

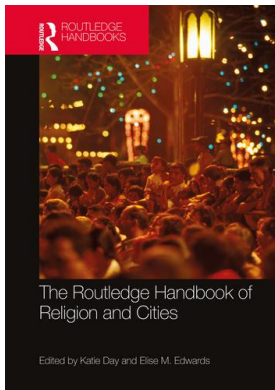
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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

Katie Day and Elise M. Edwards

When considering religion, context matters—and always has. Organized rituals and beliefs reflecting transcendent reality have never been decontextualized in their origins and development. Despite so much research on religion that focuses on individual faith, looking at religion in such individualistic terms has been a relatively recent development. Even studies of trends in the broader patterns of believing and belonging have been blinkered, for the most part, in incorporating the social and spatial contexts into their analyses. Religions develop not in isolated siloes, but in social interactions and in real time and real space. More specifically, the practices and identities of religious faiths have been social phenomena within urban contexts: religion and cities have been inextricably related throughout human history, interactive in their development. Religion and cities have quite literally grown up together. Both are complex social arrangements—dynamic in and of themselves, but even more so when considered in their relationship. Urban contexts include intersecting cultures, economies, political structures, built environments, and histories, and have profound impact on the shape of religions within them. Reciprocally, religions shape cities as well in all the same dimensions.

Religion has not been able to ignore its urban space: it is the literal context in which faith communities have flourished (or declined) and in which their primal understandings of good and evil—their very moral imaginations—have been formed. Religion is inherently spatial in its construction of meaning and message, as well as its institutional establishment. Reciprocally, cities have been shaped by religion spatially, culturally, economically, and politically. Cities are spatially mapped by religious settlers and infused as secular moral communities with their presence and symbology. This reciprocity is at the heart of the research represented in this volume. From a diversity of urban contexts from five continents, and representing a variety of faith traditions, the scholars and religious practitioners within these covers explore and analyze the nuanced dynamics of religion and cities. The rigid delineation of sacred and profane, of religion over and against the city, no longer has intellectual integrity. While maintaining distinctions, to various degrees, religion is both in and of the city. As obvious as this interaction seems, both theoretically and in lived experience, there are curious blind spots among those who engage the city, including scholars, policy makers, and even religious practitioners.¹ Those who study, design, develop, and govern cities are often blinkered from “seeing” religion and understanding its dynamic relationship to the urban context.² And those who study religion similarly overlook the impact of space on their subjects.

This volume was envisaged as a compilation of contemporary scholarship that would capture, refracted through a diversity of angles, how religions and cities are mutually engaging each other in the twenty-first century. The subject itself—the interaction of religion and cities—defies any sort of one-dimensional analysis. Its complexity is amplified by the particularities of geographic and religious contexts, reflected in the rich diversity of the chapters in this volume. From Mumbai to Stockholm, New York to Indonesia, Hong Kong to Chicago, the research represented here looks at how peoples of many religions are living out their faith in cities in myriad ways. The contributors include a wide range of academic disciplines and experience: anthropologists, sociologists, historians, theologians, journalists, practitioners, theologians, and architects, all employing their particular lenses and methodologies in their in-depth analyses.

They pull out threads of religious-urban dynamics, including economic policies, political power struggles, land use, the dramatic movement of peoples, environmental crisis, and the development of meaning and identity in it all.

As if this complexity were not enough to hold in one volume, during the final stage of this project, the coronavirus pandemic swept across the globe. In a matter of weeks, even days, much of what had defined both cities and religions—both dependent on physical gatherings of people—came to a dramatic halt. Everything from commerce to worship needed to be reimagined and retooled to remote forms of engagement for public safety. Streets were empty, workers were unemployed, borders blocked travel and immigration, and houses of worship shuttered until further notice. The coronavirus pandemic has been a cruel reminder of how interdependent we are on this planet, for better or worse. As the death toll rose in the spring of 2020 in the global city of New York—her hospitals overwhelmed, her theaters, businesses, and sacred places gone dark—it became apparent how very vulnerable cities were. Further, the pandemic ravaged those communities within cities who were most vulnerable to begin with: people of color, those in lower-paying service jobs, in dense housing, those with less access to health care, the elderly, and the incarcerated. Social inequalities were grimly laid bare and exacerbated. Those with access to internet technology were more likely to work and study at home ... and to survive. The digital divide was exposed even as it widened the social distance between the haves and the have-nots, or the hooked-in and the unplugged.

In this context, religious groups have worked diligently to adapt. As “shelter in place” policies were enacted throughout the world, the familiar rituals of gathering have been jarringly interrupted. Yet the longing for meaning, support, worship, and especially comfort during this period of suffering and dying has intensified. It should come as no surprise that many of the challenges to public orders have come from religious groups, defying bans in order to hold corporate worship and funerals. Violators—such as the Hasidic community holding a funeral for their rabbi in New York, or Christians in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, gathering for worship—elicited police responses, which no doubt felt as religious persecution by the pandemic-weary believers. Most faith communities have had to become technologically savvy and have learned to creatively continue ministries. Anecdotally, many report higher numbers of people accessing worship through technology than had previously attended. However, what the long-term impact of the pandemic will be on cities and religions is a manner of speculation. Will there be a thinning of attachment to the materiality of worship in built sacred spaces, with tangible symbols, and in the physical presence of others? Will “social distancing” erode social capital and social trust? Is what might feel apocalyptic in fact becoming “the new normal” in the future, and how will societies and religions look different? These questions and many others are not addressed here, although Richard Cimino and Hans Tokke, who write about their research on the religious super-diversity in Queens, New York, provided an epilogue in their chapter about the impact of the pandemic on the religious groups they studied.

Then, later in the spring of 2020, as people of color were bearing disproportionate amounts of suffering due to COVID, a series of Black people were fatally shot by police in the US. These sparked mass demonstrations, not only in American cities large and small, but globally as well. The empty streets were now filled with thousands of people in largely peaceful demonstrations calling for the dismantling of systemic racism, especially in police departments. As people of all races and religions marched together, it was clear that the need to assert that “Black Lives Matter” was an issue worth risking one’s health and life for. At once, the intersecting dramas of the pandemic and cries for social change were performed in city spaces. Chapters that address racial injustice, like Teresa Smallwood’s research on police violence and community response in Nashville, have even more relevance and urgency in this moment. The question of what to do with Baltimore’s “ghosts,” Confederate monuments and art from the Uprising following the death of Freddie Gray while in police custody, is raised by Marcos Bisticas-Cocoves and Harold Morales.

No doubt there will be a proliferation of additional research on these critical historic phenomena. But in moving into the post-pandemic and post-social unrest realities of this moment—if indeed there is a “post”—it will be important to look at how cities and the religions within them are changed. But first it is crucial to understand the dynamics of cities and religions as they have interacted up to this point. The contributors here bring a rich diversity of research, drilling down in their analyses of how particular urban contexts and the peoples of faith within them are in mutual engagement. Understanding the nuances of these interactions will enable clearer insights going forward.

The history of religion and cities

Early human civilization moved from agrarian settlements to more densely populated centers where commercial trade of crafts and services created communities of exchange. Since the first cities emerged in 3200 BCE in Southern Mesopotamia,³ these more densely populated spaces with markets and residences were usually organized around a centralized temple. Having a central cultic institution served a number of purposes, including generating shared meaning and social coherence among the population, creating social control through norms and laws, and facilitating the development of language. As these early cities developed, societies organized hierarchically, and political power also became centralized and sacralized. Sociologist of religion Robert Bellah has described the relationship between God and king, arguing that power was mythologized so that it might be maintained.⁴ From these early roots, religion, power, and the places of power were intricately interconnected in symbiotic relationships—in cities.

This pattern of the co-production of religion and urban life has continued throughout history until the present time. In the Hebrew scriptures, there is an identification with the spiritual self and one’s community as the Israelites in exile are exhorted to “seek the (shalom), welfare of the city ... for in its welfare you will find your welfare”—even if one is an exile in that city.⁵ Consider the later design of medieval cities in a Christocentric pattern, as reflected in the maps from this period: urban space itself both reflected and reinforced religious meanings.⁶ During the Reformation period in Europe, an urban vision informed John Calvin’s reorganization of Geneva. Although his theology affirmed the sovereignty of God, it was in the city that theological convictions were to be manifest. The centrality of cities to the organization of religion is also reflected in Islam (Mecca) and Roman Catholicism (Rome). A number of cities are shared by religions that consider them sacred, such as Jerusalem for Muslims, Jews, and Christians, and Varanasi for Buddhists and Hindus. These sacred cities provide a gravitational center for religious traditions, enabling their institutional, ideological, and political development. Religions and cities have had their identities, and indeed their fortunes, entwined.

Religions are in the meaning-making business and the cities in which they were located became a primary focus of the theological imagination. However, there was ambivalence about “the city,” which itself became a metaphor of both blessing and curse. In the Greek scriptures of the Christian tradition, the “New Jerusalem” is prophesied in the Book of Revelations as the symbolic culmination of human history and perfection of all creation. “Babylon,” on the other hand, reflects the depths of human sinfulness and self-destruction. Although it has been a great city historically, Babylon (part of what is now Baghdad) was condemned in the bible as being the place of multi-lingual confusion, idolatry, and condemnation.⁷ In the fifth century CE, St. Augustine of Hippo, in *City of God*, further explored these two conflicting metaphors of the city as a place of redemption or of ultimate damnation. In this influential work, the church and state both contribute to the ordering and progress of human community. Ultimately, however, his allegorical City of Heaven leads to salvation, but the City of the World leads to damnation. In the theological and intellectual history over succeeding ages, the city has persisted as a compelling metaphor for humanity itself—representing both its highest potential and lowest depravity. This ambivalence about the city is not just limited to a religious imaginary but has been reflected more broadly in culture, politics, and the academy.

In the American experiment, “the city” as Janus-faced metaphor also evolved. Religion was a central dynamic in the establishment of the new country, and the urban metaphor conveyed the utopic vision. Since the Puritan preacher John Winthrop exhorted those who would be settling the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630 to see their new community as a “city on a hill,” the biblical reference entered the vocabulary of American civil religion. The “shining city on a hill,” as used by President Ronald Reagan, connoted a society which was exceptional in the global community, providing a beacon from a lofty perch. But the city as metaphor, and in reality, was not always “shining,” but has also been perceived as a place of chaos, terror, and depravity. In theory, theology, public policy, and public perception, “the city” is considered with ambivalence, as both sacred and profane, the place of redemption or alienation. While this has been the bifocal lens through which religion has seen the city and its context, it has rarely looked at itself in such terms.

As well as the recurring theme identifying the city with salvation within civic consciousness, the concurrent identification of the city with sinfulness, depravity, and condemnation has been equally, and at times predominantly, in the public imagination. Urban centers are defined by density of population, enabling the creation of anonymity and the lack of social controls. The Puritans, despite imagining the American experiment as a “shining city,” looked at actual cities less charitably, as havens that bred all manner of excesses, bringing out the worst of humanity. Religious traditions have often viewed the city in pathological terms and seen themselves—religious institutions—as standing over or against the city, holding up a mirror that it might see its sinfulness. The boundary between sacred and profane was considered absolute, impermeable. The church or temple, if it stayed in the city, considered itself as judge and source of redemption for those who escaped, or were rescued from, the stench of urban decay. Urban scholar Robert Orsi describes how the popular Christian evangelist Billy Sunday of the early twentieth century reflected a prevalent social perspective on the “moral contaminations of urbanity,” and that God should “wear rubber gloves when dealing with city folk.”⁸

Ethnographer Omar McRoberts described this dynamic even among urban churches in his 2003 study of African American faith communities in Boston⁹:

The street becomes a religious trope, alternately embodying notions of irredeemable evil and combatable sin. The street is an evil other, against which the church is defined. The world of the street supplies the raw data about the nature of evil that gets incorporated into moral teaching. So the church and street ultimately cannot be separated

here. But the form that the street takes in the religious imagination discourages direct engagement with the immediate neighborhood. And this further discourages many churches from developing a sense of neighborhood identity.¹⁰

McRoberts found that the communities of faith he studied needed to maintain the urban depravity imaginary for their construction of their own religious identities. Ironically, while the sacred/profane boundary was inviolable in their thinking and they did not engage their context, they were still bound to it for their own sense of identity. Without sinful cities, evangelists like Billy Sunday would have preached to empty houses and the congregations like those in McRoberts' study would lack a coherent sense of identity and mission.

Several chapters in this volume explore the ways religion weaves a moral framework around urban conditions and the city's presumed depravity. Isaiah Ellis presents a study of religious history and culture in Chicago that examines the mutually transformative relationships between its urban fabric and the individual and collective religious expression shaped within it. Heather White's chapter illuminates a history of LGBT activism in San Francisco that adds complexity to the common representation of clergy and Protestant denominations as opponents to the 1960s homophile movement. By shifting the research focus to particular congregations and their neighborhood involvements, White exposes the way that liberal Protestant clergy and churches with ministries within the so-called "homosexual ghetto" supported LGBT activists in an era focused on sexual vices. People of faith continue to construct narratives around the meaning of cities from outside the city limits as well within them. Contributor Brian Miller analyzes how white evangelicals in the US draw on theological frames to understand lived religion in the suburbs in relation to the city. While the stigma of the city is not as pronounced as in earlier expressions, there are certainly echoes.

During the pandemic of 2020, the image of *city as contagion* again emerged in public rhetoric in assigning blame: Wuhan, China infected other parts of the world; New York was seen as the source of contamination of rural areas. New Yorkers who wanted to leave the city during the pandemic were not welcome in outlying communities and were required to be in quarantine for 14 days. Whether the city is identified with a moral or viral stain, the ambivalence toward urban contexts and the people who live in them is reproduced.

There is a counter narrative—the city not as a place of contamination but of redemption—that was particularly articulated by Harvard theologian Harvey Cox in his book *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (1965). Cox offered a different perspective on the city, countering the predominant negative image of it in the religious imagination. The city should not be understood as a metaphor of depravity, nor considered in reality to be a place that is defined by sinfulness, temptation, chaos, and danger, and therefore a threat to the body and soul of the religious. He wrote at a time when theological constructions of urban space were encouraging people—especially white Christians—to leave the city in droves for an imagined idyll of the suburbs. His central question was theological: where is God? Rather than escaping what is seen as the godless city, Cox argued that God could be found in the very secular mores of the urban context. The city should be embraced—the divine could be encountered in new ways here. This first book by a young theologian sold over a million copies, generating debate and igniting controversy.¹¹

Sacred space/urban place

Most surprisingly, it seems that despite generations of being based in urban contexts as necessary to their identity and survival, religions themselves have often lost a sense of spatial awareness.

Like Augustine's other-worldly *City of God*, the *city as place* has been at times removed from religion's consciousness of itself. The house of worship is perceived as providing a portal which transports the human spirit to the divine. Context is then relegated to insignificance, at best, or that which is to be transcended (especially if it is seen as the "evil other," over against which religion defines itself). It could be argued that the decontextualizing of religious experience in so-called Western societies is a result of the deep individualism that pervades so much of religious faith—the proverbial piety of "Sheilism" described by Robert Bellah.¹² Individualism undermines a spatial awareness. But it has not just been religious practitioners—believers—who had been blind to urban context. The phenomenon has been reflected in the approach of much study of religion as well: the research gaze has not been on religion *in situ*. Instead, research of religion has focused on aggregated trends, quantifying patterns of individual believing and belonging. There has been careful documentation of the changes in patterns of religious affiliation, practices, and affirmations of doctrines. Much of this research has been generated by religious denominations, concerned about their institutional survival, and so have monitored trends of growth and decline. Another source of data has been religious histories, also coming largely from within the religious groups themselves. But neither these historic narratives nor the quantitative data captured the spatial dimension of religion—the interaction in the environmental contexts between urban space and religious phenomena. However, Rupa Pillai offers another tool for analysis on the form of geographic information system (GIS) applications, which allows researchers to map findings about religious communities and religious expression. Pillai's chapter describes the opportunities and challenges of collecting and mapping religious data.

Why might researchers of religion have largely ignored the contextualized study of religion, especially its rich dynamics in cities? Social research in all fields has been dominated until recently by quantitative methodologies which have been focused on tracking large social trends. However, the hegemony of statistical social "facts" has been challenged by post-modernist critics since the 1970s. The very foundations of objectivity in quantitative methodology were called into question. The post-modernists argued that all research is finally "the search for self" rather than an objective analysis of "the other." This in turn redefined social research methodology to look more closely at the local subject, developing, in the familiar phrase of anthropologist Clifford Geertz, the "thick description." Rather than generalizing social theories out of large samples, the focus on local cases could enable more nuanced understandings of the dynamics of social processes. Through ethnographic research methods, what was lost in generalizability was more than offset by a deeper insight into social dynamics, which could be suggestive of an interpretive or theoretical paradigm. Just as Harvey Cox had given urban religion a consciousness of the value of its context, so too did the development of ethnographic methodology stimulate researchers of religion to critically consider the role of context in analyzing religious dynamics, privileging a spatial approach. In this *Handbook*, a variety of methodologies are employed in studying faiths in urban contexts, but the turn toward ethnography is evident, reflected in a rich array of studies which drill down into the particularities of place. Roman Williams and Timothy Shortell present visual social scientific approaches to religion and the city that turn the researchers' gaze to the street, documenting the sacred found in its symbolic, artistic, material, and embodied expressions. Visual methods, particularly through the use of photography, are increasingly part of the ethnographic toolkit.

The scholarship presented here counters those who would ignore religious groups, or consider them a benign presence (at best), having little agency to impact the urban ecology—urban planners, politicians, developers, the media, and academics.¹³ They are perceived to have minimal social value and, because they are tax exempt and are not (usually) large employers, to have minimal economic value as well. In some cases, the veil of invisibility is lifted when

houses of worship which occupy former commercial space (“storefront” churches) are considered a sign of blight and efforts are made to limit their prevalence through zoning. The logic of development does not recognize the agency of religion in the very construction of space, adding social value that is not easily monetized. In chapters by Kristin Holmes and by Rachel Hildebrandt and Chad Martin, the interaction of religion and built environment of the urban ecology of Philadelphia is explored in depth. Economic trends, religious buildings, congregational agency, and neighborhood space each have agency in their interaction, impacting one another dynamically.

Further, religious groups are generally ignored by politicians as having no real political capital to bring to the table. Contributions to the quality of life in urban space through art, education, human services, and community identity are not considered to be constructive of power and therefore not included in the political calculus. The media similarly has limited inclusion of religion, often ignoring the religious dimension of news, relegating faith to stereotypic images or perhaps “bad news” when religious people behave badly (as in the sexual abuse scandals). Madeleine Albright found this vacuum in foreign policy. The daughter of a diplomat, she studied international relations and had a distinguished career, serving in the National Security Council, as Ambassador to the United Nations and Secretary of State under President Bill Clinton. In her book, *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God and World Affairs*, she acknowledges the assumption within the field of foreign service that religion is irrelevant in geopolitical negotiations. Religion is considered a distraction; it is divisive, irrational, and finally a private matter. By the end of her career, however, she came to a firm affirmation that effective foreign diplomacy has to bring religion back in. “I am often asked, ‘Why can’t we just keep religion out of foreign policy?’ My answer to that we can’t and shouldn’t . . .”¹⁴

Religion, whether at a local or global level has animated the flows of peoples, the mapping of space, the creation of social identities and values, the flaming of conflict, and the formation of peace. Detailed ethnographic studies in this volume by Tsz Him Lai, Linda Noonan, Isabella Favazza, Trey Hammond, and Phil Tom analyze the impact of faith-based groups in the political arenas in Hong Kong and three US cities. In these contexts, religious actors have forged social movements, building on their collective identities, incorporating rituals, framing public issues, and mobilizing grassroots peoples in engaging power structures. In their chapter on urban violence, Wedam and Wong consider the degrees of agency communities of faith have in countering the prevalence of violence, another type of power structure on city streets. Agency requires a sense of empowerment which is present to varying degrees and can be drawn from different wells, as these chapters describe.

This volume, drawing on the ecological frame, attests to the reality that religious groups have shaped cities, and have also been shaped by them. As described, the spatial analysis of urban religion had been largely ignored by both religious practitioners and researchers, as well as by those who exert power in the design and governance of urban space. The research presented here is intended to challenge these blind spots and biases. As a corrective for future scholarship, Elise Edwards’ contribution offers methodologies of spatial and architectural analysis commonly used to study religion in urban settings, identifies the types of questions these methods are employed to answer, and discusses representative works in this volume and other publications that have adopted these approaches to architectural analysis. Isaiah Ellis highlights the importance of attention to cities’ infrastructure in historical narrative and urban geography. No doubt the discussion of a spatial approach will be deepened by the provocative article by James Edmonds that came out of his research in an Islamic movement in Indonesia, which challenges our understandings of cities as only built environments. In his study, religion is forming “ephemeral” cities—cities expressive of their worldview but a complex confluence of urban systems nonetheless. By

bringing to light the agency of faith communities in urban contexts, we hope to reflect and further a turn in religious research as well as in theological consciousness of urban space.

The ecological model

The frame being used in this volume stems from the urban ecological model that focuses on the interaction of religion and contexts, which is helpful in teasing out how communities of faith are shaping their urban contexts as well as being shaped by them. The ecological model has a long history within urban studies, and has evolved into a robust analytical tool for understanding religion and cities.

This development is traced back to the Chicago School and the work particularly of sociologists Robert Ezra Park, Louis Wirth, and Ernest Burgess in the 1920s.¹⁵ The Chicago School represented a theoretical frame to account for the rapid growth of cities (particularly Chicago), and to then understand how they came to be organized into the “social worlds” such as neighborhoods, slums, and ethnic enclaves. They drew on the Darwinian biological model of ecology—the web of organisms that is the context for evolution. Through appropriating this frame from nature to cities, they then employed qualitative methods to analyze cities as *systems* of actors (collective and individual) in dynamic, symbiotic relationships. Physical space and human experience were mutually engaged in producing relationships that were both interdependent and competitive. The result was that these dynamics produced particular patterns of mobility and spatial segregation that could be mapped and predicted. The Chicago School (particularly through Burgess) became best known for the “concentric zone theory,” a graphic target-like portrayal of urban space representing the interaction of cultural and social groups with socio-economic forces. In this human ecology, systems of transportation, communication, and institutions (of religion, education, media, health care, cultural, etc.) engaged symbiotically, developing larger, complex societies analogous to how species evolved in the natural ecology. Louis Wirth was the major member of the Chicago School to research the role that religion played in mapping the city.¹⁶ Actors are engaged in shaping and being shaped by their environment; religious phenomena were no different. Wirth’s research portrayed the symbiotic relationship of one religion (Judaism) and neighborhood in co-production of urban space.

The Chicago School’s concentric zone theory has been consistently critiqued as being overly deterministic in drawing on the biological metaphor. Further, human agency reflects cognition, or consciousness, not found in the natural ecology.¹⁷ Segregated residential patterns are not the result of “natural processes,” but of human agency.¹⁸ Still, the influence of the Chicago School has endured, echoing to the present generation of urban researchers in contributing an understanding of urban reality as an ongoing, dynamic construction of interdependent social webs and processes. Social processes exist in space and in fact produce spatial organization. While the legacy of the Chicago School has continued to be critiqued, it has not been dismissed but adapted and reformulated. Decades after the initial work of the Chicago School, Robert J. Sampson (also at The University of Chicago) produced a study of that city which focused on the same processes and phenomena: the creation and recreation of communities and the impact of place.¹⁹ Although he has been considered by many as carrying on the legacy of Robert Park, Sampson diverges at a critical point in not analyzing neighborhoods as being as clearly bounded as his predecessors had done. Neighborhoods are not necessarily insular, but the result of webs of social interactions, both within and transcending the community boundaries—such as the forces of the global political economy and the influx of new immigrants, religious, and voluntary groups that are engaged simultaneously in the production of local space.

The ecological paradigm has continued to influence research in urban religion as a situated phenomenon. The influence has not just been on the theoretical spatial perspective on religion but on methodology as well, especially valuing qualitative methods, which is further discussed in the chapter on “Studying Cities and Religions: Emergent Meanings and Methodologies.” A generation of researchers have developed the ecological model in studying religion in cities. The work of Robert Sampson, Robert Orsi, Omar McRoberts, Lowell Livezey, and others have fine-tuned the model as we move into the dynamism of the post-modern metropolis.

Spatial approaches to urban religion also draw on other analytical schools, including the Los Angeles School of Urbanism and the work of UCLA political geographer and urbanist Edward Soja. The Los Angeles School of Urbanism is focused on rapidly evolving cities that are decentralized, fragmented, deindustrialized, and reproduced by global capital, communications, and larger forces transcending their boundaries. This post-modern theory was developed in Los Angeles and reflects that context as the Chicago School was developed in the context of that modern city.

Soja was greatly influenced by the work of French Marxist social theorist Henri Lefebvre, particularly his book, *The Production of Space*.²⁰ Lefebvre’s argument is that space is *socially constructed* through myriad social processes engaging meanings and political economy. Soja identifies Lefebvre’s work with “the Spatial Turn” which brought a spatial awareness to “every discipline.”²¹ He summarized Lefebvre’s contribution in his own groundbreaking work, *Thirdspace*: “We are first and always historical-social-spatial beings, actively participating individually and collectively in the construction/production—the becoming of histories, geographies, societies”²² His gaze, with that of Lefebvre, was on lived space, where the contradictions and multivalent intersections of spaces, ideologies, economics, cultures, power, and experience exist and move. Binary constructions (such as black/white, sacred/profane, city/suburb, subject/object) are confining and no longer represent the complexity of lived space, if they ever did.

Nowhere is the interaction of religion and cities more complex—and in need of sophisticated analysis—than in the movement of peoples, at once pushed and pulled by political, economic, cultural, and religious dynamics. To study cities is to study immigration, and to look at immigration is to consider the role of religion as being at the core of the urban dynamics over time and space. As waves of immigrants establish themselves in cities, urban space becomes a patchwork of cultures and peoples, bounded by ethnic identities and often organized around a temple, synagogue, mosque, or church. The towers and spires of sacred places are often at the geographic and cultural center of urban neighborhoods. Even if a sacred space is not yet built, the practice of religion can intensify religious and ethnic identity. Religion scholar R. Scott Hanson found this phenomenon in his study of Flushing, New York. “Because of the separation from their countries of origin, new immigrants are sometimes even more conscious of authenticity in replicated and transplanting their religious traditions than they were before they emigrated.”²³ Contributors Cimino and Tokke found this dynamic continues to be true in their research in the religious “super diversity” of Queens as the distinctiveness of faith creates a sense of social locatedness. In the religious diversity of Mumbai, India, religion scholar István Keul looks at cultural understandings of “cosmopolitanisms.” While for many tolerance of difference is a point of pride, below the surface there is often more ambivalence about “the other.” In these very different contexts, immigration has created religious pluralism, which is at once shaping the identities of individual groups in their lived awareness of, and relation to, other religions.

Im/migrants may be pushed by poverty and persecution from their home countries and regions, and pulled by the prospect of economic opportunity, political, and religious freedom, to

cities, although the social processes of immigration are far more complex and dynamic than a two-dimensional push/pull. As “strangers in a strange land,” they establish religious institutions to enable them to claim space and construct spatial identity. For Catholic immigrants coming to North America, the identification of the “parish” area mapped a geographic space identified with the central church (in some urban areas, such as New Orleans, neighborhoods are still referred to, in fact, as parishes). After generations of waves of newcomers come and claim space, the layers of this history are worn by buildings through faded signage, chipped stucco, and distinct architectural embellishments.

The social processes involved in the construction of the cultural boundaries is generated from within and from without. As diversity proliferates, an appreciation for pluralism can result, even a culture of tolerance or cosmopolitanism, but so can religious-based conflicts, which also serve to solidify religious and spatial identity. The sensationalized ascription of depravity and threat can incite outsiders to avoid and isolate, or even attack, neighborhoods of another ethnic and religious identity. Amidu Elabo’s chapter explores the meanings and ideological claims that ethnic and religious groups attach to religious buildings and sites, even after attacks have occurred. Elabo’s research explores how religious buildings are both construed as sites for spatial dominance and used as ideological buffers against the so-called territorial expansion of the religious “other” in the urban center of Jos North, Nigeria.

Over the last several years, dramatic movements of people have occurred in many parts of the globe, including the Rohingya in Asia and the Syrians fleeing war who traveled through Turkey into Northern Europe and Scandinavia. The experience of these socially vulnerable refugees has been captured in two of the chapters in this volume. Niclas Blåder describes the ambivalent welcome refugees have received in Stockholm, as civil society engaged what was a human crisis in 2015. The Swedish national identity of tolerance, but also of homogeneity, was challenged. Anthropologist M Ala Uddin found in his study of the Rohingya in Bangladesh that they also encountered ambivalence, as they were welcomed in one city but discriminated against in another. As refugees and immigrants often experience dangerous journeys, the destination cities might not be the harbors of safety and opportunity that they had imagined.

Through a social process known as *ethnogenesis*, migrants choose destinations because of the social and cultural capital they offer—kinship networks and institutions. For African Americans, particular communities of faith drew them to specific urban neighborhoods during the waves of what is called “The Great Migration.” In many cases, whole congregations would relocate to Northern cities, reconstituting their rural Southern religion in a context that might otherwise seem alien.²⁴ In cities such as New York, Washington, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Detroit, Black religion provided identity, social cohesion, and care.

Art is one medium through which im/migrant communities claim their new space as home. Through religious ritual and cultural expressions they can build up their collective identity and challenge existing urban stratification. Michael McLaughlin’s essay studies murals from the New Negro Movement in Harlem, New York, and analyzed how these artworks engage “racial aesthetics” and bring religious significance to their surroundings. Amanda Furiasse’s chapter skillfully engages multiple disciplines to explain how art and digital technologies merge with religious ritual to redress multiple forms of exclusion mapped on to a city’s landscape, and explores the geopolitical consequences of this art. This chapter highlights why art and digital technologies must be included in the study of religion and cities, especially as we discuss im/migration, identity, and social conflict.

The dynamics of race, as of ethnicity, cannot be underestimated in shaping the spatial organization of cities. As Black neighborhoods were established in American cities, their boundaries were constructed as much by those outside the neighborhoods. Public policies, economic forces,

and social dynamics conspired to define and often isolate African American neighborhoods similar to the construction of Jewish ghettos in European cities. Residential segregation patterns in cities are often identifiable by racial demographics, a phenomenon well-documented by scholars. Although religion is often missing in the historic analyses, it is often a key factor to the racial and ethnic construction of neighborhoods. Not only can it be a variable in residential segregation, by reinforcing racialized identity through its institutions and by its complicity in “white flight” migrations of people out of communities, it can also provide counter-narratives to community homogenization and contribute to diversification of racial/ethnic mapping. Journalist Kristin Holmes analyzes the confluence of economic forces and religious commitment in both promoting and critiquing the current wave of gentrification.

Economic forces impacting cities and religions extend beyond local real estate markets. As can be seen in the issue of refugees, there are geopolitical forces at work as well. Oil interests in the Middle East and political struggles between the so-called Super Powers created an explosive situation which shattered former allegiances and commitments. The resulting messy civil war prompted the massive migration from Syria, which was also fueled by climate change and political repression that pushed Africans to flee. As the coronavirus pandemic makes abundantly clear, cities and religions are impacted by forces that are global in nature.

Theorizing religion and cities

While no one theory holds complete explanatory power of urban religion, any attempt to make sense of the complex interaction between religion and post-modern cities must be able to analyze the simultaneous interaction of forces, from global to local, at physical, cultural, political, and economic levels. This intersection of processes creates cities and religions that are continually being reproduced and redefined in their mutual engagement.

There is a “new urban landscape” in which city space continues to change in new, more complex and dynamic ways in the early twenty-first century. Forces both global and local interact in impacting urban space, often referred to as “glocalization.” The question is then asked by the post-modern urbanists, “Who owns the city?” and defies simplistic analysis. Increasingly, sociologist Saskia Sassen argues, globalized forces through the logic of capital create a series of “expulsions,”²⁵ that redefine “lived space.” Not just the literal expulsions of peoples (seen in waves of immigrants), but the expulsion of the peoples from land ownership through financial policies and practices, and the resulting expulsion of cultures. The expulsions impact the most vulnerable—the poor and the incarcerated are relegated first to the margins and then to invisibility. This complements Soja’s approach to urban analysis that leads to an understanding of injustice which becomes spatialized²⁶ in the *Thirdspace*. Here history, place, social processes, and meanings interact, and there is also space for perspective, critique, and social action. It is also in this third space where religion has agency, although often missing in urban analysis.

The challenge to find theoretical frames that hold all this is daunting. Certainly, urban theories cannot be reductionist or predictive. Ethnographic methodologies are more localized projects that often seek theories that are “grounded” in lived realities—that is, theory emerges from context. In the specific case of Baltimore’s “ghosts,” Morales and Bisticas-Cocoves draw on theories of Derrida in interpreting the particularity of that context. But are there broader theoretical constructions that link the many studies of cities and religions as represented in this volume? Increasingly public theologians and ethicists are engaging the discourse of religion and cities in a way that holds the complexities of the dynamics described here as well as the injustices that are revealed. They are beginning to reimagine the city beyond the binary of the place of redemption or condemnation. Finding resonance with post-modern urban theorists such as

Soja and Sassen has opened up theological imagination. British urban theologians Christopher Baker²⁷ and Chris Shannahan²⁸ describe the need for more expansive urban theologies:

However, if urban theologians are not to be dismissed as blinkered, one-dimensional analyses of oppression must be discarded. Creative but critical partnerships with progressive voices in social theory and cultural studies can enable the re-fashioning of existential liberation in a manner that is both rooted and intellectually viable.²⁹

Several of those voices are represented in this volume and reflect the “bilinguality” that is essential for doing public theology.³⁰ That is, they must be able to be in meaningful dialogue with fields such as global economics, science, political science, or sociology in order to be credible in public discourse. Gone is the time in which theological perspectives could merely condemn or naively romanticize the city; rather an informed and sophisticated analysis is required. Australian public theologian Clive Pearson discusses the vulnerability of the climate crisis in dialogue with science, and the possibility of theology to make meanings in the context of a dystopic future in his chapter here. Contributor Kevin Hargaden brings the lens of theological ethics in his critique of neoliberal economics and its devastating impact on creating homelessness in Dublin, Ireland. Samantha Cavanagh addresses smart cities, in which software, hardware, and the practice of data collection and information sharing are incorporated into the built environment for presumably a just end. Cavanagh uses the theo-ethical concept of justice-seeking-love to interrogate these claims for a proposal of smart development in Toronto. Each of these chapters reflect analyses of global forces that have local impacts, and expose and create social injustice. The possibilities of religious theorists to wrest meaning out of the dynamic and to contribute to the common good then bears weight.

Here, then, is a distinct contribution of seeing religion in the urban ecology: frames for understanding injustice and suffering, resources for mobilization, and the curation of public memory. Religion, particularly, resists the expulsion of memory and is a conveyor of tradition. In an urban thirdspace, it can engage in the pursuit of justice that is spatial. Of course, as much of the research contained here testifies, religion itself is ambivalent. It is in relationship with its contexts and can be adversarial or engaged in pursuit of a common good. Religion can attempt to speak in a decontextualized normative voice. But a deeper understanding of the nuanced relationship of religions and cities as mutually engaged is essential. We offer this volume in that service.

Structure of this *Handbook*

This volume is organized into three parts that establish the “state of the field” for newcomers to the discipline of religion and cities and its more experienced researchers. Introduced by Katie Day’s look at the genealogy, features, and methods of an ecological approach to research on religion and cities, the first collection of chapters, Part I: “Research methodologies,” highlights the different research methods being used in contemporary religion and cities scholarship. These chapters include case studies which convey how methods are being applied to specific urban contexts. Even in its descriptions of methodologies, scholarship in this volume never abandons the particularity and contextuality of religion. As such, it navigates the tensions between the global and the local, and religious theory and practice.

The second group of chapters, Part II, is gathered under the heading “Religious frameworks and ideologies in urban contexts.” These chapters discuss the ways religion interprets and challenges conventional understandings of cities. How do religious communities interpret city life and city identities? What is the role of religion in making meaning of urban life? How do

religious and other cultural and social narratives about urban life challenge each other? Many of these chapters consider ways that religion intersects with traditional development patterns and emerging urban typologies—suburbs, smart cities, “ghost estates,” and even mobile cities, which provoke reflection on how cities themselves are defined. Spatial analysis and inquiries into the identity of place are threaded throughout these chapters.

The third and largest collection of chapters is Part III: “Contemporary issues in religion and cities.” These chapters focus on contemporary challenges in urban life and the ways religion factors into our analysis of these challenges, as well as the way religious communities respond. Gentrification, underemployment, immigration, the refugee crisis, LGBTQ rights, racism, violence, and climate change are but a few issues addressed in these chapters. These all remain pressing issues for lived religion as well as the academic study of it. The understanding of urban dynamics as well as religious communities presented here can aid religious leaders, policy makers, and planners in making decisions about the allocation of resources (funding and land, especially in zoning decisions). In a time when the world’s population is extended to become increasingly urbanized, the study of religion in relation to these issues within urban contexts is also particularly relevant for the academy.

As can be seen in the Table of Contents, contributors come from a variety of fields and bring research from Nigeria, Sweden, Israel, Canada, New Zealand, India, Hong Kong, Indonesia, as well as from cities in the US to this *Handbook*. Religious subjects represent the traditions of Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism, as well as new religious movements. To date, there has not been a volume which collects contributions from a number of contexts, and represents a diversity of religions, disciplines, and research methods. We envision that *The Routledge Handbook on Religion and Cities* to not only fill that niche but also establish the “state of the field” for newcomers to the discipline.

Notes

- 1 This has been argued elsewhere by the author (Day) including “Urban Space and Religion in the United States,” in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Religion in America*. Dylan White, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2017: <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-470?rskey=qZ3KEy&result=40>.
- 2 This is the subject of a rare analysis and critique of urban planning’s neglect of religion in Mazumdar, Sanjoy and Shampa Mazumdar, “Planning, Design and Religion: America’s Changing Urban Landscape,” *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Autumn, 2013), pp. 221–243.
- 3 Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2011, p. 215.
- 4 Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*, Chapters 3 and 4.
- 5 Jeremiah 29:7 (New Revised Standard Version).
- 6 Sigurd Bergmann, “Making Oneself at Home in Environments of Urban Amnesia: Religion and Geology in City Space,” *International Journal of Public Theology*, Vol. 2 (2008), pp. 77–78.
- 7 Genesis 11:1–9; Isaiah 21:9; Revelation 14:8, 18:2.
- 8 Robert Orsi, *Gods of the City* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1999, p. 31.
- 9 Omar McRoberts, *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 2003.
- 10 Interview with Omar McRoberts: www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/562166in.html.
- 11 Daniel Callahan, *The Secular City Debate* (New York: Macmillan), 1966.
- 12 Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Los Angeles: University of California Press), 1985.
- 13 Katie Day, *Faith on the Avenue: Religion on a City Street* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2014.
- 14 Madeleine Albright, *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God and World Affairs* (New York: HarperCollins), 2006.

- 15 Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess, and Roderick D. McKenzie, *The City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 1925; Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press) 1921 (Third Edn, 1969).
- 16 Louis Wirth, *The Ghetto* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 1928.
- 17 Robert W. Lake, ed., *Readings in Urban Analysis: Perspectives on Urban Form and Structure* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 1983, pp. 65–67.
- 18 McRoberts, *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood*, pp. 10–11.
- 19 Robert J. Sampson, *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 2014.
- 20 Henri Lefebvre, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell), 1991; originally published in French: *La Production de L'espace*, 1974.
- 21 Interview with Edward Soja: www.jssj.org/article/la-justice-spatiale-et-le-droit-a-la-ville-un-entretien-avec-edward-soja/.
- 22 Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell), 1996, p. 73.
- 23 R. Scott Hanson, *City of Gods: Religious Freedom, Immigration and Pluralism in Flushing, Queens* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), p. 20.
- 24 Katie Day, *Faith on the Avenue: Religion on a City Street* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2014, Chapter 7 (“Urban Flux”).
- 25 Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2014.
- 26 Edward W. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 2010.
- 27 Christopher Baker, *Hybrid Church in the City: Third Space Thinking* (New York: Ashgate/Routledge), 2007, 2016.
- 28 Chris Shannahan, *Voices from the Borderland: Re-imagining Cross-cultural Urban Theology in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Equinox), 2010.
- 29 Shannahan, *Voices from the Borderland: Re-imagining Cross-cultural Urban Theology in the Twenty-first Century*, p. 23.
- 30 Elaine Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Theology in a Post-Secular Age* (London: SCM Press), 2013.