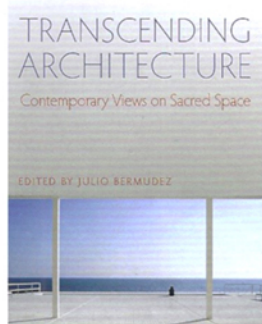


A photograph of the interior of a large Gothic cathedral, likely Westminster Abbey. The image shows a high, vaulted wooden ceiling with intricate carvings. The walls are made of light-colored stone with large, pointed arches. In the distance, an altar with a colorful stained glass window is visible. Many people are walking through the nave, some looking up at the architecture. The lighting is warm, coming from wall sconces and the altar area.

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Transcending Architecture: Contemporary Views on Sacred Space. Julio Bermudez, editor. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press 2015.

In the context of a still cautiously blooming but solidly evolving discourse about the sacred in space and built place, this book takes the reader to a threshold. Passing over it, an arched hall opens where voices and instruments from some for this "concerts" most skilled players in North America are tuned up. Compared with other contributed books, this work offers

an unusually well merged union of reflections from inside and outside of architecture, theology, philosophy, art history, and cultural studies.

Advancing chapter by chapter, what I would call "the sacred within" appears increasingly clearer and more differentiated. The intertwining of the beautiful and the good in a progressing "aesth/ethics," and the deep interchange of religion with architecture, design, and urban planning become visible in all its depth, manifold, and challenge.

The aspiration is for a profound integration of the spatial and the spiritual, the aesthetic and the ethical challenges of architects, planners, and decision makers. Both are demanded to rise to the challenges of an increasing social (and spatial) injustice, economic destruction, and dramatic environmental-and-climatic change. Architecture needs to contribute creatively and carefully with built environments to our common just and sustainable future.

In 19 chapters practicing architects, designers, and scholars in different disciplines enter an exciting dialogue about what we might call the deeper spiritual driving forces in architecture and those who inhabit it. Prominent writers with substantive contributions to the field such as Juhani Pallasmaa, Karsten Harries, and Kevin Seasoltz meet new voices and perspectives. Landscape architect Rebecca Krinke, for example,

makes us aware of the healing and ethically awakening dimension of experiencing nature and suffering. Theologian Mark Wedig calls not just for sacred space but sacred rituals in the non-space of prayer, where powerlessness is enabling. Social work scholar Michael Sheridan argues for an architecture that advances social justice, and designer Richard Vosko envisions a servant architecture where buildings help the sick, the less fortunate, and the environment.

The authors produce a rich and diverse agenda of themes where notions such as silence, aura, home, and incarnation are explored from different points of departure and with different methods. Nevertheless, the discourse about architecture and religion carries a problem that not even this book is able to solve. The diversity of terms such as religion, transcendence, faith, sacred, numinous, and spiritual is, without doubt, markedly constructive for the acceleration of thinking about the sacred in architecture. But at the same time we would also need to put emphasis on reflecting how different approaches in different disciplines relate to each other and how they might interact in a common space. I do not, of course, demand one common mandatory concept for all, as the diversity in itself represents an important intrinsic value, but I have problems with using the book title's central term of transcending to serve as an umbrella for all. One should not over-interpret my question, as the discourse on the conditions of late modern life is still in a phase of its beginning and, as I said above, cautiously blooming. Maybe it is not yet the time to envision one common language, but one should exercise patience.

Having walked through these chapters, which in different ways are transfiguring both faith and form in architecture, a silent and light-toned hope ensues. A hope that doing good by and through architecture might help us to transform the post-metropolis, and the landscapes carrying it, into a space that is habitable for all beings. Spatial design develops in such a hope in synergy, with the life-giving Holy Spirit who takes place.

—Sigurd Bergmann

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