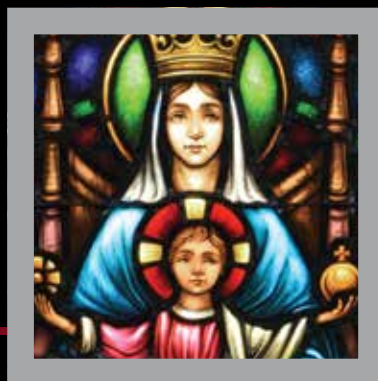
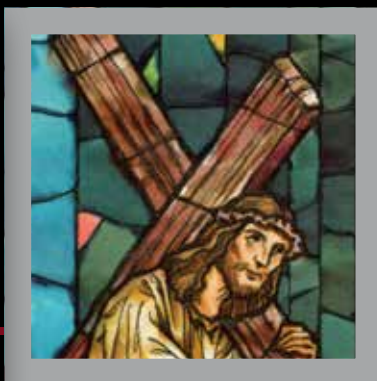
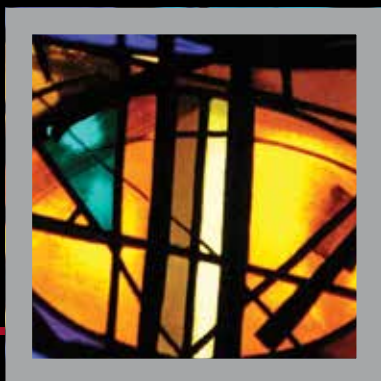
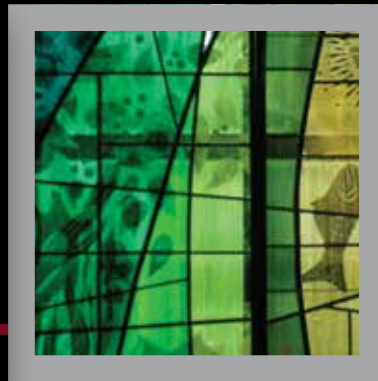
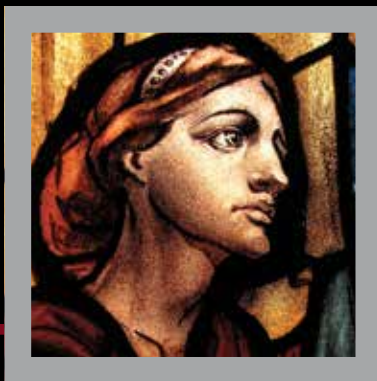
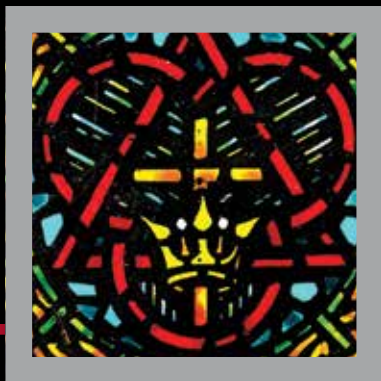




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**Designing and
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CONTENTS

THEME ISSUE: DESIGNING AND BUILDING FOR ISLAM

Mosque: Cube and Circle

Text and Photographs by H. Masud Taj 6

Paradise Present

By Tammy Gaber 10

Malleable Mosques

Photographs and Text by Mohammad Reza Domiri Ganji 18

'The Mosque Above the Shop'

By Denis Byrne 23

A Dialogue On Sacred Space

By Ozayr Saloojee and Richard Vosko 26

Why a Mosque?

By Daniel Davis, AIA, LEED AP 28

A Reflection on 'Care for Our Common Home'

By Roberto Chiotti 32

SPECIAL FEATURE ONLINE:

The Symbolic Potential of the Transnational Mosque *By Kishwar Rizvi*
Only at faithandform.com



ON THE COVER:

Dome of the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Isfahan, Iran, completed in 1619 and photographed by Mohammad Reza Domiri Ganji (*article begins on page 18*).

DEPARTMENTS

Editor's Page	4
Architects Directory	34
Artist/Artisan Directory	34
Notes & Comments	36
The Last Word	38

INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

ArchNewsNow.com	36	J. Sussman, Inc.	38
Connect to Faith & Form	36	KML	4
Conrad Schmitt Studios Inc.	17	Partners for Sacred Places	17
Dekker Perich Sabatini	17	Rohn & Associates Design, Inc.	5
Faith & Form Fall 2016 Theme Issue	40	Willet Hauser Architectural Glass, Inc.	2
Faith & Form Spring 2016 Theme Issue	39	Yale Institute of Sacred Music	17



WHOSE HOUSE IS THIS?

EDITOR'S PAGE ★ MICHAEL J. CROSBIE

Many designers, architects, artists, and craftspeople see their ultimate calling as the creation of home for humankind through the environments they help fashion. Of course, our day-to-day existence is often filled with the minutia of the making of these places—designing, document-


ing, selecting, procuring, verifying, delivering—the thousands of steps that it takes among us and our collaborators to bring a project to fruition. But in those details we must never lose sight of the bigger project at hand: the creation of a world or, more humbly, a home (in its broadest sense). Within this realm of making, many view the creation of the Lord's house as a “meta-calling,” so to speak—above and beyond our work to create everyday space and place. There's a story that someone once asked Eero Saarinen what is the dream commission of every architect, and he is said to have replied: “A cathedral.”

I recently found this exalted view of our creative work challenged in a book by the philosophical geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, *Religion: From Place to Placelessness*. I was directed to Tuan's book by a quote at the beginning of Denis Bryne's article in this issue. Tuan's argument in the book is that for truly religious people, those who, he writes, follow the religion “... associated with Buddha, Jesus Christ, and the great prophets of Israel... the true home for human beings is never a geographical place—a holy city or mountain—somewhere on Earth. It is always elsewhere.”

If this really is the case, how can we truly view the making of sacred places and spaces as the highest calling, when the ultimate home for

whom we design form is not of this Earth? That, in fact, the making of a place on Earth, which as professionals we are so dedicated, is seen by the true followers of the world's religions as at its best merely a distraction, and at its worst a human conceit?

Tuan's insight seems at odds with another observer of religion and the making of sacred place, Mircea Eliade, whom Bryne also quotes in his article. In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade writes that “...to settle somewhere, to inhabit a space, is equivalent to repeating the cosmology and hence to imitating the work of the gods...” Through our actions we create a new world, a new home, as a way of imitating the divine. When we do so, it is an act of faith, an expression of belief. Eliade further notes: “...for religious man, every existential decision to situate himself in space in fact constitutes a religious decision.”

Tuan and Eliade might seem at odds, but perhaps they are describing two sides of the same coin. For Eliade, it is the essence of our humanity to make a sacred place for ourselves in a profane world, and in doing so we engage in the work of the gods. Eliade was an historian of religion, so his view is anthropological: how do human beings make a place in the world that they see as sacred? Tuan, the geographer, writes from a similar position. He views sacred place-making as ultimately a way of making ourselves as humans at home in the world. The way of making sacred place is shaped by human culture and history. But Tuan's great insight is that the sacred place we create is primarily for us to share belief and to be in community for only our brief time on Earth—not necessarily a House of the Lord. 

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The patriarch of the Jews, the exemplar to Christians, and prophet of Islam is asked to repair The Cube (Al-Ka'ba): "... and we commanded Abraham and Ishmael: Purify My House (the Ka'ba) for those who circumambulate, those who contemplate, and those who bow down and prostrate themselves (in prayer)."

--Qur'an 2:125 (part)

Let us visit the historic cube in Mecca to conduct a thought-experiment: Imagine you are suspended in space in a satellite directly above it. Presume also that it is night and all the lights in the world have been switched off. Now switch on the lights that shine on the courtyard of the Great Mosque of Mecca in which the black cube is located, and also switch on the lights of all the mosques of the world.

This is what you will see: directly below you will be the black square of the Ka'ba at the center of a vast concentric system of white circles that emanate from it like ripples: The innermost circles are in constant motion around it, and they are packed close together. White wheels within wheels unceasing in their motion. They are encircled by white circles that have a space between each other. These do not move around the cube but they do sway towards and away from it. Radiating away are unmoving white dots that make up bigger and bigger circles at greater distances from each other.

The three sets of circles we see while being suspended in space above the Ka'ba are gatherings of people in different acts of worship. Closest to the cube, the Ka'ba, are pilgrims dressed in the stipulated white unstitched garments, akin to their shrouds, circumambulating, walking seven times around the cube chanting *Labaik, allahumma labaik* ("I am here, for You, I am here"). They form the first set of moving concentric circles.

The next set of circles is made up of pilgrims in concentric rows: standing, bowing, and prostrating to God in the prescribed prayer. If the first set of circles moves along the circumference, then this set of circles moves along the radius, where each worshipper, while going from the standing, bowing, and prostrating mode, is moving radially towards the cube and then receding. From your vantage viewpoint up in the night sky, this second set of circles appears to be made up of white rings that pulsate: expanding in width and contracting.

Finally, you have the distant circles that are made up of white dots that are the mosques of the world: segments of great circles (were you to light up all the graves of Muslims in the world, they too would lie in concentric ripples emanating from the Ka'ba). Thus, the mosque is a designated segment of a circle whose center is the Ka'ba (the direction is called *qibla*). Any definition of the mosque devoid of the *qibla* is erroneous; any stylistic addition to the definition (that which has domes, minarets, etc.) is superfluous.

Being local segments of global circles, rows of worshippers are straight and not curved. The leader of the prayer, or Imam, stands in front in a



niche (*mihrab*) that establishes the radial direction towards Ka'ba. Thus the space of the mosque via the niche of the *mihrab* is in transit to Ka'ba.

The *mihrab* is the most blessed part of the mosque as it is geographically nearer to the Ka'ba. The first row that lies immediately behind the *mihrab* is likewise more blessed than the rows behind it. Thus the plan of the mosque, following the practice of the Prophet ﷺ, is a rectangle with the longer side of the rectangle facing Ka'ba giving more worshippers the opportunity to be so blessed.

Often there is a stepped platform to one side of the *mihrab*, called the *minbar*, for the Imam to ascend and address the congregation on Fridays. But neither are iconic objects, as the mosque is less a shell gazed upon and more a shell held against the ear. It is an acoustic space

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Mosque: Cube and Circle

Islam's arc of belief as reflected in its houses of worship worldwide

Text and photographs by H. Masud Taj



The Cube at the center of the Grand Mosque.

sustained by sound. God in the Qur'an is referred to as "the All Hearing and the All Knowing" or "the All Hearing and the All Seeing" and in each instance Hearing precedes Knowing and Seeing.

The mosque is devoted to listening to the Word of God (*Al Qur'an* means "recitation" from *Al Qara* to recite). While listening the worshipper is at the center of the sound that envelopes; sight is restrained to the spot where the forehead touches the floor in prostration. In the realm of invocation, not depiction, vision detracts and hearing engages. Hearing inescapably implies presence.

This global concentric system made up by all the mosques in the world oriented to a single center is a geometrical analogue of *tawhid*—a doctrine of the Oneness of God and the unity of all existence. *Tawhid*

is the foundation of Islam. Hence Ka'ba is an ordering device, a marker that locates the *axis mundi* at the center of the concentric system, the solitary altar of all mosques.

Thus, while each church has its own altar, mosques have none within them but they all share the same altar that lies outside them: the Ka'ba in the valley in Mecca. The only mosque in the world that is not a segment of a circle but completes the circle is the Great Mosque of Mecca that contains the Ka'ba in its courtyard; hence the only mosque in the world with its own altar. All other mosques of the world are segments that imagination composes into circles. For instance, a mosque in New York would be a segment of the circle that passes through Canada and crosses the Arctic to Russia, Mongolia, China, Vietnam, Singapore, and



The worshipper faces the mihrab and the distant Ka'ba in prayer.

then crosses Antarctica, Peru, Colombia, and Cuba, before re-entering the US. The circle is made up by connecting the mosques--the white dots you saw from outer space.

Moreover, the mosque is more the ground than the superstructure above, as according to the Prophet ﷺ the whole earth is a mosque.¹ This is enacted each Friday in various urban centers around the world, when straight rows spill out onto streets with the mosque's inability to house the world's fastest growing religion (which, by 2050, is expected to be the largest religious group in the world).² The congregation outside a mosque is often bigger than the one inside; bodies of worshippers themselves constitute the greater mosque and when their foreheads touch the mundane sidewalk, it is hallowed ground. When millions pray simultaneously during the annual Hajj pilgrimage in the valley of Arafat, with only a fraction contained in the valley's Namira Mosque, the meta-mosque of bricks and bodies appears in the clear light of the desert sun.

The mosque being a performing art, before and after the performance of prayer, the existence of the mosque is open to question as the essential acoustic space disappears when silence prevails. Between performances, could the stage be either adapted for different performances or dismantled and put away? Just as jurisprudence checks the rear view mirror for precedents before moving ahead, we hearken back.

The precedent was set by Muhammad ﷺ, the second source of authority after the Qur'an (which does not stipulate any particular form or feature that a mosque ought to have). His mosque in Medina was a

courtyard with a verandah of palm-thatch flat-roof supported on palm tree-trunks on the *qibla* side for the worshippers, and another verandah on the opposite side for *saliks* (wayfarers). The following can be deduced from it: It made no attempts to formulate a separate style from the prevailing built context; with the house adjacent, it did not insist on being a free-standing building and except for its *qibla* orientation (facing the direction of Ka'ba in faraway Mecca) and a *minbar* (stepped pulpit) it had no other distinguishing feature. The minaret, the characteristic tower for the call to pray, evolved later, as did the *mihrab* and the unique tessellation of *muqarnas* (stalactites).

For an aniconic religion it is understandable that the minimal form of this early mosque leaves the visual trajectory of mosque architecture open-ended. "What did the Mosque look like" gets displaced by a more productive line of questioning: "What did the Mosque do?"

The early mosque was multifunctional and served as a social, political, and religious center. Based on numerous *hadith* (a record of the actions and advices of Muhammad ﷺ) it was a dormitory for travelers, an educational institution, a health care facility, a temporary treasury, a court of law, (even a temporary prison!) and yes, brief prayers were also performed in congregation five times a day. Because, according to Islam, all the above actions constitute acts of worship. In other words, it was a community center in which prayers were said.

This is in keeping with the Arabic word for worship in the Qur'an: *ibadat*. It is derived from *abd*: one who would strive to please his lord.




Every mosque is part of an arc of worship that encircles the world.

Hence “worship,” in Islam, is the manner of conducting one’s daily affairs. Apart from right beliefs, according to the Qur’an, to worship is to “...spend of your substance out of love for Him, for your kins, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity, to fulfill the contracts which you have made...”³

Historically, form and function bear an inverse relationship in the development of the mosque. As it shed its various functions, its form paradoxically grew more and more complex, until we are left with a highly specialized building serving a single function. In tandem with the shrinking domain of the mosque’s activities grew the demand that the sacredness of the dwelling compensate for the diminishing spirituality of the dweller; those with an identity crisis demanded that architecture fabricate an identity in a historical regression of the mosque from dynamic multi-functionality to sterile specialization.

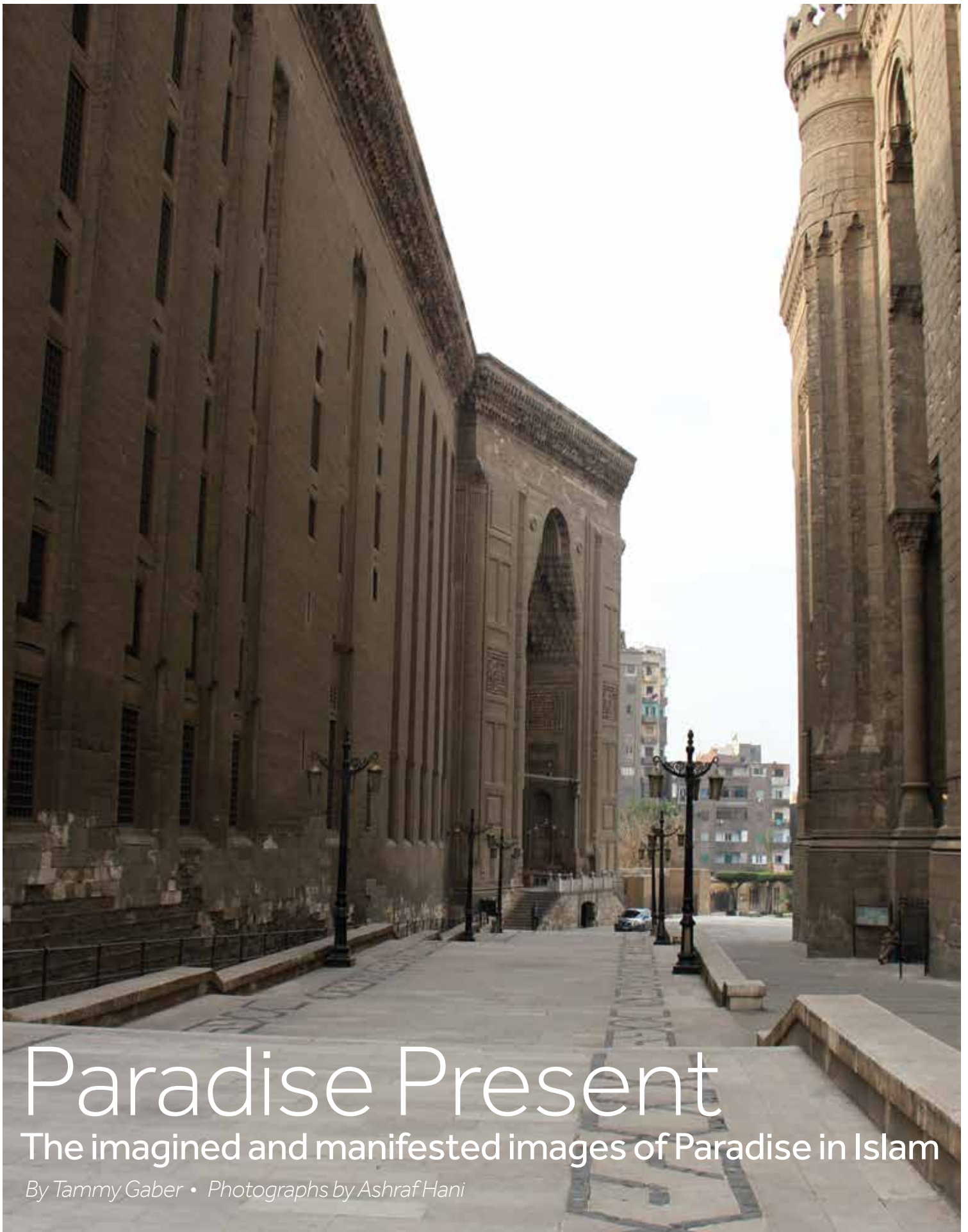
Paradoxically we find that the basically fundamentalist maneuver of returning to origins has progressive consequences. It is analogous to pulling back on the arrow in order to launch it forward on a liberating trajectory. The future of the contemporary mosque lies in recovering the multi-functionality of an expatriate past: from mosque as a machine-for-meditation to mosque as a site-for-social-action for the community it serves.

Ka’ba, in Arabic, means the “cube” and also “a shape that emerges”—both the form and the emergence of form. If the form is the cube, then

what form remains to emerge? As an ordering device, the Ka’ba is not the modest cube in Mecca but a monumental project that has, for over a millennium now, been redefining the world in its own image. It has been constructing its circumferences (without which the center is a point without identity). Each time a group of Muslims gathers in prayer or builds a mosque, each time Muslims follow Muhammad’s ﷺ practice of sleeping on the right side with their faces towards the Ka’ba, each time a Muslim dies and is buried in a grave that is always oriented towards the Ka’ba, in each instance a fragment of a circumference is being put into place. Prayer halls, beds, and graves are all rectangles with their longer side facing the Ka’ba; all chords of its circumnavigating circles. With the global consolidation of a sacred center, the faithful barely perceive that with their bricks and their bodies, they construct and constitute an ongoing international installation. 

NOTES

1. As reported by Jabir b’Abdullah al-Ansari, Hudhaifa and by Abu Hurairah; Sahih Muslim 521a 522a & 523a
2. Aug 31, 2015: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/04/23/why-muslims-are-the-worlds-fastest-growing-religious-group>
3. Qur’an: Surah 2: Verse 177 (part)



Paradise Present

The imagined and manifested images of Paradise in Islam

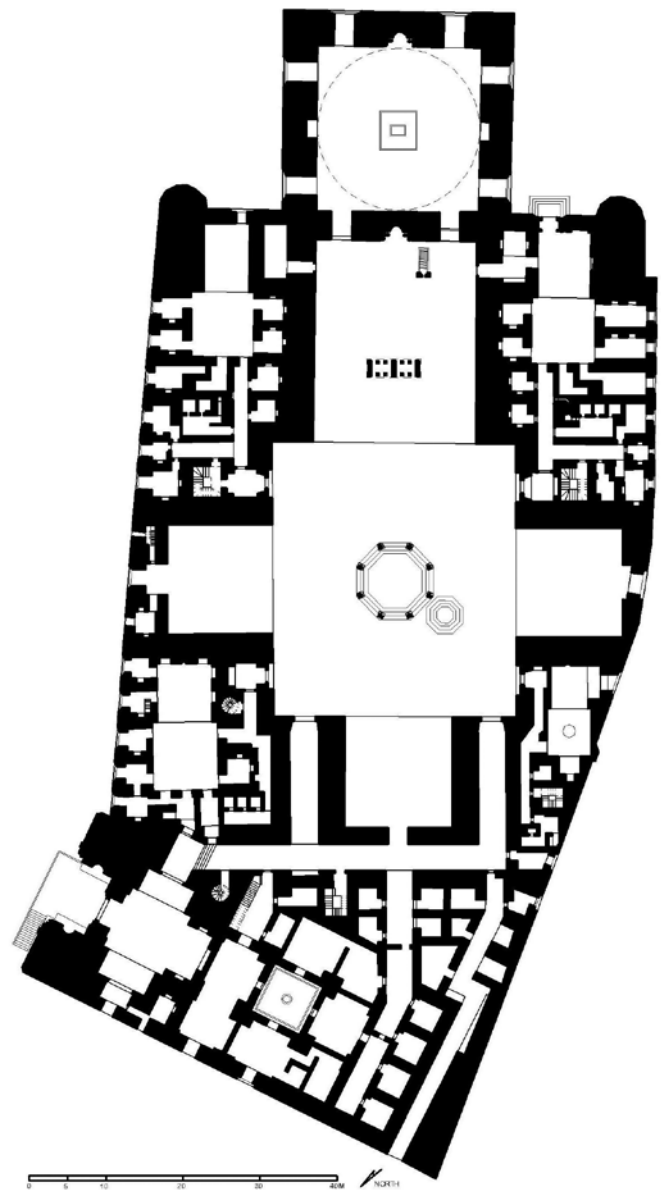
By Tammy Gaber • Photographs by Ashraf Hani



Entrance portal to the Hassan mosque is rich in images of nature.

THE ASPIRATION OF PARADISE WAS EMBEDDED in the daily consciousness and imagination of Muslims through their prayer, scripture, and invocations to God. The brilliance of paradise described in the Qur'an did not remain in the textual imagination alone. Throughout the centuries and in all regions the religion has spread, followers have attempted to imagine paradise on Earth physically. From the objects commissioned of lamps, *kursi*, doors, and the portable verdure on carpets, the abstraction and recreation of paradise was wholly composed within the constructs and mediation of architecture: paradise was reimagined again and again as a shadow of what is possible and more importantly as an offering to God.

To the followers of a religion born in the desert, the verdure and ideals of paradise in the Qur'an were represented in objects and in architecture as exemplified by the objects commissioned for the 14th-century Mamluk madrasa mosque of Sultan Hassan in Cairo, and the



Plan of the Mosque of Sultan Hassan.

encompassing architecture. The Sultan Hassan madrasa mosque was the height,¹ if not the epitome, of ambitious Mamluk architectural patronage that creatively combined elements of extant architectural innovations in the city and region and of contemporaneous influences.² The Mamluks' active patronage of the arts, scholarship, and pious buildings was an essential aspect of their reign, interpreting the Muslim requirement of charity on a large scale:

When a human being dies, his doings come to an end except in three cases, [if he leaves behind] an ongoing charity, or beneficial knowledge, or a virtuous offspring to pray for him.³

The act of patronage of such a charitable institution, like the madrasa-mosque, regardless of other political motivations and ambitions, to the medieval Muslim mind would have clearly been an act to earn entry into paradise. Layered within this pious act, the images of paradise were abstracted through geometries, forms, and colors and represented



Light, color, and geometric decoration distinguish the courtyard entrance.

cohesively throughout the architectural complex of the madrasa-mosque reinforcing this space as a gateway to promised hereafter.

COMMISSIONED OBJECTS: LAMPS, KURSI, DOORS, AND CARPETS

Within the madrasa-mosque spaces, forests of oil lamps were suspended from long metal chains. Those in place today are replicas of the originals, a number which are on display in museums.⁴ The original lamps demonstrated various designs with emphasis on Qur'anic scripture, foliage, and sometimes a royal seal.⁵ The scripture quoted on the lamps was from the "Light" chapter:

God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as a niche in which there is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as if it had been a glittering star, kindled from the blessed olive tree, neither eastern nor western, whose oil is about to illuminate although no fire touches it. Light on light, God guides to His Light whom He wills! And God pro-pounds parables for humanity and God is

*Knowing of everything. The light is lit in houses God gave permission to be lifted up and that His Name be remembered in it. Glorifying Him in the first part of the day and the eventide.*⁶

In the Mamluk era this specific passage was often placed on the lamps commissioned for mosques and at Sultan Hassan, or was written in gilded ceramics with ornate *naskh* script on an elaborate floral background.⁷ The associations to paradise were accentuated with the floral designs filling all other surfaces of the lamps, and the light that projected through their transparencies and contrasted with the opaque presence of the enameled text. The path to paradise was translated from the text to exquisite physical objects, that when suspended by the dozens and softly lighting the space, must have been ethereal—providing just enough light in the massive spaces for prayer and contemplation.

The *kursi*, the stand for the large-scale-manuscript Qur'an commissioned for the mosque (one of the few furniture elements in the madrasa mosque), was located in the

mausoleum room behind the eastern *iwan*. The embellishment of the *kursi* paralleled the work on the doors of the mosque with elaborate geometric patterns forming an array of multi-pointed stars. Specifically, at Sultan Hassan the decorative program of the *kursi*, the original main door,⁸ and the *mihrab* door⁹ focused on a series of complex 16-point stars. Stars in their celestial form referenced the heavens, but the number of points on the stars was designed with mathematical and cosmological significance. Traditionally, various numbers were interpreted as expressions of divine and esoteric concepts.¹⁰ In Mamluk tradition the number eight represented the important transition between the terrestrial earth (formed by squares) to the heavenly infinity of the circle, or dome because the number of angels or rows of angles that supported the throne of God numbered eight.¹¹ The doubling of the eight-point star into 16 and the use octagonal shapes¹² on the *kursi*, interpreted in aesthetic and mathematical terms the rows of angles supporting the word of God in the physical Qur'an it supported.



Detail of geometric tile used in the mosque courtyard floor.

The same types of stars appeared on the original doors of the madrasa mosque and on the smaller scale doors of the *minbar* (pulpit). The verdure of paradise was not absent; rather, within the shapes composing the stars on the metal doors of the *minbar* and main door, small vegetal forms were embossed and punctured out so that at close proximity the stars dissolved into arrays of petal-like elements. The consistency of the geometry in the mosque suggested a cohesive collaboration between the numerous trades and craftsmen and pointed to an overall agenda of focusing on the transition and support for the divine appropriate to the aspiration of the complex commissioned.

For Muslims, the primary object facilitating worship is the carpet—both historically and in contemporary practice. For nomadic and traveling Muslims, the carpet was a portable memory of physical gardens and a reminder of promised paradise with literal representation of verdure or abstractions in colorful geometric patterns that reflected the ordered layout common in Islamic gardens.

The prayer carpet in particular became the virtual portal to Mecca and paradise. Individual prayer carpets were of a smaller and specific range of dimensions allowing for efficient portability and use.

Large extant Mamluk carpets featured dominant geometric designs often with a central octagonal medallion and combinations of squares and stars that were multiples of eights and were predominantly red with detailing of geometrical and vegetal forms in other colors such as green and blue¹³ and contained Egyptian local vegetal forms such as papyrus, lotus, cypress, and palm trees.¹⁴

Smaller Mamluk prayer rugs from the 15th century demonstrated the open field in the center framed by an arch made of scrolls and an octagonal form at the bottom.¹⁵ Other 16th-century Ottoman-made individual prayer rugs had the same distinctive format of an open space framed by arches and columns with a hanging lamp were influential on village-made prayer rug designs and on carpet making in regional centers of the Ottoman empire.¹⁶ In the 17th century, Egyptian-made

group prayers rugs in the form of long rectangles, for Yeni Cami in Istanbul, had multiple *mihrab* forms depicted on them (from 10 to 132 forms)¹⁷ indicating the popularization of a mosque type of carpet derived from the design of individual carpets that in effect created rows and rows of arches on columns. This virtual architecture, abundant with weaved representations of lamps, served to create multiple portals of prayer.

What the carpets commissioned for Sultan Hassan madrasa mosque looked like can be inferred from these examples and due to their portability, the carpets were probably relocated more than once and worshippers simply brought their own to pray on. Themes of the virtual portal connecting to Mecca and octagonal medallions framed by verdure emphasize transitions to the hereafter through the designs.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF PARADISE

The architectural design of Sultan Hassan embodied ideas of imagined paradise. The approach to the madrasa mosque led to a set



The main iwan, the largest of four, with mausoleum room to the rear.

of stairs under the monumental entry portal, which was emphasized by the large epigraphy and the complex *muqarnas* (stalactite-like pendentives) detailing at the apex proclaiming this building as a path to paradise. Passing through the monumental door elaborately covered with 16-point stars, worshippers were brought to a dark vestibule that led to a darker and narrower, *megaz* (multiple-bent entrance hall). Moving through the tunnel-like *megaz* was an exercise that phenomenologically separated the worshipper from the outside world: it dulled the sound with three-meter-thick stone walls, it dulled sight and allowed for moments of guidance only at every sharp turn (three times) where the small opening above permitted for momentary light and air flow to help orient the worshipper.

The experience of the prolonged entry allowed for the clear separation of the public world into another, unearthly place. At the end of the *megaz*, the opening to the courtyard was an overwhelming sight: the spatial expanse, bright light, and the completely different soundscape of the water fountain and lingering

birds hushed the loud, busy, outer world. The abundant light, in contrast to the dark *megaz*, coming from the courtyard opening above, along with the four-pointed *iwans* led the gaze heavenward. The unpredicted void, roughly more than a cube, seemed carved out of the monumental mass of the madrasa mosque.

Underfoot in the large courtyard¹⁸ the cool paving of polychrome marble inscribed a paradise garden. Strips, squares, triangles, and octagons cut from white-, black-, grey-blue-, yellow-, and red-colored marble fit together to form a large composite covering for the whole courtyard--similar to the perfected expressions in Islamic gardens and paradise carpets.¹⁹ The effect of the polychrome marble floor was amplified by the stark, four-story massive and unembellished (save for the epigraphy) walls and *iwans*. The four *iwans* (spacious teaching and praying areas formed out of deep pointed vaults four stories high) of the madrasa-mosque complex equally connected to the courtyard. The layout of the courtyard floors was divided into a nine-square grid, with the fountain at the center. The patterns in the eight

remaining squares propelled the visual reading of the space in counter-clockwise motion (like circumambulation at the Ka'ba) through the rotation of geometries. All nine squares had geometrical compositions with a central four- or eight-point figure and multiples of this geometry emerged around them. The rotations of geometries occurred on multiple scales within the composition using shapes and color reinforce the dynamic quality of the courtyard space.²⁰ The "geometric choreography" unified the horizontal composition and served to link the various spaces of the madrasa mosque.

In the center was a covered fountain with the bulbous wooden dome resting on eight marble columns, and with marble stools facing the marble water basin. Underscoring the importance of the number eight (angles supporting the throne of God), the Throne Verse was written around the dome of the fountain:

God! There is not god but He, The Living, The Eternal. Neither slumber takes Him nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in and on the earth, who would intercede with Him but



The scale of the iwans, or prayer areas, is enormous, yet detailed with images of paradise.

*with His permission? He knows what is in front of them and what is behind them. And they will not comprehend anything of His knowledge, but what He willed. His Seat encompassed the heavens and the earth and He is not hampered by their safe keeping. And He is the Lofty, The Sublime.*²¹

Within this verse, which was also inscribed on the interior of the mausoleum dome, the basic tenant of the faith—affirmation of a single God—was expressed. In the transitory, octagonal space of the fountain, the worshiper through the purification washing ritual shifted to the act of prayer.

The eastern *iwan*, the largest of the four, was the main *iwan* of the complex and was reported by the 14th-century historian al-Maqrizi as the largest in the Medieval world.²² On the interior surface of the *iwan*, the continuous band of epigraphic text from the Victory chapter surrounded dense floral designs and proclaimed entry to paradise as a victory. From this space the call to prayer was made, the Friday *khutba* sermon was given from the top of the elaborate *minbar*,

and prayer was directed with the polychrome marble *mihrab* and marble dado finishes on the walls. As in all of the *iwans*, the lamps hung by the dozens framing the spaces and illuminating them when there was no daylight and the carpets were spread facing Mecca and reinforcing the virtual portal connecting to the center of their world.

Behind the main *iwan* was the mausoleum room—the apex of the journey through the spaces. With three external walls, and large deep-set grilled windows that immediately pierced into the exterior life of the city the mausoleum created a public presence of the dead that was imagined by the Mamluks to allow for a continued existence in the city and to facilitated the back-and-forth flow of *baraka* (blessings). From the large *kursi*, continuous reading of the Qur'an (by scholars supported by the madrasa mosque) for salvation of the sultan was recited out loud and heard in the street would be reciprocated for intercessions by those walking by. Although Sultan Hassan himself was not buried there,²³ the space of the mausoleum had a many-fold importance and

reinforced the desire of an earthly expression of paradise.


Inside at the center was the elevated and decorated casket, facing the *mihrab*—the dead in Islam were buried lying on their right side facing Mecca so that in death the body was connected to the center. Above, the dome rested on painted and gilded wooden pendentives, and a cantilevered octagonal frame hung with no other purpose than to reinforce the mystical connection of earthly square base, octagonal transition, and the heavenly sphere of the dome that rested on seven rows of wooden *muqarnasa* like the seven levels of heavens.²⁴ Emphasizing the transition of earth to heaven, behind the cantilevered octagonal frame, was the epigraphic text of the Throne verse²⁵ in large gold and green colors in a band encircling the mausoleum interior, similar to the relationship of the dome of the ablutions fountain.

The worshipper, after paying respects in the mausoleum, returned back through to the main *iwan* and the view of the extents of the madrasa mosque on the way out culminated

the simultaneous qualities of serenity, silence, mass, and space that reinforced the transformative power of space—one that glimpsed momentarily a paradisiacal world.

PARADISE MANIFESTED THEN AND NOW

Sultan Hassan was an exemplary Mamluk madrasa mosque architecturally, coupled with the objects and elements commissioned for it. The entire composition demonstrated a uniquely sophisticated cohesive expression of the conceptual idea of paradise still palpable by worshippers today.

What does this mean to contemporary worshippers and designers? The importance of the unifying conceptual idea of religion inspiring and manifesting itself in design is not anachronistic, or exclusively the domain of medieval design. Paradise in the written imagination is ever present in contemporary Muslims' minds. The text still speaks the same ideas, the rituals of prayer remain the same. Architects, artists, and patrons need to collaborate and continue to imagine a space with objects that layer together pragmatically, aesthetically, and with expression in contemporary language the Islamic ideas of paradise. 



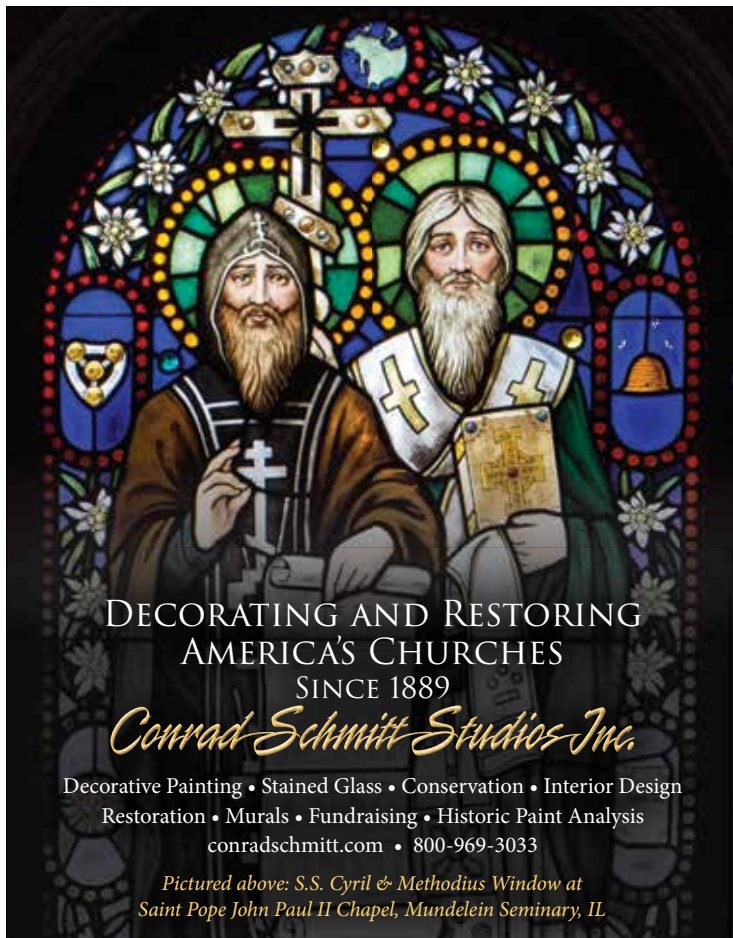
Many of the lamps display decorative script that refers to the importance of light.



Minbar metal doors are covered with allusions to stars.

NOTES

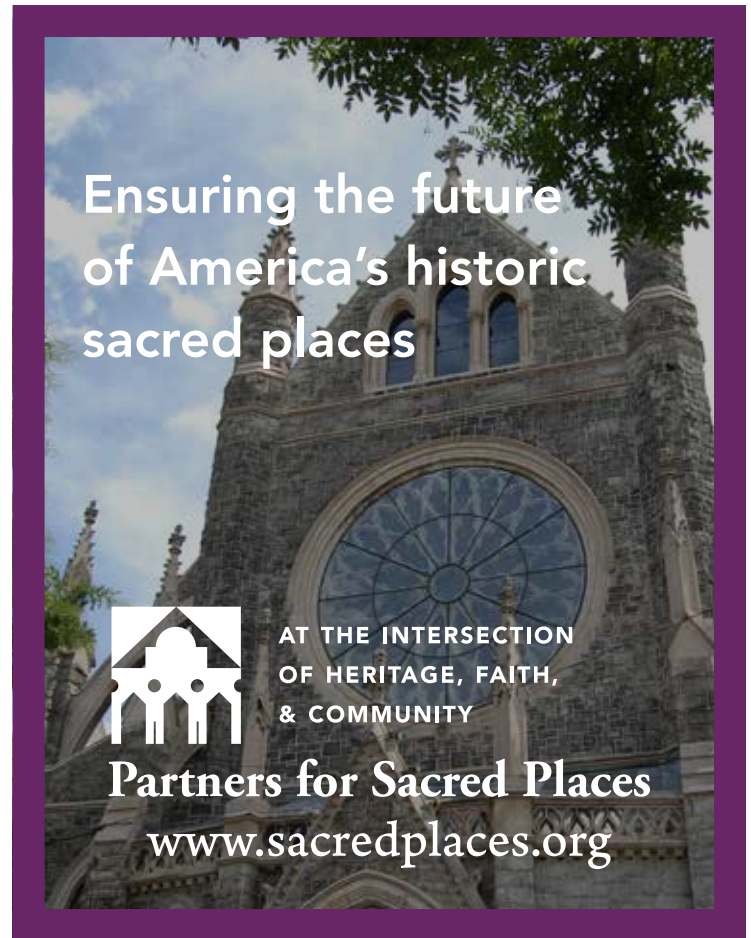
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*Pictured above: S.S. Cyril & Methodius Window at
Saint Pope John Paul II Chapel, Mundelein Seminary, IL*



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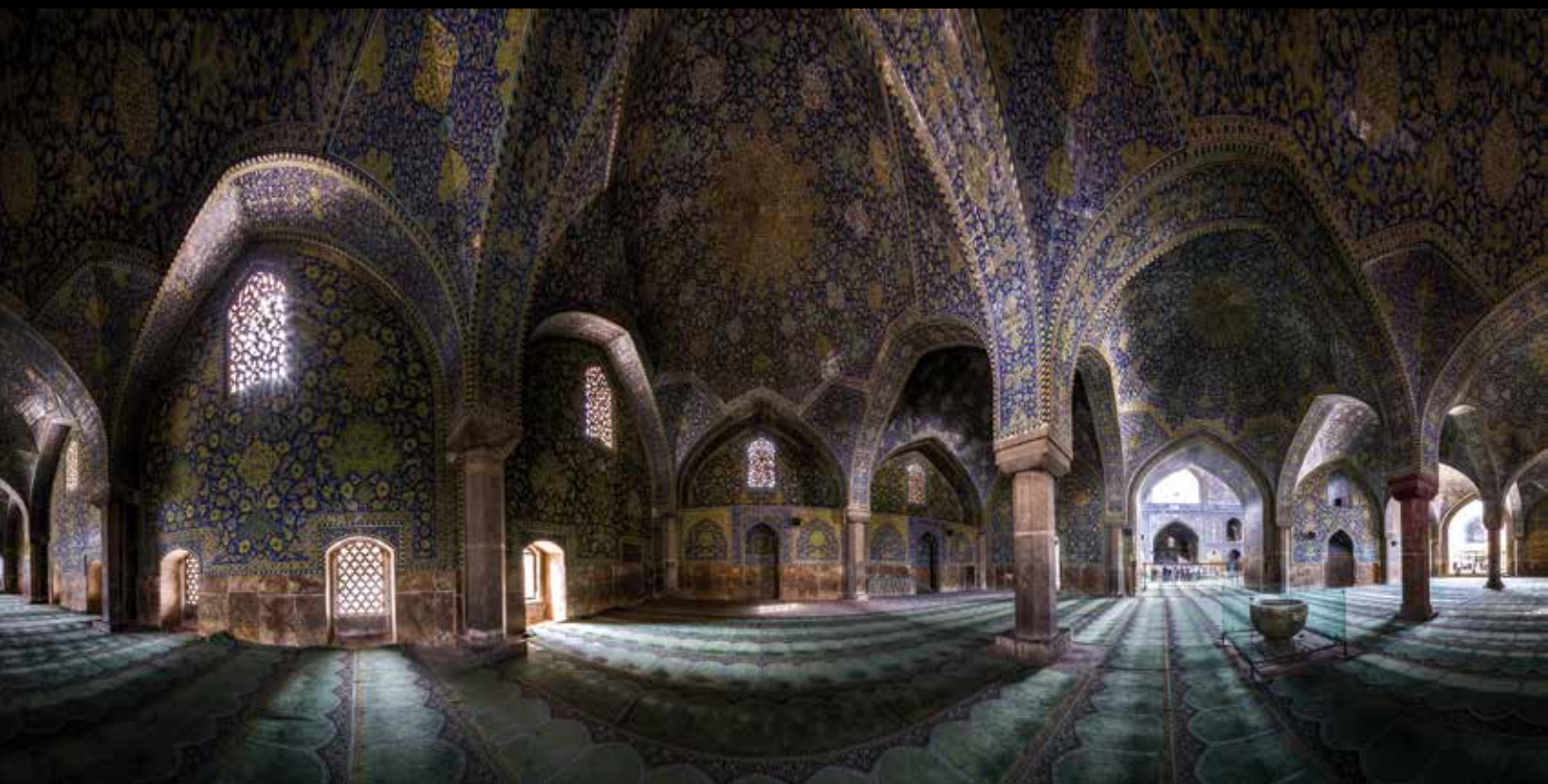
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Malleable Mosques





Photographs and Text by Mohammad Reza Domiri Ganji



AS A 24-YEAR-OLD STUDENT OF PHYSICS I am fascinated with how the elements of the physical world can potentially enthrall us. As a photographer for the past five years, I am drawn to document the material places that capture culture in creative ways. In my native Iran, mosques are some of the best examples of this.

For me, symmetry, repetition, controlling the light, and tiling are the most important characteristic of mosque architecture. The interesting part is that almost all of the mosques that are intact are being used to this day. I always try to illustrate stunning features of buildings along with the detail in architectural photography through artistic viewpoints. I have tried to use artistic tools

Left, top: The color-saturated interior of Nasir al-Mulk Mosque (known as the 'Pink Mosque') in Shiraz, Iran.

Left, bottom: Panorama of the interior of Shah (Emam) Mosque, also known as the 'Royal Mosque,' in Isfahan, Iran.

Top: A carpet repair workshop in Shiraz, Iran.

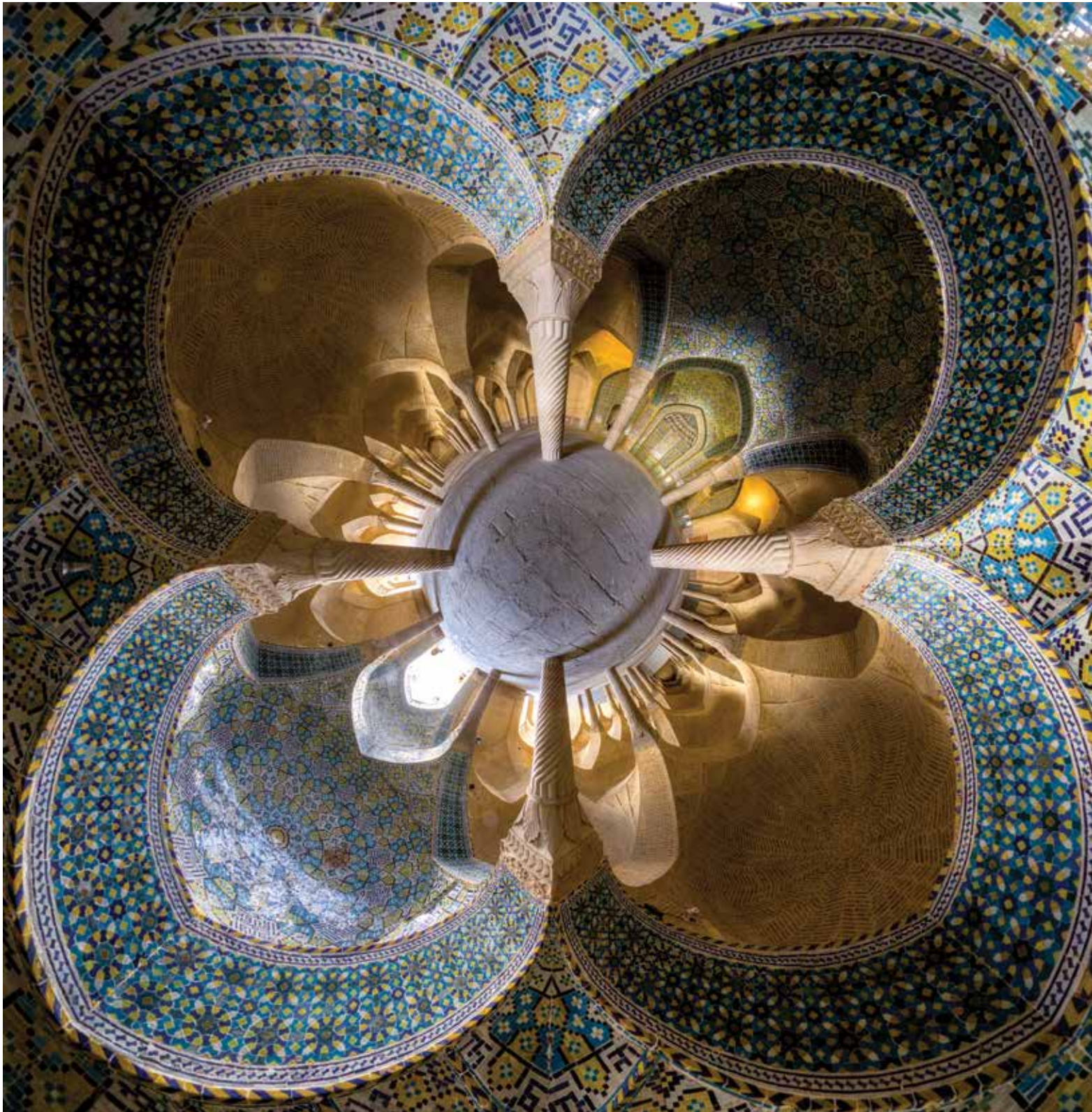
as much as possible to improve the aesthetic of my work. But to be created, this artwork requires a beautiful historical building. It's not an easy process, and there have been times when even with a permit to take photos, I didn't receive the appropriate reception from the people in charge, therefore, I left the location without taking any photographs. It has to feel right to me.

Most of my pictures are accomplished with wide-angle and fish-eye lenses, showing the entire building in a single frame, and also have a highly dramatic range of color and texture. For me, light is a critical element in photography. In other photos, I join several images together to create a virtual reality for the architecture.

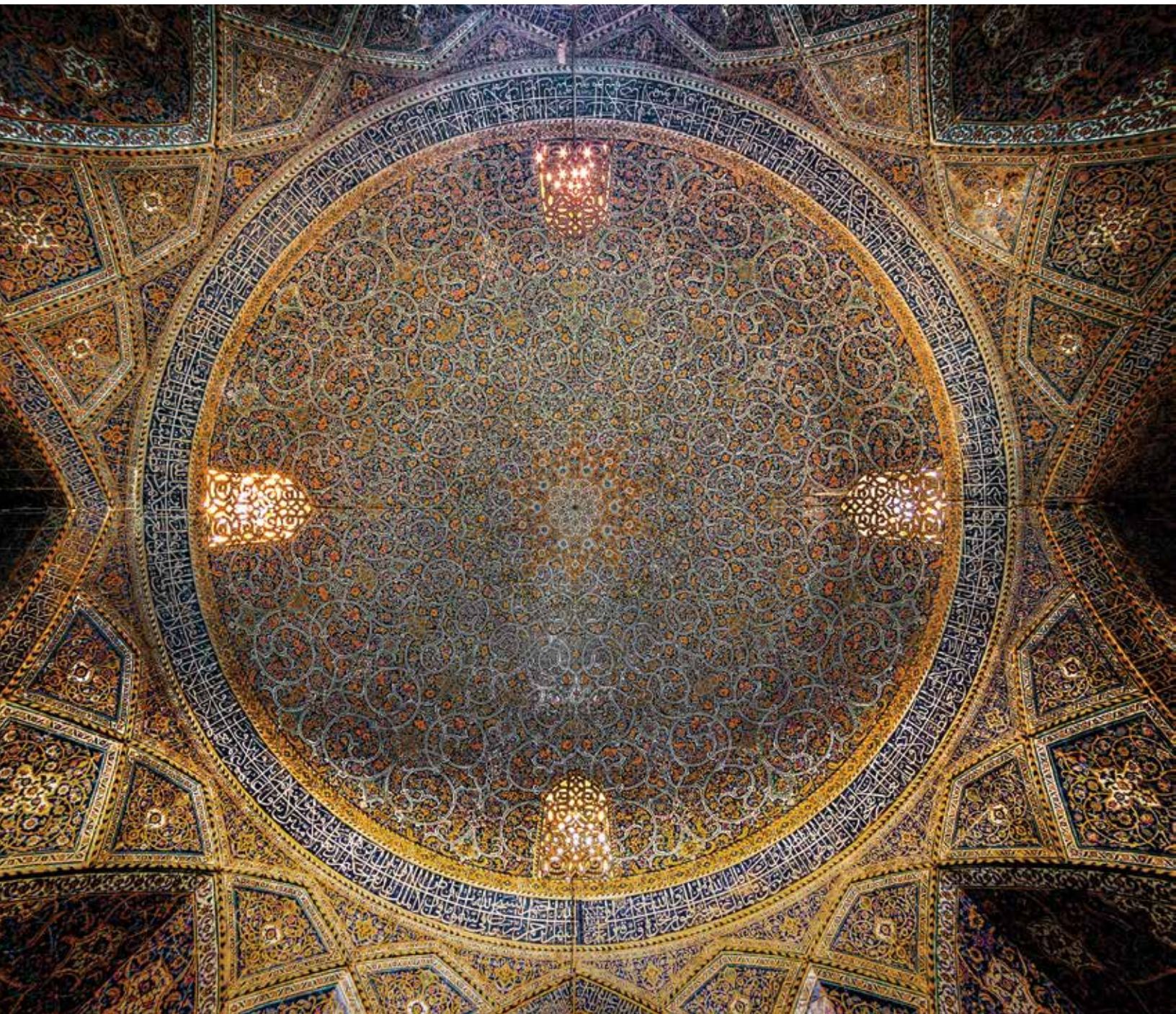
Text continues on page 22



Shahyad (Azadi) Mosque Tower in Tehran, Iran, designed by Hossien Amanat and completed in 1971.




A 'little planet' view of the interior of Vakil Mosque in Shiraz, Iran.



Dome of the Seyyed Mosque in Isfahan, Iran.

My favorite photo in my portfolio, “Historic Persian-Islamic Monuments and Temples,” is a landscape shot of the Nasir al-Mulk Mosque in Shiraz, Iran (the image is at the top of page 18). Known informally as “the Pink Mosque,” and built around 1888, it’s a beautiful building. I hope that the photo illustrates the architects’ (Muhammad Hasan-e-Memar and Muhammad Reza Kashi Paz-e-Shiraz) choice of

perfect symmetry, tiling, colors, unique lighting, different patterns, repetition, arches, and rosy stained glass.

I hope that my photography touches and inspires people to look at the world differently. I want to visit the world’s best architectural structures and, through my photography, present my own opinions and interpretations of them. Changing perspectives means everything to me. 

Editor’s note: Many more of Mohammad Reza Domiri’s Ganji’s photographs are shown on the Faith & Form website: faithandform.com

‘The Mosque Above The Shop’

The making of new sacred space in Ireland

By Denis Byrne | Photography by Eugene Langan



“Isn’t it characteristic of religion to produce distinctive, emotionally charged places—sacred places? Yes, it is. But only one kind of religion, albeit one that most of humankind embraces.”

Yu-Fu Tuan, *Religion: From Place to Placelessness*

Entrance to the Al-Mustapha Islamic Centre and Mosque, located northwest of central Dublin, Ireland.

We are dealing here, firstly, with religion—that ancient, shadowy concept, notoriously shy of the light of common agreement—and secondly with place, the here that is the city of Dublin and the now that is recent, memorable, and still anecdotally rich. This period has seen extraordinary changes in Irish life; in the economic area certainly but also in the social, demographic, political, and intellectual spheres and Dublin bears the marks (or scars) of this the most dynamic era in its history. Part of this dynamism has seen the arrival of new communities, with their ways, customs, and religions, seeking a new home.

In the telling of the story of religion and place we are also cognizant—as the humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan points out in his meditative book on geography and religion, *From Place to Placelessness*—that not all religions require sacred places for their existence. For some the

sacred exists, not in the “magical and concretely specific but in the rational abstract,” in the elsewhere of placelessness.

Most of the stories in the exhibition “Sacred Space,” shown at the Dublin Architecture (darc) space gallery from February to April of this year, document religions that deal with the “magical and concretely specific,” the kind generally associated with the concept of place, the kind moreover that leaves telling tracks on the landscape of the city. Religions such as these rely on the making of a significant space through the act of marking off as separate for the purposes of ritual and occasion, however informal they may appear to be to the outsider. The root sense of sacred (*sacer*) has the meaning of separate or set apart and it is this formal act of setting apart, by various architectural and/or mood control mechanisms that we, like the scientist, observe and annotate.

The main focus of the exhibition is concerned with the making and unmaking of sacred space in Ireland over the last decade of the century just past and the beginning of the new one. The unmaking of this type of space and its transformation to other (profane) uses is inherent in the life-cycle of the sacralized process.

THE AUTHOR IS THE DIRECTOR OF DENIS BYRNE ARCHITECTS IN DUBLIN, AND HEADS THE DARCS SPACE GALLERY. THIS ARTICLE IS ADAPTED FROM BYRNE’S PREFACE TO THE SACRED SPACE EXHIBIT CATALOGUE. A COPY OF THE CATALOGUE IS AVAILABLE BY CONTACTING THE DARCS SPACE GALLERY AT: [INFO@DARCSPACE.IE](mailto:info@darcspace.ie).



Inside the Al-Mustapha mosque, men assemble for prayer.



Prostration during prayer at the Al-Mustapha mosque.



Prayer space in the Tallaght Mosque, on the upper level of the Greenhills Business Center.

MAKING: THE GROUND THAT RECEIVES THE FIGURE

For recently arrived communities in Ireland, looking to pursue and continue their religious traditions and practices, it has typically meant the appropriation of the available and existing rather than the construction of new space, just as the early Christians in ancient Rome adapted existing space to their use.

The fact that similar possibilities still exist in our cities for the creation of dynamic new entities within old elements, by giving them a new spirit and function, is shown by the many religious communities that have made home here. Occasionally, the newly arrived communities in Ireland have, if sympathetic in doctrine, brokered a sharing arrangement in existing church buildings, but many have tended to search out available, cheap, functional spaces and adapted them to their needs. Very often this search has led to the light industrial/warehouse areas at the edges of Irish towns and cities or to the many unnecessarily empty rooms about the ground floors of our retail streets.

This process has been repeated in Dublin, and indeed in Ireland, during recent times. Interesting new urban hybrids have been constituted, such as the “church in the warehouse” and the “mosque above the shop,” and the new vibrancy may be detected in the peripheral and marginal spaces of our cities and towns. Though generally not involving architects at the layout or detailed levels, the conversions reviewed here nevertheless possess an irresistible attraction due to the dynamism inherent in the urgency of the intensely felt communal act. Where engaged, professional construction consultants are generally delegated to negotiating the tricky path through planning, regulatory, and legislative requirements of these modern places of assembly.

The existential urge to create sacralized space within the homogenous expanse of profane space is well documented by Mircea Eliade in his book, *The Sacred and the Profane*. Eliade suggests that, for religious man, “...if the world is to be lived in, it must be founded,” and we thus, on these terms, improbably found ourselves with apparently no less a project on our hands than a cosmological study of the founding of worlds (assistance from NASA may have been indicated).

The architectural conventions normally followed in the making of sacred space are not found important here, or even desirable; natural light generally plays no part in the articulation of these spaces, which may be considered as “black boxes” or almost-theatres. The idea of threshold is minimally

observed, with most layout displaying sudden abrupt transitions from profane to sacred. Iconography, at least in the traditional sense, is restricted to the minimum necessary though the main space perhaps in part-compensation tends to be highly decorated.

In this context, significance or the sacralization of space is achieved by several functional means: by artificial light, by the positioning and richness of linings, by color, by the directional placement of furniture, occasionally by stage and PA systems; but always it is accompanied by the complete understanding of the procedures of the ritual by the congregation. The intensity of the religious experience contained within is acontextual and completely independent of the architecture of the container.


The containers indeed are nondescript and generally, at the urban level, unflagged; we only need to view the photograph of the entrance to the Al-Mustapha mosque in the Masjid Community Centre to understand this. They do not seek to dominate surroundings or command vistas; they may be considered analogous to the position of the Irish non-established churches in the 18th and 19th centuries, often found hidden down side lanes and buried deep within urban blocks, seeking only to practice faith near their congregation, quietly and unobserved. The older Catholic churches bear witness to this uncertain early time, before the triumphal emergence of later days.

The images in this part of the exhibition are inevitably people-centered, being demonstrably less to do with the buildings themselves, and the photo-essay form reveals the spirit of this quiet revolution most appropriately. The photographs are the result of long hours by the photographer, Eugene Langan, of talking with communities, of gaining trust sufficiently to allow full camera access to places of worship during worship. It is of immense credit to Langan and symptomatic of his patience, professionalism, and profound interest in the human condition that he



Entrance to the Tallaght Mosque in the Greenhills Business Center, southwest of central Dublin, Ireland.

managed to win the acceptance and trust of the various communities that are the subjects of his exceptional photographs. Great thanks are also due to the communities for their courage in accepting and welcoming the curiosity of outsiders.

In conclusion, this exhibition seeks to explore the changing landscape of faith in Dublin and the hitherto barely documented re-use, adaption, and re-appropriation of existing space to meet this need. It portrays the city as a place of dynamic change, of human ingenuity, and of tremendous community spirit, against a background of economic turmoil and uncertainty. The fundamental aim has been to document and transmit part of the message that cities carry, and have always carried—that of hope for the future. 

Gathered together for prayer at the Tallaght Mosque.



A Dialogue on Sacred Space

By Ozayr Saloojee and Richard Vosko

Editor's Note: The Tenth Anniversary Celebration of the Muslim-Roman Catholic Dialogue in the Capital District of New York took place on June 2, 2015 at the new Al-Hidaya Center and Mosque, Latham, New York, designed by Reza Hourmanesh (photo across page). The event was called "Sacred Spaces" and featured illustrated lectures by Ozayr Saloojee, associate professor of architecture at the University of Minnesota, and Richard Vosko, a liturgical designer from Clifton Park, New York. Both are editorial advisors to Faith & Form. What follows are excerpts from their presentations.

Ozayr Saloojee: Unity Through Diversity

THE SACRED ARCHITECTURE OF ISLAM, like the faith itself, is not homogeneous. While there are architectural or spatial conventions that are common (universal, even) the forms of this faith are, in the very best nature of the tradition, about celebrating the notion of "unity through diversity." Whether speaking of the great mosques of Djenne and Timbuktu, the expansive heritage of Mameluk, Egypt, or the contemporary mosques of Turkey that sit side by side with the great Ottoman exemplars of Hoca Mimar Sinan, whether we look at the work of Hasan Fathy, Abdulwahid al-Wakil, Paolo Portoghesi's Rome Mosque, or Bjarke Ingels' winning entry for an Albanian Mosque, there is an overwhelming multiplicity in the sacred architecture of Islam. This is, in a way, a kind of spatial echo of the Qur'anic verse that notes: "We have created you from nations and tribes so that you may know one another." This diversity of form, of expression, of detail and ornament, of pattern and process, is ultimately about unity and community. From difference we attain understanding, harmony, accord.

There is nothing definitive about the construction or making of space through the texts of the Qur'an. In contrast, while verses from Kings and Chronicles may give us concrete dimensions and proportions of Solomon's Temple, in the Islamic world analogous passages from the Qur'an are probabilistic in nature, speaking to qualities of space that emphasize

beauty, serenity, and wonder, emphasizing that the ultimate purpose of creation is a recognition of God's majesty, mercy, and elusive beauty. The sacred architecture of the Islamic world—buildings, cities, urban form—are all tied to equally diverse histories. For Muslims, these spaces are rooted in the spiritual and ethical framework of Islam, not only the imperatives of desires of human beings.

The forms of this faith therefore celebrate, at their most fundamental level, the Oneness of God (*Tauheed* in Arabic), and they serve as spatial catalysts that help facilitate the spiritual journey of a worshipper towards God. These architectures, after all, create a regular axis between anywhere on this planet (upon which humans have been placed as stewards and vicegerents, according to the Qur'an) to the Ka'ba in Mecca, believed by Muslims to have been first built by Adam, then restored by Abraham and Ismail, and lastly cared for by Muhammad. This is perhaps the ultimate exemplar of unity through diversity, that the manifold communities of Muslims around the world (from America to Zambia) all turn towards this First House, recognizing the larger arc of a spiritual and community ethos that underpins all the spaces of Islam—past, present, and future.

Embodied within this larger narrative are other constants in the architecture of Islam: that these spaces are not merely spaces, but are embodiments of a deep environmental

ethic--of sustainability, of resiliency, of landscape and terrain. This is a religious tradition that does not have the sculptural legacy and emphasis of the Renaissance or the Baroque, but what it does have is a deep and profound well of symbolic clarity, a fundamental connection (not just literal) to narratives and stories of Islamic views of life. While there is less of the plastic brilliance of Bernini in the architecture of Islam, there is rather the subtle genius of unnamed stonemasons and craftspeople who tile the *zelij* patterns of the Qarawiyyin Mosque in Fez, the Mosque of Hassan II in Casablanca, the carved *muqarnas* stalactites of the Süleymaniye mosque in Istanbul, or the serene interior of the Sancaklar mosque 500 years later on the outskirts of the great metropolis.

The form of this faith and the faith of this form are deeply intertwined, connected in a timeless dialogue of space and spirit, tradition and modernity, meaning and expression. Like the other great architectural examples of the Abrahamic traditions, the sacred architecture of Islam offers a glimpse at an ocean of difference, of cultural expression and regional variety. Like all sacred architecture, these spaces can often be contested and provocative, generating strong sentiment and opinion (both inside and outside the community). They are, however, at their most meaningful when they act as bridges to understanding, to engagement, to knowing each other.



Richard Vosko: Creating Common Ground

OUR ANCESTORS IN FAITH SENSED that their lives were affected by a higher being or power. They set aside spaces and erected objects and buildings to mark their experiences with their gods or goddesses. There are ancient references to holy places in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur'an. In the Tanakh, God saw that all of creation was good. (Genesis 1:24) Jacob saw angels on a ladder in his dream and thought it must be the house of God. (Genesis 28:10-19) Moses stood on holy ground near a burning bush. (Exodus 3:1-15) Solomon built the First Temple symbolizing the presence of God among the Israelites. (1 Kings 6:11-13)

The Christian Testament speaks of the dwelling place of the holy one in metaphorical terms. The apostle Paul said, "Your bodies are God's temples," (1 Corinthians 3:16) and "You are living stones." (1 Peter 2:5) Early church writers reminded their audiences that Christians did not build temples to honor God. Of course, the history of Christian architecture reveals a very different understanding of these figures of speech.

In the Sahih Bukhari (one of six prophetic traditions of Sunni Islam) Ibrahim said, "Allah has ordered me to build a house here, pointing to a hillock higher than the land surrounding it." (Volume 4, Book 55, Number 583) The Prophet added, "Then they raised the foundations of the House (i.e. the Ka'ba). Then Ibrahim and Ismail prayed, "Our Lord, accept [this] from us. Indeed You are the Hearing,

the Knowing." (Qur'an, Surat Al-Baqarah 2:127-128).


These three religions were birthed from the same father (Abraham) and two mothers (Sarah and Hagar) and each seeks to retain harmonious relationships with their supernatural heroes. According to all three faith traditions, rituals of prayer coupled with charitable works are two ways to express love of God and neighbor. An important feature in each religion is the practice of building structures for the purpose of strengthening bonds in the community, worshiping God, and studying the sacred texts.

As a liturgical designer I have noticed there are several common elements that contribute to the honorific claim that these are "sacred" spaces. While doctrinal differences may hinder the dialogue among religions, there are artistic, architectural, and liturgical facets in our houses of prayer that create a common ground. The most noticeable commonality is the description of sacred spaces as metaphors. They symbolize who we are, what we believe, and how we behave in public. We shape our places of prayer and they shape us. Here are a few examples:

On the outside of our buildings we create pathways to remind us of our pilgrimages in life. Magnificent doors greet us and symbolically open up unimaginable possibilities. Domes, peaks, and towers point beyond this earthly realm to signal perhaps there are alternative ways to live. There are solar collectors

and wind turbines on the property to help produce and conserve energy. Collectively our buildings are more environmentally and user friendly than ever before.

On the inside there are other similarities. A baptismal font, a mikvah, or a *wudu* tap is available for initiation or purification purposes. An inviting lobby affords room for greeting each other and related activities. There are spaces for offices and different meetings. The interiors of many churches, mosques, and synagogues use glazing to admit more natural light. The worship center itself shows similarities. In many synagogues the ark houses the Torah on the east wall. In mosques the *qibla* points to Mecca. In a more traditional way many churches and synagogues are returning the sanctuary, chancel, or bimah to the center of the space. There it fosters an egalitarian spirit and increases congregational engagement with rituals and prayer leaders.

Some of these houses of worship also are places of memory of deceased loved ones and of spiritual models — holy men and women. The buildings serve as narrations linking the past and present with the visions of the community. And, finally, these buildings are expressions of beauty. Appropriate scale, proper proportions, natural materials, and pleasant colors are touchstones stirring the sensation that these are indeed "sacred" spaces set aside for extraordinary purposes. 

Why a Mosque?

Using the building type as a pedagogical design education tool.

By Daniel Davis, AIA, LEED AP

The University of Hartford's Master of Architecture program, accredited by the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) is required to demonstrate that each graduate possesses the knowledge and skills defined by the NAAB's Student Performance Criteria. Two of these criteria are "History and Global Culture" and "Cultural Diversity and Social Equity," in which students are expected to demonstrate an understanding of cultural norms and the diverse needs, values, behavioral norms, and social and spatial patterns of different cultures and individuals. For nearly a decade, one way we have addressed these criteria in our fall semester second-year graduate design studio is for students to research, program, and design an Islamic Community Center, which includes among other things, a mosque. This project provides a unique educational opportunity in many ways, requiring the students to understand and appreciate how architecture should reflect not only its place, program, client, budget, and time, and also the politically and emotionally sensitive issues it can evoke.

Hartford's student population is diverse, including native and international students of many faiths and cultures; typically there is only a small number of Muslim students. The majority of the students have little if any exposure to the Muslim faith and people, so there is a great deal of research to do on this six-week-long, challenging design project. In an effort to keep the project fresh, we have used different sites, which all encompass different

Top: Design for a mosque by E. Kelsy Wisniewski for a site in Montreal creates a glowing jewel box on the street.

Center: E. Kelsy Wisniewski's design of the prayer hall encompasses a glass box within a surrounding decorative scrim.

Bottom: Prayer hall in a mosque designed by Kayla Verbitsky is naturally illuminated through the cutout text of the Qur'an.

THE AUTHOR IS A PROFESSOR OF ARCHITECTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD IN WEST HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT. ILLUSTRATIONS ARE DRAWN FROM PAST DESIGN STUDIO PROJECTS.



issues. Sites have varied from New York City and the Park51 Islamic community center, to Hartford in the shadow of the state capitol, to Montreal, Quebec, in residential and downtown locations.

We kickoff the project by visiting a mosque at the Islamic Association of Greater Hartford in the nearby Connecticut town of Berlin for a tour of their recently built facility and the Friday afternoon prayer. For many students this is the first time that they have visited an Islamic center or mosque. One year a student initially refused to go inside, but eventually changed his mind and joined the other students. We are always greeted with a smile from Dr. Ali Antar, who is a terrific host and able to explain things about the facility and its function to the students with a friendly manner and a great sense of humor. We are eventually separated into two groups, male and female, remove our shoes, and are directed to our appropriate prayer spaces to observe the prayer ceremony, which is presented in a mix of English and Arabic. The students learn that Muslims do not worship a different God, that Allah is simply the Arabic word for God with an identical name in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; consequently Allah is the same God worshiped by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The students also recognize that the Muslim prayer hall, even though it is deliberately quite bare and has different proportions, resembles the prayer spaces of other faiths. Their reaction to the visit is always that they feel welcomed and comfortable within the facility, and by the people they meet and speak with.

We then visit the Islamic Study Center at the Hartford Seminary, where we receive an informative presentation from Dr. Yahya Michot, professor of Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations. Michot is an Islamic Scholar and a convert to Islam himself. He presents and discusses a great many mosque structures, from the ancient to the new, around the world. The students are always impressed by his knowledge, especially when he notes that he only presents mosque structures that he has visited. He's clearly an expert on Islamic architecture, but more specifically on mosque architecture and design.

This past year we were blessed with the opportunity to include Dr. Tammy Gaber, MRAIC, assistant professor at the Laurentian University School of Architecture, of Sudbury, Ontario, an expert on gender issues in mosques, and she shared her paper with the class, "Beyond the Divide: Women's Spaces in Canadian Mosques." Gaber's research raised many interesting issues with the students regarding how the genders are often treated



Kayla Verbitsky's mosque design for a site in Montreal is snugly integrated with the site.

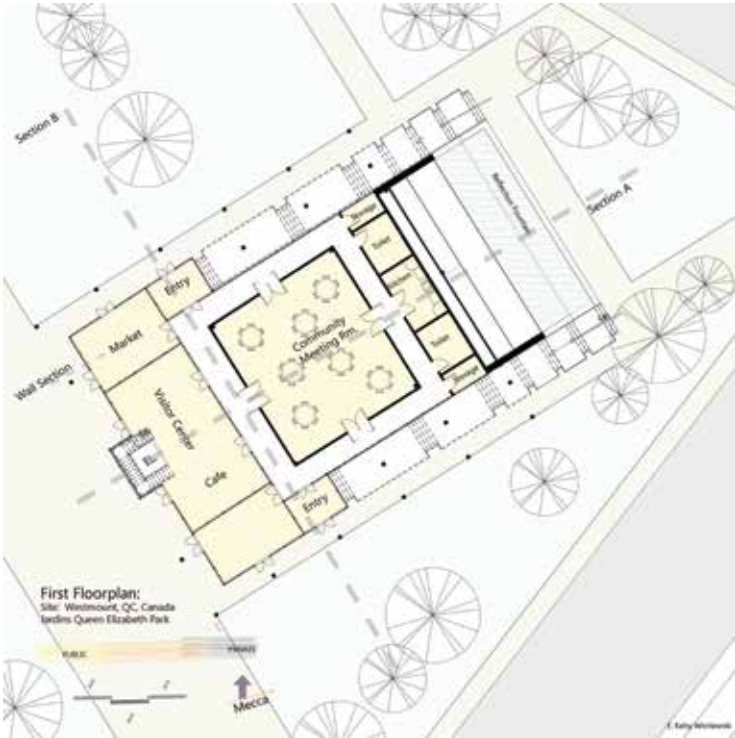
differently in Islamic centers and mosque structures. Gaber also participated on the final design competition and design reviews.

Prior to developing the project program of required spaces and their sizes, the students continue their preparation by researching and analyzing the following: Islamic and mosque architecture, elements, and decoration; other Islamic community center and mosque precedents; green and sustainable opportunities (the designs strive for LEED Silver certification);

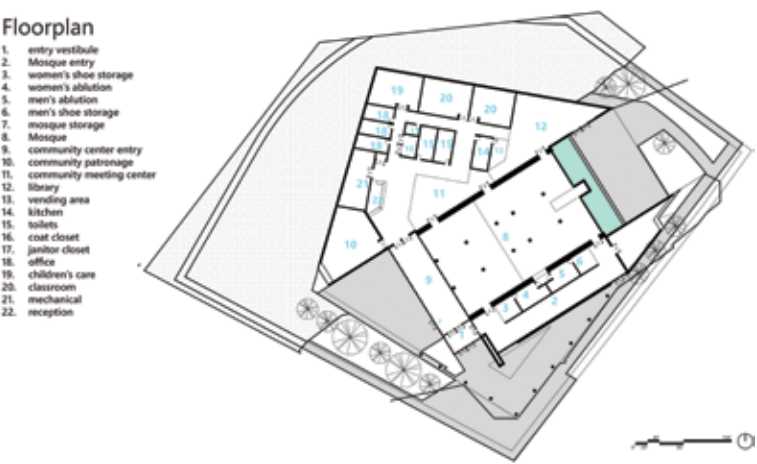
the historical/political/emotional context of the site; the location of other religious structures near the site; local planning and zoning requirements; views both to and from the site; adjacent street elevations; climatic influences; prevailing winds; sun/shade/shadow studies; site access by foot/car/truck; and local area public transportation both above and below grade. The students also build a physical scale model and a computer-generated digital model of the site and surrounding neighborhood.



Design for an Islamic Center of Greater Hartford, by Anthony Papa, uses a central minaret as a landmark. The project won a 2014 Faith & Form/IFRAA Award for Student Work.



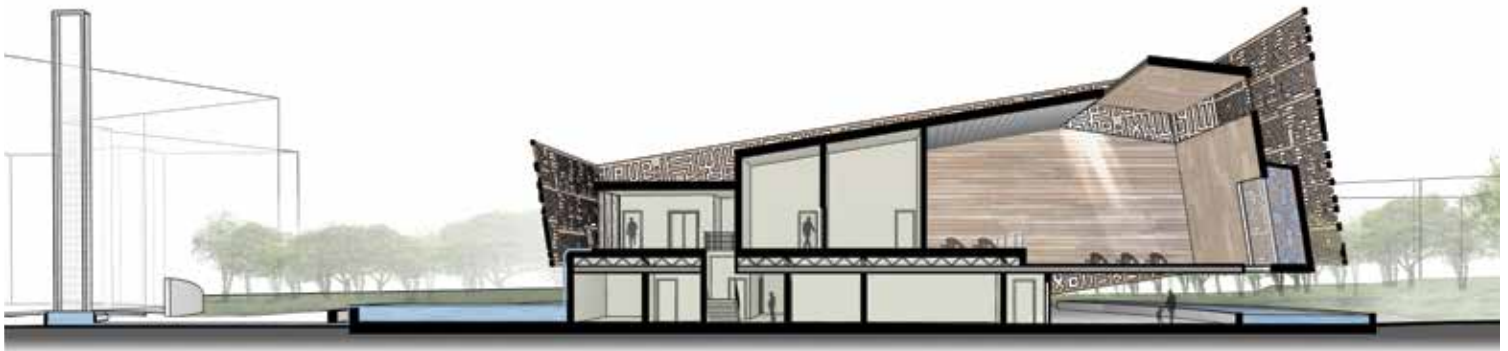
Ground floor plan of E. Kelsy Wisniewski's design.



Ground floor plan of Kayla Verbitsky's scheme.



Rendering of Anthony Papa's Islamic Center of Greater Hartford demonstrates how the building rises to welcome visitors.




Section through Anthony Papa's Islamic Center of Greater Hartford shows how the prayer hall is elevated above grade, hovering over a pool.

The project is assigned in early November, has a preliminary review in early December, and is due in mid-December. All students are required to exhibit their projects in the architecture gallery at the University of Hartford's Harry Jack Gray Center for other architecture students and faculty to view. The students then present their projects to a diverse group of invited architecture and expert jurors. The day ends with the announcement of awards given to the three best projects--prizes generously sponsored by the Greater Hartford Islamic Coalition.

Over the years the projects have exhibited a great sense of cultural awareness and

empathy, are varied in their design, but always sensitive to the discussion, controversy, issues, and phobias that come with this building type and this type of assignment. The students approach the project as a community center with a prayer hall or as an Islamic study center with a restaurant, and not solely as a mosque. Some open the prayer space to views by people visiting the facility or just passing by, in an attempt to remove the sense of secrecy and to demonstrate that Muslims worship very much like those of the other Abrahamic faiths. I find it interesting that it is typically impossible to identify a project designed by an Islamic student from

one designed by a non-Muslim student.

After the reviews are complete, many of the jurors share their thoughts with the guests and students. To our surprise, we've learned that architecture can indeed successfully deal with politically and emotionally sensitive issues. We see firsthand how the effort to inform and educate the students in the early weeks of the project allows them to grow and mature as architectural designers, and to appreciate the power of architecture to address sensitive political and cultural issues. I am equally certain that, thanks to this project, our students grow in their understanding of diverse global, cultural, and social issues. 

A Reflection on 'Care for Our Common Home'

By Roberto Chiotti

"A sober look at our world shows that the degree of human intervention, often in the service of business interests and consumerism, is actually making our earth less rich and beautiful, ever more limited and grey, even as technological advances and consumer goods continue to abound limitlessly."

"We seem to think that we can substitute an irreplaceable and irretrievable beauty with something which we have created ourselves."

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*

The much anticipated papal pronouncement on the environment, "Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si* of the Holy Father Francis On Care For Our Common Home," was promulgated on June 18, 2015, which coincidentally fell on the initial day of proceedings of an international conference I was co-chairing at Toronto, Canada's OCAD University (Ontario College of Art and Design), the institution where I currently hold the position of Assistant Professor and Sustainability Officer for the Faculty of Design. Our "Urban Ecologies 2015" conference was formulated on the understanding that, more than ever before, major urban centers were going to be at the forefront of the transformation and change necessary to accelerate a sustainable human presence. The framing of the conference set out to consider the largest possible context of all debates—the limits of our planetary ecosystem. It was within this "Big Picture" context that the conference hoped to challenge the current economic, political, and social frameworks that generate the design of our urban infrastructure and built environment.

The timely publication of the papal encyclical and the responses that immediately followed generated a palpable "buzz" for conference attendees. Pope Francis had just added a significant, authoritative voice to the many others who have been critical of our destructive models of industrial production and consumption, with their resultant social inequities and havoc wrought upon the very systems that support life on the planet. To the environmental dialogue, his encyclical introduces a uniquely spiritual perspective, one that identifies the planet as a sacred reality to be protected and cared for as our common home. In the words of St. Francis of Assisi, the pope's acknowledged guide and inspiration, (10) he "...invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness." (12) [Editor's note: citations refer to the 246 numbered sections of the encyclical]

In subsequent chapters, Pope Francis provides several references from Thomas Aquinas, Teilhard de Chardin, John Paul II, and others who understood the universe in all of its diversity and interconnectedness

as a form of sacred scripture in and of itself, reiterating that "The entire material universe speaks of God's love... Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God." (84) He quotes my own Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops as rightly pointing out that "From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine." (84)

I see this as constituting a definitive shift away from understandings that identified the divine as transcendent to the natural world, towards those in favor of embracing the natural world as the very threshold where the meeting of the human and divine occurs. (88) Subsequently, care for God's creation becomes not only a moral religious imperative, but also a core value of what it means for humans to be spiritual.

"*Laudato Si, mi' Signore*" – "Praise be to you, my Lord," the title of the encyclical, is the oft-repeated refrain by St. Francis in his *Canticle of the Creatures*. The pope reminds us that in the words of the canticle, "...our home is like a sister with whom we share life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us." (1) "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains us and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs." (1)

But the pope immediately goes on to lament that we have distanced ourselves from our sister, having forgotten that "...our very bodies are made of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters." (2) Due to the violence in our hearts, we have plundered her gifts at will, having laid waste her soil, water, air, and all forms of life endowed her by God. (2) As humans, we are not just on the earth... we are of the earth. We share her chemistry, her DNA. Our human story is part of her 4.5-billion-year earth story, so when we wantonly destroy a part of her, we destroy a part of ourselves.

A portion of the document is dedicated to identifying the human roots of the current ecological crisis. Pope Francis challenges the basis of modern anthropocentrism, acknowledging that, "...an inadequate presentation of Christian anthropology gave rise to a wrong understanding of the relationship between human beings and the world... 'dominion' over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship." We can no longer assume that we can get away with privileging our needs over the needs of the planet that sustains us. (116) However, he feels that yielding a misguided anthropocentrism in

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Photo: Wikimedia Commons/Alfredo Borba

Pope Francis in St. Peter's Square

favor of “biocentrism” will merely substitute one imbalance for another, creating more problems without solving current ones. (118) Instead, he defines what is necessary as an “integral ecology,” one that recognizes the interrelatedness of everything and our responsibility as humans to bring about a fair, just, and responsible relationship to each other and to all of creation. (137) “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental.” (139) He makes the case that an “integral ecology” can only be achieved when we see the interconnectedness and interdependence between our environmental, economic, and social ecologies. “We urgently need a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge, including economics, in the service of a more integral and integrating vision. Today, the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work-related, and urban contexts, nor from how individuals relate to themselves, which leads in turn to how they relate to others and to the environment.” (141)

Pope Francis entreats us to listen to the groans of the earth and refers us to John Paul II’s first encyclical, which called for a “global ecological conversion” (5) and the need to “safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic human ecology.” (6) *Laudato Si* appeals to Christians

and non-believers alike to cooperate with each other, calling “...for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet.” (14) “We require a new and universal solidarity. As the bishops of Southern Africa have stated: ‘Everyone’s talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God’s creation.’” (14)

What does *Laudato Si* mean for us architects and designers, and for our students and interns? I believe that it challenges us to design as if the planet were our client, ensuring a responsible use of her resources in their extraction, processing, and ongoing use throughout the life of the buildings we design in service to creating urban built environments that are generative, equitable, and enhance the quality of life for their inhabitants and the ecosystems within which they exist. The educators among us are challenged to inspire and empower our students with the vision and skills to design a future worth inheriting. To do this, I believe we can draw inspiration from the life of the pope’s own namesake, guide, and inspiration, St. Francis, who he acknowledges as “... the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology...St. Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically...He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.” (10) 

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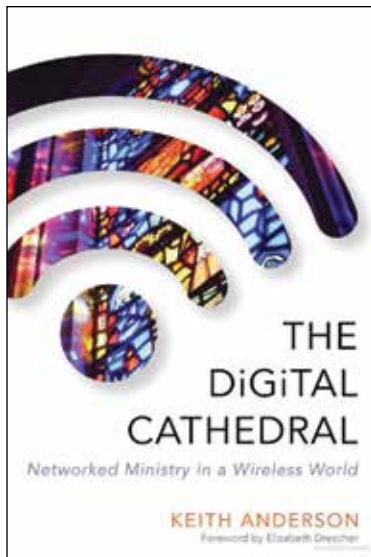
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The Digital Cathedral. Keith Anderson. New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2015.

Lutheran Pastor Keith Anderson's new book is a penetrating, intelligent, innovative, and inspiring vision of where religious belief might be heading in a networked, relational, digital world. The term "Digital Cathedral" might at first be off-putting to some readers: "Oh, no, not another edgy, trendy bro-mide on how the Church as we know it will soon be just a flood of Tweets, Selfies, and Likes." But this is not Anderson's message at all. His view of the future Church

combines an ancient sense of a networked community with the world as we live in it now. He writes about how faith communities are breaking through the barriers of their buildings, taking Church to the streets and other places you typically don't expect to find it, and in the process creating a community of faith that feels much closer to how the first few centuries of Christians experienced "church," without the benefit of religious architecture.

In many ways, the past two decades have been challenging to the field of religious architecture—spending on such buildings among Christian and Jewish communities has declined, mainline faith traditions have seen their numbers shrink, we now live in a world where the largest single segment of the population describes themselves as "Nones": affiliated with no organized religious group. Is there a future for religious architecture at all?

Reading Anderson's book from this perspective, I find much to be hopeful about. Yes, the image of "church" is changing and traditional notions of where one goes to be "holy" or "sacred" or "in communion" is radically transforming. Anderson offers a new view of where

one finds sacred space: at a bus stop, in a tavern, in a barber shop—almost anywhere that people gather together outside of home or work. These sacred "Third Places" are made holy by the networked community of people who are in relation with each other, either physically or digitally (Anderson writes about both). He wisely chooses cathedrals as his model, not churches, because, as he writes, cathedrals are not just monumental architectural landmarks, but "deeply connected to their cities, regions, and the people who live there. Cathedrals are networked, relational, incarnational communities that include people with a surprising range of beliefs and practices." Architects need to appreciate cathedrals in this fashion, not just as buildings but as focal points of human relationships in faith. And what is the Digital Cathedral? Anderson describes it this way: "...an expansive and holistic understanding of church—one that extends ministry in digital and local gathering spaces, recognizes the sacred in everyday life, and embodies a networked, relational, and incarnational approach to ministry relationship in a digital age."

This new understanding of church presents a new challenge to architects and designers of sacred space. They may no longer be called upon just to design sacred precincts that wall themselves off from the neighborhood and the city. Instead, we will find ourselves thinking about sacred space in fresh, new ways: How does an architect create sacred space in a coffee house? How might architecture help to sanctify the disposition of ashes on a train platform, as commuters scurry to work or to home? Writer Elizabeth Drescher coined the phrase "in cathedral," which recognizes the sacred in everyday life, in everyday places, and the witness of believers beyond the confines of a building. How can architects design "in cathedral"?

Anderson closes his book with a note on Shingeru Ban's "Cardboard Cathedral" built in ChristChurch, New Zealand in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake that destroyed the city's Anglican cathedral in 2011. He sees Ban's building, made primarily of paper, as transitional and provisional. It is a metaphor for the work we are called to do now, moving into a new time of faith. Architects and designers should read this book as a call to contribute to this new time.

—Michael J. Crosbie

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The Greening of Architecture: A Critical History and Survey of Contemporary Sustainable Architecture and Urban Design. Phillip James Tabb and A. Senem Deviren. Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013.

Co-authors Phillip James Tabb of Texas A&M University and A. Senem Deviren of Istanbul Technical University have provided us with a thoroughly researched and documented, seminal volume on the emergence and evolution of the contemporary move-

ment towards the “greening” of architecture, “...from the visionary and technological explorations of the 1960’s to the more biophilic and infrastructural green propositions of today.” Together, they also draw from the lens of their own extensive knowledge of sustainable design principles and the nature of place making to provide a narrative that is scholarly, engaging, and very accessible.

The authors deftly navigate through the varied and complex set of emerging values, defining influences, incremental responses, and evolving metrics and technologies that each of the five decades they explore have uniquely contributed towards our current understanding of what is required to effectively reduce the ecological footprint of our built environment and co-exist more benignly within the ecosystems that we inhabit. They draw from a substantial range of international examples, diagrams, and photographs to support and illustrate their text.

More significantly, they establish the context for this journey by illuminating that the term “architecture” itself, when subjected to an etymological exploration of the word’s three Greek roots, suggests inherent green principles of design within its very definition. Their unpacking of the term in this way establishes that architecture is “the First Principles that are well-fitted to a context or woven into a dynamic place.” Similarly, in their concluding remarks, the authors reiterate, “The First Principles of architecture remain a timeless guide, which are continually interpreted and positively contributing to an alignment with the mutable processes of the greening of architecture.” They posit that the natural fulfillment of this alignment would presuppose that eventually all architecture “...will naturally embody and fully actualize effective green principles.”

For *Faith & Form* readers and, in particular, for those of us engaged in the design of sacred space, this understanding provides a wonderful

opportunity to reflect upon the archetypal religious truths or “First Principles” that we attempt to make manifest in built form. Studying theology in a Catholic Christian tradition taught me that revelation comes to us through sacred scripture, and through God’s creation. Similarly, my expectation is that all faith traditions embrace an understanding of creation as sacred reality. This means that there is every reason to not only ensure that faith-based architecture incorporates sustainable design strategies as an *a priori* value, but that we also strive to give meaningful and tangible expression to creation as revelatory.

With the growing sense of urgency to find appropriate responses to global warming, what better time to reclaim this consciousness from our religious traditions and demonstrate to the secular world that people of faith can make an invaluable contribution in the discourse that seeks to, as the author’s referenced Brundtland Commission Report in 1987 defines sustainability, “...meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

How this goal is accomplished is limited only by our imagination. *The Greening of Architecture* offers practical insights and resourceful information on how the architectural and urban planning world has addressed this challenge over the past five decades. Reading this book and becoming truly attentive to the diversity of awesome wonder and creativity that so generously and profoundly declares itself throughout God’s creation may prove to be the defining font of inspiration that we need as we seek to envision a viable future for humankind.

—Roberto Chiotti

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WHAT'S PAST IS PROLOGUE?

THE LAST WORD * RICHARD S. VOSKO

Shakespeare used it. John Toynbee used it. It's engraved on the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C. "What is Past is Prologue" is a phrase that commonly refers to the influence history has on creating a context for understanding and maybe even shaping current events. I experienced an interesting twist on this expression while in conversation with 100 new presidents of Reform Jewish congregations from across the US and Canada at the Scheidt Seminar, sponsored by the Union for Reform Judaism. The focus on successful synagogue building projects was tempered with a more pressing question: "What does it mean to be Jewish in the 21st century?" As a Christian I was fascinated by the stories told by these leaders of some of the most progressive Jewish cohorts in North America. Recent trends in religious behavior affecting all mainstream Christian churches present the same challenges for Jews. The big question was not about whether Judaism would survive but "how" Judaism would survive.


The now ubiquitous claim that one can be spiritual without being religious has led to a rise in the numbers of Jews who celebrate Jewishness but are not affiliated with a congregation. In general, the increase in disenfranchised members is due, in part, to the worn out prayers and music, the delivery of uninspiring sermons, and dissatisfaction with the way organized religions deal with real-time issues. These factors, plus aging congregations, dated infrastructures, and unreliable sources of revenue create an immense challenge for any religion, which is why religion has become a marketable commodity today. The competition is keen.

I was curious whether these leaders thought that returning to the past, that is, to a more traditional practice of Jewish rituals in

conventional synagogue buildings, might be the way to attract younger generations. The answer I heard was a loud "no!"

The solutions were more about taking risks and "thinking outside the box." The key word was "relationships." Pining for the "good old days" and thinking that if it worked "for past generations" it will work today was not on the agenda. Instead, the strategy focused on challenging the assumptions of the congregation, making connections with other religions and other Jewish traditions, seeing Judaism in new refreshing ways, and recognizing patterns of behavior especially among younger generations.

What role does the synagogue building play in this period of religious transformation? Having a place set aside for praising and thanking God is still a high priority in most religions. The sacred space does not have to be palatial but functional. What matters most is not the edifice but the inclusive and diverse relationships that are fostered within the congregation and with others in the larger community. More Jews and Christians alike are gathering with youthful, non-conforming, charismatic leaders in ordinary places as well as by means of social media.

Jewish programs and worship will undoubtedly change. This might alter the way synagogue buildings look. The aphorism "what is past is prologue" is no longer a sufficient panacea for maintaining relevance in societies that are changing faster than you can Tweet your followers. What might work is to learn to be open to change. 

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The Spring 2016 issue will explore the myriad roles of landscape in spiritual belief.

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