religion in the twenty-first century, this article offers a select review of recent scholarship and key projects and presents an individual perspective on faith, space and place in late modernity. Such an endeavor is ambitious in scope and the focus has inevitably narrowed on Europe and the Anglophone world. However, an emphasis on the significance of globalization in late modernity offers a window into practices across the global East and South.

New critical approaches: space, materiality and economics

Interrogating what the sociologist Grace Davie describes as the "persistent paradox" of religion in the twenty-first century, has required theorists to formulate new critical frameworks.[2] The secularization theory that seemed so persuasive in the wake of Weber's disenchantment thesis, has given way to the much-debated proposition of a "post-secular" landscape. This ambiguous term, employed by Charles Taylor in his seminal work *A Secular Age* and subsequently given traction by Jurgen Habermas following "Notes on Post-Secular Society," aims to capture the shifting nature of religion across North America and Western Europe.[3] The post-secular lens has proven particularly useful to urbanists: the geographer Justin Beaumont, for example, suggests that "it is in the urban that the shift from secular to post-secular…is most intensely observed and experienced."[4] Others, however, have approached the term with caution, arguing for more nuanced and subjective positions. For example, Kim Knott has questioned the value of religious, secular and post-secular "camps," arguing instead for a sharper focus on the

Figure 1
Kali Amman Hindu Temple, Walthamstow, London, 2008. Courtesy of Sirj Photography.

significance of space.[5] Knott's development of a spatial methodology as a "theoretical framework for considering religious/secular relations in Western modernity"[6] has influenced subsequent analytical models that foreground the space and place of religion. Notable among these is the geographer, Veronica della Dora's "infrasecular geographies." Drawing from Edward Soja's "third space," della Dora argues for a paradigm that "shifts attention from time to space; from progression and consecutiveness to simultaneity and coexistence."[7] As case studies to illustrate the utility of infrasecular geographies, della Dora considers the reuse of redundant churches for secular purposes—such spaces, she argues, clearly articulate the overlapping of sacred and secular as categories.

Both Knott and della Dora place emphasis on the everyday in their analysis of space and religious practices and in doing so, align with sociologists who have identified domestic spheres as important sites of worship. For example, Meredith McGuire and Nancy Ammerman's research into everyday and lived religion explores possibilities for "describing the social worlds in which religious ideas, practices, groups and experiences make an appearance [and] describing what religion itself looks like."[8] This area of scholarship synchronizes with the material turn in the humanities and the research of historians, such as Colleen McDannell, whose work on religion and popular culture in America has been influential. For McDannell, "experiencing the physical dimension of religion, helps *bring about* religious values, norms, behaviors and attitudes."[9] Historians, Lucinda Matthews-Jones and Timothy Jones have followed this direction of travel, arguing that "objects play an integral role in both institutional and personal expressions of faith."[10] The focal shift from public to private/theological to material in these discourses has offered ways of understanding the agency of marginalized groups in constructing their own spaces of worship and prayer.

Contemporary religion has, correctly, come under the scrutiny of the socio-economist lens. Mathew Guest's recent work on neoliberalism and religion, for example, continues the critical lineage established by Weber, offering an insightful analysis of the role of capitalism in the formation of contemporary religious cultures. For Guest, far from occupying mutually exclusive positions, religion and neoliberalism are indivisible: he argues that "What we find in the twenty-first century…is [that] religion has become 'reciprocally entailed with economic forces'."[11] While Guest is not the first to use late capitalism as a frame of enquiry (he acknowledges a debt to, among other influential works, Peter Berger's, *The Sacred Canopy*), his overview is valuable in foregrounding the significance of choice and individualism in the new religious marketplace.[12]

The religious marketplace: pluralism, hybridity and choice
The prospect of a society in which religious practices were no longer proscribed by institutions but were instead shaped by the individual was

predicted by Emile Durkheim in the *Division of Labor in Society*.[13] For Durkheim, religion was a litmus test for his social solidarity thesis: the shift from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity would, in this model, confer greater self-determination and new forms of religion would unfold as a result. The extent to which this has come to pass in the twenty-first century has been explored by scholars across disciplines. Guest, for example, makes a convincing argument that religion is now "less bound by traditional structures and meanings, and is freed up to forge novel relationships and connections with a range of non-religious social phenomena."[14]

The loosening of ties to "traditional structures and meanings" has seen the decline of Christianity in Europe and North America. Results from the latest UK census show that Christianity is now, for the first time, a minority religion, as it is in other European countries, such as Czechia.[15] Similarly, the findings of a report following 20 years of research by the US-based Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership, reveals that religious affiliation and attendance at places of worship has fallen markedly in the US since the beginning of the twenty-first century.[16] These results reflect a general trend in census data that has been analyzed by the sociologist, Linda Woodhead.[17] Woodhead suggests that despite the decline of Christianity in Britain (it is important to note that Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism are growing in the UK) the population remains religious but in a different form; the decline of Christianity is in inverse proportion to the growth of new age and alternative religions, such as paganism and shamanism and the rise in those people who identify as spiritual but not religious.[18] Sociologists have mapped this trend in the West onto the emergence of the consumer economy and the "turn to the self."[19] Here, as Guest, Davie and others suggest,[20] intersections between the interests of faith and secular communities have produced a marketplace, in which religious groups must now compete for worshipers who are accustomed to a world shaped by choice and who curate their own devotional practices, often borrowing from a range of world religions and new-age practices and moving flexibility between them: a phenomenon that Davie describes as "believing without belonging."[21] In the US, this picture is supported by research undertaken by the anthropologist Amanda Lucia, who explores the rise of those who describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious." Lucia observes that "SNBR [Spiritual but not religious] populations are defined by unimpeded individual choice that emerges as a result of freedom from religious institution."[22] Grace Davie makes a similar observation of spirituality in the UK:

> Specifically, the many and varied forms of 'spiritual' now present in Britain must be taken into account, as must the increasing tendency towards bricolage - that is the building of individual packages (both religious and spiritual), which reflect the diversity

of late-modern lifestyles rather better than historic forms of religiousness. And once started, the logic of choice is relentless. It is almost certain to include a range of secular options which are as diverse as their religious counterparts.[23]

Though Davie is clear that this shift sits alongside traditional churches, it has had a marked impact on spaces designed to accommodate informal, personal and alternative worship.[24] In some cases, this has obviated the need for physical places of worship altogether. For example, the urban planner, Katie McClymont considers the outdoor worship practices of new age or pagan Goddess-focused faiths, where the absence of spatial hierarchy offers greater agency in place-making for women.[25]

In the gaps between religion and secularism, humanist groups have emerged to meet an apparently enduring need to gather and belong. In his aptly titled study "Belonging Without Believing," the sociologist Josh Bullock explores the Sunday Assembly, an "atheist church" established in London in 2013. Bullock argues that:

> The growth and initial demand of and for the Sunday Assembly indicate that a Christian culture still exists and the congregational community structure is still sought in a post-Christian transition. By rejecting Christianity, but with a heritage of Christian memory still persisting, the Sunday Assembly offers a suitable alternative to a congregational religious community.[26]

It is noteworthy that the Sunday Assembly was founded in a deconsecrated Anglican church but relocated partly because the Steiner School (itself built on the quasi-religious principles of Rudolf Steiner) with whom it shared the space, considered the Sunday Assembly's motto, "antithetical to their own ethos."[27] A similar yearning for the structures of religion minus the supernatural is expressed by the writer Alain de Botton in his popular manifesto *Religion for Atheists*. In a chapter dedicated to architecture, de Botton calls for a new "religious" architecture for atheists:

> … we should revive and continue the underlying aims of religious architecture, by expressing these through secular temples designed to promote important emotions and abstract themes, rather than through sacred shrines dedicated to embodied deities[28]

de Botton's proposed "Temple to Atheism," a 46-m monolithic black tower in the City of London, designed in 2012 by architects Tom Greenall and Jordan Hodgson, remains on paper.[29] However, the intentionally oxymoronic Secular Retreat in Devon, commissioned by de Botton and completed to austere designs by Peter Zumthor in 2019,

embodies some of the principles that de Botton outlines for a "Temple to Reflection," which would create, "reassuring conditions for contemplation, allowing us to wait in a restful bare room for those rare insights upon which the successful course of our life depends."[30] Such architecture expresses a desire for the esthetic experience of religion without belief in a cosmic deity—and perhaps an underlying anxiety that uncompromising atheism is yoked to philistinism.

Elsewhere, the merging of the spiritual, sacred and secular has been reflected in the rise of multi-use spaces. For example, the former Anglican church of St Augustine's in Brighton now operates as St Augustine's Arts and Events Center; a mixed-use site that blends traditional and new age religion with commercial enterprises. The building, which is owned and managed by a private secular organization, maintains the outward appearance of a late-Victorian church but has been reconfigured internally to facilitate several activities, including a purpose-built yoga studio, a café, offices and treatment rooms for holistic therapies. Importantly, however, it has retained the chancel for occasional worship by a Hare Krishna community and Pentecostal Christian services.

Repurposing and reuse
The decline of organized religion and the move toward hybrid and flexible practices has produced a growing supply of redundant places of worship. In Europe, Australia and North America, these are predominantly churches: as the American sociologist Wendy Cadge has noted "take a drive down Main Street of just about any major city in the country, and … you might pass more churches for sale than homes."[31] The challenge of repurposing deconsecrated spaces has been the subject of studies by both architects and heritage professionals, concerned about inappropriate or destructive reuse of sites that continue to carry symbolic meaning, memory and community value. The Conservation Network of the European Association of Architectural Education hosted a workshop in 2015 to explore this issue, with its transactions offering a valuable overview of current architectural approaches, scholarship and debates in the repurposing of religious buildings.[32] The workshop used architectural responses to live case studies as a provocation to discussions of the ethical implications of projects. In her analysis of suitable uses, the conservation expert, Carolina Di Biase, observed the wider social impact of repurposing faith buildings:

> Churches, sanctuaries, monasteries and other places of worship constitute a rich artistic and historic patrimony whose significance is even more 'intangible' than that of other historical sites, and the future of such places raises political, legal, economic, sociological and of course, religious issues.[33]

The religious issues that Di Biase refers to vary across denominations, with greater sensitivity around Catholic and Orthodox churches that have been desconsecrated to allow for secular reuse.[34]

The research of architectural historian and archeologist, Thomas Coomans has also focused on the reuse of places of worship across Europe. Coomans remarks on the particular complexities of repurposing a building from one faith use to another:

> Perhaps the most controversial change of use is when a place of worship is taken over by another religion. This could be considered paradoxical because the places then remain sacred and, in a certain way, the buildings are not 'reused' because they conserve a function related with worship. But it is well-known that the reuse of a church by a community of another religion is a particularly sensitive problem and is almost always considered a 'defeat' by those who 'desert' the place.[35]

Such transformations frequently serve as a flashpoint for nationalists who perceive multiculturalism as an exercise in replacing native traditions with those of migrant communities: for these groups, architecture is a potent symbol of social and political upheaval. For example, a proposal in 2015 by the rector of the Paris Grand Mosque, Dalil Boubakeur, to convert redundant churches into mosques in France, was greeted with hostility by some clergy and conservative politicians. The debate revealed the depth of Islamophobia, not only among the far right but also in some quarters of the Catholic Church, with Cardinal André Vingt-Trois, Archbishop of Paris, suggesting that: "Muslims have no intention of praying in Christian churches—don't kid yourself."[36] That this issue should generate such heated discussion in a constitutionally secular country with a long history of reuse of churches, highlights the enduring cultural significance of places of worship.

Within and across borders: nationalism, transnationalism, and globalization

Debates around the secular and post-secular condition are explicitly Western-centric—a weakness that, in the age of globalization, potentially undermines the relevance of much of this discourse. In the global East and South, adherence to organized religion continues to grow, with figures from the Pew Research Center revealing that at a global scale, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and some denominations of Christianity flourish and that numbers of atheists and agnostics are, in fact, declining: for most of world's population, notions of the secular and post-secular are incidental.[37] In addition, secular/post-secular discourse sometimes misses the persistent (and in some cases growing) prominence of religion in the public sphere across every continent, including those where religion is apparently in decline. This can be observed in the influence of Evangelicalism on jurisprudence in the US;[38]

the establishment of a caliphate in Iraq and the Levant; the rise of Catholicism in Poland's ultranationalist government and the place of religious fundamentalism in Israeli politics, where the nation's most iconic religious landmark, the Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa Compound, is also its most politically divisive.

The role of religion in politics (and vice versa) continues to be expressed in state-commissioned architecture and this is most conspicuous in nations that have turned, in the twenty-first century, away from secularism. For example, in 2020, the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi laid the foundation for the new Hindu temple of Ram, in Ayodhya, built, controversially, on the site of a sixteenth-century mosque destroyed in 1992. In Turkey, president, Reycep Tayyip Erdogan commissioned the vast Çamlica Mosque, completed in 2019. The building, now the largest mosque in Turkey was modeled on one of the great architectural legacies of the Ottoman Empire; the seventeenth-century Blue Mosque. In the Russian Federation, the Orthodox Cathedral for the Russian Armed Forces in Moscow, completed in 2020, is the third tallest Orthodox Church in the world and features mosaics of Stalin and Putin. In all three cases, the return to traditional and historicist styles coincides with the rise of nativist populism and authoritarian leadership.

Elsewhere, the use of traditional styles in the diaspora—a practice that has a long history, which is especially visible in the US—continues to be employed as a means of maintaining bonds with homelands. This is evident at all scales: from the modest repurposing of secular buildings to the construction of large purpose-built sites. While this is not a twenty-first century phenomenon, the development of new building techniques and advances in communication, digital technology and logistics, has enabled the reproduction of monumental places of worship, raising new questions about authenticity and tradition. For example, at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in London, designed by C.B. Sompura and completed in 1995, the community exported marble from Bulgaria and Italy to be carved in Gujarat and then shipped to the UK as prefabricated components to be assembled *in-situ* (Figure 2). The transnational character of this building, asks us to understand it on an entirely different plane to earlier British mandirs. Elsewhere in the UK, the architectural historian, Megha Chand Inglis, examined the construction process at the Shree Krishna Temple in West Bromwich, visiting the factory in Ahmedabad where the stone for the temple was carved. In focusing on the manufacture of the temple's parts, Inglis's work considers not only logistics and communication but also the contentious use of digital and machine techniques, as an alternative to traditional craft skills.[39]

In recent years, scholars have paid increasing attention to informal architecture in migrant communities and the ways in which this is, often invisibly, embedded in the urban grain. For example, the geographer, Clare Dwyer's pioneering ethnographic project, "Making

Figure 2
BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Neasdon, London, C.B. Sompura, 1995. Courtesy of Sirj Photography.

Suburban Faith," explored the significance of material culture, ritual, interiors and community spaces to different British faith groups in shaping diasporic identity.[40] A key output of the project was the photographic exhibition, "Faith in suburbia: a shared photographic journey" in which Dwyer worked with the photographer, Liz Hingley to document a selection of places of worship across London, with representatives of each community (Sikh, Muslim, Hindu and Christian) working together to photograph the buildings and their internal spaces. The participant photography method generated cross-faith dialogue, and offered a visual story of each site, that focused on everyday and lived religion. The methods employed in the project reflected the shift in scholarship toward the vernacular, domestic and material culture. As Dwyer observed:

> Paying attention to the ways in which 'ordinary' faith lives are lived in 'everyday' suburban spaces thus opens up important ways to both reconfigure suburban geographies and rematerialize geographies of religion.[41]

A similar methodology was employed by Shahed Saleem and Julie Marsh, who used a combination of ethnography, filmmaking, 3D scans

and 1:1 scale models in their work on "Three British Mosques," exhibited at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale. The installation, which explored the repurposing of buildings as mosques, focused on the perspectives and experiences of community members.[42]

Though tradition continues to orient many worshipers, not all faith architecture in the twenty-first century cleaves to the past. The internationalism of the mid-twentieth century, symbolized by the Modern Movement, gave way to globalization by the end of the century: a transformation that was driven by financial markets and the internet and found its architectural expression in high-tech. The cultural anonymity demanded by twentieth-century Modernists shaped the movement's iconic places of worship: those, such as Le Corbusier's Notre-Dame du Haut and Oscar Niemeyer's Brasilia Cathedral and inspired the late twentieth-century minimalism of Álvaro Siza's Santa Maria at Marco de Canavezes and Tadao Ando's Church of the Light. The influence of these buildings has endured in the twenty-first century, with high-profile international architects, such as John Pawson and Peter Zumthor, continuing to favor minimalism and controlled natural light as keynotes— and significantly, to the specifications of the religious groups who engage them (Figure 3).[43] Of note, here, is the Church of the Jubilee, commissioned by the Vatican to mark the millennium and express the values and spirituality of the modern Catholic church. The architect Richard Meier, known for his idiosyncratic white architecture, was commissioned to design a church that is minimalist, ahistorical and entirely white—a building that, in fact, renders the values of the Catholic church unreadable.[44] Beyond the Jubilee Church, the reasons that underpin an abiding taste (among architects and religious communities) for whiteness in Christian architecture deserve further attention.

Minimalist styles have also been employed in other world faiths. In contrast to Turkey's Çamlica mosque, for example, the Sancaklar Mosque, in Büyükçekmece, a suburb of Istanbul, employs a radical stripped back design, that gives little indication of the building's purpose (Figure 4). Other examples of mosques that eschew tradition and conspicuous symbolism include the Cahndagon Mosque in Bangladesh; the Masjid Daing Abdul Rahman, Johor, Malaysia and the Abijo Mosque, Lagos, Nigeria.[45] Similarly, Buddhism has explored both contemporary styles and mixed-use. For example, the Bow Yun Temple in Taiwan; the Buddhist Retreat in Grover, Utah; and the White Temple in Kyoto, Japan. Much of this architecture is shaped by new technologies and the styles that have followed in their wake—the use of CAD has enabled architects to produce designs that were hitherto impossible and this has undoubtedly influenced architectural trends. However, fashions in faith architecture must be parsed differently to those of other building types. In many cases, the move away from tradition toward generic styles mirrors theological shifts—those perhaps that emphasize the spiritual over the sacred.[46]

Figure 3
Moritzkirche, Augsberg, Germany, John Pawson, 2013. Courtesy of Susanne Bauer.

Figure 4
The Sancaklar Mosque, Istanbul, Emre Arolat Architecture, 2013. Courtesy of Sirj Photography.

The cultural anonymity of some contemporary places of worship may also reflect population shifts, migration and the subsequent rise of pluralism and ecumenism. The blurring of difference and the sharing of both spiritual and architectural languages finds its apotheosis in multi-faith spaces, where the absence of religious symbolism is less a design choice and more a necessity. The architectural historian, Andrew Crompton and theologian, Terry Biddington have made a comprehensive study of multi-faith prayer rooms in public buildings, such as airports, shopping centers and museums, while Sophie Gilliat Ray's research on the prayer space in the Millennium Dome offers a particularly pertinent reading of multi-faith space at the dawn of twenty-first century.[47] As the demographic complexion of countries have shifted over the last two decades, the need for such spaces has grown.

At a larger scale, high-profile multi-faith initiatives, such as the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi, completed in 2023, demonstrate a drive to focus on the essential rather than cultural, as the scheme's architect David Adjaye emphasizes:

As an architect I want to design a building that starts to dissolve the notion of hierarchical difference – it should represent

universality and totality – something higher that enhances the richness of human life.[48]

Similarly, the interfaith "House of One," in Germany's multicultural capital, Berlin aims to be "a symbol of peaceful dialogue" between Judaism, Islam and Christianity.[49] The landmark project was conceived in 2011 and a global fundraising campaign was mounted in 2012, with the foundation stone finally laid in 2021. The competition brief for the building, required that it "exude an inviting openness to everyone, even those who are not religious, while clearly incorporating design elements that transmit the identities of the three religions outwardly."[50] Whether the selected architect, Kuehn Malvezzi, will achieve this ambitious objective with the simple, brick building that is currently under construction, remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that many religious groups view ecumenism and the dismantling of difference as progress. Others, however, may see the loss of cultural and religious identity as a function of assimilation.

Virtual thresholds: places of worship in the digital age
The globalization of religious practices was accelerated from 2020 onwards by the Covid pandemic, which necessitated remote sites of worship, devotion and pilgrimage. Much of the technology that had been developed theoretically, became a vital facilitator of religious practice during lockdown, with many forms of digital worship continuing to flourish as the possibilities for expanded reach have unfolded. This has added fresh impetus to scholarship in the field of digital religion, with a burgeoning of recent studies on telemediated services, virtual and augmented reality and the use of social media.

The cross-disciplinary field of digital religion studies began to emerge in the mid-1990s to address the role of the internet in prayer and organized worship. Much of this research has since coalesced around the Network for New Media, Religion and Digital Studies, founded in 2010 and based at Texas A&M University.[51] The work of Heidi Campbell, Director of the Network, has been particularly useful in providing an overview of recent scholarship across different disciplines, considering aspects of digital religion from computer gaming to virtual worship spaces.[52] Campbell has highlighted the research of architectural theorist, Nesrine Mansour, who discusses the potential for displaced communities to recreate faith buildings and generate spiritual experiences in virtual worlds.[53] More recently Mansour has explored the possibilities for virtually reproducing the effects of light in material sacred spaces.[54]

The work of Mansour and others explores virtual worship in parallel to physical spaces. Elsewhere, however, efforts have begun to establish communities that exist solely in cyberspace, enabling worshipers from across the world to join live services. For example, VR Church is a "spiritual community" that functions exclusively in the

Metaverse; worshipers equipped with VR headsets are invited to create avatars and join a globally-connected congregation.[55] There is nothing on the VR Church website that indicates the particular culture or theology of this community, led by the self-styled "Bishop of the Metaverse," D.J. Soto; rather, the focus is on the immersive and experiential qualities of the church. This perhaps, highlights the risk of homogenization that Western-centric cyber-religions pose.

Such practices are not confined to Christianity. At the University of Kyoto, the Buddhist scholar, Seiji Kumagai has been working with tech entrepreneur, Toshikazu Furuya to develop the "Teraverse," a virtual Buddhist temple where worship is mediated by the AI-based chatbot, "Buddhabot." The initiative has been driven, in part by the cost of building-maintenance and the increasing closure of Buddhist temples.[56] In addition, Kumagi suggests that virtual worship may help reverse the declining interest in traditional worship amongst the young.[57]

Elsewhere in Japan, an extensive ethnographic project has drawn on interviews to examine the effects of Covid on religious practices.[58] Levi McLaughlin, set out to explore how worshipers' activities had changed in response to Covid, interviewing adherents of Shinto, Buddhism and New Religions (those founded or imported over the last two hundred years). McLaughlin's project explored the challenge of transitioning pilgrimages, services and even funerals to online platforms in a culture in which religion is "intensely social." His findings revealed the ingenuity and enterprise of clergy, in their determination to find ways of continuing to minister to their congregations. As one Buddhist cleric, described:

> Covid 19 will not put a stop to my activities. No matter what it takes, I must transmit the teachings of the Buddha. I have begun broadcasting my thoughts via Youtube … from last year, I started an internet radio broadcast and I've been putting my efforts into that as well.[59]

Other researchers have focused on the effect of homes becoming temporary places of worship during Covid, as services appeared on television and computer screens. For example, John R Bryson, Lauren Andres and Andrew Davies, brought together geography and theology to explore the impact of live-streamed telemediated services, exploring, in particular, the way in which "the minister's home is temporarily linked to the homes of congregants, forming a new intersacred space."[60] Such spaces created novel encounters between the sacred and secular, which have allowed Bryson et al to test the value of Veronica della Dora's infrasecular framework.

In the post-pandemic landscape, some digital initiatives have endured, while others have been less effective at reproducing in-person experiences. An interactive digital Hajj experience produced by the German software developer, Bigitec, for example, seems to have made

little impact on the numbers of those returning to Mecca in person, following lockdown.[61] However, the suggestion by Bigitec that virtual pilgrimages are a more sustainable alternative may offer such initiatives a future, potentially supporting guidance set out in the *Green Guide for Hajj*, produced by the NGO Global One.[62]

Worship in the anthropocene: the rise of eco-religion

The *Green Guide for Hajj*, which emphasizes the importance of environmental stewardship in Islam and advocates for the use of renewable energy, sustainable cities and greening public buildings, reflects a move across all faiths to recognize the impact of climate change. This has been accompanied by a growing body of cross-disciplinary scholarship on religion and the anthropocene. Of significance to this article, is the work of the German-Swedish theologian, Sigurd Bergmann whose research on contemporary religion includes studies of both the built environment and ecology, which he draws together under the rubric of a spatial theology that synthesizes "the esthetical, ethical, religious and ecological in the microcosm of architecture."[63]

For some religious communities, environmentalism has a particular resonance with their spirituality and vocation. For example, the Benedictine rule of stability means that monastic communities are tethered to particular sites and therefore develop deep connections with their local environments.[64] This is reflected in the purpose-built Stanbrook Abbey (completed in 2015) in the North Yorkshire moors and Mucknall Abbey, a repurposed farm and new chapel in Herefordshire (completed in 2011). These buildings have reimagined traditional monastic architecture, foregrounding nature and ecology: where agricultural self-sufficiency was a historical feature of monastic life, this has been articulated at Stanbrook and Mucknall through energy independence. Both schemes were responses to briefs produced by the communities: at Stanbrook, the nuns selected Fielden Clegg Bradley Studios for their expertise in sustainable architecture, commissioning a set of buildings that reinterpret the traditional monastic plan and employing eco-technology and locally sourced materials that blend with the natural landscape (Figure 5). At Mucknall Abbey, the mixed community of nuns and monks engaged the practice Acanthus Clews to adapt a collection of Victorian farm buildings, using recycled and local materials.[65] The drive to create a sustainable monastery explicitly reflects the community's principles, as their mission statement suggests:

> Today we maintain a deeply held commitment to ecumenism and in more recent times have sought to address in whatever ways we can the ecological crisis facing our world. For without a habitable planet, there will be no future kingdom.[66]

Figure 5
Stanbrook Abbey, North Yorkshire, UK, Fielden Clegg Bradley Studios, 2015. Courtesy of Sirj Photography.

Elsewhere, a focus on renewable energy and sustainable technology has been a valuable promotional tool in high-profile projects. For example, Cambridge Central Mosque, designed by Marks Barfield and completed in 2019, has won much acclaim for being the first eco-mosque in Europe (Figure 6). According to the mosque's website:

> The mosque is committed to sustainability: its advanced eco-design gives it a near-zero carbon footprint, honors natural forms with sustainable timber vaulting, and reminds the visitor of our connection to nature.[67]

With the use of photovoltaic cells on the roof, locally-generated energy and a grey water and rainwater harvesting system, the environmental credentials of the mosque are far deeper than greenwashing but its status as an "eco-mosque" has no doubt served as a valuable publicity.

In addition to eco-technology, the use of sustainable materials has also been a feature of recent schemes. Rammed earth, for example, which has a long tradition of use in parts of Asia, has gained popularity in recent years and has been employed in several schemes, including Berlin's Chapel of Reconciliation (2000) and the Dandaji Mosque in Niger (2018).

Figure 6
Cambridge Central Mosque, Cambridge, Marks Barfield Architects, 2019. Courtesy of Sirj Photography.

In the Jewish cemetery in Bushey, Hertfordshire, the prayer halls designed by Waugh Thistleton and completed in 2017, are constructed almost entirely from rammed earth, largely on account of its sustainability (Figure 7). The building was shortlisted for the Stirling Prize in 2018 with the RIBA suggesting that the use of rammed earth carried an additional significance:

> The fact that the rammed earth walls of the prayer hall will return to the earth once the cemetery is full and has to be extended again, is a poetic response to the programme for the cemetery and the traditions of the Jewish faith.[68]

Whether this symbolism was part of the brief and accurately reflects Jewish spirituality remains unclear.

Conclusion

This article has touched on some aspects of faith, space and place in the twenty-first century while remaining keenly aware of its limitations and omissions. Perhaps the most significant gap in this review is the relative absence of women and LGBTQ groups in the shaping of religious space. It would be remiss to ignore the fact that religious groups frequently

Figure 7
Bushey Cemetery Prayer Halls, Hertfordshire, Waugh Thistleton, 2017. Courtesy of Sirj Photography.

side-line (and in some cases oppress) both women and LGBTQ people and that their agency in shaping faith spaces and practices is often circumscribed. As a result, the literature on both the gendering and queering of religious space is scant: as the urban planner, Clara Greed has recently suggested, gender is rarely acknowledged in debates about the secular and post-secular, and frequently overlooked in studies of urban planning.[69] Similarly, religious architectural practice is an arena that continues to be overwhelmingly male-dominated, although a notable exception to this, which deserves closer attention, has been the rise of women designing mosques, especially in Turkey. These include Zeynep Fadillioglu, Bahar Mizrak, Hayriye Gül Totu and beyond Turkey, Marina Tabassum, Mariam Kamara and Julia Barfield. LGBTQ communities have also been under-represented, with few studies or projects exploring queer faith spaces.[70] Of note, here, is the global rise of the Metropolitan Community Church, which was founded in Los Angeles in 1968 to minister to the LGBTQ community: a valuable study of their purpose-built church in Washington DC (designed in 1992 by Suzan Reatig) and the residential space surrounding it, is offered by the sociologist, Stephen Hunt.[71] However, such examples are in short supply and I hope that the gaps in this review, highlight the uneven distribution of power in shaping places

of worship and the need for further research to uncover forms of agency among marginalized groups.

This raises a larger point about the position of religious architecture in secular research: religion is, by its nature, moored to immutable truths and laws and therefore often perceived to be at odds with progressive scholarship. However, secular scholars must be wary of assumptions; we are frequently mistaken in the way that we interpret unfamiliar traditions and impose our own values. This is particularly pertinent in the case of sex-segregated spaces in mosques and orthodox synagogues. Such sites require nuanced analysis that focuses as much on the voices of worshipers as on architectural readings. Indeed, few fields of scholarship ask the researcher to listen without prejudice more than the study of religion.

Finally, in assembling this critical overview, it has become clear that, while detailed studies of places of worship in the twenty-first century have been conducted in the fields of theology, geography, planning, sociology, and anthropology, there has been considerably less work by architectural historians and theorists. Some notable contributions to scholarship have been made by, among others, architects and theorists, such as Julio Bermudez and Juhani Pallasmaa and several important cross-disciplinary edited collections offer a picture of recent scholarship but more extensive studies remain to be done, especially in the emerging field of digital religion.[72]

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Notes

1. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1930, trans.).
2. Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015).
3. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). Jurgen Habermas, "Notes on Post-secular Society," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2008): 17–29. It is important to note that Peter Berger, among others, proposes the term "desecularization" to describe the shift from secularisation. This has term has been employed by others as an alternative to the post-secular, including David Goodhew in his analysis of London's churches. David Goodhew and Anthony-Paul Cooper, eds., *The Descularisation of the City: London's Churches, 1980 to the Present* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2019).
4. Justin Beaumont, "Transcending the Particular in Postsecular Cities," in *Exploring the Postsecular City: The Religious, the Political and the Urban*, ed. Arie Moledijk, Justin Beaumont, and Christoph Jedan (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2010), 3.
5. Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 126. Also see,

Knott, "Cutting through the Postsecular City: A Spatial Interrogation," in *Exploring the Postsecular City: The Religious, the Political and the Urban* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2010), 19–38.

6. Knott, *The Location of Religion*, 234.

7. Veronica della Dora, "Infrasecular Geographies: Making, Unmaking and Remaking Sacred space," *Progress in Human Geography* 42, no. 1 (2018): 44–71, 48.

8. Nancy T. Ammerman, ed. *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6. See also Meredith McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

9. Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 2.

10. Timothy Willem Jones and Lucinda Matthews-Jones, eds. *Material Religion in Modern Britain: The Spirit of Things* (New York, NY: Palgrave McMillian, 2015), 2.

11. Matthew Guest, *Neoliberal Religion: Faith and Power in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 15.

12. Peter Berger, *Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1990).

13. Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2014).

14. Guest, *Neoliberal Religion*, 18.

15. "Religion by Age and Sex, England and Wales Census," 2021. Available online: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/religionbyageandsexenglandandwales/census2021 (accessed February 1, 2023).

16. Scott Thumma, "Twenty Years of Congregational Change: The 2020 Faith Communities Today Overview" (Hartford, CT: Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership in Association with Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2021).

17. Linda Woodhead, "The Rise of 'No Religion': Towards an Explanation," *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review* 78, no. 3 (2017): 247–262.

18. The 2021 UK census revealed that the number of Pagans had risen from 57,000 in 2011 to 74,000. The fastest growing religion in the UK was Shamanism, which increased more than tenfold to 8000 from 650 in 2011. "Religion, England and Wales: Census," 2021, Office for National Statistics. Available online: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021 (accessed April 30, 2023).

19. Guest, *Neoliberal Religion*.

20. Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox*, 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 161.

21. For a discussion of hybrid spiritualities, see Graham Harvey and Giselle Vincett, "Alternative Spiritualities: Marginal and Mainstream," in *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, ed. Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto (Oxford: Routledge, 2012).

22. Amanda Lucia, *White Utopias: The Religious Exoticism of Transformational Festivals* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020). See also, Amanda Lucia, "Representation and Whiteness among the 'Spiritual but Not Religious'," September 24, 2020, *Canopy Forum on the Interactions of Law and Religion*. Available online: https://canopyforum.org/2020/09/24/representation-and-whiteness-among-the-spiritual-but-not-religious/ (accessed January 19, 2023).

23. Davie, *Religion in Britain*, 8.

24. The 2016 International Report on Religious Buildings in Transition, indicates that denominations vary in how they regard mixed-use: "religious communities have very different attitudes to the physical heritage. Some (such as the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches) regard the buildings and their contents as sacred. Others (such as most Protestant Churches) are very much open to multifunctional use of the premises." Henrik Lindblad and Eva Lofgren, *International Report on Religious Buildings in Transition: An International Comparison* (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2016), 29.

25. Katie McClymont, "Neo-Paganisms, 'Dark Green Religion' and What the Divine Feminine Might Mean for Planning," in *Gender and Religion in the City: Women, Urban Planning and Spirituality*, ed. Clara Greed (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

26. Josh Bullock, "The Sociology of the Sunday Assembly: 'Belonging without Believing' in a Post Christian Context" (PhD diss., Kingston University, 2017), iv.

27. Ibid., 49.

28. Alain de Botton, *Religion for Atheists* (London and New York, NY: Penguin, 2013), 275.

29. Rose Etherington, "Alain de Botton Plans Temples for Atheists," *Dezeen*, January 2012. Available online: https://www.dezeen.com/2012/01/25/alain-de-botton-plans-temples-for-atheists/ (accessed April 29, 2023).

30. de Botton, *Religion for Atheists*, 267.

31. Wendy Cadge and Elan Babchuck, "American Religion Is Not Dead Yet," *The Atlantic*, January 6, 2023. Available online: https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2023/01/us-religious-affiliation-rates-declining/672729/ (accessed January 31, 2023).

32. Donatella Fiorani, Loughlin Kealy, and Stefano Francesco Musso, eds. "Conservation, Adaptation: Keeping Alive the Spirit of the Place Adaptive Reuse of Heritage with Symbolic Value," in *EAAE Transactions on Architectural Education*, No. 65 (Hasselt: EAAE, 2017).

33. Carolina di Biase, "Suitable Reuse Rather than Adaptive: Religious Heritage in Contemporary Societies," in *Conservation Adaptation: Keeping Alive the Spirit of the Place Adaptive Reuse of Heritage with Symbolic Value, EAAE Transactions on Architectural Education*, No. 65, ed. Donatella Fiorani, Loughlin Kealy, and Stefano Francesco Musso (Hasselt: EAAE, 2017), 55.

34. Henrik Lindblad and Eva Lofgren, *International Report on Religious Buildings in Transition: An International Comparison* (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2016), 57.

35. Thomas Coomans, "Reuse of Sacred Spaces: Perspectives for a Long Tradition," in *Loci Sacre: Understanding Sacred Places*, eds. T. Coomans, H. De Dijn, J. De Maeyer, R. Heynickx, and B. Verschaffel (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), 221–241, 222.

36. Available online: https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/2174/turn-france-s-empty-churches-into-mosques-says-muslim-leader (accessed February 1, 2023).

37. Available online: https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/ (accessed January 19, 2023).

38. Examples of the influence of Evangelicalism on US policy-making, include the reversal of Roe V. Wade in 2022 and the bill, passed by the Texas Senate in 2023, requiring public school classrooms to display the Ten Commandments.

39. Megha Chand Inglis, "Stories from a CNC Factory in Ahmedabad," *Dearq*, 27, 2020, 20–35.

40. Claire Dwyer, David Gilbert, and Bindi Shah, "Faith in Suburbia: Secularisation, Modernity and the Changing Geographies of Religion in London's Suburbs," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38, no. 3 (2013): 403–419.

41. Clare Dwyer, "Photographing Faith in Suburbia," *Cultural Geographies* 22, no. 3 (2014): 531–538.

42. The installation was commissioned as the V&A Pavilion for the Biennale. Christopher Turner, "Three British Mosques at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale," *The V&A*, 2021. Available online: https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/design-and-society/three-british-mosques-at-the-2021-venice-architecture-biennale (accessed February 2, 2023).

43. For example, see Peter Zumthor's Bruder Klaus Kapelle, completed in 2007 and John Pawson's Abbey of Our Lady of Novy Dvur (2004) and Moritzkirche (2013). For an account of the design, offered by the client, see H. Haug and U. Horwick, *Built up towards the Light: John Pawson's Redesign of the Moritzkirche in Augsburg* (Munich: Hirmer, 2019).

44. For a discussion of whiteness in relation to the Church of the Year 2000 see Victoria George, *Whitewash and the New*

Aesthetics of the Protestant Reformation (London: Pindar Press, 2012), 44.

45. Available online: https://de51gn.com/22-contemporary-mosques-around-the-world-that-redefine-sacral-architecture-with-respect/

46. See Peter Anson for an account of the significance of church fashions Petriplatz, understanding social and theological shifts. Peter Anson, *Fashions in Church Furnishings and Décor, 1840–1940* (London: The Faith Press, 1960).

47. Andrew Crompton, "The Architecture of Multi-Faith Spaces: God Leaves the Building," *Journal of Architecture* 18, no. 4 (2013): 474–496. Sophie Gilliat Ray, "'Sacralising' Sacred Space in Public Institutions: A Case Study of the Prayer Space at the Millennium Dome," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 20, no. 3 (2005): 357–372. For a study of airport prayer space in the US see also Marion Bowman, Kimberly J. Lau, and Teri F. Brewer, "Sacred Spaces in Liminal Places: Airport Chapels and Religion in Transit" (American Folklore Society, Video presentation, 2004).

48. David Adjaye, *Abrahamic Family House, Adjaye Associates*. Available online: https://www.adjaye.com/work/the-abrahamic-family-house/ (accessed April 29, 2023).

49. House of One, "The Concept." Available online: https://house-of-one.org/en/concept (accessed February 1, 2023).

50. "House of Prayer and Learning at Petriplatz, Berlin, Limited, One Stage Competition," Architects competition brief, 2012, 12.

51. Network for New Media, Religion and Digital Culture Studies. Available online: https://digitalreligion.tamu.edu/ (accessed February 1, 2023).

52. See for example, Heidi Campbell, ed., *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2013); Heidi Campbell and Wendi Bellar, eds., *Digital Religion: The Basics* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2023).

53. Nesrine Mansour and Anat Geva, "Displacement in the Era of Digital Religion and Virtual Sacred Architecture" (Conference Paper, Architecture, Culture

and Spirituality Symposium (ACS10), 2018), 1–5.

54. Nesrine Mansour, "The Holy Light of Cyberspace: Spiritual Experience in a Virtual Church," *Religions* 13, no. 2 (2022): 121.

55. VR Church in the Metaverse. Available online: https://www.vrchurch.org/ (accessed February 2, 2023).

56. Seiji Kumagai, "Development of Buddhist AI, AR, and VR toward the Establishment of Buddhist Metaverse 'Tera-verse'," *Kuensel*, October, 2022. Available online: https://kuenselonline.com/development-of-buddhist-ai-ar-and-vr-toward-the-establishment-of-buddhist-metaverse-tera-verse/ (accessed February 2, 2023).

57. Kumagi suggests that, "While young people overvalue economics and technology, they are beginning to lose interest in tradition and religion. However, technologies such as AI and the metaverse have the potential to make the younger generation more interested in tradition and religion." Seiji Kumagi, "Development of Buddhist AI."

58. Levi McLaughlin, "Japanese Religious Responses to COVID-19; A Preliminary Report," *The Asia Pacific Journal* 8, no. 9 (3) (2020): 17–23.

59. Ibid., 14.

60. John Bryson, Lauren Andres, and Andrew Davis, "Covid-19, Virtual Church Services and a New Temporary Geography of Home," *Royal Dutch Geographical Socie*ty 11, no. 3 (2020): 360–372, 360.

61. Muslim 3D. Available online: https://muslim3d.io/ (accessed April 30, 2023).

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63. Sigurd Bergmann, "Theology in Its Spatial Turn: Space Place and Built Environments Challenging and Changing the Images of God," *Religion Compass* 1, no. 3 (2007): 329–413, 368. See also Sigurd Bergmann, ed., *Theology in Built Environments: Exploring Religion Architecture and Design* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017); Marcus Vogt, Celia Deane-Drummond, and Sigurd Bergmann, eds., *Religion in the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2018).

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Relation between Ecological Practices
and Spirituality? The Case of
Benedictine Monasteries," *Journal of
Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*
31 (2018): 559–582. See also
Richard Irvine, "The Architecture of
Stability: Monasteries and the
Importance of Place in a World of
Non-places," *Etnofoor* 23, no. 1 (2011):
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Roman and Anglo Catholic Monasteries
in the Twentieth Century," in *Places of
Worship in Britain and Ireland and
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queering sacred space, offers tangential
ways of reading faith architecture. See
for example, Sally R. Munt, Andrew
Kam-Tuck Yip, and Kath Brown, eds.,
*Queer Spiritual Spaces: Sexuality and
Sacred Places* (London and New York,
NY: Routledge, 2010).

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Metropolitan Community Church-DC and
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and Culture: A Journal of Feminist
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72. Sigurd Bergmann, ed., *Theology in Built
Environments: Exploring Religion
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Routledge, 2017); Julio Bermudez, ed.,
*Transcending Architecture: Contemporary
Views on Sacred Space* (Washington, D.C.:
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