

3-1-2003

Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity

Elizabeth A. Dreyer

Fairfield University, edreyer@fairfield.edu

Peer Reviewed

Repository Citation

Dreyer, Elizabeth A., "Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity" (2003). *Religious Studies Faculty Publications*. Paper 52.
<http://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/religiousstudies-facultypubs/52>

Published Citation

Dreyer, Elizabeth A. "Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity." *Horizons* 30.1 (Spring 2003): 160-161.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Religious Studies Department at DigitalCommons@Fairfield. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religious Studies Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Fairfield. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@fairfield.edu.

Theology and Modern Science: Quest for Coherence. By James A. Wiseman. New York: Continuum, 2002. 175 pages. \$59.95 (paper \$22.95).

James Wiseman, O.S.B., associate professor of theology in The Catholic University of America, offers in this book an overview of many of the key issues in the contemporary science-and-religion debate, beginning with a brief historical introduction focusing in succession on the thought of Boyle and Newton, Schleiermacher and Barth, Teilhard de Chardin and Rahner. Wiseman's own view is that "a valid theology must be consonant and coherent with scientific findings, even though it cannot simply be derived from or conflated with them" (10-11). Accordingly, he concludes in Chapter Two that the doctrine of creation has more to do with the contingency of the physical universe than its alleged beginning in time; in Chapter Three, that divine directionality more than intelligent design seems to be at work in the evolutionary process; in Chapter Four, that human beings may experience bodily resurrection at the moment of death instead of at the Last Judgment; and in Chapter Five, that the "new creation" promised in Sacred Scripture is not incompatible with the eventual heat-death of the physical universe. Inanimate creation, in other words, may not survive in eternity though other life forms besides human beings may well do so. In Chapter Six, Wiseman reviews various theories of divine action in the world ("top-down" vs. "bottom-up") and settles for the classical distinction between the primary causality of God and the network of secondary causes in creation. Finally, in Chapter Seven he argues for God as personal, working in the world through love more than coercion; for openness to the eschatological future on the part of human beings; and for increased respect and affection for other life forms.

Wiseman's book is clearly written in non-technical language and thus is well suited as a textbook for undergraduate courses in science and religion. My only misgiving is that in his "quest for coherence" Wiseman did not buttress his position on various issues with a consistent philosophical conceptuality. There is only the hint of a connection, for example, between his affirmation of divine primary causality and his belief that God works in creation through empowering love, not coercion (127-28); between his endorsement of "pan-experientialism" (67) and the possibility that non-human life forms may survive in the eschaton (91-95). He makes favorable reference to a number of process-oriented thinkers (Whitehead, Teilhard de Chardin and Rahner) but refrains from an explicit endorsement of their conceptual schemes. Perhaps each in its own way is inadequate, but then the challenge is to fashion one's own.

Xavier University

JOSEPH A. BRACKEN, S.J.

Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity. By Philip Sheldrake. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. ix + 214 pages. \$15.95 (paper).

British theologian Philip Sheldrake examines the meaning of "place" from the perspective of Christian spirituality, adding an important theological voice to a discussion located primarily in the social sciences. In particular, he ex-

plores how place is related to memory and human identity. The first three chapters address foundational issues; the final three, practical considerations. Sheldrake begins by reflecting on place in relation to culture, belonging, commitment, landscapes, memory, narrative, conflict and particularity. Chapter 2 focuses on the ways in which Christianity transferred the sense of the sacred to people—saints and martyrs. Chapter 3 reflects on the meaning of catholicity of place, especially as it relates to Eucharist. In Chapters 4 and 5, Sheldrake reflects on medieval monasticism and mysticism as they both ground and transcend a sense of place. And in a final chapter, “Re-placing the City,” the author laments what he sees as a crisis of urbanization (characterized by mobility and the consequent relativization of space and the dissolution of any “place identity.”) and suggests ways to resist this dissolution and recover a more humane city.

In this short volume, Sheldrake covers a huge range of primary and secondary sources. It is an interdisciplinary work, touching on philosophy, archaeology, anthropology, architecture, sociology, and city planning, in addition to theology and spirituality. But there are a number of themes that run throughout and tie the many disparate strands together. Sheldrake keeps before the reader a nexus of tensions—the sacred and the secular; interior and exterior spaces; particularity and universality/ catholicity; stability and liminality. The book is also a conversation between traditional (patristic and medieval texts and especially the legacies of Duns Scotus and Ignatius of Loyola) and post-modern perspectives (Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault, et al.), in which I sensed some nostalgia for earlier, better days.

In an extensive reflection on utopias, Sheldrake defines them as expressions of a world of imagination and desire. In many ways, this is an apt description of *Spaces for the Sacred* because it offers not only analysis, but also a dream that we might create and dwell in more humane places. The contours of this dream are not naïve—there is ample talk about inclusivity and ethics—but I wished for more testing in concrete realities. For example, in an extended analysis of the Eucharist as catholic, ethical, reconciling and committed to embracing the whole created order, there is no mention of the Roman Catholic practice of refusing Eucharist to Protestant brothers and sisters. I also wondered how these proposals for humane space might apply (or not) to cities of a hundred, ten thousand, or fifteen million inhabitants.

The wide range of references will make for challenging reading for many undergraduates, but with guidance from someone knowledgeable in both the Christian tradition and strains of postmodern thought, *Spaces for the Sacred* would be an excellent choice for religious studies courses or adult groups focused on the topic of sacred/secular space. It should spark memories and rich discussion about the quality of the places in which we live.

Fairfield University

ELIZABETH A. DREYER

The Strangest Way: Walking the Christian Path. By Robert Barron. New York: Orbis, 2002. 175 pages. \$15.00 (paper).

Aligning himself with Wittgenstein, Goethe, William James and Newman, Barron has written this book consciously against the Cartesians (28) whose