

Research Article

# Rosaries and Prayerbooks: Sacred Objects of Spirituality and Religion on Antarctica

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## Abstract

In the language, literature, and culture of Antarctica, religion and spirituality have always played a supremely valuable, yet glaringly overlooked, role. For some people, like Antarctica itself, spirituality and religion often go unnoticed in their daily lives. Very slowly, as global warming and climate change have started to affect more people's lives in an increasingly negative way, Antarctica is slowly revealing itself in its fullness and power. As both Poles begin to unveil their strengths (and sadly, weaknesses), it is also time to examine the foundational aspects of many pieces of literature, as well as previously unrevealed and unstudied things found on Antarctica: objects of spirituality and religion. This essay seeks to explore these things and objects, whether tangible or intangible, whether past or present. Just like the construction of a house of worship, I will begin with the foundational things of religion and spirituality, which is more than just a church, temple, beach, mountain, or chapel. Then, I will continue with what many would consider the "big" things of religion and spirituality, followed by the "little" things, which are innumerable. Finally, the intangible things of religion and spirituality, as found and practiced on and about Antarctica, I will attempt to analyze. The intent is to offer here a new perspective on the sacredness of Antarctica, with the hope of growing increased awareness of concern about, and passion for Antarctica, and indeed, our planet and humanity at large.

## Keywords

Antarctica, Religion, Spirituality, Culture

## 1. Introduction

In the language, literature, and culture of Antarctica, religion and spirituality have always played a supremely valuable, yet glaringly overlooked, role. For some people, like Antarctica itself, spirituality and religion often go unnoticed in their daily lives. Very slowly, as global warming and climate change have started to affect more people's lives in an increasingly negative way, Antarctica is slowly revealing itself in its fullness and power. As both Poles begin to unveil their strengths (and sadly, weaknesses), it is also time to examine

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spirituality, followed by the “little” things, which are innumerable. Finally, the intangible things of religion and spirituality, as found and practiced on and about Antarctica, I will attempt to analyze. The intent here is to offer a new perspective on the sacredness of Antarctica, with the hope of growing increased awareness of, concern about, and passion for Antarctica, and indeed, our planet and humanity at large.

## 2. Sacred Objects of Spirituality and Religion on Antarctica

First, I posit several questions: what is religion, what is spirituality, and what, quite simple are “things” or “objects”? There are many ways to define both religion and spirituality, but here, we will refer to Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, to keep it simple: “Religion is a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith,” [10] and, “Spirituality is the quality or state of being spiritual, [which means] of, relating to, consisting of, or affecting the spirit; of or relating to sacred matters; and, of or relating to supernatural beings or phenomena,” [11]. For some people, religion is concretely practiced regularly in a house of worship, whether a temple, mosque, synagogue, cathedral, church, or chapel. Being more “formal,” religions seem to have proscribed rules and practices to which their followers adhere; in terms of Antarctica, that can be somewhat problematic, for example, for Muslims to fast an entire solar day for the month of Ramadan, and in the Jewish religion, it is difficult to determine the length of a “day” at the Pole. Spirituality is hard to define, although dictionaries do their best. Because it is almost vague, people who have their own spiritual beliefs and customs might have better luck on a far away, icy continent, depending on their custom or practice. Now, as for what “things” or “objects” are, things and objects can be possessions, belongings, articles, gadgets, devices, or literally, anything, and this is where it gets slippery. Things are also entities, ideas, events, occurrences, matters, issues, details, and literally, any phenomena. Here in this essay, I will attempt to reveal as many objects and things found on Antarctica that are used for religious or spiritual purposes.

### 2.1. Foundational Things of Religion and Spirituality on Antarctica

When one thinks of the “foundation” of formal religions, often the houses of worship are viewed as foundational. They are where the believers gather together, for prayer, services, and community. However, like most things on Antarctica, one must think innovatively and creatively. Therefore, we also examine the ships that brought the earliest explorers, the first huts that they built, and of course the ships and planes that continue ferrying all explorers, scientists, and staff, and the research bases where they actively live and work, for sacred “objects,” or in this foundational section, spaces for practicing

religion and spirituality. Literally the foundation of human religions are the structures: the churches, temples, mosques, chapels, synagogues, cathedrals, and countless other spaces where religion is practiced. When one adds in spirituality, these sacred places multiply further, but let us start with the concrete foundation of what people call religious houses of worship. To date, on Antarctica and its Peninsular, there are eight churches; images and photographs of each are readily found on the Internet. As Nag explains, “These places serve to satisfy the religious and spiritual needs of the people who brave all odds, especially the harsh climate, to live in Antarctica and conduct scientific research for the benefit of all.” [8] These are structures that were intentionally built as spaces of worship or have become thus repurposed.

#### 2.1.1. South American Churches on Antarctica

The very first church on Antarctica is also the first Roman Catholic Church on Antarctica, the Capilla de San Francisco de Assisi (the Chapel of St. Francis of Assisi). Consecrated on 18 February, 1976, this chapel stands proudly at La Argentina’s Esperanza Base, marking the northern tip of the Antarctic Peninsula as the first house of worship on the continent. Its first presiding priest, Father Buenaventura de Filippis, an Italian Jesuit, initiated a series of significant events within its walls, amongst them, as Pittaro [9] explains: the first sacrament of marriage ceremony, the inaugural First Communion Mass, and the first Catholic baptism to grace the Antarctic shores, notably that of Emilio Palma, the continent’s first recorded birth. Resembling its counterparts at other research stations, the Chapel of St. Francis of Assisi presents as a modest red steel structure, accentuated by windows on its sides and a yellow foundation supporting its front steps. In contrast to the seeming grandeur of McMurdo’s Chapel of the Snows (see below), this sanctuary accommodates just four rows of pews within its confines. Adhering to the Roman Catholic tradition, the interior hosts an altar adorned with liturgical linens, a crucifix, a tabernacle, a monstrance, as well as various statues and paintings, each carrying its own religious significance (these objects of religion will be explained in greater detail later). Positioned outside by the entrance, the Virgin of Luján resides within a glass enclosure, embellished with a cross, while a quaint bell tower graces the vicinity of the chapel, completing the serene atmosphere of this spiritual haven amidst the Antarctic expanse.

Continuing with Argentine churches on Antarctica, we find another Virgin of Luján. In 1996, the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin of Luján, or known in Spanish as the Capilla de la Santísima Virgen de Luján, was consecrated at the Argentine base Marambio on Seymour-Marambio Island in Antarctica. Despite the Marambio base having been established in 1969, the chapel was a later addition. Built as a permanent structure, it is made of steel and painted red, featuring a bell tower and a steeple adorned with a cross. The building is reinforced with strong steel girders resembling arches, evident both over the roof and along the sides, enhancing its structural integrity; this

appears to be a common feature among the base's buildings. Remarkably, this church holds the distinction of being the third most southern house of worship on planet Earth. Due to the Marambio base's modest size, the chapel appears relatively small and serves the researchers, staff members, and any visitors. Presumably named after the Virgin patroness of Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay, it pays homage to Our Lady of Luján, the principal church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, which stands in Luján, Argentina, about 70 kilometers west of Buenos Aires, constructed between 1887 and 1935. The interior of this particular Catholic chapel is cozy, with reddish wood-paneled walls. Its features include a stained-glass window, a small statue of the Virgin adorned in lace, a limited number of pews, a pulpit, an altar, and the Stations of the Cross depicted through small oil paintings. Notably, on 23 October 2014, a glass-covered box containing the skullcap and rosary of Pope Francis, along with his written blessing for Antarctica, was unveiled, adding an extraordinary element to this chapel's interior. (For further details on this event and its origins, please refer to Gianni Varetto's article [14].)

At this point the winner with three churches in Antarctica, while all other countries only have one (or no specifically constructed space for worship), la Argentina also has the most unique chapel. Literally dug out of the snow in 1979, the Capilla de Nuestra Señora de las Nieves, or, the Chapel of Our Lady of the Snow, is a Roman Catholic place of worship excavated in an ice cave near the Argentine Belgrano II Base. It is regularly acknowledged as the southernmost site of worship in the world. To find this, perhaps one of the more unique Catholic chapels on Earth, there is a system of ice hallways, or really tunnels, and the entrance to the chapel resembles a trap door in the ice, which can stay propped open temporarily with a pole. Upon entering, one sees that the floor, walls, and ceiling of the chapel are made of ice, with what appears to be a glistening effect of inestimable hues of blue. Seemingly one can sense the divine presence cleanly in the luster of crystal-ice lining the entire chapel. Truly, it appears that nature and the divine encounter one another here, or simply stated, spirituality and religion. Once inside, there are individual chairs serving as traditional pews, one on each side of the short ice aisle, leading up the altar. On the walls are the Stations of the Cross, consisting of the 14 images of Christ on the way to Calvary and ultimately, to his crucifixion and subsequent resurrection. To find the Stations of the Cross at the end of the world must be awe-inspiring for Catholic Christians. In "God in a Cold Climate," Sarah Woolley [18] explains, "This is the place of worship closest to the South Pole, and its luminous blue walls cocoon a frost-covered Christ on the cross, who looks as if he has been dipped in sugar."

There is one more South American church in Antarctica, and it is Chilean. The government of Chile decided to implement a plan to solidify their territorial claim on Antarctica, so in 1984, the Chilean settlement Villa Las Estrellas was

founded, on King George Island, Antarctica. Along with houses for the military families and staff, as well as a school, gymnasium, and other assorted buildings, they erected a Catholic church, Santa Mar á Reina de la Paz (Saint Mary Queen of Peace), the fourth intentionally-constructed house of worship on Antarctica. Comparable to the typical Antarctic pod, but without the legs, this structure is a white building that has both electricity and heat, and the Catholic deacon, who is a permanent resident of Villa Las Estrellas, offers Mass. Painted white on the outside, Santa Mar á Reina de la Paz has several windows on each side and an inviting front porch, indicative of the idea of church as a community gathering place. On the internet, there are very few images of the interior of Santa Mar á Reina de la Paz, but from what is available, the interior is wood-paneled walls, with a tiny altar holding candles and an altar cloth, and the Virgin Mary and Child statue to the right corner of the altar and another statue to the left, along with a pulpit, which most other churches on Antarctica lack. Directly in front of the altar are two flower arrangements, most likely artificial of course. An additional feature that Santa Mar á Reina de la Paz has, compared to other Antarctic churches [5], is that there is purple carpet on the floor. Also, there is a small stage, or niche, behind the altar, which is several steps above the aisle and the nave itself. Here, there are four rows of pews along both sides of the aisle, and as in most Catholic churches around the world, the Stations of the Cross are on the walls. This church is unique in Antarctica because it is actually for entire families, including the spouses and children, because as explained above, Villa Las Estrellas was a governmental initiative to create a real town of inhabitants on Antarctica. The current Santa Mar á Reina de la Paz church is a replacement for an older, dark blue church made out of shipping containers. Although there are images online, there are no dates, nor a construction year of Santa Mar á Reina de la Paz. However, on an image from 2018, there is a purple ribbon draped across the porch in front of the church, with people poised to cut it. This might show the opening of the newly reconstructed church because in another photograph of this event, a priest appears to be blessing the structure, which always occurs at the consecration of any new Catholic church. The Chilean people and their children who live and work in Villa Las Estrellas might find this church to be their bedrock or foundation, giving them a slice of normality and remembrance of their lives back in Chile.

### 2.1.2. Additional Christian Churches on Antarctica

The first four churches are Christian, Roman Catholic to be precise, and the next three are Christian as well, Orthodox Catholic, sometimes referred to Eastern Orthodox or simply Orthodox. As with Chile above, with one church on Antarctica, the following three are each country's one church on Antarctica. In 2003, the St. Ivan Rilski Chapel was built, and it is positioned on Livingston Island, at the Bulgarian research base, St. Kliment Ohridski, which was opened in 1988. It is Antarctica's first Orthodox church structure and it also

maintains the record of being the world's southernmost Orthodox site of worship. Orthodox churches are often famous for their icons, and this chapel holds icons of St. Ivan Rilski and Jesus Christ the Bridegroom. From the exterior, St. Ivan Rilski Chapel has a small staircase to climb, in order to enter, and the chapel itself is a gray, steel triangle, with the top portion sliced off and replaced with a cross and a bell below it. Surrounded by snow on all four sides, the chapel is also tethered to adjacent boulders, thus buttressing it further. A Bulgarian physician who worked at the research base from 1993 to 1994 donated the church bell. The interior walls are planks of wood and at the front and back, they appear to be concrete. There is a candelabrum, decorative sconces on the walls, several crosses, and as is customary in worldwide Christian Orthodox churches, iconic images of the Virgin, Child Jesus, and other important figures and saints on the walls, too, in addition to the several listed above, of greater significance. In 2012, a new building was constructed on a knoll overlooking the research base, and it now houses the chapel. It is a typical Antarctic research pod painted red, resting on legs, and the cross is erected on top; inside, the new chapel has a much larger altar, and the icons appear brighter, perhaps having been retouched.

Named after Vladimir the Great, St. Volodymyr Chapel was built in 2011, and it is a Ukrainian Orthodox chapel located in the Ukrainian Antarctic scientific station, Vernadsky Research Base [16]. Of all the Antarctic churches, this one seems to be of simpler construction, made exclusively of wood, and it was consecrated by the Archbishop of Lviv. On the outside, it is painted light brown, and on top there is a gold-colored Orthodox cross. Located next to another research building on base, the chapel seems quite small in comparison, but what it lacks in size is made up for inside. The interior is light blonde wooden walls, which brightens the chapel considerably, and there are several objects of religious use, such as for incense and communion, on the altar. Among the icons, St. Nicholas hangs on the wall, as well other figures. In the article, "Ukrainians To Build an Orthodox Church in Antarctica" [13], the Director of their National Antarctic Scientific Center, Valery Litvinov, writes: "When we send polar explorers to the South Pole we don't ask about their confession. But every person can have a wish to stay alone, to pray. Why don't we build a church?" The same article imparts a quote from the Archbishop of Lviv, from his visit: "When you pray there you get unspeakable impressions. It is zero altitude, but you have such a feeling that the church almost fly above Earth."

Perhaps the most famous of the Antarctic churches is Trinity Church, another Eastern Orthodox church, on King George Island at the Bellingshausen Russian research station. Consecrated on 15 February 2004, this church seems to have more images online than most of the other churches on Antarctica, as it is quite exquisite, elaborate, and unique. After being built in Russia, it was dismantled, shipped to Antarctica, and then re-assembled on a solid foundation. From the ground to the high church bells and all, Trinity Church was con-

structed to be able to withstand 90 miles per hour winds. At nearly 50 feet high, Trinity Church is constructed of wood, and it is architecturally designed in the traditional style of Russian Orthodox churches. A flight of steps leads up to the main door, and during the Antarctic nights, beautiful spotlights shine brightly and light up the church magnificently. At the time of this writing, there are still at least one or two Orthodox priests regularly in residence all year, even over the harsh Antarctic winter, and the church can hold 30 worshippers. In addition to praying for the Russian citizens who have died in Antarctica, the priests meet the religious and spiritual needs of this and other nearby research stations, sometimes offering services in Spanish. The interior of Trinity Church bring to mind a log cabin, with wooden beams made of pressurized Siberian pine, and of course there are paintings, candelabrum, and icons, as well as an altar and pulpit (as this one is larger than other Antarctic churches). According to the article, "Antarctica: Inside the Southernmost Russian Orthodox Church" [15], when visiting Antarctica and Trinity Church, the Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all-Russia stated: "You are here on the top of the planet... When I sanctified the water in Antarctica today, I thought about the whole globe below us, and prayed for God's creation. Praying in this temple for relatives and all who works here in Antarctica, for their Countries and the whole world." Remarkably, in Russia, the city of Valdai has a nature preserve, and in 2007, an exact replica of Trinity Church was constructed, called the Church of St. Sergius of Radonezh.

### 2.1.3. The Chapel of the Snows on Antarctica, for Services of All Religions

Finally, the eighth church of Antarctica is located at the United States of America's McMurdo Station. Here, the Chapel of the Snows is listed as non-denominational, but it mostly holds Catholic Masses and other Christian services. For five decades, Catholic priests were sent by the Diocese of Christchurch, New Zealand, but now the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services fills that need, and the responsibility of staffing Protestant ministers is held by the U.S. Air National Guard. As Messynessy explains, "During winter, the station is host to around 200 people, while summer sometimes sees up to 1,000 visitors. The non-denominational church also does its best to cater to worshippers of all religions, and Father Michael Smith has even been known to conduct Buddhist and Bahai ceremonies." [7] Sacred services of other religions (including Jewish and Latter Day Saints as well) have been held here, and meetings and services of other secular groups (such as Alcoholics Anonymous) also take place at the Chapel of the Snows, which accommodates more than 60 people. The original plans for building the McMurdo Research Base did not include a church, but as extra construction material began accumulating on a bluff overlooking the base, workers from the U.S. Naval Construction Battalion began building the first house of worship in Antarctica, in 1956. Having been destroyed by a fire in 1978 [2], today it is a white building with



gray trim; the main entrance door is balanced by a window on each side; there are custom-designed stained glass windows, depicting a cross and Antarctica itself; and there is a steeple (however, the original church had a larger cross on top). In *Terra Incognita*, Sara Wheeler [17] describes, “The Chapel of the Snows was a pink and powder blue Alpine chalet with a stained-glass penguin at one end looking out over the Transantarctic Mountains... The priest called us the Frozen Chosen,” (47). As a larger church, for Antarctica anyway, there is a sizable altar as well as a pulpit, and there are two steps up to the raised platform where they are. Reminiscent of many Christian churches around the world, there is balustrade, or wood railing on both sides of the platform; traditionally in Catholic churches, the faithful would kneel at the balustrade to receive communion. The new Chapel of the Snows was consecrated in 1989, and both Catholic and Protestant Christian services are given at the chapel on a regular basis by various priests and ministers, as well as other above-mentioned religious and secular services. Additionally, it has Antarctica’s only permanent organ, which is yet another thing found on Antarctica!

#### 2.1.4. Other Sites of Worship on Antarctica

Now that the overview of “real” churches on Antarctica is complete, attention must be turned to other sites of worship. Truly, what is meant by that is the answer to the question, where did the earliest seamen, explorers, and sealers practice their religion (if they had one), or their spirituality, before churches were built on Antarctica? That answer is simple, religion (and other forms of spirituality) was practiced on their ships, and later, both on ships and in the earliest huts and structures on Antarctica. In fact, it was obligatory for Sunday services to be held on the English ships that traversed the world’s oceans and seas. For example, in *Terra Incognita*, Sara Wheeler [17] explains about modern ship captains, including one she had met: “Like Scott, he had been obliged by the Navy Act to conduct a church service on board each Sunday, and he described reading the lesson on deck in the wintry sunshine while Antarctic terns flew around the prow,” (263). One might call the churches and other spaces of worship in Antarctica big, compared to the usual cramped, tiny offices on the research bases or even the small tents. However, these Antarctic houses of worship are not big at all, in comparison to a typical parish church or temple (and certainly they are tiny, in comparison to the Hagia Sofia, the largest mosque in the world, or a huge Cathedral, such as the one in Sevilla, Spain). Thus I call these sites of worship the foundational things, and now the big objects of religion and spirituality on Antarctica will be examined; however, it is not just physically big, in terms of size, but also in the abstract.

## 2.2. Big Things About Religion and Spirituality on Antarctica

Perhaps the first big thing about religion and spirituality on

Antarctica is something that is on everyone’s mind as they prepare to travel to the white continent, as a tourist, explorer, scientist, staff, or adventurer, whether visiting for a week or possibly to live there for a few months or to winter over for a year (or more): death. Death is obviously not a physical object that we can touch, as a concept, but of course, one can touch a corpse and places of eternal rest. In the case of Antarctica, that can become interesting. For example, when Robert Falcon Scott and his companions perished on their way back from the South Pole, their dead, frozen bodies were not discovered, and recovered, until many months later. The search party found Scott and his men deceased in their tent, completely frozen. Other deaths on Antarctica include attacks from seals, whales, and sea lions; falling into a crevasse; drowning in the sea; and, of course, any type of stroke, heart attack, or illness, which can of course happen anywhere on earth. The problem on Antarctica is that death is always behind you, nipping at your heels, waiting to trip you up, and thus we have a big object of religion and spirituality on an Antarctica: death. Death is intricately and explicitly linked to religion and spirituality. Although most corpses lay buried where the person died, there are remarkably several tiny cemeteries on Antarctica (however, they are “big,” in comparison to the little religious and spiritual things found on Antarctica). There are also crosses, shrines, and other markers of bodies, which leads to the idea of tents as tombs, such as Scott’s and other tents, and countless crevasses serving as coffins. Furthermore, to shine a more positive light on a dark scene, I hope to illustrate that in fact, there is peace in these resting places, as they tell their people’s stories, as Scott’s written words beg: “These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale.”

#### 2.2.1. Cemeteries on Antarctica

Most people link corpses to cemeteries, so that is a fine place to continue examining big things of religion and spirituality on Antarctica. Within “Antarctica,” in this case including the continent, peninsula, and all of the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic islands, there really are cemeteries. First, however, one must distinguish the two terms cemetery and graveyard. The word cemetery (from the Greek word κοιμητήριον, koimeterion, or ‘sleeping place’) implies land that is specifically designated for a burial ground, and it was originally applied to the Roman catacombs. The term graveyard is often used interchangeably with cemetery, but a graveyard refers primarily to a burial ground within a churchyard. Although most corpses lay buried where the person died, there are remarkably several tiny cemeteries and one graveyard on Antarctica. The graveyard is on South Georgia Island, at the Grytviken Church (built in 1913; note that for the churches on Antarctica, I limited them to the continent and peninsula), and it is here where Ernest Shackleton is buried. The cemeteries on Antarctica include the following: first, Whalers Bay, in the South Shetland Islands, contains 35 burials and a memorial to ten men lost at sea. It also commemorates and acknowledges the historic value of

other events that occurred there. At Scotia Bay, the cemetery has its origins in the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition (1902-1904); there are twelve graves, with the oldest dating from 1903. Buromskiy Island lays 0.6 km (0.37 mi) south of Haswell Island, in the Haswell Islands of Antarctica. Discovered and mapped by the Australasian Antarctic Expedition under Douglas Mawson, 1911-14, it was later photographed by the Soviet expedition of 1958 and named for N. I. Buromskiy [1]. The island holds a cemetery for several citizens of the then-existing countries the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, German Democratic Republic, and Switzerland. Those buried here died while working for the Soviet and Russian Antarctic expeditions. In 2013, Russia proposed this as a historic site at the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting. Currently, there is a fourth cemetery on Antarctica, at Argentina's Esperanza Base, in Graham Land on the Antarctic Peninsula. The base's motto is *Permanencia, un acto de sacrificio*, or 'Permanence, an act of sacrifice,' and clearly, with a cemetery, that is the case. This cemetery has a stele (a stone or wooden slab, generally taller than it is wide, erected in the ancient world as a monument; the surface of the stele often has text, ornamentation, or both) commemorating Argentine expedition members who died in the area.

### 2.2.2. Crosses, Shrines, and Other Markers on Antarctica

Surely, as time goes by, there will be more cemeteries on Antarctica, and meanwhile, there are also crosses, shrines, and other markers of bodies, which leads to additional big objects of religion and spirituality. Over the past century, there has been an increasing quantity of crosses, memorials, and other types of monuments and shrines erected on Antarctica. The remarkable range of resting places on Antarctica, as well as inimitable memorials and incomparable relics, is surprising. It was in 1904 when the first shadow of a cross fell on Antarctica. "Vince's Cross" was raised on the cliffs of Ross Island to commemorate where George T. Vince, a 21-year-old seaman, had slipped to his death into the waters below. His surviving shipmates were sailing aboard *Discovery* under the command of Robert F. Scott and Ernest Shackleton at a time when humanity, let alone religion, was a virtual stranger to the Antarctic shores. Similarly, on Wind Vane Hill at Cape Evans, the Ross Sea Party of Shackleton's ill-fated Imperial Trans-Antarctica Expedition of 1914-1917 mounted a cross in memory of three of their fellow members who died nearby. A modern equivalent of a commemorative cross was the one erected in 1982, in honor of the three members of the British Antarctic Survey who died while crossing the sea ice. In addition to crosses, there are shrines on Antarctica. By definition, a shrine is a sacred place where a religious relic might be held, or where a religious apparition or historical event took place, or simply, a place that is designated to foster devotion to a saint or to commemorating a person or event. A personal favorite of many visitors to the continent itself is the charming Roll Cage Mary. Officially, it is called Our Lady of the Snows,

and it sits on a hill overlooking the U.S. McMurdo Station, perhaps offering her benedictions. It is dedicated to Richard Williams, who died in 1956 with his bulldozer broke through the ice, and surely it is the most unusual and charming Catholic memorial on Antarctica, perhaps in the world. There are additional shrines dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and other saints, throughout Antarctica, such as at the Argentine base Matienzo, dedicated to Our Lady of Loreto, the patroness of their Air Force. During an expedition to the Nelson Base, a Czech crew built a shrine dedicated to the saints Agnes of Bohemia, Ludmila, and Wenceslaus. At the Arctowski base, Polish researchers carved two shrines to the Madonna into niches in nearby rocks. Up the hill from another Argentine base, San Mart ín, the shrine to Cristo Caminante, or Walking Christ. Similarly, at Orcadas research base, currently owned by Argentina but originally established in 1903 by the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition, is the Stella Maris shrine. The first Catholic Mass in Antarctica was celebrated here on 20 February 1946, by Father Felipe L árida, and a 25 foot cross was erected at the site.

### 2.2.3. Other Memorials and Markers of Bodies on Antarctica

A shrine of a different nature, and but ostensibly religious or spiritual to some people, Scott's hut on the north shore of Cape Evans on Ross Island, where the bunks, boxes, canned food, and the newspapers of the day still sit. Erected in 1911 by Scott's British Antarctic Expedition, and used sporadically afterwards by other expeditions until 1917, it was then unused until 1956, when United States expeditioners dug it out of the snow, England and New Zealand jointly restored it, and visitors still come regularly. Likewise, from Ernest Shackleton's British Antarctic Expedition of 1907, is their hut still much in the same state, over 100 years later, and people visit as pilgrims, to pay homage to this hero, too, Shackleton. Conceivably amongst the most famous of memorials, in this case, indeed a burial place, is Scott's tent, in which he died with his Polar Party companions by his side, Dr. Edward Wilson and Henry "Birdie" Bowers (the other two members of the party died days earlier). The last entry in Scott's diary is dated 29<sup>th</sup> March 1912, but we cannot assume that this was the date on which he died. They had stopped for the last time ten days earlier, and Scott continued to write his diary, as well as his final letters. Their bodies were found in the tent nearly eight months later on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1912. In this case, their sleeping bags became their shrouds and the tent itself was their tomb. This leads us to the unique situation of grieving on Antarctica. In Scott's case, he and his companions never made it back, and for weeks, the other members of the expedition who were on the Antarctic coast at the hut speculated about what had happened. After months, particularly over the winter, they knew they had lost their leader and the others. In her article, "A Frozen Graveyard: The Sad Tales of Antarctica's Deaths," Martha Henriques [3] explains: "For those who experience the loss of colleagues and friends in Antarctica,

grieving can be uniquely difficult. When a friend disappears or a body cannot be recovered, the typical human rituals of death – a burial, a last goodbye – elude those left behind.” If someone has fallen into a crevasse, usually others are nearby, witnessing and helping the person, but that is not always the case, both companionship and rescue. In the end, there are countless ways in which one might perish on Antarctica, from frozen and alone to warm and surrounded by friends. Obviously dozens of explorers and expeditioners have died on Antarctica, and since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is noted that perhaps about 1,000 people have died in various accidents and disasters on Antarctica, according to information found on the “List of disasters in Antarctica by death toll” website [6]. Whether it is a bunk on a ship that sinks or a sleeping bag that contains a frozen body, or any number of such things, including crevasses and caves, these are big objects of religion and spirituality found on Antarctica. However, sleeping bags and bunks are also sites of worship and/or spirituality, and thus they serve to link the big to little objects of religion and spirituality.

### 2.3. Little Things About Religion and Spirituality on Antarctica

As the adage in English goes, the best gifts come in smaller boxes, so now the little things of religion and spirituality on Antarctica will be searched for and analyzed. On a bunk or in a sleeping bag, people might read a prayerbook, a sacred text, or something that is spiritually meaningful to them; these are the first of many little objects of religion and spirituality which are found on Antarctica. As mentioned previously, a cross can be considered a big object of religion, depending on its size (and one’s opinion); however, a cross can also be little, such a cross pendant that someone traveling to or living on Antarctica might wear. As an important religious symbol, the Christian cross is recognized around the world by people of many different religions. Similarly, the crucifix is a rendering of Jesus Christ on the cross, and it can be small and worn as a pendant on a necklace for example, or larger and hung on the wall in a room. Other small objects of religion and spirituality include the Bible, Koran, Torah, and other sacred texts, as well as prayerbooks, hymnals, and other holy books, as well as countless spiritual texts. We know that many ships in the early days of Antarctic exploration carried a Christian Bible. For example, during the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, the ship *Endurance* was trapped, crushed by the ice, and subsequently sank. In his book *South*, Ernest Shackleton [12] writes: “I tore the fly-leaf out of the Bible that Queen Alexandra had given to the ship, with her own writing in it, and also the wonderful page of Job...” (77). Jumping ahead 100 years, in his article, “A Chilling Rosh HaShanah Experience,” Kenneth Iserson [4] explains: “We had one small machzor for the Rosh Hashanah evening service, donated by my synagogue. We read and sang some selections, in no particular order except that they struck a chord with members of our

group.” He also states that other than “the donated prayer book, we had the contents of the chapel’s two ‘Jewish Boxes,’ a strange mix of objects, ranging from a can of matzo ball soup to some stale matzoth and a somewhat battered menorah. A small torah scroll that had once been on-Station disappeared back to the U.S.”

Small objects used during Catholic Mass include the chalice (the cup or goblet which holds the Eucharist, or communion, during Mass); ciborium (the vessel in which the Eucharist is kept before and after Mass, then placed in the tabernacle, a small cabinet), corporal (the linen square, basically a small tablecloth), monstrance (another container for the Eucharist, which displays it for adoration and prayer), pall (a small cover to place over the chalice), paten (the petite dish which holds the priest’s Eucharist during Mass), and of course, relics and statues. Some of these objects used during the Catholic Mass can be seen in various photographs and images of the churches on Antarctica, and several of them are essential things used during every celebration of Mass worldwide. A small precious object owned by many Catholics worldwide is the rosary, which is a string of beads used for keeping count of prayers. At the Argentine Belgrano base in the Chapel of Our Lady of the Snow, the crucifix holds an apparently frozen rosary. It is impossible to discount the extremely important value of small objects of religion and spirituality on Antarctica.

## 3. Results Incorporated into a Final Discussion

Whether it is foundational, big, or little, the things of Antarctica previously examined were all physical objects, that one can see and touch, so now it is time to examine the intangible things of religion and spirituality on Antarctica. These are things that you cannot necessarily see, hear, smell, touch, or taste. However, you can certainly “feel” them. As explained above, prayer is one of those things that can be found written, such as in sacred texts and prayer books. When spoken aloud during a religious service or in the heart of an individual, prayer is also intangible. One can imagine that many prayers are uttered on Antarctica: prayers of worship, expressing wonder at the glorious continent and its beauty; prayers of supplication, if one has fallen into a crevasse or any sort of danger; and prayers of gratitude, when one has been delivered from peril or saved from endangerment. Similarly, death is both tangible, as explained earlier with things such as corpses and cemeteries, and it is also intangible. It is nearly impossible to say when the first human being died on Antarctica. First, would it have to be on land, and second, are there records of every death below the Antarctic Circle? Based on speculation, when the Spanish ship *San Telmo* was damaged in the Drake Passage and sank in 1819, all of the officers and mariners on board died. However, were they actually in Antarctica? That is impossible to determine, even

though William Smith, who discovered and named King George and the South Shetland Islands, found signs and remnants of the wreckage on Livingston Island; if any of the Spanish sailors had survived, they would have been possibly the first people to reach the continent of Antarctica. Because of the dearth of surviving ship logs and diaries from the earliest ships that sailed towards Antarctica, it is hard to say who died first in Antarctica. Jumping ahead by decades, perhaps the Belgian Antarctic Expedition, 1879-99, the first to winter over in Antarctica, has the first recorded death, when the sailor Carl Wiencke drowned after being washed overboard during a storm. Later that year, Lieutenant Danco died from a heart condition, during the unforgiving winter, when their ship *Belgica* was trapped frozen in the sea ice. Finally, nightmares, dreams, and hopes are also intangible things that can be “found” on Antarctica. Treacherous situations become living nightmares; while sleeping on Antarctica, people often suffer nightmares, as well as other kinds of dreams; and finally, hope can be unearthed on Antarctica as well, the hope of surviving and thriving.

## 4. Conclusion

To close this piece, which is hopefully a mere beginning to searching for more evidence of spirituality and religion on Antarctica (indeed amongst humanity, on our planet, and in the universe), I use one more thing, perhaps the most important object of life: the candle. The candle gives both light and warmth, two things that Antarctica cannot give in the winter. For Christians, the candle also symbolizes the light and presence of Jesus Christ. However, no matter what religion anyone practices, and no matter what anyone finds spiritually important, it is the light and presence of one another, whether on Antarctica or anywhere, which makes life worth living and our planet worth saving. That is the important thing. Go out and be a light in someone’s darkest hour, and be present to them. Then spread the joyful news that indeed, there is religion and spirituality alive and thriving on Antarctica!

## Author Contributions

Ellen Cressman Frye is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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