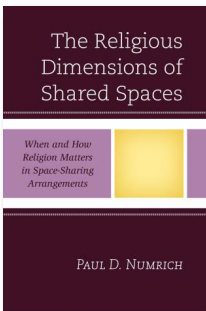


BOOK REVIEW

The Religious Dimensions of Shared Space: When and How Religion Matter in Space Sharing Arrangements. By Paul D. Numrich. Lexington Books, 2023. 290 pages. \$96.52 (hardcover). ISBN 9781793639349.



Paul Numrich categorizes his book as an effort to show how religion matters in the field of sociology. In exploring the religious dynamics on space-sharing arrangements, he asks what difference does being religious make? What invested meaning is there in “sacred spaces” and how is it used? How and why do different faith communities enter into rental arrangements? What can religious and secular space sharers learn from each other? These spaces include churches hosting congregations of different denominations, synagogues renting to community organizations, and interfaith centers where multiple religious traditions operate side by side.

With an open and honest approach, Numrich employs ethnographic methods, including participant observation and interviews with clergy, congregants, and community leaders. This gives multiple layers to his analysis and ensures that the voices of those directly involved in space-sharing arrangements are up front and center. Through his use of case studies, he presents a balanced and nuanced exploration of the complexities surrounding religious coexistence in shared physical spaces.

In Part 1 of the book, Numrich surveys “The Space-Sharing Phenomenon” in the United States. Noting the extent and reasons behind the movement of different faith groups’ cohabitation of shared buildings and spaces. He then elaborates his theoretical framework to guide and describe his research as follows: (a) investing space with meaning, (b) choosing to share space, and (c) structuring and maintaining the space-sharing agreement. Each of these categories draw upon a wide range of scholarship as he endeavors to demonstrate the role of religion.

In Part 2, Numrich presents several case studies on space-sharing. He organizes these studies into three chapters based on ownership of the space: (1) religious groups renting out their building to different congregations of the same faith tradition, (2) religious organizations who allow non-faith groups to use their space, and (3) secular organizations leasing their buildings and spaces to faith-based groups. A key aspect to Numrich's exploration is his inclusion of historical examples and contexts.

Building upon Parts 1 and 2, in Part 3 Numrich seeks to answer his questions. He identifies distinguishing traits of faith-based groups, which he calls "the religious factor," that gives them a unique characteristics in choosing to share their spaces, viz., (a) a worldview in which space sharing can be part of their vocation, (b) caring for others in times of need, and (c) being exemplars of religious reconciliation. Numrich uses these religious factors, along with nonreligious factors, to further the discussion on the role of religion in space sharing. In chapter seven he even ventures to propose what religious and secular space sharers could learn from each other. Based on his interviews, Numrich notes the core themes of his book boils down to clear expectations and relationships.

Part of Numrich's honest approach comes in his directions for further research in this area. These include expanding such investigations past the United States to other parts of the world and exploring the diversity of societies with their differing contexts and histories. I would like to add to this and ask for an expansion into Indigenous space sharing. Countries like Canada and the United States were originally built upon treaties with Indigenous groups. These treaties are considered by Indigenous people as sacred because land is sacred. For example, an excellent case study could be Gwaii Haanas National Park, which is the only national park in Canada to have a cooperative management agreement. With this partnership being between the Government of Canada and the Council of the Haida Nation. This would push the study of space-sharing beyond buildings and could also engage the Indian/Aboriginal Reservation systems present in countries such as Canada, USA, and Australia.

The Religious Dimensions of Shared Space is an excellent resource, not just in terms of its case studies and theory, but also in its appendices. Numrich includes the forms, questions, and guides he used in his study, along with additional rental agreements. In his venture to shed light into this area of religious space-sharing Numrich provides critical insights into how such arrangements both challenge and reinforce religious identities, practices, and relationships. His work is therefore invaluable to leaders of

faith-communities as they seek to live well among and within diverse religious communities.

Kevin R. McCarty
Vancouver School of Theology



The views, opinions, and positions expressed in all articles published by the *Journal of Interreligious Studies (JIRS)* are the authors' own and do not reflect or represent those of the *JIRS* staff, the *JIRS* Board of Advisors, or *JIRS* publishing partners.