



# The Geometry of Love: Space, Time, Mystery, and Meaning in an Ordinary Church

*Margaret Visser*

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Margaret Visser has visited many more churches than most people, but like the rest of us, she began to tire of the slew of facts and lack of meaningful information available from guidebooks. The desire to find answers to her own questions -- as a traveler, a believer, and an insatiable anthropologist of the everyday -- led her to undertake this unique and revelatory book.

More than any other kind of edifice, a church is intentionally meaningful in all its aspects, and Visser decided to find out what it was trying to express, in its nuances as well as in its grand gestures. She deliberately chose a relatively simple church just outside the walls of Rome, Sant'Agnese fuori le Mura, but she casts a wide net -- taking in history, theology, anthropology, and folklore, among other disciplines -- to illuminate its physical and spiritual architecture. As she guides us through the building, from apse to nave, catacombs to campanile, Visser explores the symbolism of lambs, the Christian fascination with virgins, the meanings of martyrdom, and the history of relics. At the same time, she moves back through the centuries to reveal Christianity in its earliest forms and purposes. The book ends at the church's beginning, with the grave of Agnes, a twelve-year-old girl who was murdered seventeen hundred years ago and whose remains lie buried beneath the altar. By then we have learned how to read any church building, how to interpret what it "does" and "says," whether we are of any faith or none.

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