

## Religion, Space, and Place

### The Spatial Turn in Research on Religion

*Kim Knott*

■ **ABSTRACT:** Following a consideration of the impact of the late twentieth-century spatial turn on the study of religion by geographers, anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and religious studies scholars, two trends are distinguished: the poetics of place and the sacred; and politics, religion, and the contestation of space. Discussion of these reveals substantially different approaches to religion, space, and place—one phenomenological, the other social constructivist. The spatial turn has been extremely fruitful for research on religion, bringing together scholars from a variety of disciplines, and connecting not only to traditional areas such as sacred space and pilgrimage, but to new ones such as embodiment, gender, practice and religious-secular engagements.

■ **KEYWORDS:** geography of religion, poetics and politics, space and place, spatial method and theory, spatial turn

Since the early 1990s the English-speaking academic community saw a cross-disciplinary rise in interest in the study of 'space'. Channeled by a group of critical geographers who were responding to the spatial interventions of French theorists—such as Michel Foucault ([1968] 1986, 1991), Henri Lefebvre ([1974] 1991), and Michel de Certeau (1984)—this spatial turn challenged earlier Cartesian approaches, focusing attention on social as well as physical space, foregrounding spatial practice and representations, and stressing the importance of power and the production of space. Edward Soja (1989, 1996), David Harvey (1993), Rob Shields (1991), and Doreen Massey (1993a, 1993b, 1994) developed French spatial theory in the context of a radical postmodern geography. Around the same time, cultural theorists such as Adrienne Rich, bell hooks, and Homi Bhabha were exploring cultural positioning, the politics of location, and marginality as a site of identity and resistance (Bhabha 1994; Rose 1993). Since that time the spatial turn has had a wide-ranging impact, especially when seen in association with simultaneous—and arguably interlinked—scholarly interests in embodiment, performativity, and material culture. Its impact has been felt in studies of religion as much as in other fields of the social sciences and humanities. Whether we consider anthropology, theology and religious studies, sociology, or history, a similar story can be told of a shift in gear from the mid-1990s on. Before that time, there was comparatively little interest



in researching religion, space, and place, and it was generally limited to certain topics such as sacred space and pilgrimage (e.g., Bhardwaj 1973; Eliade 1959; Smith 1978; Turner and Turner 1978; van der Leeuw 1933). Even within the discipline of geography, the engagement between religion and things spatial was a minority interest, often not considered at all in textbooks and rarely in academic journals, with a few notable exceptions (e.g., Büttner 1974, 1980; Deffontaines 1948; Fickeler 1962; Gay 1971; Isaac 1960; Sopher 1967).

An instructive way to consider the impact of the spatial turn is to look at two review articles by the geographer Lily Kong (1990 and 2001; see also Cooper 1992; Holloway and Valins 2002; Park 1994).<sup>1</sup> In the 1990 article Kong reviewed past efforts and considered the trenchant debate concerning the disciplinary territories and boundaries between geographers working on religion and scholars of religion working on space and environment. She then turned attention to new research foregrounding cultural and social plurality and the consequent contests and conflicts—involving both religious and secular agents—that shaped the urban landscape. Kong also noted the rise in interest among geographers in environmental theology and ethics. Having begun to draw up an agenda for a forward-looking engagement between religion and geography in 1990, Kong found herself, in 2001, with the task of synthesizing what some writers then saw as an ‘incoherent’ field of scholarly activity. By that time, many more researchers had begun to conduct research in the area of religion and geography, from humanities and social science perspectives, and from an array of diverse disciplinary backgrounds (though many cultural geographical texts still failed to include it at all). Kong’s challenge to the geographical community was direct:

I will also argue that religion deserves to be acknowledged fully and in like manner alongside race, class and gender in geographical analysis. Most significantly, I underline the geographic significance of examining religion, not least in the intersection of sacred and secular forces in the making of place. This is especially so in urban contexts where the sacred and secular and, indeed, varieties of the sacred, frequently exist cheek by jowl. (2001: 212)

Organizing her review with reference to the conceptual dichotomy of the poetics and politics of sacred space—building on Chidester and Linenthal (1995)—enabled Kong to root an abundance of publications from the 1990s in longer-standing scholarly traditions that included the work of Hertz ([1913] 1983), Eliade (1959), Wheatley (1971), and Lane (1988).<sup>2</sup> This dichotomy is helpful for distinguishing those whose research on religion, place and space focuses on power, contestation, identity, and discourse, from those working in a phenomenological tradition with regard to place and the sacred.<sup>3</sup>

Kong concludes her article by proposing an agenda for future research based on a consideration of the following key themes: sites of religious practice beyond the officially sacred, sensuous sacred geographies, religions in different historical and place-specific contexts, various geographical scales of analysis, different constitutions of population, dialectics, and moralities (Kong 2001: 228; see also Holloway and Valins 2002: 6; for discussion of Kong’s themes, see Knott 2005a: 105–10). These themes reflect the immense range of possibilities for new geographies of religion, though Kong’s expectation must have been that the fulfillment of such new geographies would be both multi- and inter-disciplinary. And such has been the nature of research on religion, space, and place since her second review: it has not respected disciplinary boundaries. It has defied those twentieth-century scholars who called for the separation of approaches by geographers and those in religious studies (*Religionswissenschaftler*) (Kong 1990: 360–61), and who assumed that specialists from varied disciplines would bring very different fare to the feast. Instead, scholars from a wide range of fields and

contexts have found space, place, and geography to be rewarding frames for the study of religion. Increasingly, they have drawn on and made use of relevant research irrespective of its disciplinary origins.

In addition to the geographical reviews cited above, in the first decade of the twenty-first century there have been several substantial additions. Principal among these have been a major textbook (Stump 2008), and three special issues of geography journals: *Social and Cultural Geography* in 2002, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* in 2006, and again *Social and Cultural Geography* in 2009 (Holloway and Valins 2002; Proctor 2006; Yorgason and della Dora 2009; see also Brace et al. 2006). Looking beyond geography of religion to other disciplinary fields we may note recent issues of three other journals focused on religion, space, and place. In 2005, the Nordic journal of comparative religion, *Temenos*, presented four articles (Anttonen 2005; Knott 2005b; Kong 2005; Kunin 2005), with a fifth the following year (Sekine 2006), from a conference panel on “Religion, the Sacred, and Spaces of Contestation, Segregation, and Difference” (International Association for the History of Religions XIX World Congress, Tokyo, 2005). The journal *Religion* ran a special issue in 2009 on “Local and Regional Perspectives on Religion in Western Europe” focused on meso-level research on religion that bridged national studies and those of individual groups (Stausberg 2009; see also Mikaelsson [2009] on regional approaches and Knott [2009a] on locality and location). In the same year, a review symposium on Thomas Tweed’s (2006) spatial theoretical approach to religion appeared in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (Knott 2009b; Tweed 2009; Vásquez 2009). With *Religion Compass* also publishing reviews of the spatial turn in both theology (Bergmann 2007) and religious studies (Knott 2008), the decade has seen space placed firmly on the agenda of the study of religions, and religion given renewed attention by geographers.<sup>4</sup>

My own interest has led me to review historical and contemporary perspectives on religion, space, and place. In an attempt to situate my own research, I reviewed not only spatial and geographical contributions, but writing on sacred space, globalization, and locality (Knott 2005a: 11–34; 94–123). More recently I examined key contributions on pilgrimage and movement, diasporas and migration, body, death and dying, and religion in secular context (Knott 2010a: 482–91). These have been important themes for exploring the intersections between religion and space, but rather than rehearse them here I will return to the dichotomy used by Kong (2001) to distinguish two broad approaches to space and the sacred, one ‘substantial’, the other ‘situational’ (first used by Chidester and Linenthal 1995: 5).

Although there are scholars who prefer to resist or blur the oppositional dialectics of poetics and politics (e.g., Holloway 2006: 186; Yorgason and della Dora 2009: 631), the distinction remains important and useful for two reasons. First, it signals profoundly different scholarly approaches to place and the sacred, and, second, it helps to keep the research agenda open in recognition of the complex construction of religious and secular places and the narratives that produce them.

### Poetics, Place, and the Sacred

A strong tradition—with its roots in the thought of Husserl, and later Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty<sup>5</sup>—has informed phenomenological approaches in both geography and the study of religion. Those committed to the primacy of place (Relph 1976; Tuan 1977)—and the sui generis nature of the sacred (Eliade 1959; Lane 1988)—have provided the foundations on which later scholars have built, with the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard responsible

for the term “poetics of space” ([1957] 1992). When writing some two decades later about the material production of space, Henri Lefebvre ([1974] 1991: 120–21) drew attention to the nostalgic, quasi-religious tone of writing about dwelling in the mid-twentieth century. Writing of Bachelard’s work, Joan Ockman suggests that it is “the interrelationship between science and poetry, experiment and experience, that seems to have the most radical potential” (1998: 1), while the nostalgic and essentialist worldview that infuses his conceptions of dwelling and home comes across now as historically dated. Nevertheless, the poetics of space has continued to attract those whose spatial focus is experience, aesthetics, the senses, and the sacred.<sup>6</sup>

Two collections of essays were located squarely within this scholarly tradition, *Senses of Place* (Feld and Basso 1996a) and *Experiences of Place* (Macdonald 2003a). The first of these offered a “phenomenological prolegomena” by Edward S. Casey that aimed to refocus attention on place as the “first of all things” (1996: 16) and on the relationship between perception and place: “To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in” (ibid.: 18). This is a knowledge made possible as a result of one’s embodiment, and it is knowledge not of space in general, but of the particularity of places as events in space and time (ibid.: 36–37; see also Jenkins 1999; Knott 2005a: 29–33, 120–22). Casey’s powerful account of the existential nature of place provided the foundation for the ethnographic essays in the volume by contending that “place is the most fundamental form of embodied experience—the site of a powerful fusion of self, space, and time” (Feld and Basso 1996b: 9; see also Casey 1997 and Csordas [1994] on the place of the body). Although the focus of these essays is not religion per se, I would argue that both the phenomenological perspective and the attention to body and the senses and emotions of dwelling and landscape place the volume within a tradition of scholarship about sacred space.

The second collection was more explicitly located in that tradition, with the editor Mary Macdonald (2003a) citing work on both the sacred by Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade, and the poetics of place by Bachelard and Yi-Fu Tuan, in her introductory chapter. Identifying that “place remains an underdeveloped concept in religious studies,” Macdonald stressed the ways in which religious people “work with concrete and imagined places in constructing worlds of meaning” and, through their religious work, “transform [space] into place” (2003b: 17, 2, 17). In the ethnographic essays that followed, material sacred locations, the fantasized places of heaven and the conspiratorial underworld, as well as the sites of oral and textual traditions and places of dreaming and promise were all aired. However, despite Macdonald’s claim that what was offered were comparative perspectives on place (2003b: 13), no methodology or model was proposed as a result of the interaction of these scholarly perspectives, no tools with which to proceed to develop further the concept of place in studies of religion.

The poetics of place and the sacred have also continued to excite interest among geographers. One of the new geographical perspectives noted by Kong in her 2001 review was sensuous geographies, with Nigel Thrift drawing attention several years later to the way in which religious and spiritual spaces “quiver with affective energy” and suggesting that these energies are worthy of investigation (Thrift 2004: 57). An example of such an investigation is Julian Holloway’s (2006) work on the enchanted space of the séance. Writing about the spiritualist movement in Britain in the 1890s, Holloway (2006: 183) noted the importance of the séance in reproducing itself and transforming wider socio-cultural narratives and practices, such as relations with the Christian church, with empiricist scientific discourse, and Victorian norms of gender and sexuality. The séance formed one site in a geography of femininity, taking place in the home, with women seen as the most effective mediums. Séances were “liminal spaces wherein sensuous impulses could flourish ... The semi-light or darkened room of the séance was one such space. Here, male and female bodies, both material and immaterial, touched

and brushed up against each other” (ibid.). The organization of the space, the spatial practice of the medium, spirits and participants, the levitation of the table and other objects were all well known at the time and became standardized practices, coming to form a disciplinary code of corporeal behaviors and relations between living bodies and spirit bodies (ibid.).

Holloway’s role in shaping the ‘poetics’ branch of scholarship on religion, place, and space became clear in the following quotation: “Enchantment and enchanted spaces are sensuous spaces that cannot be reduced to societal processes, structures or belief itself” (2006: 186). They are not fully captured by either theological or modernist geographical explanations. For Holloway the focus on affect would allow geographers to take seriously belief and religiosity as subject matter as well as “the sensations that affirm and reiterate them” (ibid.: 186) without having to debate their causes or to accept or reduce the beliefs that lie behind them. As such, his study attended to the mutually informing relationship between religious/spiritual beliefs and practices and the spatiality of bodies, homes and other everyday, non-religious places.

This disciplinary anxiety arises from the fact that, as Yorgason and della Dora (2009: 631) have suggested, for geographers, religion represents “the last *terra incognita* (after class, race, gender, sexuality, disability etc.)” Not “a blank surface waiting to be inscribed and shaped ... it rather ‘speaks back’ through its own specificities” and problematizes the colonizing strategies of geographers and other scholars (ibid.: 631). But how do such specificities inform space and place? In an essay in the same issue of *Social and Cultural Geography*, Dewsbury and Cloke (2009) argued that spiritual landscapes “provide a worthwhile avenue towards new understandings of how faith, belief, religion and phenomenology ... illuminate the notion of being in the world. Spiritual landscapes are not just about religion, but open out spaces that can be inhabited ... in different spiritual registers” (Dewsbury and Cloke 2009: 696). Working out of phenomenology and arguing that “existential sensation, performative faith, and immanence are ... the problematics on which the spiritual is based,” they sought to theorize, analyze, and characterize the space of the spiritual in everyday life, a space that has long been ignored in social science discourse (ibid.: 708–9).

The work of these scholars illustrates a trend among scholars of religion toward researching landscapes and spaces of experience, affect, belief, and theology—and an ethics of scholarly engagement that foregrounds the researcher’s own spiritual or religious positionality. This is in contrast to the majority of geographers, sociologists, anthropologists, and cultural studies scholars who have favored a social constructivist approach to researching the relationship of religion, place, and space, and for whom the focus in recent years has been on material relations, identity politics, spatial contestation, representation, and embodiment.

### Politics, Religion, and the Contestation of Space

The genealogical trail for this branch of scholarship on religion, space, and place leads back to those Marxist and post-structuralist social theorists mentioned at the outset of the article. They were eager to overturn a limited, Cartesian conception of space (a view shared by phenomenologists of place), and were interested in the production, practice, and representation of space, and its relationship with knowledge and power. Their work was swiftly taken up and popularized by a group of post-modern geographers for whom religion was at best of historical interest. Despite this dismissal, the attention paid by this group to issues of power, development, capital, urban studies, identity, and difference informed the current generation of younger scholars working on the politics of place and space for whom religion is very decidedly on the agenda.

Before considering several examples, it is important to note the material cultural trend that developed within the discipline of religious studies in the same period, particularly as a counter-response to the phenomenological approach. Jonathan Z. Smith—whose *Map Is Not Territory* (1978) and *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (1987) I have written about elsewhere (Knott 2005a, 2005b, 2008)—was committed to an anthropological approach to material and cosmological places that recognized them as human not divine work, and to the sacred as a transitive category arising from people’s ritual practice and attribution of meaning and value. Among a number of scholars who built on Smith’s work, Chidester and Linenthal (1995) stand out for their focus on contestation and the production of sacred places, indeed for articulating some of the fundamental attributes of a politics of religion and space. Noting that, “In search of the sacred, we immediately had to recognize that these places were intimately entangled in such ‘profane’ enterprises as tourism, economic exchange and development, and the intense conflict of contending nationalisms” (1995: 1), they saw sacred sites as a ‘lens’ through which a variety of types of relations could be examined. Connecting back not only to Smith, but also to van der Leeuw (1933), Chidester and Linenthal distinguished several political registers—a politics of position, of property, of exclusion and of exile (1995: 7–9)—that could help in understanding the production of American sacred spaces. Just as Belden C. Lane (1988) reinterpreted the infamous axioms of Mircea Eliade (for an American phenomenology of sacred space), so did Chidester and Linenthal but with politics and contestation in mind, noting the entanglement with the profane and risk of deconsecration, the importance of social hierarchical rather than mythological levels of reality, and the human nature of “the symbolic labor that goes into making space sacred” (1995: 17). They identified four key strategies used in its production, notably appropriation, exclusion, inversion, and hybridization (ibid.: 19), and in so doing engaged as much with post-structuralism and post-modern geography as they did with their forbears in religious studies.

Other contributions from this period are important for their focus on contestation. Eade and Sallnow’s *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (1991) sought to challenge the paradigm of ‘*communitas*’ (Turner and Turner 1978) by rethinking pilgrimage sites as places informed by diverse and competing discourses and practices.<sup>7</sup> Another collection, *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places* (Carmichael et al. 1994), this time in the territory of archaeology rather than anthropology, focused on the ownership and management of sacred places and the many contests between multiple indigenous perspectives and the voices of heritage and local politics. Moving from landscapes to home as the locus of the sacred, Judy Tobler (2000) radically challenged those who would resort to a phenomenological view of home as the first place or as a sacred arena of safety, nurture, and sanctuary, by reminding readers that homes are scenes of domestic violence and oppression (see also Rose 1993). Writing in the context of South Africa—where, at that time, a woman was raped every twenty-three seconds—she critiqued the idealization and essentialization of home by phenomenologists, and demanded a more nuanced critical analysis of assumptions about the maternal body upon which notions of the space of home are constructed. Tobler added to the scholarly genealogy of the politics of sacred place by bringing the feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray to the table (Irigaray [1985] 2002; see Casey 1997, for a phenomenological engagement with Irigaray’s work).

In the 2000s scholars of religion in a variety of locations have been attentive to struggles for public space, among different groups of religious actors (often in multicultural contexts), between the secular state and religious claimants, and between religious groups and atheist opponents. In his volume on the geography of religion, Roger Stump (2008) examined the way in which beliefs and practices are marshaled by religious groups to influence and exert

power in secular space, especially in relation to processes of the privatization of religion. The attempt to assert religious control over social space is, as Stump demonstrated, evident at a variety of scales from the body to the state, and negotiated in the context of internal religious debates about innovation and tradition, and external ones about the place of religion in public life more broadly. In addressing these issues, it is important to recognize that differing state formations and religion/state settlements provide varied contexts for the enactment of such religious and spatial struggles. This point becomes clear if we consider the range of approaches to the making of Muslim space in different places and scales in North America and Europe (Metcalf 1996), while paying heed to the way in which a local space results from the co-mingling of its historical environment and monumentality, its representations, and the emplaced and bodily experience of its inhabitants (see O'Meara [2007] on uncovering pre-modern urban Fez through an interrogation of its medina walls).

In addition, in late modern and post-colonial contexts, differing religious/secular relationships—both ideological and strategic—inform the way in which public spaces are negotiated. In his study of secular iconoclasm, Howe (2009) has considered how, across the United States, different secular spaces are produced as a result of the exclusion of religious speech and symbols. Three models are presented—purification, privatization, and profanation—that arise from examining how diverse secularist iconoclasts (including religious secularist ones) shape material landscapes through different performances of meaning and value. The range of American secularisms and their relationships with religion(s) are quite different to those encountered in Britain, France, India, or Turkey, all of which have different histories of nation-building, colonial encounter, and migration. Not surprising, the modes of engagement and spatial implications also differ. These arise from controversies over planning and the built environment (Gale 2005; Gale and Naylor 2002; Knippenberg 2005); negotiations over public worship or performance (Kong 2005; Metcalf 1996; Werbner 1996); the formation of faith or inter-faith spaces (Gilliat-Ray 2005; Valins 2003); deliberations over civic spaces, rituals, and symbols (Chidester and Linenthal 1995; Sekine 2006), or spatial struggles involving identity politics (Chivallon 2001; Prideaux 2009; Walton-Roberts 1998).

Central to my own work has been the development and application of a spatial approach for examining the location of religion in the fabric of the secular. Like other research on religion that foregrounds the politics rather than poetics of space, it sees religions and their practical, discursive, and material entailments as co-constructed by religious actors in engagement with their traditions, social relations, and historical, geographical, and political contexts, and as amenable to spatial interrogation. Working out of such a social constructivist perspective requires the identification of tools and resources for researching the encounters, controversies, and contestation that arise when the deeply held experiences and representations of religious and other actors come into contact or require negotiation. Such struggles, as Lefebvre suggested, are produced by, played out in, and directed toward space: “Space is becoming the principal stake of goal-directed actions and struggles ... it has now become something more than the theatre, the disinterested stage or setting, of action ... its role is less and less neutral, more and more active, both as instrument and as goal, as means and as end” ([1974] 1991: 410–11).

### **Religion, Place, and Space: Method and Theory**

Since the spatial turn, space has indeed become more than a ‘theater’ or backdrop for the study of religious groups and their activities. Researchers of religion have sought to confront

and examine the relationship between space and power, whether they see power as inherent and manifest in places and/or the sacred (poetics), or as a property of contested spaces, of the dominant and demotic discourses and practices by which groups seek to make or retain space for themselves (politics). Most of those scholars—whether as ethnographers, historians, or geographers—have been caught up in the spatial turn, without engaging directly in theoretical debates about space or its relationship to religion.

In seeking to develop a spatial methodology for locating religion, particularly in secular places, things, communities, and objects, I used the ideas of Lefebvre, Foucault, de Certeau, and Massey on space, knowledge, and power to produce a series of steps for analyzing the location of religion. These include (1) the body as the source of space, (2) dimensions of space, (3) properties of space, (4) aspects of space, and (5) the dynamics of space (Knott 2005a: 11–58, 124–30; 2005b: 156–66; 2008: 1108–11). Together, these analytical steps facilitate a detailed interrogation of a place, object, body, or group by means of its spatial attributes.

The first step is the significance of the body for the experience and representation of space and—because spatial metaphors are central for cognition and representation—for talking about the environment, the nature of society and relationships, time and progress, culture and the sacred. More than the sum of its physical parts and biological processes, the body is the point of connection between local social practices and the large-scale organization of power (Foucault 1991; see also Csordas 1990, 1994). It is the place where religious discipline may play itself out. In the second step I turn to the physical, social, and mental “dimensions of space.” In the case of a religious group, place, or object, this involves examining its material and physical emplacement, the space of its social relationships, and its ideological, imaginary, and cosmological locations. As Lefebvre suggested, all places simultaneously ‘envelop’ or configure these three fields or dimensions of space ([1974] 1991: 410–11).

This propensity to gather the physical, social, and mental is the first of several “properties of space” that form the next analytical step. Loosely developed from spatial characteristics noted by Foucault in “Of Other Spaces” ([1968] 1986), in addition to configuration, they include extension, simultaneity, and power. With the term extension, I aim to convey both the sense of time flowing through space and the way in which particular places betray the traces of earlier times and different political and religious regimes (de Certeau 1984: 201). In addition to the extensive, diachronic nature of a place, there are also its synchronic interconnections with other similar and co-existing sites, real and imagined, to which a place may be connected by the movement of people and capital, and the flow of communications and ideas. The final spatial property is power: knowledge power and social power. Without a space to produce and shape, ideas and beliefs, principles and values—whether religious or secular—remain ephemeral and ungrounded, lacking “an appropriate morphology” (Lefebvre [1974] 1991: 417). As Massey suggested, by its very nature socially constituted space is “full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation” (1993a: 156).

Analyzing a place and the location of religion within it with these properties in mind foregrounds the active nature or dynamism of space, and this is further underlined in the remaining analytical stages, where the focus turns to those dialectical aspects theorized by Lefebvre in which space is perceived, conceived, and lived ([1974] 1991: 38–40). These three aspects—spatial practice (perceived space), representations of space (conceived space), and spaces of representation (lived space)—provide resources for thinking about how people experience, use, and represent the spaces they inhabit. Scholars have applied these aspects to a variety of locations, from Edmonton to Los Angeles, and from the theology of the built environment to the diasporic spaces of British-Caribbean religious experience (Chivallon

2001; Gorringer 2002; Shields 1991; Soja 1996; see also Knott 2005a: 35–58). Recent social and cultural theory has reconceived space as dynamic, in terms of its relationship to power, history, and time, its condition of simultaneity and the various ways in which it is experienced and represented. No longer a mere theater for other action, it is enmeshed in embodiment and practice, knowledge and discourse, and in religion.

The application of this spatial methodology has been particularly useful in cases where competing religious, secular and postsecular beliefs, and values are evident (Knott 2005a, 2009a, 2010b; Knott and Franks 2007), and for uncovering the various dimensions, properties, aspects, and dynamics of such spaces of controversy. By their very nature such spaces have revealed not only the heterogeneity of beliefs and values but also at times their non-negotiability. They have been sites where matters of ‘sacred’ significance have been contested (Carmichael et al. 1994; Chidester and Linenthal 1995; Eade and Sallnow 1991; Kong 2005; Kunin 2005; Valins 2003; Werbner 1996). It is for this reason that it has been important for me to engage my spatial approach with research on the notion of the ‘sacred’ and its attribution.

Veikko Anttonen is a neo-Durkheimian scholar of religion who has brought together cognitive and cultural research to theorize the ‘sacred’ and examine its applications. In common with earlier theorists, he has taken space seriously, though not solely as the site of the sacred (Eliade 1959) or the product of sacralization (Smith 1987), but as central to the generation of the ‘sacred’ as a category boundary (Anttonen 1996). Anttonen’s focus is on body and territory, those “domains of experience whose social meanings are symbolically construed ... [but also] cognitively organised at the preconceptual level” (1996: 41). Their value for theorizing the ‘sacred’ as a category boundary arises not just from their foundational nature, but also from their “co-extensiveness as bounded entities” (ibid.). The boundaries among body, territory, and beyond become culturally dependent cognitive markers for distinguishing between entities based on their value, and 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” (Anttonen 2002: 31). The ‘sacred’ separates different domains and binds them together, and is generated “when boundaries between the categories of male and female, life and death, pure and impure, left and right, inside and outside of sacralized space, inside and outside of the human body are in transition” (Anttonen 2005: 191). 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.

As Anttonen demonstrates in his work on territorial boundaries in the Baltic Sea area, this cognitive capacity for using spatial structures to distinguish certain things, events, persons, and places as ‘sacred’ is culturally dependent. For example, the Finno-Ugric word *pyhä* was used to describe places that people wanted “to demarcate from the rest of the environment as ‘separate,’ ‘designated,’ ‘prohibited,’ ‘dangerous’” (2005: 192). But Anttonen also noted that, in other cultural contexts, whether religious, national, or ideological, a similar process of ‘sacred’ attribution was at work (2000: 280–81). We see from this observation that the ‘sacred’ is a scholarly resource that can be used to interrogate not only religious entities and places but also their non-religious or secular counterparts.

Moving from cognitive conceptions of space for theorizing the sacred to the use of spatial tropes for theorizing religion, we turn to the American scholar Thomas Tweed. In his *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*, Tweed sought to develop “a theory that made sense of

the religious life of transnational migrants and addressed three themes—movement, relation and position” with the potential to be applied to other (non-migrant) religious lives (2006: 5). At the heart of his work is a definition of religion, which employs spatial and aquatic terms: “Religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries” (ibid.: 54). Unpacking this, Tweed discussed the orienting spatial metaphors of ‘dwelling’ and ‘crossing’ and the aquatic metaphors of ‘confluence’ and ‘flow’, drawing on the theoretical insights of Deleuze and Guattari (hydraulic model), Latour (circulating fluids), Appadurai (cultural flows), Long (religion as orientation; one’s place in the world), and Clifford (dwelling-in-travel) (Tweed 2006: 57–61; see also Vásquez 2009). Following an examination of ‘dwelling’ and the kinetics of homemaking through the body, home, homeland, and cosmos, Tweed turned his attention to exploring the three aspects of terrestrial, corporeal, and cosmic crossings. He revealed the potential of this spatial term to connect geographical, embodied, and imagined movements and transformations, concluding that “religions are flows, translocative and transtemporal crossings” (2006: 158).

Arguably a poetics of religion and space (Knott 2009b: 422), Tweed’s theoretical project shows the rich possibilities of rethinking what religion is and does through spatial metaphors. Religions, according to Tweed, enable people to make homes (to dwell), whether they are migrants and outsiders or settled insiders; they also facilitate crossings, as groups and individuals reposition themselves in physical, as well as corporeal and cosmic terms. However, from one contemporary geographer of religion, we may note a counter-move in which the disaggregation of religion rather than its definition and theorization is proposed. Adrian Ivakhiv calls for geographers to adopt a deconstructive approach to ‘religion’ and the ‘sacred’, and to consider them as “ways to distribute a certain kind of significance across geographic spaces” (2006: 169). Citing Foucault on the invention and possible erasure of ‘religion’, he suggests that “it is the task of geographers of religion to trace the changing orchestrations of those significances across space and place” (ibid.: 169), noting their relationship to other forms of significance, whether ideological, cosmological or political (ibid.: 171). Geographers, Ivakhiv suggests, are particularly well suited to tracing the “(re)distribution and (re)configuration” (ibid.: 173) of such significances, for example of religious sacrality and irreligious profanity, and their relationship to ethnic or national sacralities. From a starting point in geography rather than cognition, Ivakhiv nevertheless comes close to Anttonen in recommending the study of the incidence and distribution of sacred significance in its many forms and contexts.

As I hope this review has shown, the spatial turn has been extremely fruitful for research on religion. It has brought together scholars from a variety of disciplines, and has connected outward not only to traditional areas such as sacred space and pilgrimage, but also to new ones such as embodiment, gender, practice, and religious-secular engagements. Furthermore, it has incorporated researchers with very different perspectives, those with phenomenological as well as social constructivist inclinations, and those concerned with the poetics as well as the politics of religion, space, and place. It has been a productive thinking space for the study of religion.

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■ **Kim Knott** is professor of Religious Studies at the University of Leeds, UK. She has directed an interdisciplinary strategic research program “Diasporas, Migration and Identities” for the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council, and is co-investigator on a research project on “Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred.” Since completing *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis*, she has published many articles developing its twin

themes of religion, space, and place, and the relationship of the religious and the secular. She has completed an edited collection (with Seán McLoughlin), *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities* (Zed Books, 2010), and a co-authored volume on religion and the British media is forthcoming; k.knott@leeds.ac.uk.

## NOTES

1. It was not possible to consider Kong's latest review article (2010) which was published as this volume went to press.
2. Kong (1990) reviewed some sixty studies in the field of geography and religion from 1911 to 1988; in her 2001 article she identified more than 100 for the 1990s alone. Neither review, according to Kong, was exhaustive.
3. Although debates have taken place on the meaning and relationship of the terms "space" and "place" (see discussion in Knott [2005a: 29–34]), many scholars have used them interchangeably and this is unavoidably reflected in this essay. In my own work I have adopted a complex understanding of the dimensions, properties, aspects, and dynamism of space and have understood places to be parts of or locations within space.
4. For further examples of references to the Christian theology of space and place see Sheldrake (2001), Gorringer (2002), Inge (2003).
5. Of particular relevance to the poetics of place and the sacred, Heidegger's "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" ([1951] 1993) and Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* ([1945] 2002).
6. Despite Bachelard's reference to the poetics of space, inheritors of the phenomenological tradition have generally preferred place to space because of their attention to the particularity and primacy of the former, as opposed to what is often deemed to be the abstractness of the latter.
7. Scholarship on pilgrimage took a further spatial turn—with a focus on movement and circulation—with the volume by Coleman and Eade (2004).

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