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Viele Religionen—ein Raum?! Analysen, Diskussionen und Konzepte

Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2015. 240 pages, € 24,80,
ISBN 978-3-7329-0065-7 (flexcover)

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For several years now, research in the area of religious studies has been increasingly directed towards theoretical and empirical analyses to define the relationship between space and religion. The focus is both on investigating materials and on individuals' religious activities, thoughts and feelings. Multi-faith spaces as a form of religious contact in pluralised settings have rarely been investigated from a historical perspective.

The anthology, edited by Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler (Philipps University of Marburg), Mirko Roth (Philipps University of Marburg) and Bernadette Schwarz-Boenneke (Archdiocese of Cologne), results from a seminar entitled: "Viele Religionen—ein Raum!? Multireligiöse Räume als Ausdruck der Transformation von Religion in der Moderne: Pluralität—Individualität—Institutionalisierung", which was held in July 2013 in collaboration with the Philipps University of Marburg (Department for the History of Religion and the Institute for the Construction of Church Buildings) and the Herbert Quant Foundation, Bad Homburg. The anthology consciously broaches the issue of historical perspective, and attempts to combine this with present-day phenomena.

The interdisciplinary anthology features authors from the fields of sociology, religious studies, and Christian archaeology, along with

representatives from the domains of architecture, theology and various institutions. It addresses the issue of different religions sharing prayer rooms in schools, universities, hospitals and airports. Ultimately, these are all public institutions. As levels of pluralism in society have risen, the significance of the major Christian faiths as the dominant providers of religion has fallen. As a result, multi-faith “Zwischenräume” (Beinhauer-Köhler, p. 55) have been established, offering space for individuals to experience religion themselves. The volume is divided into three sections and closes with a note by Beinhauer-Köhler:

- Reflections,
- Types of Spaces,
- Insights

The first section, “Reflexionen: Machtstrukturen, Konfliktfelder, Nutzungskonzepte” (pp. 17-98), begins with an article by the sociologist *Markus Schroer* who sees current spatial arrangements of functional differentiation as part of a process of resolution. He uses the term “Räumliche Diffusion” (p. 21) to describe the situation in which a broad range of practices are no longer to be found solely in the locations ascribed to them, but also in other locations as well. In this manner, religious practices can easily slot into multi-faith spaces, for example, in airports, because the power and authority of the Christian Churches are dwindling. In addition to the shifting of the practical side of religion into the private space, the exterior appearance of sacred architecture is also changing. To a certain extent, it is near-impossible to tell religious buildings apart from museums or other public buildings. He terms this “Räumliche Inversion” (p. 30). The traditional function of churches, namely less shaping and structuring the public space, is thereby reversed, with public spaces

being less structured because observers are asked to impose their own interpretations on them.

Alexander-Kenneth Nagel, a scholar of religion, examines multi-faith spaces with regard to processes of change. However, he focuses less on design concepts and theological justifications for multi-faith spaces, concentrating his efforts instead on a discussion of these spaces as a material expression of religious communication in response to religious pluralism (p. 37). He uses empirical examples to demonstrate which players use the spaces to represent themselves, which conflicts have to be resolved in the construction of the spaces, and that a line has to be drawn between inter-faith and multi-faith spaces.

The two articles following those just discussed expand on the previous two theoretically based articles by examining a perspective that is often neglected in the discussion on multi-faith spaces: historical comparisons. Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler takes recourse to the sociocultural significance of “Zwischenräume” (p. 56) and a selection of case studies from the Islamic areas of India, Jerusalem and other areas in Asia to show that it is possible to determine three types of spaces: politically intended community spaces, conflict-laden spaces that are required by several religious players at once, and spaces open to any religion (p. 72). The historically derived types can assist with the investigation of contemporary phenomena. Ute Versteegen examined multiconfessional arrangements in her historico-cultural analysis, using examples of Christian/Muslim pilgrimage sites in the Holy Land, Latin/Greek parish churches of the late Middle Ages in the eastern Mediterranean, and Central European “Simultankirchen” (p. 94) to show that regional political and social groupings determine how spaces are used by multiple religions simultaneously.

The second section, “Raumtypen: Institutionen auf der Suche nach religiösen Gemeinschaftsräumen” (pp. 101-146) contains two articles that

deal with “rooms of silence” in schools and universities. *Alina Bloch* uses descriptions of rooms and concepts to show that, in terms of schools, there are two major aspects to be considered when setting up a space of this kind. Firstly, the space should be a place of tranquillity; secondly, the spaces should allow (inter-) faith celebrations to be held. This gives the spaces a unique role in the otherwise rather hectic school day. *Stephanie Matthias* shows in her article that ‘Räume der Stille’ (‘rooms of silence’) in universities, while originally set up as secular spaces, quickly turned into religious ones as a result of their use by religious students. This makes it clear that spaces develop dynamically beyond their original concept.

The third and longest section, “Einblicke: Räume zwischen den Religionen in Deutschland und der Schweiz” (pp. 149-227), presents six empirical examples. *Rudolf Steinberger* uses the development of the ‘Haus der Stille’ at Frankfurt’s Goethe University to illustrate the founding concept, construction and usage of the space, and emphasises in conclusion that it represents an attempt to reflect the religious pluralism of society within a secular university. The article by *Gerda Hauck-Hieronimi* concentrates on Berne’s ‘Haus der Religionen’ (‘House of Religions’) in Switzerland, where she works as Coordinator. She discusses the fact that religious minorities often lack a suitable space, and explains that the ‘House of Religions’ was founded as part of the city’s endeavours to create a space fit for shared spiritual use by different religions. The two theologians *Gregor Homberg* and *Roland Stolte* use their article to present ‘The House of One’, a building of prayer and teaching in Berlin, which is intended to promote peaceful dialogue. Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities are involved in its realisation. At the same time, the authors advocate a comparative style of theology that recognises the variety of religions and distances itself from comparisons between religions in terms of the truth of their content. The architect commissioned for the project, *Wilfried Kuehn*, gives additional

information to explain the concept behind the construction of 'The House of One', in which the spaces for each of the communities are located around a central, shared room. While the previous two examples discussed spaces designed for dialogue, Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler and Christian Meyer examine Frankfurt airport along the same lines as Steinberger does the 'House of Silence' at Frankfurt University. Airports are public spaces where prayer rooms can often be found for the use of travellers, visitors and employees. Frankfurt airport plays host to a grouping of prayer rooms for Christians, Jews and Muslims. However, inter-religious dialogue is not the focus of the rooms. The section concludes with an article by the religious scholar Christa Frateantonio who describes how a former Catholic church has been turned into a multi-faith space in which denominational and non-denominational funeral ceremonies take place. The design of the interior features Christian 'intermediary' and 'natural' (p. 226) objects.

The final perspective is offered by Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler who reacts to the various theoretical approaches and case studies with 13 points to summarise religious plural spaces. However, her points focus less on the historical examples noted at the beginning, and concentrate instead on the design of the space, the players involved, and notes on the expectations and types of use of rooms of this kind.

In previous research, multi-faith spaces were investigated as objects involved in inter-religious dialogue initiatives, or with reference to concrete examples such as 'rooms of silence'. On the one hand, the book at hand artfully highlights that multi-faith spaces can be much more diverse than case studies show. On the other hand, the anthology shows that investigation of present-day phenomena cannot succeed without the analysis of historical phenomena. The central finding of the work is that multi-faith spaces are not a new phenomenon. It also became clear that contact between religions also finds its expression in material aspects, such

as architecture and interior design. However, some follow-up questions also spring to mind after reading the book.

Some aspects are highly appreciated and could have received more space and more detailed exploration. This is especially true of the typology of multi-faith spaces proposed in the book. There are already numerous—and often similar—classifications of ‘rooms of silence’, but Beinhauer-Köhler refines these, using a historical perspective. Other typologies of ‘rooms of silence’ are predominately focused on the level of religious orientation (from mono-religious, to inter-religious, to a universal claim) and the number of different religions involved. Beinhauer-Köhler’s classification, by contrast, revolves around the form of interaction itself. The variety of pluralistic spatial arrangements past and present discussed by her demonstrates that synchronistic and diachronistic comparisons must be examined in more detail. Doing so in the context of *Viele Religionen—Ein Raum?* would have been an additional asset to an interesting book.

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