

November 11, 2015

**Martin Centre Lecture**  
Department of Architecture



## **Modern Architecture and the Challenge of the Sacred: Mies van der Rohe's Chapel of St. Saviour, 1952**

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The diminutive Chapel of St. Saviour on the IIT Campus in Chicago is Mies van der Rohe's sole ecclesiastical building and as such enjoys a singular status in the architect's vast rationalist oeuvre. In a short article accompanying the first published photographs of the building he wrote the following knotted statement that sheds light on the conundrum of religious architecture after the 'death of God' famously announced by Friedrich Nietzsche: *"I chose an intensive rather than an extensive form to express my conception, simply and honestly, of what a sacred building should be... It was meant to be simple; and, in fact, it is simple. But in its simplicity it is not primitive, but noble, and in its smallness it is great—in fact, monumental."* The masonry chapel apparently refuses traditional religious architectural decorum, preferring to emerge from the sober minimalist properties of silence and earth. However, the extensive suite of architectural drawings held in the archives at MOMA, New York in fact discloses a deep knowledge of traditional architectural symbolism. This talk reveals the chapel's elaborate and largely secret world of correspondences and echoes through geometry and seeks to shed further light on the dilemma of what might be termed the Modern 'secular-sacred'.

**When:** 1.15 - 2.15, November 11, 2015

**Where:** Lecture Room 1, Department of Architecture  
1-5 Scroop Terrace, Cambridge CB2 1PX



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