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## Sacred Space/Place

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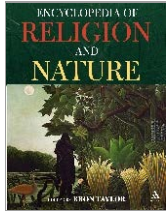
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## Oxford Reference



### The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature

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## Sacred Space/Place

Landscape, space, and place are three concepts that merge together to create the human experience of the environment. Space is the most basic concept of geography; it is the three-dimensional extent in which objects and events occur. Landscapes and places are both contained within space. Landscape provided the taken-for-granted back-drop for human activity and behavior. It is the most visible but least consciously felt aspect of regional character; it is an assemblage of sensory information, which generates a seen and felt experience of the world. Not only are there practical economic bonds between peoples and land-scapes, there are also powerful religious, social, and psychological bonds. It is through these bonds that people develop affinities with particular locales and develop a sense of place.

Part of the human quest for meaning involves the ordering of landscape into places, and all cultures have separate, dedicated, hallowed spaces. Places are discrete units of meaningful space, and are fundamental expressions of human involvement with the world. They are distinguished from landscapes not in their scale, but in their qualitative experiential dimension. Whereas landscape is part of any immediate encounter with the world, place is further distinguished through symbols and affections. Places focus landscapes around human intentions and are sources of inspiration and insight; they are centers of cultural and personal meaning.

A “sense of place” begins with interactions between people and the world and develops out of a symbolic constitution of the environment within which we exist. It involves a blending of intellect, intuition, and imagination. On one hand people feel what it is like to be at a place, and on the other hand people intellectually grasp the meaning of a place. A sense of place unfolds, then, through the application of religious, moral, and aesthetic discernment of specific locations. Place is a universal marker of identity in relation to the landscape, although expressions of this association vary culturally.

Geographical places become sacred or symbolic when they conjoin human social facts with those of nature. A sacred place, then, is a charged meeting ground between person and the other. People in diverse parts of the world have long utilized natural places in their quest to connect with the numinous. Through mythological interpretation of landscape and place, geography is transformed into cosmology. People experience discrete places of power, and these culturally defined sacred places offer a nexus between humans, the physical environment, and deities. Sacred places are symbolic, transcending their immediate physical forms; they are unique parcels of the Earth, which aid in the transformation of self.

*PAUL FAULSTICH*

### Further Reading

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**Find this resource:**

Buttimer, Ann. *Geography and the Human Spirit*. Baltimore, NJ: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

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Sack, Robert David. *Conceptions of Space in Social Thought: A Geographic Perspective*. London: Macmillan, 1980.

**Find this resource:**

Swan, James A. *Sacred Places*. Santa Fe: Bear and Company, 1990.

**Find this resource:**

See also: [BIOPHILIA](#); [ELIADE, MIRCEA](#); [GEOPHILIA](#); [SACRED GEOGRAPHY IN NATIVE NORTH AMERICA](#); [SACRED MOUNTAINS](#).

WAS THIS USEFUL?   Yes   No

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