

Sacred Spaces and Sacred Places

by Geoffrey Simmins, PhD, MDiv

Table of Contents

Preface	5
1. Defining Sacred Spaces and Sacred Places	7
1.1. Overview of Key Concepts	7
1.2. Dictionary Definitions of Key Terms	7
1.3. Theological Approach	8
1.4. Scriptural Precedent	8
1.5. Binary or Unitary Definitions of Sacredness	8
1.6. Physical or Symbolic Geography and Architecture	9
1.7. Commonalities and Differences between Cultures	9
1.8. Recent Perspectives	11
2. Indigenous Peoples' Views of the Sacred	13
2.1. General Overview of Issues	13
2.2. A Paean of Praise and a Note of Caution	13
2.3. Key Concepts Identified with Native Spirituality	15
2.4. Variable Sacredness in Native Cultures	16
2.5. Examples	17
2.6. Problems Associated with Aboriginal Sites	18
3. Examples from the Classical World and other non-Judeo-Christian Cultures	21
3.1. Overview of Issues	21
3.2. Classical World	21
3.3. Ancient Neolithic Europeans	22
3.4. Celtic Sites	24
3.5. Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, and Confucian Concepts	24
4. Jewish, Christian, Islamic and Hindu Concepts of Sacredness	27
4.1. Overview of Issues	27
4.2. Jewish Sacred Space—An Overview	27
4.3. Early Christianity and Sacred Spaces	30
4.4. Islam	31
4.5. Hinduism	31
5. Programmed or “Inspired” Architectural Sacred Spaces: An Abbreviated Historical Survey	33
5.1. Overview of Issues	33
5.2. Commonality and Differences between Cultures	33
5.3. Egypt and Africa	33
5.4. Jewish Historical Examples	34
5.5. Christian Worship Sites: An Overview	35
5.6. Islamic Traditions	41
5.7. Hinduism	42
5.8. Taoist	43
5.9. Buddhism	43
5.10. Shinto	44
5.11. Sikhism	44
5.12. Jainism	44
6. Programmed Architectural Spaces: Recent Notable Examples	47
6.1. Overview of Issues	47
6.2. Analysis of Recent Religious Structures	47
7. The Beauty of Order, the Order of Beauty: Benedictine Monastic Architecture and Sacred Geometry	53
7.1. Overview of Issues	53
7.2. Examples Defined	53

7.3. Sacred Geometry and Architecture	53
7.4. The Golden Section	54
7.5. The Golden Section in History	54
7.6. Root Rectangles and the Golden Section.....	55
7.7. The Golden Section Applied in Architectural Practice.....	56
7.8. The Golden Section in the Work of Benedictine Architect-Monk Paul Bellot.....	58
7.9. The Beuron School.....	59
7.10. Sacred Geometry—Some Possible Explanations for its Use in Bellot’s 20 th -century Benedictine Architecture	60
8. Beyond Programmed Spaces: Deep Ecology or Green Spirituality.....	65
8.1. Overview of Issues	65
8.2. Nature, Arcady, and Spirituality.....	65
8.3. The Judeo-Christian Attitude to Nature	66
8.4. The Unitarian-Universalist Contribution.....	70
8.5. Inter-Faith Perspectives on Nature.....	71
8.6. Deep Ecology	71
8.7. Sacred Sites Tourism.....	71
8.8. Painful Sites—Sacred or Shameful? Or Both?.....	72
9. Literary and Scriptural Conceptions of the Sacred and Non-sacred (Heaven and Hell)	75
9.1. Overview of Issues	75
9.2. Paradise Lost, and Paradise Found.....	75
9.3. Dictionary Definitions of Heaven and Hell	75
9.4. Conceptions of the Sacred among Different Cultures	75
9.5. Literary Conceptions of Heaven and Hell and Paradise	79
10. Personal Sacred Spaces	83
10.1. Overview of Issues	83
10.2. Definitions and Historical Examples	83
10.3. Sacred Spaces Within.....	83
10.4. Suggestions for Activities while Waiting for Enlightenment.....	84
11. The Sacred Space of Music	87
11.1. Overview of Issues	87
11.2. Music as a Doorway to the Sacred.....	87
11.3. Music in My Life.....	88
11.4. Sacred Music in Western History—A Partial and Personal View	88
11.5. Musical Suggestions	91
Selected Bibliography	93
Glossary of Terms Related to the Book <i>Sacred Spaces and Sacred Places</i> and to Sacred Architecture Generally	95
Notes.....	99

Preface

The principal goal of this book is familiarize readers with different ways that people throughout history, and from different faith traditions, have defined particular places and spaces as “sacred.” We will consider both western and non-western (including aboriginal peoples’) contributions. We will also explore scriptural and literary definitions of the sacred, and its opposite, including Heaven and Hell. The book was written with the following aims:

- To help people understand how different peoples in different cultures throughout history have defined sacredness;
- to explore both architectural and non-architectural definitions of sacredness;
- to examine and critically consider various writings on the subject of sacredness;
- to quicken readers’ appreciation of literary and scriptural definitions of the concept of sacredness;
- to gain some idea of developments in the history of sacred architecture in the western and non-western traditions (including what is termed “sacred geometry”);
- to consider the pros and cons of the recent phenomenon known as “sacred spaces tourism”;
- to help readers become aware of how different religions have defined both Heaven and Hell, as metaphors for sacredness and non-sacredness;
- to become aware of the profound mystery of human efforts to define, and work towards, creating sacred spaces and places.
- Finally, my goal is to invite readers to explore the sacred in their own lives.

A note regarding illustrations: in an ideal world, it would have proven possible to illustrate all the sites and buildings mentioned here. However, given the ready accessibility of images via the Internet, it is hoped that viewers will be able to access visual resources by typing the name of a particular site or building into an appropriate search engine. In the text, a number of illustrations are keyed to Colin Wilson’s book, *The Atlas of Holy Places & Sacred Sites* (Harmondsworth, Mx.: Penguin, 1996). At the time of writing this book is widely available although no longer in print. It may be complemented by more recent books, such as Brad Olsen, *Sacred Places Around the World: 108 Destinations* (San Francisco, CA: CCC Publishing, 2004).

1. Defining Sacred Spaces and Sacred Places

1.1. Overview of Key Concepts

In this chapter, we will consider some of the challenges when defining what is sacred. “Do not come near,” says God to Moses; “put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5 [RSV]). As this quotation from Scripture shows, Judeo-Christian traditions maintain that there are sacred places and sacred spaces—places in which we should stand in awe. The other religions of the Book—Judaism and Islam—share this attitude, albeit in different ways. Can people today experience this same awe in the presence of a place deemed by tradition to be holy or sacred? Are they still influenced by scriptural concepts? Are sacred places inevitably associated with human presence, or can nature speak to us unmediated by human intervention? To put a new twist on the famous Zen Buddhist adage, if there are no humans in the forest, are sacred spaces still sacred? This book addresses some of these issues. Through a series of thematic chapters, we will examine the definitions of sacred places and sacred spaces in a variety of cultures and times, from aboriginal peoples to the recent deep-green ecology movement.

1.2. Dictionary Definitions of Key Terms

1.2.1. *Sacred*

The word “Sacred” stems from Latin, *sacer*, to make holy. Essentially, “that which is set apart from the ordinary world” comes as close as any other working definition.

The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines sacred thus: “Consecrated to; esteemed especially dear or acceptable to a deity ... set apart for or dedicated to some religious purpose; made holy by association with a god or other object of worship; Consecrated, hallowed.” Further definitions include: “Regarded with or entitled to respect or reverence similar to that which attaches to holy things.... And: Sentiment, reverence, sense of justice, etc., against violation, infringement, or encroachment ... Sacrosanct, inviolable; protected by some sanction from injury or incursion.”

1.2.2. *Holy*

The definitions of holy are: “Kept or regarded as inviolate from ordinary use, and set apart for religious use and observance; consecrated, dedicated, sacred. Free from sin and evil, morally and spiritually perfect and unsullied.

Hence, (a) of persons: specially belonging to, commissioned by, or devoted to God. (b) Of things: pertaining to God or the Divine Persons; having their origin or sanction from God, or partaking of a Divine quality or character.

Conformed to the will of God, entirely devoted to God; of godly character and life; sanctified, saintly; sinless.”

1.2.3. Profane

(as a noun) Literally before (i.e., outside) the temple, hence not sacred, common, also impious; not pertaining to or devoted to what is sacred or biblical, especially in history or literature; not initiated into the religious rites or sacred mysteries; ... not admitted to some esoteric knowledge; uninitiated. Unhallowed; ritually unclean or polluted, especially said of the rites of an alien religion; heathen, pagan. Characterized by disregard or contempt of sacred things; irreverent, blasphemous, impious, irreligious, wicked.

(as a verb) to treat (what is sacred) with irreverence, contempt, or disregard; to desecrate, violate.

1.3. Theological Approach

Although Christian teaching and perspectives inform this book, multi-faith perspectives will enrich and enlarge the Christian perspective. And while chronological accounts will be offered, this is not strictly a chronological survey: we will proceed by thematic chapters. Nor is there an implied evolution (e.g., from polytheism and pantheism to monotheism): each attitude will be considered as possessing its own integrity.

1.4. Scriptural Precedent

Perhaps surprisingly, the word “sacred” is not at all common in the Bible. It is only found in Mt 7:16: “Do not give a dog what is sacred,” and in 1 Cor 3:17, “for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.” The word “Holy,” and holiness, occurs much more frequently. *Harpur’s Dictionary of the Bible*, for example, has a lengthy entry under Holy, and another under holiness. According to the *Harpur’s Dictionary*, holiness is a term in Hebrew probably meaning separate from the ordinary, or profane. It has pretty well the same meaning as the dictionary gives for Sacred, but holy is the preferred word in scripture. We turn to the word holy, and see how it has been used in Scripture. One of the most significant is from Exodus that we have just considered—“Do not come near,” says the Lord to Moses; “put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5 [RSV]). Such a passage raises this question: does a sacred place have to be a physical location, or can it be a place in the heart?

1.5. Binary or Unitary Definitions of Sacredness

Let us consider in more detail what we might call “The dichotomous vision” (Sacred and Profane), as compared with a unitary conception of deity, which we might call the Immanent Deity. An important distinction can be drawn between immanence and transcendence as two dimensions of the sacred. On the one hand, we have the concept of the Numinous (that which is eternally sacred), or else that which is only occasionally sacred, and which may require human intervention.

The Romanian scholar of religion, Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), who taught for many years at the University of Chicago, gave us the term “hierophany” to describe what he felt was the particular character of places brushed by God’s presence. This concept, however, has not received universal acceptance. More recent theologians (Eliade’s book *The Sacred and the Profane* was written in 1948) have tended to stress the unitary concept of divinity. Do we picture the sacred either as a sort of puncturing into the window of the divine, or as a quality that is present always? These approaches are

linked with the concepts associated with liminality (“the condition of being on a threshold or at the beginning of a process”) or immanent (“remaining within; indwelling; inherent”).

Even though some say that the world may be divided into sacred and secular (or profane), not everybody agrees. We might end up with a view of the world that we might call sacredness amid sacredness: accounting for specialness in a divinely ordered world. Why would there be a need for anything more sacred, if all places and all spaces reflect perfection?

One might also define the sacred as a “journey from holiness to wholeness.”¹ By this I think we might refer to sacredness as anything that we can define as holy, and that the process of aligning ourselves with those holy forces help us become whole. We can attempt to take (retake?) possession of that which is sacred.

That will be one of our main tasks in this book: to consider the extent to which either the binary or the unitary views of the world conforms with history, and to your own concepts of sacredness.

1.6. Physical or Symbolic Geography and Architecture

Many religions associate sacred spaces with their founders’ lives and acts, and feel that their most sacred spaces represent the centre of the universe. This book could have focused entirely on built places, and regarded any building used for religious purposes as “sacred.” Instead, we will try to define sacred more broadly, and include sites that are not modified by human agency.

So must there be human intervention in making the space sacred? That is, is a mountain sacred whether or not humans are present? And, just as importantly, can human intervention make a sacred space less holy? This is difficult to define precisely, because as we will see, most world religions assert that the world is made in the image of the divine, and therefore retains traces of the sacred. To what extent is this universally true?

Finally, are the texts associated with particular religions held to be sacred? For all devout Muslims, and many traditional Christians, the word of God is contained in their sacred texts, and is as holy as anything else in their religious pantheon. For Sikhs, the Siri Guru Granth Sahib, their holy book, serves as a living guru to Sikhs. But to others, these holy texts are only the snake’s skin, as it were, of the sacred—the sign of the sacred’s passing, but not the sacred itself.

Interestingly, Scripture has a more flexible approach in defining sacredness than one might imagine. For example, the City of Jerusalem is both a physical place (actual geography) but also a symbol of the Celestial City described in the Book of Revelations. Thus it is symbolic geography as well as actual.

1.7. Commonalities and Differences between Cultures

Most cultures have some concept of sacredness. There are interesting parallels. The examples that follow are somewhat abstract, and are intended to show a general similarity rather than a specific relationship. In general, many cultures have a strong belief in the relationship between *directionality and the sacred*, a belief clearly tied into concepts of cosmogenesis, or origins of the world. That is, we frequently see a belief that the sacred is to be found in the heavens; anything vertically closer to heavens (mountains, especially) is to be regarded as more sacred. This was true of Judaism in the pre-exilic period, and also true of Confucianism, Hinduism, and other Asian religions. The Earth is

regarded as the Middle Kingdom in Chinese thought—the intermediary between heaven, earth, and humans.

Aboriginal peoples around the world share, in general, the belief in vertical hierarchy of sacredness. Aboriginal peoples also believe in the power of certain elemental geometrical shapes, such as circles.

One of the most interesting shared conceptions of sacredness revolves around the idea of precinct and threshold. We are not surprised to learn that this was one of the cornerstones of Judaism; the Temple was a place where only a certain priestly caste could penetrate. Christians have also shared this point of view. In this way of thinking, a given place was perhaps sacred by God's having communicated something to humans from here (e.g., Mt. Sinai), and it was preserved as sacred by human agency.

In some cases, those who dared cross the threshold and enter the precinct were punished, and even put to death like Aaron's children (as described in Exodus). The Holy of Holy (the innermost shrine of the Jewish temple) was reserved for adepts—those with special gifts and training. In such traditions, complex ritual purification and abstinence rites were practiced as a means of propitiating the negative energies of an angered deity.

Aboriginal peoples also believe that a certain place was sacred because the Creator touched it. Here, too, native peoples tended to practice certain rites of preparation, ranging from prayer and fasting to sexual continence. And while no particular rites were necessary to make a given place sacred, it could be interfered with by too much human contact (one of the problems now encountered by sacred sites tourism, as we will discuss below).

The Taoist and Shinto visions of nature tend to be more unitary and may be contrasted with the Judeo-Christian concepts of precinct, and threshold. Sometimes, places regarded as sacred have a sort of spilling-over effect: in Christian tradition, people have often chosen to be buried near sacred spaces, such as churches. And markets often grew up around churches. This is also seen in Islamic tradition. There, the Friday mosques were often associated with markets. If an impartial point of view were needed, the Iman (Islamic prayer leader) was consulted; his house, politically neutral, was often located near to both a market and a mosque. Thus we see the interesting ways that one supposedly pure realm—the sacred—pours over into the secular world.

Unfortunately, although we gain some valuable insights when we compare the ways that different cultures have defined sacredness, we also have to admit that there is a problem in accommodating other people's divergent views of the sacred. One of the most troubling aspects of any study of sacred sites is the realization that religious intolerance sometimes results in the destruction or defacement of sites that others regard as sacred. More difficult still are cases, as in India in recent years, where two religious groups have laid claim to the same sacred site (usually an ancient temple with both Hindu and Muslim roots). The same thing is seen in Jerusalem, aspects of which are sacred to three of the world's great religions, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

Also, we have to consider whether there can be too much of a good thing. That is, even if faithful of most world religions believe in the power of pilgrimages to sacred sites (particularly Muslims, Christians, and Hindus, but also others), there have been some teachers who have decried the pilgrimage as spiritually vacuous. The Buddha, for instance, "deplored pilgrimage as a worthless

activity,” and Guru Nanak, one of Sikhdom’s great spiritual teachers, also felt that pilgrimage was a matter of internal spiritual growth, not simply a tourist activity.²

1.8. Recent Perspectives

Recent developments in theology have tended to call into question some of the traditional definitions of sacredness. Some authors have questioned how useful Eliade’s “hierophany” concept really is today. New age authors are seeking spiritual authority from a variety of non-Judeo-Christian sources, from aboriginal to Celtic. Feminist scholars have challenged the dualistic nature of the debate. Persons concerned by ecological issues have sought a spirituality that is less injurious to the earth. We will be considering some of these recent perspectives in later chapters.

Suggested Further Reading:

Jane Herbert, “Sacred Beliefs and Beliefs of Sacredness.” From *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places*, edited by David L. Carmichael, Jane Hubert, Brian Reeves, and Audhilde Schanche (London: Routledge, 1994), 9–19.

Gabriel Cooney, “Sacred and Secular Neolithic Landscapes in Ireland.” From *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places*, edited by David L. Carmichael, *et al.*, 32–43.

2. Indigenous Peoples' Views of the Sacred

2.1. General Overview of Issues

I write from the perspective of a Canadian living in the western part of North America; most of my examples are informed by traditions practiced in this region. In recent years it has become apparent that the inherent power and originality of aboriginal faith traditions has not been adequately recognized. A number of sources are now attempting to redress this oversight. In general, aboriginal traditions are seen as more unitary than traditional Christian perspectives (although what some feel is a Christian disdain for nature, I will argue presently, is exaggerated). Nonetheless, native teachings are making their way into mainstream culture, both through New Age theology, and through mainline religious denominations, such as the United Church of Canada, which has recently instituted teaching practices such as "Learning Circles" consciously modeled on First Nations' teachings. As mainline churches reexamine their own views towards nature and towards each other, First Nations' Peoples are now recognized to offer much to non-native cultures.

2.2. A Paean of Praise and a Note of Caution

We will do our best to honour and respect Native teachings. With mainstream western culture engaged in a pursuit for profits that seems to many people to result in destruction of our land and the creatures who live on it, native peoples seem to symbolize a greater sense of harmony and understandings. We are coming to see them as stewards and moral guardians of the land. But it is somewhat doubtful that we can do native beliefs full justice. I am no expert on this material, and most natives would probably not feel comfortable in having a non-native once again interpreting their cultures as an expert. What follows are some insights that I believe to be generally accepted. I am happy to receive corrections and different points of view.

One of the most obvious truths to be communicated here is that native people have indeed developed a rich spiritual life based on a close relationship with nature. We will start this section with a "Prayer to the Four Winds," contained in Courtney Milne's book *Spirit of The Land: Sacred Places in Native North America*.

Great Spirit, I invoke the peace pipe in reverence and gratitude of thy vast creation, of which I am a part.

To the life-giving of thy servant, the sun and all heavenly bodies, the blue sky, the great everlasting rocks, the magnificent mountains with their fragrant forests, pure streams and the animal kingdom.

We thank thee for all these gifts.

To the North and its guard, the White Eagle,

keep us pure and clean of mind, thoughts as pure as Thy blanket, the snow.

Make us hardy.

To the East and thy sentry, the Red Eagle
 Grant us light that we may see our faults
 And have better understanding with everyone.
 To the South, and thy sentinel, Brown Eagle
 The beautiful one, grant us warmth of heart,
 Love and kindness to all.
 To the West and the Thunder Bird
 Who flies over the universe hidden in a cloak of
 Rain clouds and cleanses the world of filth,
 Cleanse our bodies and souls of all evil things.
 To Mother Earth we come from thee and will return to thee,
 Keep us in plenty that our days may be long with thee,
 Great Spirit we thank thee and appreciate all these wonderful gifts to us.
 Have pity on us.³

Another blessing, this one from the Apache people, states: “Beauty above me, beauty below me, beauty all around me.” This blessing reinforces the idea that aboriginal peoples hold a unitary view of the sacred.

Another element that interests non-natives is the way that aboriginal peoples honour the older people in their society for their accumulated knowledge. Older people are known as elders. It has become apparent how important women are as teachers, mediators, and preservers of tradition. But, as I have just suggested, there are many problems associated with non-natives studying, interpreting (and speaking for) native culture. There is the obvious problem of one person speaking for another, without permission. Then too, native peoples are very different from one cultural group to another; it is somewhat insulting to generalize widely about what “natives believe.” Who in particular? From which culture? For another thing, many recent writers idealize native persons, regarding them as existing outside of time, as being somehow part of what is termed the anthropological present (that is, as if the native person were somehow not from this day and age). We can see native persons leading a prayer in the desert, but we can’t see them driving a pickup truck or doing their shopping in a downtown mall. Worse, the non-native community associates natives with drunkenness and disorder. These stereotypes result in a false, and dichotomized view of native people: on the one hand, they are artificially idealized; on the other, they are scorned and dismissed.

By borrowing from native teachings, often without asking, and by visiting native sacred sites, often without understanding them, non-natives appropriate their culture. The non-native community should ask whether it wants to assimilate the best of native teachings without paying any sort of meaningful price for these teachings. Some people feel that mainstream culture has yet again taken from the Natives, while continuing to ignore the very real social problems that plague many (but certainly not all) native communities. By borrowing native teachings without any concern for real native peoples, are we not committing the same faults as those non-natives in the nineteenth century who took native lands without compensation?

These are some of the issues we will address in more detail later, when we discuss the pros and cons of New Age teachings. My own view is that we should be cautious in going out and visiting native sacred sites. If in doubt; ask. Native people are often generous with their time, and with sharing their

beliefs. But it is perhaps better to learn about their sites through books, and only to visit them after considerable study beforehand—and with permission obtained.

2.3. Key Concepts Identified with Native Spirituality

Native people's beliefs about the sacred are radically different from those held by the non-native cultures. Native persons have a holistic view of the sacred, and believe that all nature, and all life within nature, are part of the sacred world. They also hold a strong interest in living in harmony with natural cycles such as the seasons and the harvesting of resources. That is not to say that all locations have the same value. Some locations are valued because of their association with a particular spirit; others are valued for their association with particular resources; still others are valued because of their association with ritual activities. The difficulty for us is to go beyond a simplistic view of native persons and to understand some of the layered meanings associated with their conception of sacredness. We will see that in some cases the location identified as sacred is left entirely alone, while in others the site has been transformed by human intervention.

Every individual human, every animal, every plant and every other part of nature, is sacred; God made the world to be appreciated and enjoyed by humans as well as animals, in a deep and mystical harmony. Some other key concepts:

- There are permeable membranes between realms (I mean by this the spirit, human, animal, and afterlife);
- The Spirit world is considered by many groups to be attainable through vision quest, and by shamans—those who have a particular sensitivity to the Spirit world;
- Spirits are thought to reside (or may be summoned to) shamans' houses.
- Natives love transformative imagery, often associated with tricksters: Raven, coyote. Their sense of humour is complex, and is based on the humorous (sometimes blackly humorous, and other times simply playful) interplay between humans and gods.
- In general, particularly of aboriginal groups on the Great Plains, there is a conception of geography as divided into realms, each of which are connected with cycles of life, the seasons, and particular abstract human attributes. The East is connected with the spring; it is the place of life and new beginnings (buildings are almost always sited towards east). The South is identified with summer; it is the time of youth, strength, and idealism. The West is associated with autumn; it is identified with the time of emotional growth and self-knowledge. The North is identified with winter; it is the time of wisdom and life's fulfillment.
- These cardinal points (and their associated life-cycles and seasons) are also connected with four elements: earth, wind, water and fire.
- Natives, again, to use the people of the Plains as an example, consider the human to consist of four distinct parts: emotional, mental, physical, spiritual. These are linked with cardinal points, and with colours: e.g., physical (white, north, pipe holder), spiritual (east, red, sweet grass); south (yellow, emotional, sweat lodge); west, mental, black, sun-dance). In some traditions, there is believed to be a link between certain sacred sites; these, in turn, communicate to the aware person the harmonious workings of God. According to one native

spiritual leader I spoke to, there are always fours in native teaching: emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual.

- Natives, again, particularly those on the Plains, have a special interest in circles because of their unitary value, symbolizing connection. This interest is testified to in tipi encampments, in the bowl of ceremonial pipes, in sweat lodges, and in medicine wheels and in other ritual buildings.

Speaking to native spiritual leaders reveals that they have a mystical outlook regarding a complex vision of interrelated sites within North America, some of which may have been visited directly by divine forces. This subject is complex, and I don't feel comfortable or qualified to speak of it.

2.4. Variable Sacredness in Native Cultures

If every individual is sacred, and all nature is sacred, how can anything be designated as especially sacred? Natives would have no difficulty with this, because they can easily accept that certain parts of the world are to be used for some purposes, and other parts for other purposes. Thus they have a concept of sacredness within sacredness. Just as the sun shines more powerfully towards a south elevation, so too are certain spots more powerfully touched by divinity.

Natural areas intersect the physical and metaphysical worlds. This is particularly true of mountains, caves, and springs (and some groves), rocks, canyons, and of mountains generally. A notable example would be Acamo Pueblo in the southwest United States: this is not just the oldest continually inhabited location in North America, it is regarded as inhabited *because* of its sacredness.

Certain places are regarded as places where the spirit may be transformed. But there are many different kinds of transformation.

Places of transformation:

- Life passages (puberty, marriage, death);
- Vision Questing/ pilgrimage (Revelation of power);
- Sweat lodges (imbue participants with special power);
- Sun dances, rain dances, and other ritual activities (for developing and enhancing community spirit, and for healing).

Resource areas:

Some areas are sacred because of their association with particular animals or plants used by natives for food. In such places, the animals or plants would be harvested with ritualistic care. The animal would be thanked for its spirit, and sometimes, as in west coast tradition, trees would be stripped of planks only after the harvester had "begged" for the wood. The tree would be left alive. There are special areas for harvesting ritual activities (e.g., animals, trees, salmon, bison, sweet grass, sage, for smudges).

Houses:

The great cedar houses of the West Coast tribes of the Kwak wakh' wakh' (formerly Kwakiutl), and the Haida, among many others, were places of ceremony and power. Winter ceremonies, potlatches, provided evidence of the permeability of spiritual worlds. But we must not see these buildings purely in terms of a place; they should also be seen in terms of the activities that take place there. For example, the powwow ceremonies of Plains native peoples create a sacred space by means of the shared ritual activity, as do winter ceremonials among West Coast native groups.

2.5. Examples

2.5.1 Alberta places sacred to native peoples: Chief Mountain, Blackfoot Crossing, Rundell Mission, Old Man Dam, and Calgary's Nose Hill.

2.5.2 Manito Ahbee, Manitoba, Whiteshell Provincial Park

This site shows an amazing powerful image of what was a healing place for several different native cultures. Shows interest in transforming nature.

2.5.3 Red Rock Ridge, Jeffers, Minnesota

This shows petroglyphs (or paintings on rocks). These were found in many ancient aboriginal sites (these perhaps 5,000 years). Typical of many places in native North America. Images of powerful spiritual beings. These are also seen in Manitoulin Island, Ontario.

2.5.4 Serpent Mound, Ohio

This is the largest serpent effigy in world. Its use is enigmatic, but it is now generally believed to have been a form of lunar observatory. Ancestors of Eastern Woodlands peoples created it sometime between 1000 BCE and 400 CE. Such a site is symptomatic of a general lack of understanding of native sites: we cannot say with any certainty what this may have meant. Serpents, unlike in Christianity, revered in many cultural groups (e.g., Hindu). So perhaps tied in with this. But no native remains. The most likely explanation is that it was tied in with lunar observations.

2.5.5 Rock Eagle, Eatonton, Georgia

This site shows an enormous bird effigy with a 120-foot wing span. White quartz boulders stand here also, laid in place perhaps 5,000 years ago. Again, its purpose enigmatic to us today. Was it a guardian spirit for Eagle clan? A symbol of spirit world? Perhaps its very enigmatic qualities are what impart to it enduring power.

2.5.6 Mesa Verde, Colorado; Chaco Canyon, New Mexico

This site is typical of mountainous landscapes inhabited by Anasazi people. This is a Navaho word meaning "ancient ones." The Anasazi peoples inhabited canyons, cliffs, and valleys in Arizona and Colorado sometime between 900 and 1300 CE. They built kivas, circular underground structures with considerable symbolic and ritual significance, now found among Hopi and Zuni people. The canyon shows circular stone kivas (or ritual prayer centres), carefully fitted together and multi-storey. Wilson points out (*Atlas*, 78), that stone roads run out from the Canyon—for what purpose is unclear.

2.5.7 Big Horn Medicine Wheel, Wyoming

This is a two-thousand-year-old monument connected with Crow, Arapaho, and Shoshone peoples. Twenty-eight spokes radiating out from centre correspond to native interest in numerology. Similar to Medicine wheel near Sedona, Arizona, a site with 10,000 years of inhabitation, and felt by many to have strong earth energies. Native people are convinced that certain spots like this were the places where there were visitations, or connections with the spirit world. They are places where spirits may be cleansed and strengthened. Sites like this have recently gone onto the “hot-list” of tourists looking for authentic visions. This has caused some problems, as discussed below.

2.6. Problems Associated with Aboriginal Sites

There are many problems associated with the contemporary use of aboriginal sacred sites. For one thing, there are religious conflicts: natives and non-natives don't always see eye to eye about usage. Natives are worried that many of their sites are becoming too well known. Some sites are vandalized; they are believed by natives to suffer a loss of power. Tourism and New Age practitioners from non-aboriginal cultures are a mixed blessing. There are several locations both in the U.S. And Canada where climbers and other outdoor enthusiasts have argued that they (non-natives in the main) should be granted full access to native sites, even if the natives are convinced that visitation is harmful. The result can lead to mistrust and resentment on both sides. Court cases have resulted.

A case in point: I visited Acamo Pueblo in the southwestern United States, a site continuously inhabited since approximately 1100 CE (and perhaps before). Physically, it is impressive: a gigantic molar protruding from the plain. From atop the mesa the spirit world seems real, and near. And yet at least from my experience the natives on the site receive visitors only reluctantly. Visitors are hurried and herded from place to place. Photography is permitted only under tightly controlled circumstances. I felt a sense of resentment, because I felt of myself as a “citizen of the world” who was being impeded from appreciating the site fully. On the other hand, I had to appreciate the native point of view: their sense was that the visitors did not truly appreciate the importance of the site, and they obviously resented having to accommodate outsiders. It was also a good lesson, I suppose, to experience the sensation of not being appreciated as an individual—something minority groups have had to live with for a long time. Surely this raises the point that in order for native sites to be appreciated, but not overwhelmed, future good-willed dialogue will be necessary.

Suggested Further Reading:

Black Elk, “Wiwanyag Wachipi: The Sun Dance.” From *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux*, ed. Joseph Epese Brown, 1953, rpt. Gottlieb, ed., *This Sacred Earth*, 470–9.

Nicole Price, “Tourism and the Bighorn Medicine Wheel: How Multiple Use Does Not Work for Sacred Land Sites.” From *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places*, edited by David L. Carmichael, *et al.*, 259–264.

Brian Reeves, “Ninaistákis—the Nitsiapii's Sacred Mountain: Traditional Native Religious Activities and Land Use/Tourism Conflicts.” From *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places*, edited by David L. Carmichael, *et al.*, 265–95.

Howard L. Harrod, *Renewing the World: Plains Indian Religion and Morality*. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press 1987.

Nabokov, Peter, and Robert Easton, *Native American Architecture*. New York: Oxford University Press
1989.

The Spirit Sings: The Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples. Calgary: Glenbow-Alberta Institute
1988.

3. Examples from the Classical World and other non-Judeo-Christian Cultures

3.1. Overview of Issues

Many sacred sites were associated with gods and goddesses whose name and function are now forgotten. Nor do we know, really, what these sites were used for. Faced with this fundamental ambiguity about how these sites were used, and sometimes even by whom, we have to exercise caution about reading into the sites values that may reflect our own interests rather than those of the peoples who created the sites.

There are many cases in point. For example, the megaliths at Carnac, France, and Stonehenge, England (and elsewhere in the United Kingdom) have been interpreted in very different ways over the years, and some of the interpretations are contradictory. Then too, New Age proponents, with their interest in places of power, are now attempting to reclaim some of these sites, and yet does so with their own agenda, as it were. All this suggests that such places should be approached with a degree of caution, and with an open mind.

3.2. Classical World

3.2.1. Minoa

This was a world of beneficent goddesses and graceful, thin-waisted athletes, and lovely frescoed palaces. The palaces were possibly sited so as to take advantage of geographical symbolism. J. G. Davies provides some hint of the complexity when he observes,

Three elements are involved in this pattern: an enclosed valley within which the palace is located; a rounded hill on the north-south axis of the palace and, in line with this, a double-peaked mountain. The profile of the last is that of a pair of horns, suggesting upraised arms and the female cleft. As such it serves as a symbol of the active power of the Earth Mother, while the rounded hill, with the breast-like outline, has the same association.⁴

The Greek Pantheon associated with vertical view of sacredness; gods dwelt on Mt. Olympus. Therefore shrines tended to be associated with mountains. But also with sacred groves and forest, because associated with particular gods and their attributes, e.g., Pan or Artemis for groves.

3.2.2. Delphi

Delphi was associated with Ge, the earth goddess; to determine the *omphalos*, or navel of the world, Zeus released two eagles, one from each end of the earth. They met at Delphi. The shrine of Apollo at Delphi was therefore associated with the navel of the world (see *Atlas*, 42, and Plato, *Republic*, 427, b,c). An egg-shaped stone, which once rested in the inner sanctuary, was decorated with two birds, one on each side, which represented the two eagles. This sacred stone is associated with the worship of the earth goddess. The Delphic oracle, who plays such an important role in Greek mythology, was likely

therefore a remnant of an earlier, perhaps goddess-based, form of worship. Surviving on the site are the fragmentary remains of a temple to Apollo, the sun god.

3.2.3. *Ephesus*

This site is a good example of how same site acquired different associations over the years. (See *Atlas*, 32). According to Wilson, Greeks following a prophecy of the Delphic oracle settled Ephesus. Its shrine was first associated with goddess worship, and perhaps even with mythical Amazons. Later came to be identified with moon-goddess Artemis. There followed several other temples, one of which had a statue of Diana with seven breasts, an image of plenty and fecundity, which was later taken over by Romans. Ephesus fell to Romans in 133 BCE, but kept its independence. Indeed, one Roman emperor, Julian, tried to restore cult of goddess there, but he was murdered. The statue of Diana was destroyed by a Christian zealot in 400 CE, along with the fifth and final temple devoted to Diana. What stands on the site now is a modest temple of Hadrian, as well as a small house nearby associated with the virgin Mary, who one legend says passed her latter years here. Thus the site has many different accretions of meaning. Question: can it be termed sacred at all now?

Another possible goddess site in the area is the Ggantija temple, in Malta (see *Atlas*, 34 and 38), thought to have been erected about 300 BCE as a goddess sanctuary. What survives there are some fragmentary walls constructed of large blocks of stone. Some see these curvilinear forms as “gynomorphic” (that is, relating to the womb), and have argued that these sites were possibly associated with healing and goddess worship.

3.3. Ancient Neolithic Europeans

Neolithic Europeans created powerful, enigmatic monuments that some feel are among Europe’s most sacred spaces. Others feel, however, that these spaces have been denuded of any of their sacredness by both hostile and well-meaning inheritors of the site. The difficulty is caused by the accretion of later buildings, and also later interpretations, sometimes hostile.

3.3.1. *Lascaux and Les Ézies: (see Atlas, 58–59)*

These are two of the hundreds of elaborately painted caves in southwestern France. They are thought to date to approximately 15,000 BCE. They were discovered only as recently as 1940! They portray ancient animals and other rites. They were very likely to have been connected with special, intermittent activities associated with ritual activities. No one lived here, in other words. Such caves are sometimes discussed in terms of concept of “sympathetic magic”—the idea that the hunter would gain power over intended prey by in effect enacting the ritual of the hunt as a sort of dance. But others have seen a more mysterious and definitely religious purpose here . . . remember how difficult it was to get here. It is also interesting that they were not associated with ritual burials, which is much more common of sites such as these. Judith Thurman, writing in *The New Yorker*, reviews several recent (and widely differing) books purporting to explain the art found in these caves. Pointing to the fundamental ambiguity inherent in such caves, to their deep, enduring mystery, she writes: “Whatever the art means, you understand, at that moment, that its vessel is both a womb and a sepulchre.”⁵

3.3.2. Carnac, France (see *Atlas*, 56)

This site features the largest concentration of free-standing stones in Europe—some 3,000. Possibly built as long ago as 5,000 BCE. The original placement of the stones in parallel rows is now obscured because of villages built subsequently, but the site is still very impressive. What was its purpose? Fertility, worship of moon goddess? Were they apotropaic, that is, did they keep crops from disaster? It is hard to see without the people who no doubt animated the mute stones. They are now generally felt to have been aligned so as to permit solar and lunar observations. The addition of other rites, such as fertility, does not contradict the original purpose, but rather reinforces it.

As was the case of Ephesus, there is evidence that Carnac was used also by some later cultures: Romans carved deities on the stones, and Christians carved crosses. The essential form of the stones was left largely intact. Wilson points out, although without corroborating evidence, that these stones are charged with magnetic forces. Similar claims are made for other Neolithic groupings in England and Ireland.

Many sites like this are connected with very ancient practices that relate to geomancy, e.g., ley-lines, in England. It has been demonstrated that present-day Christian churches, for instance, often sited on locales where ancient pagan temples were located. Is this simply a matter of coincidental siting, or is something else involved?

Free-standing pillars, alone, grouped, or placed close to a temple, have been venerated in very early times. An undated Canaanite stone at Hazor shows hands raised towards the sun. Twin pillars also raised before moon god's temple at Ur. Egyptian obelisks referenced the sun god Amon-Ra.⁶ Jachin and Boaz are the names given the pillars of Solomon's Temple. Indus Valley monuments show sacred pillars that date to pre-Aryan times. Such pillars are seen also in ancient Iberia (Spain); see *Atlas*, 54. They are also seen in Hindu worship, e.g., lingams, an ancient symbol of Shiva in phallic form. So in other words, such columns are very common. Stonehenge and Avebury ought to be seen in this light.

If one obvious level symbolism of these forms is phallic, we should not stop here: the stones are more generally symbolic of humans' aspiring towards the sky—or so it seems to me, because we will never know for certain, although Wilson argues today that the most likely meaning for these circles was certainly astronomical. This would correspond to what we know of ancient peoples, whose priests often were associated with the prediction of the seasons.

3.3.3. Stonehenge, Silbury Hill, and Avebury, England (see *Atlas*, 68–69)

These obviously interrelated stone circles in southern England are perhaps the world's best-known Neolithic sites. They represent a phenomenal output of human ingenuity and labour, extended over many generations. Some contemporary observers (not me) feel that the technology required to erect such sites was so advanced that the sites could not have been built without alien visitors lending a helping hand (or tentacle, or whatever).

At Stonehenge, the first stage of Henge, around 3300 BCE, was built of wood. The first stone henge was built around 2200 BCE. A circular ditch 320 feet across surrounded it. Stonehenge II, two horseshoes of blue stone pillars, was built around 2000 BCE. Stonehenge III, built around 1900 BCE, removed many of the bluestones, quarried from Wales, and built great circle of 30 megaliths with lintels and a horseshoe of five trilithons. The sheer amount of labour was impressive, but likely required

only relatively simple technology—pits and levers. Lintels with mortices were tipped onto stone tenons inserted into the vertical posts.

Stonehenge was used for many hundred years by several distinct cultures. What was the use? In this case, there can be little doubt that the site was connected with astronomy. For example, the midsummer sun rises along the main avenue of Stonehenge. Its northeast axis is aligned with the sunrise at summer solstice, and is in line with Silbury Hill. At the winter solstice, the sun sets in the opposite direction. Avebury, which was once larger even than Stonehenge, has suffered considerable vandalization: it was periodically looted for its stones, due to hostility to its presumed pagan purposes. Wilson states that ley-lines link Silbury and Avebury. So we see these three sites as once forming part of a now-mysterious connection. Glastonbury, a hill south of these sites associated with King Arthur, was once thought by some to be the navel of the world. Silbury is the largest human-made earthen mound in the world, and its purpose, as with these other locations, remains enigmatic.

3.4. Celtic Sites

3.4.1. Newgrange, Ireland; also 3.4.2 The Hill of Tara, south of Newgrange

Located in the Boyne Valley in County Meath, Newgrange (Irish: Dún Fhearghusa) is the largest surviving example of ancient Celtic megalithic passage grave. If this was a grave, it was also designed to coincide with seasonal cycles. The long (60-foot) passage is covered by a high-domed burial place covered with white quartz. On the winter solstice, sun shines along the passage to the burial site itself. This was also true of the Gavrinis passage grave, not far from Carnac (see *Atlas*, 56) situated in the Gulf of Morbihan in Brittany. We note at Newgrange the presence of spirals—a particularly Celtic form indicating unity and universality. Newgrange is now rather manicured, with a trimmed green lawn and impossibly white stones covering the domed passage. It is hard to picture it as it once might have been.

The Hill of Tara is the most legendary site of all in Celtic mythology; it is thought to be legendary site of kings of Ireland. The article on Celtic spaces in Ireland points out that large graves had tendency to attract smaller ones in periphery; a sort of community of the dead was created. There were also many other ancient burial sites, although none of them has the powerful connotations of these Irish complexes. One example is the Lindholm Høje, a Viking boat burial site and former settlement dating to between 700 and 1050 CE (see *Atlas*, 65).

3.5. Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, and Confucian Concepts

We will discuss these traditions in more detail below, in the chapter on programmed spaces. We might keep in mind, however, how complex Asian attitudes to sacredness are. The Taoist tradition venerates sacred mountains. We encounter again the interesting notion of sacredness amid sacredness: holy woods, sacred groves, and magic mountains, all interact with the ordinary world in a sort of sacred dance. We encounter similar concepts in the Hindu belief in sacred geography—the connection between particular shrines and a sacred divine world.

Suggested Further Reading:

Molyneaux, Brian Leigh, and Piers Vitebsky. *Sacred Earth, Sacred Stones*. London: Duncan Baird, 2000.
 Olsen, Brad. *Sacred Places Around the World: 108 Destinations*. CCC Publishing, 2004.
 Wilson, Colin. *The Atlas of Holy Places & Sacred Sites*. Harmondsworth, Mx.: Penguin, 1996.

Thurman, Judith. "Letter from Southern France: First Impressions. What does the world's oldest art say about us? *The New Yorker*, 23 June 2008, 56–67.

4. Jewish, Christian, Islamic and Hindu Concepts of Sacredness

4.1. Overview of Issues

In this chapter we will compare and contrast the ways that these different religious traditions have defined sacred space. We are talking about *concepts* about sacredness: we will be considering architectural responses to these ideas in the next chapter.

4.2. Jewish Sacred Space—An Overview⁷

Jews have clearly defined what is sacred. Jewish definitions of the sacred, however, have undergone significant changes in response to changing political and social circumstances. I depend heavily in this section on a book by Robert Cohn, entitled *The Shape of Sacred Space: Four Biblical Studies* (1981). Cohn's book argues that Jews were particularly influenced by their geographical self-identification as a mountain people. They developed a concept of vertical sacredness—seeing the world as increasingly holier the closer one was to the mountains. This explains their concept sacred mountains, such as Mts. Zion and Sinai. But all this was before the building of the Temple. When the Temple was built, this effectively replaced mountains as the Jews' most "holy" place. And when the Temple was destroyed, the Jews shifted their concept of the sacred towards the Torah, and towards the practice of the Jewish faith in each Jew's home. Therefore it is correct to state that Jews had three quite distinct concepts of sacredness: mountains; the Temple; and the Torah. A quote from Robert Cohn sums it up (p. 79): For Jews, "The holiness of place is never absolute." *Jahweh* first moved with the tribe; then dwelt in the temple; then with the Torah, and finally among the community of the faithful, wherever they were.

4.2.1. Jewish Sacred Space—Its Evolution in Jewish Thought

Commentators on the Hebrew bible have recognized that the Jewish concepts of divinity (and of their relationship to it) evolved gradually, and were influenced by other traditions, such as Zoroastrianism (we will discuss this in more detail in the chapter on Heaven and Hell).

The earliest Jewish traditions show that they had a vertical hierarchy of holiness, appropriate for a mountain people. Sites brushed by God (particularly mountains) showed that nature was associated with the Divine. Wilderness itself was associated with the divine; as Cohn remarks (p. 13), "Wilderness ... is a typical metaphor for the liminal phase of rites of passage." This is followed by a hierophany—the sacred instruction on Mt. Sinai, which resulted in new bonds of community. Cohn continues (p. 17): "The Sinai theophany and the establishment of the covenant are clearly the focus of the entire Pentateuch. To Sinai the fugitive Hebrews march, and from Sinai, as the newly formed people of God, they trek towards Canaan."

Canaan was a mountainous land, and the mountains connoted holy space. Mountains are a centrally important part of the biblical cosmos. The most common Hebrew word for mountain appears no fewer than 520 times in the bible (everywhere but in Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Esther, and Ezra). It connotes security, agricultural base, height, and antiquity (Cohn, p. 26). Mountains are holy, but God

can make them tremble ... people who are arrogant set themselves on high. Cohn argues (p. 2) that “Land is a central, if not the *central theme* [sic] of biblical faith...it will no longer do to talk about Yahweh and his people but we must speak about Yahweh and his people and *his land*.”⁸

Mountains represent even more than this: they become a metaphor for fertility and the female body in Song of Songs (Cohn, p. 37). The Bible even refers to illicit fertility rites on top of hills (Hos. 4: 13, Cohn, p. 36). *But* their fertility depends upon Israel’s obedience (Cohn, p. 37). Mt. Zion is the home of the eternal God, and is itself eternal (p. 38).

Examples from Scripture concerning the use of the word holy include the following:

Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his footstool, for he is holy...

Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain for the Lord our God is holy (Ps. 99:5, 9, Cohn, p. 40).

The Lord bless thee out of Zion (Ps. 128:5, Cohn, 40).

4.2.2. *The Sinai Symbol*

As Cohn remarks, “Mt. Sinai, the source of Torah, and Mt. Zion, the site of the once and future temple, represent the alpha and omega of biblical sacred geography” (Cohn, 43). But Sinai existed in memory only.... See Exodus 19–24 (Cohn, 44). Mt. Horeb, where the burning bush was seen conflated with Sinai for biblical commentators ... they no longer saw them as separate, in other words. Elijah returns to Horeb (Ex. 34:28; 1 Kings 19:11, Cohn, 53).

Mt. Sinai was sacred for three reasons:

- 1) It was seen as the *Axis mundi* within the Pentateuch (the Books of Moses)—a link between Heaven and Earth;
- 2) It was seen as the peripheral pivot (the furthest point to which Jews travel);
- 3) It was seen as symbolizing primal time, or the beginning of Israel. (Cohn, 54).

4.2.3. *The Temple Period*

Cohn does not discuss the Temple period. This is when the centre of Judaism was no longer in the mountains, but in the Temple itself. Hence the care regarding activities in the Temple. Many scriptural examples that show care applied to practices in the temple. The Bible states that the Temple in Jerusalem was the most holy place in Israel because God’s presence dwelt here (1 Kings 8:10–12). By extension, if Israel and her priests and her people follow the teachings of the Lord, then the nation of Israel will itself be holy.

A discussion of the needs of priesthood in is found in Leviticus, chapter 21. The clearest description is found in Lev. 21:6: “Because they [priests] present the offerings made to the Lord by fire, the food of their God, they are to be holy.” The entire book of Leviticus is concerned with “relating to the Levites,” the priestly clan of Israel, and therefore with the services of worship at the tabernacle. Exodus had contained the directions for building the tabernacle. Leviticus gives the laws and regulations for practicing worship there. Detailed proscriptions in order to keep the priests holy; for keeping the priests holy ensured that the temple itself would be kept holy. In fact, the theme of the

entire book is holiness—the holiness of God and of man. This is stated most clearly in 11:45: “Be holy because I am holy.”

Materials for the Tabernacle are described in Exodus 35: 4f)—including the ark with its poles and the cover and the curtain that shields it—presumably because of the power of the Lord. Therefore, care had to be taken by Aaron the priest and his sons; even their garments had to be sacred (see Leviticus 8ff), and the washed themselves whenever they entered the Tent of Meeting or approached the altar, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Only when all this was done did the Lord come to dwell in the temple (Ex 40:34–8), when “the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.” When the Lord came to dwell in the temple, not all could serve him equally ... remember what the Lord said to Moses (Ex 33:12f) about his glory. Moses asked to see the Lord’s glory, and the Lord said that no one could look upon him and live, and put Moses in a cleft in a rock so that Moses could see his back. “Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen” (Ex. 33:23).

So after Aaron and his sons had been consecrated to the Lord, as described in Leviticus, we have the case of Aaron’s sons Nabab and Abihu, who (Lev 10 1–2) “... offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.”

Aaron remained silent in the face of the judgment of the Lord, and was informed by the Lord of further commandments, upon pain of death: not to drink fermented drink in the Tent of Meeting; to eat their part of the offerings only in the special part of the temple sanctified for eating. (Thereafter the Jews follow dietary laws, purification after childbirth, etc.)

All these detailed proscriptions could be carried to an extreme, as Seth Kunin writes in his chapter on Judaism contained in *Sacred Place*. Here, we find ideological sacred space expressed through degrees of purity—ten in fact—ranging from the lands outside Israel in concentric circles into the courtyard of the temple, the altar, the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, where none may enter save the High Priests on the Day of Atonement.⁹ But this attitude changed following the destruction of the Temple.

4.2.4. Jerusalem as Symbol and City

Cohn refers to Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, in which Eliade points out that a variety of images can serve to express the “symbolism of the center.”¹⁰ The pillar, ladder, tree, vine, and mountain can each symbolize the communication link between heaven, earth and underworld at the spot where the sacred has manifested itself. This spot “constitutes a break in the homogeneity of space,” [Eliade, 37] a place around which the world is ordered.

Post-Exilic Jews still retain an interest in Jerusalem—the Holy City (Cohn, 72). As noted above, the classical world regarded Delphi as the navel of the world. The Jews of the Diaspora assimilate this concept of the omphalos (navel, or centre) and apply it to Jerusalem, from Josephus to many other Hellenistic commentators (Cohn, 73).

4.2.5. *The Rabbinical Period, Torah, and Synagogue*

Still later, the centre of the world shattered into myriad pieces, the study of Torah came to define the practical centre of Judaism; “the synagogue came fully into its own as a place of prayer and study of Torah” (Cohn, 75).

Rabbinic literature commonly expresses the idea of the presence of God by the term *Shekkinah*. It is a noun meaning to dwell, rest, repose, abide. The term is used in the Hebrew Bible with respect to God and his [*sic*] sanctuary.¹¹ Originally restricted to the Temple, this concept was broadened during the Rabbinic period, when it was said that *Shekkinah* could occur if any two or three were gathered together in God’s name. It seems as though Matthew adopted this concept in his Gospel, when he referred to worship consisting of a group of persons gathered together in Christ’s name.

Following the final destruction of temple, and the Diaspora, we witness not only a shift towards the importance of synagogues, but to individual Jewish homes as a sacred place. In other words, where the Torah’s precepts are held, there also is the sacred. And yet, as Cohn observes, “Jerusalem remained the ambiguous center, partaking of but not wholly containing the holiness of Yahweh. The center for Judaism was sacred but not ultimate” (Cohn, p. 79). Hence the ambiguous but undeniable continuing power of Jerusalem as a holy site for Jews: they recognize that the Torah and the synagogue, wherever Jews come together, has effectively replaced Jerusalem as the centre of Judaism, but it is hard not to be moved by the symbolic significance of Jerusalem.

Still, as Rabbi Sharon Sobel argues in *Ecumenism*, the modern concept of the sacred in Judaism is not to be found in buildings, or even exclusively in the Torah, but rather in the community of observant Jews who embody the precepts of Judaism. She cites Exodus 25:8: “Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.” Jewish commentators, Rabbi Sobel observes, are “intrigued by the notion that God will not dwell *in the sanctuary*, but rather that the building of the sanctuary will cause God to dwell *among the people*. This represents an interesting extension, in other words, of the previous concept of God dwelling only within the Temple. Sobel observes, “The sanctuary is not for God, it is for the people; it is to be a visible symbol of God’s presence in their midst.”¹²

4.3. Early Christianity and Sacred Spaces

Christianity took over many of the Jewish concepts of sacred space. For example, Christians shared the mystical Jewish concept of *Shekkinah*, or God’s presence amid the faithful, wherever they were located, which is expressed most clearly in Matthew 18:20. Christians also added a new conception of sacredness—the idea of specific locations that were associated with important individuals and their places of teaching, healings, and/or martyrdom.

There is also a quite unrelated issue—whether sacred spaces have to exist in reality in order for them to be venerated. Douglas Davies, in the chapter on Christianity contained in *Sacred Place*, discusses in some detail the interesting problem of Christianity and literal vs. metaphorical interpretations of sacred places. He uses the example of Jerusalem. For example, there are many instances in Christianity where Jerusalem (the actual city) is held to be especially sacred. For example, we have the emphasis on Jerusalem symbolized by Jesus’s childhood visit to the temple, his determination to deliver his message there, his anger at the temple’s defilement, and his post-resurrection appearances nearby. These all testify to Luke’s desire to show Christianity as proceeding from the spiritual and geographical heart of Judaism.

But very quickly Christianity became a diaspora as well; there was a shift away from the earthly Jerusalem towards the Heavenly Jerusalem. Scriptural examples of the shift in meaning abound. In Galatians (13:14), we read: “For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come.” Evidently, the real city has been overlain with an apocalyptic meaning. This apocalyptic connotation is even more strongly expressed in Revelation (21:1–2), where the holy city, the new Jerusalem, is described as coming down from God out of heaven. This concept is called “living in the eschaton,” a Greek word meaning the end of everything, or the final destiny of the world. This belief relates to the Early Christians’ fervent belief that the Second coming would come in their lifetime. But when the eschaton was delayed, Rome became the effective new omphalos, or centre, with Jerusalem reduced to a pilgrimage site (Cohn, 78).

Both Judaism and Christianity, therefore, show themselves to have a shifting concept of sacred space. This was in part pragmatic, due to political and social circumstances, and in part due to evolution within the religions themselves. Still, Christianity always retained its twofold attitude to Jerusalem as both a physical setting and also a promised land; its symbolism merged with other biblical places such as Eden, Babylon, where the hopes of the faithful had alternately been raised and dashed. We will return to discuss Christian attitudes to sacred spaces in more detail in the context of programmed spaces.

4.4. Islam

The followers of Islam hold that there is a fundamental unity between the sacred and the secular. Given that God has created all things, and that every thing in God’s creation is essentially good, then it can be argued that no place in Islam is more sacred than another. If this is true in theory, this claim can be contradicted, although not entirely, by the fact that Muslims have a sentimental and historical attachment to certain geographical locales. Moreover, one of these—Makkah—is so important that a pilgrimage to this site is required by all faithful Muslims who are able to undertake the trip, as one of the five pillars of the faith. Still Muslims remain less attached to particular locales than any other major religion, with the sole exception of Judaism. We will return to Islamic traditions in the chapter on programmed spaces.

4.5. Hinduism

As in Islamic tradition, the Hindu world-view sees no absolute dichotomy between sacred and the profane. Nevertheless, if this is once again true in theory, in practice Hindus hold certain places to be more sacred than others. For example, they venerate mountains; the Himalayas, writes Anuradha Roma Choudhury, “held the Hindu spellbound.”¹³ The Hindu’s admiration for mountains is evident in the architectural arrangement of Hindu temples, which take over mountain forms. Hindus also worshipped sacred groves, seas and lakes, and, most especially, rivers. Air, fire, earth and ether sustained by water have been held to be an unusually potent source of sacredness. The Hindu concept of *tirtha* is interesting: the word means literally a bridge, or crossing to the “other shore,” or sacred world—essentially a pilgrimage. That is, in order to gain freedom from cycle of lifetimes, Hindus believe that pilgrimages help cleanse one of one’s sins. The more arduous the voyage, the more efficacious it is to cleanse sins.

This is facilitated by Hindus by the practice of ritual bathing. The Ganga (Ganges) is held to be the holiest of rivers, and here sins are said to be cleansed immediately. Dying beside the Ganges is thought to free one from the cycle of death and rebirth. *Tirthas* are moreover conceptualized as a network of forces running in four directions. Land in India is held to be sacred, and the ideal voyage that a Hindu could make (not many do) would see them circumambulating the sacred land of India clockwise, visiting four divine abodes (*dhamas*) that stand at the compass points of the territory of modern India:

- Badrinatha in Himalayans (north);
- three coastal centres: Jagannatha Puri in the east (Bay of Bengal);
- Ramesvaram in south (Indian ocean);
- and Dvaraka in west (Arabian Sea).

Most pilgrims visit local shrines or those on the Ganga, where representations of the four *dhamas* are preserved in one place—e.g., Varanasi. So too have locales with associations with saintly persons have been held to be sacred. Note, too, that Hindus tend to be rather ecumenical in their outlook to holy persons: they regard Buddhist and Jainist temples as possessing sanctity as well. It is also fascinating that Hindus living in North America have developed a new system of *tirthas*, establishing major temples at the four cardinal points of North America. One is found in Pittsburgh, one in Livermore, California, two in Toronto and Montréal, and one in Houston. Hindus can make a pilgrimage to any of these instead of those in India.

Although many Hindus have family shrines, some hold that there is no need for any external sacred space, and believe only in internal sacredness. These latter Hindus are in the minority. Most Hindus would agree, it would appear, that a place is sacred if one feels sanctified by being there. This may explain why there are some shifts in what is regarded as a *tirtha*.

5. Programmed or “Inspired” Architectural Sacred Spaces: An Abbreviated Historical Survey

5.1. Overview of Issues

In this chapter we will be offering an overview of architecturally designed sacred spaces, which I am calling here “programmed” (i.e., planned) or “inspired” (i.e., with the hope of sacredness dwelling within them). Where have religious persons worshipped? What has made a particular space sacred? That is what we will be considering in this chapter. This is the single longest chapter, and includes a great many comparative examples.

5.2. Commonality and Differences between Cultures

“Houses of God may be likened to—in Yeats’s phrase—an “artifice of eternity.”¹⁴ All are intended to embody a system of worship; as such they embody a power greater than human. For this reason, they can simultaneously be a seat of power (sometimes dangerous power), and also a place of refuge and renewal. Many places of worship were built in places where power was thought to reside, for example, the monastery of St. Catherine, at the foot of Mt. Sinai, said to stand on very site where God appeared to humans in the Burning Bush. Conceptually similar are temple cities in many other religions.

5.2.1. *Abstract Analysis of Programmed or Inspired Sacred Spaces*

When examining religious buildings, it is easy to get lost in details. So it is helpful to remember archetypal forms such as:

- enclosure;
- gate;
- altar;
- mountain;
- pillar;
- cave.

Then too, we are invited to become aware of topography. Are structures built on a hill? into a hillside? We need also to consider contrasts and passages from light into darkness and vice versa. These can all be very significant. Other questions include: who can enter? where? Under what conditions, and when? What boons granted to visitors? What dangers (physical or spiritual) do they risk if they enter here without permission? In other words, it is helpful to imagine oneself moving into the space in order to imagine where its sacred properties, if any reside.

5.3. Egypt and Africa

Architecture in these regions introduces the concept of priestly castes, mediators between ordinary citizens and the divine. Buildings likely now thought to replicate astronomical information in their siting, e.g., the pyramids at Giza relating to Orion. The Giza pyramid remains the largest single building

ever erected. Pyramids have evoked some remarkably wrong-headed interpretations over the years. The pyramids have so dwarfed other monuments in Africa that only gradually are worthy monuments emerging from Egypt's shadow. These include such overlooked spiritual places in Africa as the 13th-century Great, or Friday Mosque in Djenné, Mali, one of the great structures of medieval Africa. One observer has described it as "Mud at its most majestic...[and] one of the wonders of Africa."¹⁵

5.4. Jewish Historical Examples

At first Jews worshipped at sacred sites outdoors, then at the temple, and then at the synagogue, which simply means, "assembly." As for historical precedents, it is hard to say whether Solomon's tenth-century BCE temple is really to be considered an historical example, simply because nothing of it remains. What we know stems chiefly from descriptions in 1 Kings 6–8 and parallel account in 2 Chronicles 2–4. Ezekiel also has an extensive Temple section (chapters 40–6). There is no archaeological trace of this First Temple; it was razed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. Even so, we can state that basic shape was rectangle, subdivided laterally into three sections, all with the same interior width—about 105 ft by 35 by 52. (Contradictory measurements are found in Ezekiel.) It was entered through a porch, flanked by two bronze pillars (Jachin and Boaz). Steps led up to the entrance to the Temple proper. A great hall accommodated most of the cultic activities. Beyond this was the Holy of Holies, or the Tabernacle, accessible only to the priestly caste.

The Second Temple was built between 520 and 515 BCE to replace the temple built by Solomon and demolished during the period of Babylonian Exile (586–539 BCE). The third and final temple was rebuilt by Herod, himself a Jew, who was appointed King of Judea by Romans in 31 CE. This temple was demolished by the Roman general Titus and his troops in CE 70.

The Babylonian exile had the effect of lessening the influence of the temple per se; rabbis consolidated teachings, and hereafter, wherever the Torah went, it made a holy place of whatever room Jewish worshippers met in. Where the Torah was became the centre of both religious worship and also of religious learning. Torah study remains important to Jews. Some knowledge of Hebrew is required at the time of Bar or Bat Mitzvah, when the 13-year-old boys and girls read from Torah, respectfully not touching the holy book, but rather pointing to it with a silver pointer.

Despite the nostalgic significance of the Temple, Jews developed a pragmatic approach. A *minyan*, ten Jewish males, could be established anywhere, from a private residence to a more formal setting. All that counted was the presence of the Torah. One writer memorably described this as a "portable fatherland."¹⁶ (Modern Jews, at least in some Conservative and Reform congregations, have relaxed the requirement that the *minyan* consist of adult males, and now number females in the quorum.)

The Temple in Jesus's time would have featured the following elements:

- Gate (Gate Beautiful)
- Altar (in front of court)
- Court of Men
- Court of the Gentiles
- Court of Women
- Inner Court
- [The Clearing of the Temple took place in Court of the Gentiles]

Only fragments of one wall still stands of Herod's temple (Wailing Wall). It was widely recognized, however, as early as the sixteenth century BCE, as a sacred Jewish site.

The earliest surviving example of a synagogue is from Dura Europos, dated to 240 CE, preserved by sand intact after a Roman garrison evacuated the site.¹⁷ It shows an Ark (the scrolls of the Law, or the Pentateuch) surmounted by painting of Solomon's temple, and flanked by frescoes showing Solomon sitting in judgment, finding of Moses in rushes by Pharaoh's daughter, and Joseph amid his brethren. What Dura Europos teaches is that Jews, at least in the first centuries of the common era, did not strictly interpret the commandment against graven images. Dura Europos also anticipates an important point relevant to Judaism as a whole: there was never a single approved style of synagogue. Judaism has demonstrated itself to be very pragmatic and highly varied in its architectural responses.

5.5. Christian Worship Sites: An Overview

The word church has two meanings: the building used for Christian worship, and also the religious community of Christians. There was no monumental Christian architecture per se for at least 250 years following Christ's death. There was no reason for an elaborate architectural setting. A simple Eucharistic meal was shared in a private house by a non-hierarchical community. Then too, periodic persecutions by Roman zealots tended to make Christians keep their heads down.

Some worship took place in funerary settings, where feasts were held on the anniversary of deaths. These were known as *agape* or love feasts. Many of these catacombs—which extend for hundreds of metres, and were hollowed out of the porous volcanic stone outside of Rome—still survive today. Christians did not like Roman practice of cremation, because they felt that resurrection of the dead would require the whole body to be preserved. So they developed elaborate funeral rituals and practices, albeit in secret.

The early Christians probably celebrated the Eucharist in the catacombs. Certain martyrs' sarcophagi had pull-out stone altars on which Eucharistic celebrations took place. There are also some small Christian chapels to be found in surviving catacombs, such as the chapel of St. Agnes, located, as are the rest of the main Christian catacombs, outside Rome. Baptisms seem to have taken place outdoors; the free-standing baptistry is a relatively late development.

The Christian attitude regarding sanctuary was less exacting than that of Jews. There was only a residual concept of the holy, the place where only the priests could enter. There was also no mention of possible death of those who defiled the sanctuary. As for actual buildings devoted to Christian worship, the surviving pre-Constantinian record is scanty. Aside from the catacombs, which survive in large numbers, we do not have many examples of surviving house-churches. This was scarcely surprising, given that they were indistinguishable from ordinary houses, with the exception of an apsidal worship space. A good example of a surviving house church is Dura Europos, in present day Syria, which dates to 256 CE.

Ongoing research has complicated the picture of the earliest purpose-built churches. For instance, during the 1990s two early fourth-century churches were discovered—one at Um Qais, Jordan, another at the Jordanian Red Sea port city of Aqaba. This latter church, thought to have been built between 290 and 320 CE, now lays claim to being the earliest purpose-built church in history. The church at Aqaba, whose dimensions were 25.91 by 16.15 metres (85 by 53 feet), features a stone foundation with mud-

brick walls and arched doorways.¹⁸ Its purpose can be inferred partly by its basilican plan with side aisles, by its orientation to the east, and by artifacts, including a bronze cross found in an adjacent cemetery. There appears to have been a chancel area east of the nave and a rectangular apse. The date can be fixed fairly confidently, due to the presence of pottery and coins in an adjacent cemetery.

As a 1998 article in the American journal *Archaeology* noted:

A few earlier churches are known, but these were originally built for other purposes, such as a house at Dura Europos in Syria that was converted into a church. Usually dated to ca. 230–240, it apparently went out of use when the city was captured by the Persians in 256. Mud-brick churches similar to the one at Aila are known from Egypt, but they are slightly later. Other early Christian churches, like that of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, originally erected ca. 325, have been in continuous use and rebuilt over the centuries, making their original architecture difficult to discern. The church at Aila was used for less than a century. Its latest coins date to 337–361, suggesting the church was a victim of an earthquake that, according to historical sources, devastated the region. The building was then abandoned and quickly filled with wind-blown sand, preserving its walls up to 15 feet in height.¹⁹

There is also a very early Christian worship space located beneath the present-day church of San Clemente in Rome. It is reputed to be the house of St. Clement, the fourth pope, and is attached to a Mithraeum (a temple devoted to Mithras, one of the Persian mystery cults that enjoyed enormous popularity in the pre-Constantinian Roman Empire).

5.5.1. *Post-Constantinian Christian Buildings*

The early Christians' somewhat furtive or at least unostentatious form of worship changed in 313 CE, when the Roman emperor Constantine I adopted Christianity as the official religion of the state (The Edict of Milan). After this, Roman public building types, particularly the basilica, were adapted for Christian use. Christians also adopted Roman funerary buildings, such as mausolea. Thus it is appropriate to see Christian architectural tradition in terms of a pre- and a post-Constantinian tradition.

After Constantine gave approval to Christians, the architectural development was notable and swift. Christian architecture, like Christian theology, is notable for its omnivorous architectural expression. That is, Christians borrowed frequently from other traditions—as indeed they had to, as no Christian architecture per se existed.

The Roman basilica became the single most important Christian building type. This was a long, rectangular building, with a curved, or apsidal end. In Roman legal tradition, the emperor or his representative would sit here during legal proceedings. Christians adopted the basilica as their own. The early church taught that the basilican church was the Eucharistic room. The bishop and presbyters sat in the apse (where the emperor or his designate previously had his symbolic seat). Raised a few steps above the level of the nave was the altar, the place of sacrifice. The altar was raised to symbolize the ancient place where humans and the divine met. The altar was just a table, bare except for chalice and paten, set for a Eucharistic banquet. Over the altar, a ciborium, or canopy, proclaimed the table's special purpose and holiness. These must have been impressive, unitary spaces: seating, apparently, was pretty well absent. Directionality would have emphasized Christian message contained in the altar. In essence, these basilicas are recognizable today as the most common form of “church,” the so-called Latin cross.

Many fourth-century basilicas survive, since at about this time Christianity began its visible reinterpretation of its own history. Having been ignored and persecuted, its members now wished to celebrate the suffering of its early teachers. Early churches include: San Paolo fuori le mura (380, rebuilt 1823); Santa Sabina (425); San Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna (532–536, consecrated 549); (San Vitale (522–47), and Santa Maria Maggiore (432). Some different forms were evident even in the early church. S. Constanza, Rome (350), a monument to Constantine’s daughter, is a mausoleum (the dome is an image of heaven). A similar dome seen at the Rotunda of the Anastasis (Resurrection) at Jerusalem, whose construction began around 340CE—that is, shortly after Constantine’s death in 337. Baptism was given architectural expression by a separate chapel, and, sometimes, in a separate building. If separate, the baptistery was often octagonal in form, relating it to Roman martyria. This was because in the early church there was a strong emphasis on the concept of the symbolic death of the old person, and their rebirth into Christ’s community of the faithful. Baptisteries and churches were considered sacred because of the practice of holy rites there.

Specialized baptisteries were eventually built, for example the so-called Orthodox Baptistery (400–500) and Arian (c. 500), both built in Ravenna, have in dome representation of baptism of Jesus by John. Octagon thought to refer symbolically to Christ; eight referred to first day of a new week, and so to Sunday when the New Age dawned with the resurrection of Jesus.

5.5.2. *Martyria and Associational Shrines*

Christians celebrated their martyrs. We see a very early development of interest in martyrs’ resting places, an especially good example of which is St. Peter’s in Rome. Here is where transepts (the lateral side arms) were developed: partly to handle crowds of pilgrims, and partly to accommodate those who wanted to be buried close to the saint. It was felt that the saint would offer some sort of protection to the faithful. The practice of being buried close to a saint, in fact, not only led to the development of larger burial grounds within sacred buildings, but also spilled over, as it were, into consecrated ground, which was held to have the same form.

Relics became a very important part of Christian sacred site. No part of a saint’s body was too insignificant to be venerated. These might include “Our Lord’s shoe, his swaddling clothes, blood and water from his side, bread from the feeding of the five thousand and the Last Supper ... the rods of Moses and Aaron, relics of St. John the Baptist.”²⁰

Other important early associational shrines include the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. One early church celebrates Saint Simeon Stylites—the Church of Qalaat Seman, Syria, 587–90 CE (the Monastery of St. Simeon, North of Aleppo, Syria), around pillars on which Saint Simeon lived for forty years.

5.5.3. *Later Christian Examples*

There are so many, and of such rich variety! This book cannot even begin to cover them. But if you are not familiar with them, I recommend a look at some of the examples listed below:

- Hagia Sophia, Justinian’s great sixth-century church in Constantinople, with which he hoped to rival Solomon;

- Aachen, Charlemagne’s Palatine Chapel, in which he was crowned Holy Roman Emperor, on Christmas Day, 800 CE;
- Conques and other pilgrimage churches, the expression of medieval pilgrimage;
- the harmonious middle Byzantine churches, which survive in isolated pockets of Greece;
- Cluny and the other great Benedictine houses—and Cîteaux, France, the Cistercian’s pointed commentary on Benedictine excess;
- Chartres (and other great Gothic churches generally);
- Michelangelo’s dome at St. Peter’s Rome; Wren’s dome at St. Paul’s;
- the creative excesses of eighteenth-century German baroque.

The possibilities are almost infinitely rich. If I treat this material lightly here, it is not due to a lack of respect, but rather to a sense that the material is nearly overwhelming.

5.5.4. *The Monastic Contribution*

The monastery was a sort of paradigm of Sacredness on Earth. Monastic architecture is one of the most important developments in sacred architecture. This is a subject I am quite interested in and I will devote a considerable proportion of the rest of this chapter in introducing monasticism to you.

There are many different kinds of monasticism—not just Christian. I am most familiar with the Benedictine tradition. In order to put Benedictine spirituality into context, it will be helpful to give you an historical overview of St. Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-c. 547 CE), the father of western monasticism. In North America, the monastic life, once intimately familiar to most of those who practice the Roman Catholic faith, is now unfamiliar to all but a few. Many people have developed an image of monks and nuns gleaned from books, and from the *Caedfael* series on PBS television. But the teachings of St. Benedict, a sixth-century Roman, form the basis of all western monasticism since then—a contribution of paramount importance in western cultural history.

People living in Europe during the sixth century of the Common Era faced many political upheavals that made life very precarious. Many people sought alternative ways of life. Benedict, who grew up not far from the then-decaying capital of the Roman Empire, was one of these. He founded a monastic community, and developed a Rule by which the monks under his guidance were to live. This Rule is his legacy to western culture. Like earlier monastic founders, Benedict reasoned that only by separating themselves from the world could the monks attain spiritual peace. The word “cloister,” which comes from a Latin word meaning “enclosed,” describes the enclosed gardens found in all monasteries, and has come figuratively to describe the life of all persons separated from the everyday world. Paradoxically, by abandoning the world, the monks attained spiritual wealth.

Safe from the depredations of the world, Benedict established a system of independent and hierarchical governance, with an elected abbot ruling as a sort of surrogate Christ. The monks pledged to live according to the spirit of the Rule, which so clearly embodied the Christian philosophy of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Those who felt a calling for monastic life were gently tested to see whether their resolve was true. They were read the Rule daily, twice through over the book of a year; only then did they commit to a period of trial membership, with solemn vows sworn several years later. By this way most of the broken-hearted or spiritually damaged persons were weeded out by a kind and gradual process.

Benedict was not the first Christian to devise a rule for living together, yet his rule differed from his predecessors in several crucial respects. Most importantly, Benedict did not ascribe to some of the excessive asceticism of his predecessors—those Christians who lived for years in the desert, for instance, or who flagellated themselves for their sins. To an ascetic who chained himself to a rock to combat concupiscence, Benedict is said to have remarked, “chain yourself with your faith in Christ, brother.” Such a remark points to the balanced and tempered quality of Benedict’s thought.

The Rule itself is simple, and short; its precepts address the best qualities in the human spirit. Benedict’s Rule is based on a genuine and profound understanding of Christianity, with the connotations of forgiveness, self-examination, and self-perfection. It is for these reasons that the Rule has survived for some fifteen hundred years.

The monks living according to Benedict’s Rule are known as a Contemplative Order, in that they are devoted to living their life apart from the active world (in contrast to Active Orders, such as the Franciscans and Dominicans, Orders that were established later in the Middle Ages). The Benedictines adopted the motto “Ora et labora,” a Latin phrase meaning prayer and work. Their daily life is devoted to prayer (up to seven times a day), and to a balance between manual and intellectual labours. This combination of talents enabled them to found and run monasteries all across Europe—from Monte Cassino in Italy to Cluny in France, and beyond.

The Benedictines founded both male and female contemplative orders. Benedict’s twin sister, Saint Scholastica (c. 480-547), is regarded as the founder of female monasticism—the tradition out of which grew such notable spiritual leaders as Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), the 12th-century German theologian and musician whose work we will be considering in more detail in a subsequent chapter.

The first biographer of St. Benedict was no less a man than Pope Saint Gregory I or Gregory the Great (c. 540-604), a giant of church history who was Pope from 590 CE until his death. Gregory, who gives his name to the Gregorian chant, was the first pope who stemmed from the Benedictine monastic tradition. This points to an important aspect of the political success that the Benedictine order has enjoyed: from the time of Gregory, they have remained supporters and allies of the popes, and have frequently been given benefits from this association.

Perhaps the single key aspect of Benedictine thought is their sense of commitment—their desire to lead a life devoted to an increasingly deeper harmony with a self-declared set of spiritual principles. Such an attitude might be compared with Socrates’ “considered life.” This leads the Benedictines into a paradox—living a stable life committed to change. Change, in this case, is defined internally—the change of the spirit. Early Christians well understood this paradox as “people of the way.”²¹ Their record of commissioning the creative arts is admirable. God, to them, is perfect harmony; the fine arts hold an important place for them insofar as they can inspire the viewer to contemplate divine harmony. Benedictines have numbered among the most important patrons of art the western world has ever seen. Like the famous abbot Suger (c. 1081-1151), patron of the 12th-century abbey of St. Denis in France, where the Gothic style is said to have been born, they believed that the arts could help lead one to a contemplation of the world beyond appearances. The Latin word *superbia*, originally meaning pride, describes this attitude well. Pride? This, after all, is one of the original sins when it takes the form of arrogance. In this case, I mean the word in a positive sense—the Benedictines’ pride in commissioning arts and architecture.

A third aspect of Benedictine spirituality that many would find still inspiring is their commitment to a life of Christian charity and forbearance. The Rule, so closely modeled on the best example of Christ's teachings, leads them to embody humility, modesty, an intention not to judge others, and to accept their faults. These are all admirable communitarian goals. Surely for even non-Christians, there is benefit in meditating upon the lessons of Christian forbearance and humility.

At this point, I would like to introduce you to insights that Esther de Waal offers, in her book *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict*. In this book, de Waal discusses precisely my theme. I have delayed referring to her book until now, because I wanted to explore the theme in my own way before turning to her arguments, which I recommend to you. De Waal structures her book according to quite abstract themes, namely, "the Invitation," "Listening," "Stability," "Change," "Balance," "Material Things," "People," "Authority," and "Praying." Time does not permit an exploration of each of her arguments. At the risk of oversimplifying, her book points to the central importance of process in Benedictine spirituality. That is, de Waal argues that the Benedictines, by virtue of their stability in physical and emotional terms, are free to undertake a life-long process of spiritual exploration and growth. Here are some of de Waal's thoughts on the theme of stability:

The beauty of the Rule is the way in which the three vows, to stability, to fidelity of monastic life and to obedience, all interrelate. Even if we separate them and look at them one by one we shall discover that common themes and underlying threads bind them together, and that there is an inner logic by which they constantly illuminate, deepen, and depend on each other. Together they become one great affirmation. They are not, as they might seem at first glance, about negation, restriction and limitation. They are saying Yes to entering into the meaning of our baptism as Christians and into the paschal mystery of suffering and dying with Christ so that we may rise again with him. They involve us in the need to face a number of very basic demands: the need not to run away, the need to be open to change, the need to listen. They are based on a commitment which is both total and continuing. And yet the paradox is that they bring freedom, true freedom.²²

I am attracted on some deep level to truths that seem to resonate from within these words. The paradox of change within stability is something that all of us might gain insights from.

Perhaps one lesson to retain from the example of Benedictine spirituality is that life invites us to define a balance between regulation and freedom, between ourselves and some greater "other"—whether that "other" is defined in spiritual and theological terms, or simply interpersonal ones. St. Benedict wrote that only by standing still could one move forward. In the reverberating activity of daily life, such words have the clarity of a mountain echo.

Let me conclude this section with some comments from the twentieth-century Trappist monk and theologian, Thomas Merton (1915–1968), that to me sum up well our present-day dilemma of defining a spiritual life in the midst of our secular existence:

... being attentive to the times of the day: when the birds begin to sing, and the deer came out of the morning fog, and the sun came up. The reason why we don't take time is a feeling that we have to keep moving. This is a real sickness. We live in the fullness of time.... The whole thing boils down to giving ourselves in prayer a chance to realize that we have what we seek. We don't have to rush after it. It was there all the time, and if we give it time, it will make itself known to us.²³

Such words might have been written by Emerson, or by other transcendental Unitarians of the nineteenth century, and testify to the commonality between faiths. That there may exist a common stratum lying beneath words and doctrinal differences, I would suggest, is perhaps the central lesson to be gained by a study of Benedictine spirituality: spiritual truths are all around us, and can be gained best through slow and careful accretion, like a pearl growing inside the self.

So what about surviving monasteries? Cluny is gone, all but a fragment, as are the Cistercian monasteries in the United Kingdom. But there are pockets of monastic architecture all over the world. There are also Orthodox Christian monasteries. I had the privilege to visit Rila Monastery, in Bulgaria (1335–nineteenth century), a pearl of a building located in the picturesque Bulgarian hills. It was once a place where political dissidents sought refuge. There are also many monasteries on North America, from Benedictine to Orthodox and Buddhist. They constitute a living tradition once again.

5.6. Islamic Traditions

As we discussed above, in Islamic traditions, all sites are holy, and God is said to dwell everywhere. Muslims, for example, customarily described a desert as having “nothing there but the presence of Allah.”²⁴ Daily prayer, or *salat*—one of the five pillars of the Islamic faith—can take place anywhere. Many Muslims pray alone daily, when they are required to make prayers to God five times during the day, but they are told to pray as a community at noon on Fridays, the Muslim holy day. Even here, though, the mosque need not be a building. The word mosque comes from the Arabic *masjid*, which means only “a place of prostration.” The only essential elements are a space, enclosed to give unity, with an indication of the *qibla*, the direction of Mecca (often located in a *mihrab*, or niche in the wall). The *minbar*, a pulpit, taking the form of a miniature flight of stairs leading away from the congregation, also is often seen (and is sometimes quite elaborate). Chairs are unnecessary; the typical furniture is carpets. (One removes one’s shoes, and washes before prayer.)

Moreover, because Islam wants to affirm the essential sacredness of any permitted activity (the *Qu’ran* divides activities into required, permitted, and forbidden), “the traditional mosque,” Clinton Bennett writes in his chapter in *Sacred Space* on Islam, “often opens out into commercial, educational and even into recreational space, therefore also sanctifying these activities.”²⁵

Muslims take seriously the proscription against graven images; you will never see a human form in a mosque. Some provincial mosques, however, do show animals. The preferred form of decoration is calligraphy—particularly texts drawn from the *Qu’ran*. The geometrical forms themselves favoured by many mosques are said to symbolize the unity of God. So it is probably oversimplifying to say that Muslims are not interested in decorating their mosques.

If prayer can take place anywhere, and if all nature is hallowed as part of God’s creation, some sites are nonetheless particularly hallowed within Islam. The most important site is Makkah—the birthplace of Prophet Mohammed (P),²⁶ and thought to be the navel of the world; the House of Abraham; the Kaaba or stone is thought to be an altar whose sanctity began with man and is everlasting. It was built by Abraham himself, God’s prophet, and the immense cube of basalt stands 34 feet high, 31 wide, and 38 long.

One enters the Great Mosque through the Gate of Salvation—one of the city’s nineteen gates—and passing through the inner gate of the Sons of the Old Woman, the pilgrim salutes the shrine. “Here

am I, O God, at Thy Command. Thou hast no equal. Here am I.” The entire city of Makkah is sacred, and is only accessible to Muslims. The second most holy site in Islam is Medina, where Prophet Mohammed (P) died. Then comes Jerusalem, sacred to Islam because of the Dome of Rock, the oldest existing mosque, dating from 690–2, and the place where prophet Mohammed (P) ascended to heaven on a night journey from which he returned with the instructions about how Muslims were to pray.

All practicing Muslims must, if their material circumstances and health permit, undertake, as one of the five pillars of their religion, a pilgrimage to Makkah.

Jerusalem remains sacred to all three of the biblical religions.

Sunna has the largest number of adherents within Islam, and is characterized as Islamic Orthodoxy. Shia Muslims are the main deviating sect, and are particularly prominent in Iran. Ismaili Muslims are minor in terms of numbers but are very influential in Canada. They follow the Aga Khan as a spiritual leader.

5.6.1. *Islamic Examples*

Islamic architecture possesses many architectural treasures. Some of the most beautiful are the Friday Mosque, in Isfahan, Iran, or the Blue Mosque in Istanbul. In contrast to many mosques, the Blue Mosque accommodates non-Muslim visitors. The volunteers at the mosque stand ready to lend women dressed immodestly (or men wearing shorts) a shawl to help preserve modesty. The mosque is as beautiful within as any building I have seen—although I have to say I prefer the hoary, ancient and timeworn majesty of the nearby Hagia Sophia, which, however, is no longer used as a mosque. As in the case of churches, there are so many mosques that I can only mention these few.

5.7. Hinduism

Hinduism celebrates rich pantheon between Shiva (creator, destroyer), Krishna (preserver), and Brahma. There are many other minor deities. Hinduism is also a very ancient religion that preserves many ancient pre-Aryan forms: sun, phallus (lingam), sacred fig tree, snake, hump-backed bull. Such diversity is reflected in Hindu architecture, and it is difficult to generalize without error.

Hindu temples are clearly designed as “lightning rods” or focusing elements; they provide a link between the Gods and humanity.²⁷ They are clearly separated from the mundane world. Generally, a gate precedes a holy of holies. As one author has remarked, “The Hindu temple is designed to bring about contact between man and the gods; it is here that the gods appear to man [*sic* throughout]. The process by which this contact is made comprises a series of ideas and beliefs incorporating a complex symbolism. Dynamic rituals and ceremonies permit a realization of these ideas through which the Hindu temple functions as a place of transcendence, a place where man may progress from the world of illusion to knowledge and truth.”²⁸

The main altar in many Hindu temples is said to represent mythical Mount Meru, located somewhere north of the Himalayas.²⁹ Atop the altar was a terrace, surmounted in turn by an egg, symbolizing Nirvana, transcendent reality beyond forms. Stupas are frequently seen in Hindu sacred architecture. These were originally cairns raised over reliquaries, and gradually developed into the stepped wedding cake style of temple that we know from many examples.

5.8. Taoist

Taoism, or “The Way,” is the indigenous religion of China. It is closely associated with the worship of nature, which is personified. Mountains, for example, are regarded as possessing a living spirit. Holm and Bowker, in *Sacred Space*, argue that the Chinese veneration of nature is connected with a view found in many cultures, “by which a people sees its land as the centre of the world and, in this case, as intrinsically sacred.” (p. 3). One notable example is the Hanging Monastery of Hengshan, a Holy Taoist Mountain, in the sixth century CE. Mountains are a medium through which mortals associate with the divine. As in the case of Hinduism, Chinese associate sacredness with actual geography. There are nine sacred mountains in China: four are Buddhist and five are Taoist. All are sites of pilgrimage.

5.9. Buddhism

As in Christianity, there are many, many, different forms of Buddhism, many of which are associated with national and ethnic traditions. Buddhism, according to Martin Board in *Sacred Place*, holds that “all places are potentially ‘sacred’ or, at least, to be treated with some respect. The sun, moon, planets and stars are each considered the homes of deities or spirits and this earth is abundant with them. Throughout the world there are to be found sacred rivers, lanes, rocks, mountains, trees and the rest, even the least of which are the abodes of life. Buddhists readily adopted the prevailing Indian notion of deities charged with the guardianship of the ten directions (the four cardinal and intermediate directions and above and below), and the four Great Kings who rule the north, south, east and west are said, even in the earliest texts, to have presented to the Buddha with offerings.”³⁰

For example, Buddhism in China seems to have taken over this essentially Taoist view of nature. There are four sacred mountains in the Chinese Buddhist tradition; each has sacred force associated with the earth itself, known as dragon current. Dragon currents of two kinds, yin and yang; mountains embody yang, or male, force. We might compare this with *Feng shui*, the science of wind and water—a kind of geomancy. The Chinese Buddhist sacred mountains are (see *Atlas*, 116):

- Wutaishan (north)
- Emeishan (Lofty Eyebrow Mountain (west)
- Putushan (east);
- and Jihuashan (south).

Each is associated with one of the great bodhisattvas (or enlightened ones). Emeishan is associated with Puxian, god of universal kindness, who rides a white elephant. (The Chinese fondness for these guardian spirits, by the way, help explain the otherwise baffling and frightening presence of awesome, frightening guardian spirits in, for example Chinese Buddhist tombs).

If there are many different forms of Buddhist practice, it is scarcely surprising that there are many, many different architectural forms as well. Very early forms had pillars—apparently erected on sites hallowed by the Buddha. Also, however, we find rock-cut chapels.

Certain later temples, more elaborate, were erected on sites hallowed by Buddha, as are seen in Wilson’s *Atlas*. There are many large shrines, some associated with the Buddha, some not. Many claims to attention of Buddhists—from Bodhgaya, where the Buddha gained enlightenment, through to many other sites with less direct historical connections with the Buddha.

5.9.1. *Examples: The Potala Palace, Lhasa, Tibet*

This is a gigantic Buddhist complex of worship, associated with Dalai Lama, spiritual leader of one branch of Buddhism. Many photographs show prayer flags, on which the faithful write their troubles. In Tibet, a sacred mountain circuit is thought to atone for sins of a lifetime. This is a pilgrimage site for Hindus, Jainists, and Buddhists.

5.9.2. *Schwedagon, Burma*

This is a gold-covered Buddhist shrine, said by Wilson to be the tallest in the world at 386 feet (but Salisbury cathedral's spire stands 404 feet).

5.9.3. *Borobudur, Java (see Atlas, 102)*

This gigantic structure was built during the 8–9 centuries CE, possibly originally as a Hindu monument. It is known as the Temple of the Thousand Buddhas and has a form like a stupa, a structure created to house relics, and derived from burial mounds. Looks like a celestial city, with profusion of bell-shaped domes and terraces. Circular figures symbolize wholeness. There are 432 statues of the Buddha here! It is the largest Buddhist shrine in the world. There are three miles of wall carvings on its sides.

5.9.4. *Nara, The Horuji Buddhist Temple (see Atlas, 110–11)*

This is a temple complex testifying to Buddhism's early arrival in Japan—in 552 CE. Complex includes Goju No To, five-storey pagoda, and several halls. The oldest octagonal religious building in Japan stands on this site—Yumedono, the pavilion of dreams. Also on the site is the colossal statue of Buddha Amida, dating to 1252 CE.

5.10. Shinto

Shinto is the indigenous religion of Japan. Its most famous example shrine at Ise, Japan (see *Atlas*, 108), is said to be rebuilt every twenty years. Shinto is ancient nature-based religion of Japan. It venerates spirits of nature (similar to Taoist Chinese) and regards nature as essentially sanctified. This explains why Japanese truly revere nature, as, for example, in case of Mt. Fuji, or in case of twin rocks of Ise—again, covered with materials renewed frequently, in this case, annually. Shinto points out that sacredness does not reside in the materials per se. In practice, Buddhism and Shintoism co-exist in Japan.

5.11. Sikhism

Guru Nanak (1469–1539), the first great among the ten Sikh gurus, felt that pilgrimages were of very limited spiritual use. He felt that “genuine pilgrimage was a kind of internal journey, a matter of the heart.” But this did not prevent his followers from developing a belief that the spiritual heart of Sikhism is found in the Golden Temple of Amritsar, India.

5.12. Jainism

The Jains are a small and venerable religious group emanating from India. They are best known for their abhorrence of all pain and suffering caused to living creatures. Like the Chinese Taoists and the Japanese Shintoists, the Jains revered mountains, and many of their shrines are located there, e.g.,

Mount Abu, which rises 4,000 feet near the village of Dilwara, in Rajasthan, India. Many of these lofty sites became temple cities known as ‘mountains of immortality.’³¹

Suggested Further Reading:

Humphrey, Caroline, and Piers Vitebsky. *Sacred Architecture: Symbolic Form and Ornament Traditions of East and West, Models of the Cosmos*. London: Duncan Baird Publishers, 2003.

Robinson, Martin. *Sacred Places, Pilgrim Paths: An Anthology of Pilgrimage*. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997.

6. Programmed Architectural Spaces: Recent Notable Examples

6.1. Overview of Issues

In this chapter we will be considering recent notable examples of buildings from different religious traditions.

6.2. Analysis of Recent Religious Structures

What do a Benedictine monastery, an Orthodox religious community, and some liberal Protestant Christians and Reform Jews who share worship space have in common? They are each attempting to devise new forms of sacred spaces within the context of shifting liturgical, social, and financial requirements. By using three examples as case-studies, this section explores two divergent strategies evident in certain recent North American places of worship—*atavism* and *accommodation*. *Atavism* is here defined as a desire to return to the initial architectural and liturgical practices characteristic of the religious group in question, irrespective of contemporary social realities; *accommodation* is defined as an attempt to respond to contemporary realities—whether social, financial, liturgical, or a combination of these and others—with a view to making religious spaces more responsive to shifting social and liturgical practices. As is sometimes the case with dichotomous arguments such as this, the most valuable insights to be gained are when the points of tension and interaction between *atavism* and *accommodation* are isolated and examined. Considering the fruitful places where these two attitudes interact will be the principal goal of this section.

6.2.1. *New Skete, New York*

Throughout history, God has spoken to the great and to the small in equal measure: there is no relationship between the size of a religious community and its influence. In the case of the religious community of New Skete, New York, a small band of determined and talented individuals has set about to revolutionize Eastern Orthodox monastic life. Known for its a commitment to the renewal of a dynamic liturgical practice suited to contemporary American life, New Skete has been described by the architect and priest Fr. Alexis Vinogradov as “in the forefront of liturgical development and renewal.”³² New Skete is committed to reintroducing what its members perceive to be the true and powerful religious sentiments that have been lost by current generations. Its members believe in creating a powerful, dynamic liturgy, one that can be expressed in unaffected (but still poetical and dignified) American English. These achievements have been realized in a climate in which a great deal of sentimental and perhaps even political value has been attached to the retention in the Orthodox services of languages other than English or to so-called hieratic English in the Orthodox services.

New Skete is a group of members of the Orthodox Church of America, located near Cambridge, on a rocky, heavily wooded site in eastern New York State. It comprises the Monks and Nuns of New Skete, and affiliated Companions of New Skete. Each of the three communities live separately, but they

worship together. The monks are renowned for training and breeding German Shepherds; the nuns are celebrated for their cheesecake. The monks were first members of the Franciscans of the Byzantine rite.

The monks were encouraged in their studies by liturgists active in the Roman Catholic church, in particular, the Jesuit father Juan Mateos of the Pontificio Istituto Orientale in Rome, who had by this time published a number of works on Orthodox Christianity. Other influential advisors during these years included Father Alexander Schmemmann, then-Dean of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary, whose writings contributed to Vatican II's understanding of the liturgy; and Father John Meyendorff, a theologian and writer known especially for his contributions to Byzantine studies.

"Architecturally," explains Fr. Marc Labish, a member of New Skete in an interview with the author, "Fr. Mateos suggested that we could rearrange furniture in the church so to speak, so that the celebrant is in the midst of the celebrating congregation. All priestly prayers are recited out loud for everyone to hear—and spaced throughout the service according to their proper place, just as they do in the Roman and Anglican churches, for example. The architecture can enhance the ability of the priest to communicate with the people (for example, by moving the priest's chair into the middle of the nave).

"When you have the priest sitting in the nave, there is a regular walkway between him and the altar, as he moves back and forth. There's a dynamism: it's not static. Sometimes he is listening to the word of God with everybody else, and then, at the altar, he leads us in making the offering. With this movement, pews are in the way. We got rid of the pews to allow for this dynamism. Either you have a static liturgy, with a static architecture, or else you have a dynamic liturgy with more interchange between the priest and the congregation, and there's more movement with the priest around the building. Architecturally, this entails a greater openness, removing blockages so that sound carries. This necessitated a modification of the icon screen from a solid wall, which signifies and actuates a blockage of sound and sight. What would we do? Should we eliminate it? No—it was too important a marker for the altar. So in order to preserve the sacred space, we went back to Constantinople, to the *templon* [altar screen], a pre-Iconoclastic form (still seen in some sixth-century churches). On Mount Sinai, there is an original Justinian *templon*, fronted by a later iconostasis."

Inspired by the success they had enjoyed in reviving both ancient liturgical practice and in developing a suitable architectural framework for the liturgy, the monks of New Skete set about to build their first permanent church. Constructed in 1969, it was inspired by Ukrainian and northern Russian wooden churches, with their characteristic gold onion domes. New Skete's second church, dedicated 1982, and designed by Fathers Marc and Laurence, was largely constructed by members of the community. This church is much less obviously Orthodox in its design than the first. Only vestigial onion-domes are still present, for example. Inside, the space is serene, with white walls contrasting with harmonious, well-crafted woodwork and icons. According to Father Marc, "This church was built on our increased and accumulated knowledge of the renewed liturgy and services that we had been using. So whereas the old church was like a traditional monastic chapel, the new church's footprint was designed with our liturgy, our practice in mind. It's a flowering of our studies—and yet, if you go back to pre-Iconoclastic churches, it's similar. In many ways it's going back to a more integral simplicity."

Natural light is admitted via unobtrusive but very effective clerestorey windows. These windows have both a practical and also a symbolic importance. "Clerestorey windows admit light in a way that is essentially Byzantine (eastern theology is a theology of light). So in this church, very distinct from the earlier church, light is very prevalent."

In Orthodox services, the entire liturgy is sung; music plays an essential role in the religious observances. New Skete has devoted itself to an equally thoroughgoing revision of received musical practice. The development of new musical settings has been the role of Father Laurence Mancuso, the spiritual father of the community since its foundation. Father Laurence works with the monks and nuns (who sing together in worship) to develop new settings for the texts.

The present author has been present at several religious services of the community, including the Feast Day of the Transfiguration—an especially important part of the annual cycle, because the monastery is dedicated to the Transfiguration. In each of these services, the clarity, vigour, and tangible imagery of the English employed in the services was matched by the powerful and harmonious musical settings. Father Marc observes that, “What we are trying to do is to use music that is not strange-sounding for American ears. So we want to use a type of music that carries the power of chant to uplift the soul and heal the body. Alexander Kastal’sky is an important twentieth-century Russian composer who brought into play the authentic folk harmonies with the ancient church music, the *Znamenny chant*, an ancient Russian form, instead of German or Italian harmonies that became popular in Russian churches.

The sheer number and quality of the publications that this small community has produced, working with its own resources, is little short of staggering. The monks have worked to modernize classic texts, and adapt new ones, to their specific liturgical practice. In the brochure advertising these books, one finds again and again, in bold type, words such as: “in modern English” and “reform.” Any doubts as to the polemical nature of their enterprise is dispelled upon turning to the critical introductions included in some of their publications. Their Passion Week and Easter liturgy, for example, contains a forty-one page introduction. As in the prefaces that George Bernard Shaw wrote for his plays, this introduction offers a vigorous justification for the work at hand. Just one passage from the introduction to the Holy Week and Easter liturgy must suffice to give some idea of the monks’ feisty and vigorous writing style and polemical, icon-shaking (if not -breaking) style:

It is astounding to hear [they write,] so many clergy teaching their people in sermons and elsewhere that ‘nothing has ever changed in Orthodoxy’—! And for those who would not go so far, the last five or six hundred years (if not fewer) are the place to look for what authentic liturgy should be. Trouble is, they do not see that their notions are mistaken. They are unwilling to see that an investigation of the *earlier* past might shed a great deal of light on their mistaken notions. Furthermore, an investigation of the rituals of *other* churches, if only those of the east, might show us something of value for the enrichment of our own lives, both by way of theory and of practice. But, again, we are sure that those not of our household can teach us nothing. And it has come to be that even those who *do* belong to our household can teach us nothing!³³

If this is atavism, then perhaps our terminology needs to be revised. Yes, the monks are committed to the use of architectural forms that are atavistic—one thinks of the onion domes, the iconostasis, and the icons themselves. Yet the second church, along with the musical and liturgical practices in the church, are both ancient and new at the same time—timeless in the sense that religion itself is said to stand outside of time. So too is their liturgy. Thus the use of the term atavistic, used in the context of New Skete, must be reckoned as being alive and vital, and capable of inspiring new directions for careful students of liturgy and architecture.

It is surely significant that the following words were highlighted in a New Skete copy of Thomas Matthews' study, *The Early Churches of Constantinople*:

The liturgy, too, begins to take on flesh, and its appearance is not what the liturgists have imagined; enslaved by their texts, they have generally treated their subject as simply prayer formulae. Instead, liturgy is an enormously complex symbol whose message is carried in gesture, motion, and display as much as in words. It is not a speculative statement of propositions, but an action—and its impact on its participants is to be discovered in its performance.³⁴

6.2.2. *The Abbey of Saint-Benoît-du-Lac, Québec*

As in the case of New Skete, Saint-Benoît-du-Lac, a Benedictine monastery in Québec, Canada built in several stages culminating with a monastic church completed in 1994, defies easy categorization.³⁵ On the one hand, the building's longitudinal basilican plan, with its regular structural system clearly articulated, is clearly based on ancient monastic precedent. This might suggest that atavism was the principal strategy employed. But on the other, the building is also witness to the accommodation strategy, in that many architectural details of the building provide evidence of an acceptance of contemporary architectural style.

This monastery is distinguished architecturally for two main reasons. First, the initial portions of the monastery, constructed between 1939 and 1941, are the only North American works of the noted Benedictine architect-monk Paul Bellot (1876–1944), an architect who is only now attaining the sort of acclaim that many feel is long overdue. An architect-monk, Bellot strove to balance two seemingly irreconcilable goals: to create a timeless architecture suitable for anagogical ends; and yet also to create an architecture of his own day, in which technical solutions were based on contemporary engineering principles. Thus in Saint-Benoît-du-Lac the building's shell is realized in reinforced concrete, but the details of the building's stone facing, and fenestration, are designed according to the Golden Section, which, for Bellot, was a way of calling the attention of the monks, however so subtly, to the contemplation of the divine. By our reckoning, this monastery is evidence of both the atavism and accommodation strategies: atavism in terms of its interest in sacred geometries; and accommodation in terms of its acceptance of contemporary engineering innovations.

Saint-Benoît-du-Lac is also distinguished architecturally because of its monastic church, consecrated in December 1994. The church is not intended for regular parish use; its main use is for the monks, who do, however, celebrate a public mass once daily. The uncompromisingly contemporary design was designed by Montréal architect Dan S. Hanganu, who in 1989 won a select invitational competition. Hanganu, a Romanian-born Québécois architect of Orthodox Christian faith, is known for his Modernist advocacy of contemporary architectural idioms and materials.³⁶ Thus he was not an obvious choice as architect. Hanganu created a design that resonates with ancient monastic architectural and liturgical forms. Atavism may be seen in the way that the church building's structural system offers a parallel with the ancient pattern of High Gothic churches. In every case, the materials used are contemporary. For example, steel columns provide a regular cadence within the nave that is structurally very similar to Gothic buildings. On the one hand, the building's contemporary styling would seem to suggest that the monastic community is attempting to accommodate it with current aesthetic thinking. On the other, as in the case of New Skete, its liturgical practices relate more to what has been defined here as the atavism strategy. For instance, the pronounced emphasis on both the altar and on the holy

water fonts are clear indications that the precepts from Vatican II requiring that the rites of the church should be visible to the faithful have been adhered to.

6.2.3. Cedars Worship Centre, Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario

The Cedars is believed to be North America's first purpose-built Jewish-Christian worship place of worship. Designed by Toronto-based architect Charles Simon, the sanctuary opened in 1996. The Cedars was designed to serve the needs of a Westminster United Church and Temple Shalom, a Reform Jewish congregation—both denominations being situated on the liberal end of their respective religious traditions. The United Church in Canada is a Canada's largest Protestant church, a liberal Christian denomination with the declared goal of being “not merely united, but a uniting Church.” The Reform Jewish movement is likewise considered to be a liberal denomination.

Initially, members of both congregations were understandably nervous. Christianity, after all, especially its militant practitioners, has long held as a central tenet that Christianity supersedes Jewish traditions. The chief challenge was how to give each faith a clear visual identity in the building without favouring one or the other. The eventual architectural solution was very simple: two top-lit sanctuaries gaze at each other, symbolizing the two different worship spaces. The symbolic connotations of the two towers was underlined in a text printed at the time the Centre opened, when an anonymous writer observed, “The monitor for the Jewish sanctuary catches the evening light. The monitor of the Christian sanctuary picks up the morning light. Two congregations, as complementary as night and day, working together, sharing a building.”³⁷

It would seem self-evident that this building is witness to the accommodation strategy. One might even argue that the Cedars merely recognizes the historical fact that Jews who live in predominantly Christian settings have been forced to pursue a strategy of accommodation. Indeed, the very definition of a traditional synagogue, that ten adult males be present to constitute a *minyan*, points to the flexible architectural notion of Jewish sacred space: God is where God's people are.³⁸ And yet while there were some financial advantages for both congregations to share a common worship space, financial logic does not reign in questions of religious practice: the simple fact is that this purposeful sharing of sacred space by Jews and Christians in a new building has never, insofar as we are aware, been done before. Clearly this was a case of a synergism between congregations, with perhaps a larger goal by some members of expressing their belief in interfaith attitudes.

Because accommodation works both ways here. For example, there are no permanent Christian symbols in the Christian worship space, as these can be offensive to many members of the Jewish congregation. (Crosses are brought in by procession.) If there are no permanent Christian symbols, the Jewish symbols are also somewhat restricted. The ark is very plain, and the *bimah* is a simple wooden platform. The most heavily decorated element is the decorated *parokhet*, or doors over the ark, which feature readings from Jeremiah (17:7–8), cut into decorated metal. The artist is Temma Gentles. In short, Temple Shalom is architecturally a neutral vessel, a place where sacredness is defined by activities taking place there, and not by any preconceived notion or grandeur or sacredness.

The author was privileged to be present during a Sabbath service, and can testify to the convincing creation of an intangible yet definite sense of sacredness, fostered by the ancient practices of reading from *Torah* and chanting prayers, rather than by the architecture in itself. In expounding on the possible meanings inherent in the *Torah* readings of that morning, Temple Shalom President Bob

Chodos referred to the concept of “creative betrayal” with respect to the transmission of Jewish traditions from one generation to the next. This phrase had been cited by the Rabbi Dianne O. Esses, the first Syrian-Jewish woman to be ordained and a graduate from the Jewish Theological Seminary. In an article entitled “Transmitting the Law: Paradoxes of Authority,” Rabbi Esses discusses the charge contained in the book of Deuteronomy that Jews must continue to repeat biblical stories in order to survive as a people.³⁹ The essence of her argument is contained in the following statement: “... the emphasis on repetition can be deceiving. The secret and power behind repetition is that it is not truly repetition at all. The laws *change* in transmission to the people, as does the communal story.” Her conclusion: “It is my prayer that all Jews take the commandment to transmit the tradition, the commandment to ‘betray’ the past, as the holiest of obligations—thereby perpetually transforming the tradition into a living and wild thing.”⁴⁰

It might seem quite a conceptual jump to turn from an exegetical rabbinical article to a discussion of the architecture of Temple Shalom, but perhaps a meaningful link might be made nonetheless. In “creatively betraying” Judaism by accepting to share a worship space with their historical enemies, the members of the congregation of Temple Shalom have proven themselves to be open to the sort of re-evaluation of tradition that Rabbi Esses refers to. The Reform Jewish tradition recognizes the changing social and religious context in which its adherents find themselves. Accommodation, in this case, might be said to refer to the an intelligent and deliberate choice to reinforce Jewish tradition by accepting new places to worship—and new partners in faith. Westminster United, for its part, has lived up to the United Church’s stated goal of ecumenism, and extended that into the realm of interfaith. As Psalm 133:1 has it, in a passage cited by members of the Cedars at the opening, “Behold how good and pleasant it is when kindred dwell together in unity.” If this is in many senses a marriage of convenience, one in which each partner retains its essence and does not seek to know the other deeply, nonetheless for some other members in both congregations, and for the architect, this experiment stands as a frail outpost of interfaith architecture, one whose fragility makes it all the more precious.

7. The Beauty of Order, the Order of Beauty: Benedictine Monastic Architecture and Sacred Geometry

7.1. Overview of Issues

My topic in this chapter is sacred geometry and its relationship to Benedictine architecture. My goal here is to help you to gain an understanding of how geometry has been seen to symbolize the beauty of the divinely ordered world. I will introduce you to a school of monastic architecture that used geometry as a way of pointing to the divine, like some sort of *lectio divina* (sacred reading) carved in stone. So this chapter is mainly about a theory of beauty, beauty conceived of in theological terms as a reflection of divine intelligence, and as expressed through architecture.

7.2. Examples Defined

My principal examples are derived from two Benedictine abbeys: the German abbey of Beuron, and the Canadian abbey of Saint-Benoît-du-Lac (Saint Benedict by the Lake) in Québec, already discussed in the previous chapter. The link between these two examples is Dom Paul Bellot, a French Benedictine architect-monk who worked during the first half of this century, and designed the abbey of Saint-Benoît-du-Lac in 1939. I explored some of this material in a 1997 book on the abbey co-authored with a Québec colleague, Claude Bergeron, entitled *L'Abbaye de Saint-Benoît-du-Lac et ses bâtisseurs*. Rather than simply repeating what you will find there, however, I thought I would attempt some more challenging and speculative avenues of inquiry as to the origins and meanings of sacred geometry in Benedictine architecture in the twentieth century. Finally, I will link Bellot's design with the revival of the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas, which were popular among many Roman Catholic intellectuals during the first half of the twentieth century.

7.3. Sacred Geometry and Architecture

Let us turn now to the subject of geometry and architecture. Architecture and geometry are natural allies; virtually all architecture is based on applied geometry, which imparts a sense of proportion to a structure. Proportions are more than obvious symmetry. Proportions govern relations between all of a building's parts, large and small. The building conceived of in terms of proportions is comparable to the immutably hexagonal form of the snowflake: any change to its form has to affect all its proportions. And the key to proportions is geometry.

It is important to distinguish between applied and theoretical geometry. Applied geometry is the practical knowledge gained on the worksite; theoretical geometry has an abstruse and esoteric quality that sometimes has no connection at all with the construction of buildings, or at least no readily discernible one. With respect to theoretical geometry, there is often an inverse relationship between the ardency of its exponents and the clarity of their explanations. With respect to applied geometry, no esoteric theoretical knowledge underlies its mastery. Any regular geometric figures—the circle, equilateral triangles, squares, and pentagons—can be derived by anyone armed with no more than a

length of rope and a peg. We see such distinctions in the historical record. For example, among the Greeks, two schools of thought developed as to how certain geometrical relationships were to be interpreted. One school—dominated by architects—saw geometry as a straightforward tool to a desired end. The other—dominated by the philosopher-theologians—saw geometry as a mystical language suitable for meditation upon deep secrets of the universe. Pythagoras fell into this latter camp, and his disciples, or so we are told, meditated on certain geometrical relationships as if they were the mysterious words of God. The material we will be looking at requires us to consider both applied and theoretical geometry.

The reason that certain ancient theorists became enamored of geometry is because certain geometrical relationships transcend practicality, pleasing the mind as well as the senses with their properties. Some might say that they delight the spirit. The most important of these is the so-called golden section, or golden ratio, a mathematical and geometrical relationship discovered by Euclid. The mathematical proof for this was first set out in Euclid, Book VI, proposition 30, in the context of an analysis of the regular decagon and regular pentagon. Historically, this special ratio was referred to for many centuries as “divine.” Mathematicians often refer to the ratio by the Greek letter Phi (ϕ). The term “golden” was applied much later, likely during the nineteenth century. Most authorities today refer to the relationship as the golden section, and this is the term I will use throughout this chapter.

7.4. The Golden Section

So what is the golden section? The golden section is the division of any given length so that the smaller part is to the greater as the greater is to the whole. There are several ways of denoting the relationship in terms of a formula. Typically, a line is divided into length A-B, with A-C being the golden ratio. The golden section has a numerical relationship of 1.6083:1, and 0.618 is the reciprocal of 1.618.⁴¹ The formula is: $AC:AB = CB:AC$.⁴² Mathematically, the golden section is roughly equivalent to $5/8$. The same relationship can be described as $\phi = (\sqrt{5}+1)/2$. That is, $2.236/2 = 1.6803$.⁴³

The unique properties of the golden section have long attracted the interest of geometers, mathematicians, and architects. Pythagoras loved the golden section and considered it one of the divine mysteries. During the Middle Ages, the first person to explore the golden section in any detail was probably the thirteenth-century mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci, who gave us the so-called Fibonacci sequence.⁴⁴ This consists of a numerical approximation of the golden section, in which a third number is the sum of the preceding two, thus: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 35, etc.⁴⁵ This theorem stemmed from Fibonacci’s study of the so-called rabbit breeding problem, which he set out in *Liber Abaci* (1202). Note that this sequence, when it attains 21282/13153, has the ratio of precisely 1.6180340, the golden section again.

7.5. The Golden Section in History

Later writers continued to probe the seemingly inexhaustible depths of the golden section. During the Renaissance period, Fra Luca di Borgo San Sepolcro Paccioli (d. 1514) published in 1509 a book entitled *De Divina proportione, On Divine Proportion*, which was illustrated by Leonardo da Vinci. A translation of the French edition’s title reads: *Divine Proportion: A Work Necessary for all Perspicacious and Curious Spirits, where Each of Such Persons who Love to Study Philosophy, Perspective, Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Music and Other Mathematical Disciplines, will Find a*

*Delicate, Subtle, and Admirable Doctrine and Will Delight in Diverse Questions Concerning a Very Secret Science.*⁴⁶ The famous seventeenth-century scientist, Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), likewise termed described this ratio divine, because to him it symbolized the creator’s intention to create like from like. Kepler’s and Paccioli’s attitudes to the golden section provide us with an insight into the near-mystical awe and enthusiasm with which this mysterious ratio has been regarded.

The mystery was justifiable, and so was the enthusiastic awe: there seems to be no end of the golden section, once you become acclimatized to recognizing it. For example, the golden section is found in many natural forms. The golden section is seen in the shells of molluscs (for example the equilateral spiral of nautilus), in the arrangement of whorls on a pine cone or a pineapple, in the arrangements of flowers of the composite family such as the sunflower, and in phyllotaxis (the arrangement of leaves on a stem in certain plants, which follow a sequence of Fibonacci numbers).⁴⁷ And given Euclid’s ancient proof, the presence of the golden section in the pentagon is of considerable interest. The diagonals from a regular pentagon form the pentagram, which contains 200 golden ratios! The pentagon itself can be derived from the circle, one of geometry’s perfect figures. The golden section also occurs in a right-angle triangle.

The golden section also may be found also in more complex regular geometric figures. Plato’s school was responsible for defining five regular convex solids (known now as Platonic solids): the tetrahedron, cube, octahedron, isosahedron and dodecahedron. They liked the last of these especially: its twelve regular facets corresponded to the twelve signs of the zodiac, and each pentagonal face was associated with the golden section—because the point of intersection of two diagonals divides each in the golden section.

From a square, the golden rectangle can be derived simply by tracing an imaginary line equivalent to half the width of the square and extending it so as to form a new ground line. This establishes a relationship of the height to the side of 1.61803:1, the golden section. The golden section rectangle may be further subdivided into a square with an attached golden section rectangle running perpendicularly from the ground line. If you trace diagonals across the golden section rectangles, you will establish new squares, and new golden section rectangles subdivided in that.⁴⁸ This is a figure known as “the whirling square.” Tracing an arc around the diagonals establishes an equilateral spiral.

7.6. Root Rectangles and the Golden Section

Root rectangles may also be derived from the square. The root rectangles derive from the diagonal of a square, simply by projecting the diagonal of a square down so as to form a new bottom line. Thus we pass by the $\sqrt{2}$ through to the $\sqrt{5}$ rectangles. The $\sqrt{3}$ rectangle was particularly favoured; it consists of two halves of an equilateral triangle (0.577). After four such exercises, we reach the square root of five rectangle, which is the most complex and rewarding of the root rectangles. This is because the root five rectangle essentially consists of a square with a golden section rectangle on either side of the square, on a perpendicular axis. Depending on how one conceives the figure, you can see it as square with golden section rectangles on either side, or else as a golden section rectangle on either the left or the right of the figure. In other words, the golden section is embedded within the root rectangle, and combined with its reciprocal, 0.618. These, in turn, can be subdivided into squares and more root rectangles, with the golden section rectangle recurring as well. Proportional systems derived from the root rectangles are often designated as possessing “dynamic symmetry.” As you will have appreciated, the root rectangles

usually incorporate the golden section as an integral component, but they can also express different ratios as well.

The golden section is, in short, a ubiquitous ratio that rightly evokes admiration verging on wonder. It is no wonder that mathematicians and geometers who specialize in this subject often get a mystical in their outlook, seeing harmony in every natural form and regular geometric element. If you really get going on this topic, you might want a little light bedtime reading, such as H.E. Huntley's 1970 study, *The Divine Proportion: A Study in Mathematical Beauty*, or Ann Griswold Tyng's 1975 PhD thesis from the University of Pennsylvania, "Simultaneous Randomness and Order: The Fibonacci-Divine Proportion as a Universal Forming Principle."

7.7. The Golden Section Applied in Architectural Practice

We are concentrating on applied geometry. How does the golden section apply to architecture and the arts? The answer is, almost everywhere and in almost every case. You have seen how often the golden section can be found in nature, and seen also how many different ways it can be derived from geometrical figures. It should therefore come as no surprise that most proportional systems in the west incorporate the golden section as a central element of any proportional system. The golden section proportion could be used to give an overall harmony to the design, by establishing proportional relationships between the parts and the whole. It could also be used to provide a harmonious relationship between the height and length of the building, as well as between the height and width of a given rectangular opening. Its unique and elegant properties were felt to provide a panacea that could at the very least prevent bad architecture and, in the hands of an adept, often produce masterpieces. Once you become acclimatized to the golden section proportion, it is hard to walk around buildings without wondering whether their proportions are established according to the golden section or one of the root rectangles.

The golden section could not have attained this ubiquity were it not flexible and easy to use. In fact, the golden section satisfied the architects with a penchant for theory while also satisfying those with no interest in theoretical issues. It could satisfy both the simple and the erudite because, as we have seen, it can be derived either via complex theorems or else by simple applied geometry learnable by any builder's apprentice. It was so flexible a system, in fact, that the cynic might say that anybody armed with a peg and rope could derive golden section relationships quite by accident.

Mostly by design, therefore, and possibly occasionally by accident, we find the golden section throughout western architecture. We find it governing the proportional relationships at the Parthenon in Athens. We find it in many medieval churches. We find it in windows, and doors. We find it in vases and in chairs and in tables and in paintings. Some idea of how architects might have used applied geometry within the western architectural tradition may be gained from an anecdote related in Wolfgang Braunfels' study on western European monasticism. In the context of an expansion of the great Benedictine abbey of Cluny, we read how St. Hugh "admonished by divine revelation, improved the construction of the church of Cluny both in extent and quality."⁴⁹ Saints Peter and Paul visited a dying monk, a certain Gunzo. Peter informed the monk that he must deliver a message to the abbot about the urgent need to build a new church. The divine origins of the monk's message would be believed because his life-span would be extended by seven years. But woe betide him and the abbot if Peter's orders were not followed. "Having said this, he was seen by Gunzo to *draw out measuring-ropes*

and measure off the length and breadth (of the church). He also showed him in what manner the church was to be built, instructing him to commit both its dimensions and its design securely to memory” (emphasis added). In other words, the process of laying out a medieval church in the west typically involved little more than a knowledge of how to derive regular sub-divisions from a generating form-module, in most cases, the square. (On certain occasions, however, church plans were established by geometric repetitions of a given module that would be multiplied instead of divided. At Bourges, a major cathedral in France, the distance between the outstretched hands of a sculpture of Christ apparently provided the builders with the module on which the entire building was based.)

When did these geometrical relationships start to be designated by the term “sacred” geometry? This term is first encountered during the high middle ages, and described the complex proportional systems undergirding the famous twelfth-century Gothic cathedrals, particularly those of France. Without doubt these cathedrals provide evidence of the deliberate use of proportions for both practical and theological reasons. The Gothic cathedrals, simultaneously marvels of engineering and theology, were erected with reference to a carefully developed knowledge of geometry based, once more, on the secret language derived from regular geometrical forms. Only those who were part of the brotherhood were initiated into the mysteries of the geometry, which were traced on the floor of the workshops of the cathedrals. They jealously guarded this knowledge, passing it on by means of mnemonic songs and other secret rituals, rituals that are still preserved in the traditions of freemasonry. We hear from the famous 19th-century English art theorist John Ruskin (1819-1900) much about the individual craftsman’s ability to interpret freely and to carve what he liked on these Gothic buildings; this may be true of the decorative flourishes of the bosses and capitals, but the overall structure of the cathedral, from its plan to the smallest window elevation, were governed by a secret system of geometrical order geometry known only to the building’s designers. The medieval architects favoured systems derived from squares and triangles; the golden section was incidental to such systems, but was to be found there, given its ubiquity in all regular geometrical forms. The complexity of the geometry that underlies Gothic buildings, particularly in France, bears a close and deliberate relationship to the complexity of medieval Scholasticism, in particular, the School of Chartres. The Gothic cathedrals, as Irwin Panofsky pointed out many years ago, were a form of medieval *summa*, or sermon in stone, and were characterized by sub-divisions as complex as one of the Scholastics’ abstruse arguments.

Following the Gothic period, sacred geometry never disappeared from architectural practice, but it no longer had the same abstruse and mystical connotations. During the nineteenth century, the geometrical basis underlying much ancient and Gothic architecture was rediscovered, particularly through writings of the French restoration architect and historian, Eugène-Émile Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879), who was interested only in the rational constructional basis of geometry, not its possible mystical properties. German scholars from this period published convincing proofs of the Greek use of golden section proportions in many of their most important buildings. Certain twentieth-century architects and artists rediscovered the ancient techniques, and, like their predecessors, were awed by what could result.

In the years bracketing Bellot’s design for Saint-Benoît-du-Lac, for example—that is, from the teens of the twentieth to the dawn of the Second World War—a veritable flood of books were published on geometry, nature, and the arts, in French, German, Dutch, and in English. American scholars were among the most assiduous in exploring the golden section, dynamic symmetry, and their expression in

art and architecture. To cite only a few of the American studies, I mention Samuel Coleman, *Nature's Harmonic Unity: A Treatise on Its Relation to Proportional Form* (1912); the same author's *Proportional Form: Further Studies in the Science of Beauty, Being Supplemental to Those Set Out in Nature's Harmonic Unity* (1920); Jay Hambidge, *The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry* (1919—reprinted as recently as 2006), and the same author's *Dynamic Symmetry: The Greek Vase*, (1920); George D. Birkhoff, *Aesthetic Measure*, (1933); and the erudite and underestimated architect Claude Bragdon's learned book, *The Frozen Fountain: Being Essays on Architecture and the Art of Design in Space* (1932). Clearly, many of the authors of the period had rediscovered many of the ancient secrets of sacred geometry and were eager to share these with their readers.

7.8. The Golden Section in the Work of Benedictine Architect-Monk Paul Bellot

These preceding remarks help establish a context in which we can situate the work of Dom Paul Bellot (1876–1944).⁵⁰ Although scarcely known outside Benedictine circles until recently, Bellot was well enough known back in 1945 that an article was devoted to his work, in the journal *Orate Fratres*, the fore-runner to *Worship* magazine. (The article was written by an M.P. Hamel, and entitled, “Builder of the House of God; Dom Paul Bellot.”⁵¹) Bellot received his architectural training in the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, and yet was also inspired by Viollet-le-Duc's practical approach to geometry and engineering. Viollet-le-Duc was an anomaly: he was a trained restoration architect, and passionately interested in medieval architecture, yet also called for the development of a structurally rational architecture based on forms and materials from his own period. Thus he became a champion of iron and concrete. Bellot absorbed these disparate architectural lessons, then decided to enter the monastery of Solesmes, France, at the time when this monastery was actively pursuing its restoration of the Gregorian chant and other scholarly activities. This is the monastery associated with Prosper Guéranger (1805–1875), the noted French monastic reformer and polygraph, who is regarded as the restorer of French Benedictinism during the nineteenth century. Solesmes was a ruin when Prosper Guéranger became abbot there, but by the time that Bellot entered the novitiate, Solesmes became a formidable castle on the River Sarthes, full of erudite monks excited to be rediscovering and sharing all their old monastic traditions.

Then, in 1901, came another episode in the perennially troubled relations between French state and monasteries in France. All the monks from Solesmes were expelled from France. Bellot and his community found themselves first in Belgium and then eventually at the English-speaking abbey at Quarr, on the Isle of Wight, where they stayed, effectively in exile, until the late 1920s. The influx of foreign monks to Quarr necessitated a major expansion of the abbey; Bellot was called upon to do the design. Bellot had intended to abandon architecture but he was the only person in his community with suitable architectural experience. Bellot designed a new church for the combined communities at Quarr, which was realized between 1907 and 1911. Bellot's contemporaries recognized an unusual gift, and Bellot eventually became one of the leading architects designing monastic architecture in the twentieth century.

During the 1930s, then at the height of his fame, Bellot was invited to come to North America by other members of the Solesmes congregation who had emigrated to a picturesque corner of Québec in the Diocese of Sherbrooke, known as Saint-Benoît-du-Lac, and there had lived there for decades in unsatisfactory temporary buildings. Bellot designed a new monastery for them. The initial two of five

planned wings for the monastery were constructed between 1939 and 1941. They stand as Bellot's only North American works.

Bellot absorbed several different lessons from his quite different architectural teachers. From the Paris *École des Beaux-Arts*, the largest and oldest school of architecture in the western world, he learned how to conceive of large spaces in abstract, pleasing relationships. This helped him design monasteries that functioned well. From Viollet-le-Duc, he learned how to incorporate contemporary engineering—in the case of Saint-Benoît-du-Lac, a core of reinforced concrete, reveted with local granite. The concrete core of the building allowed Bellot to create dramatic interior spaces, such as a six-storey staircase.

7.9. The Beuron School

It is no mystery as to where Bellot developed an interest in sacred geometry, especially given his practical training. In 1948, followers of Bellot published a posthumous semi-autobiographical book that he had intended for publication some years earlier, entitled *Propos d'un bâtisseur du bon dieu/Concerning a Builder for the Good Lord*, in which Bellot states that a group of mystical artist-monks at the famous German abbey of Beuron had introduced him to sacred geometry.⁵² Beuron, of medieval Augustinian foundation, was closed early in the 19th century and refounded 1863 by Benedictines. Beuron was elevated to an abbey in 1868, and despite being repressed anew by German laws between 1875 and 1887, became known during the late nineteenth century as an important art centre.⁵³ It is now the head of Beuroner Congregation, with filiations all over the world, including Japan and Chile, but mainly in Germany. In the United States, there are Beuronese-influenced paintings at St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota, at the Benedictine Conception Abbey, and also at the women's Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Clyde, Missouri.

The main figure in the Beuron school was Peter (later Father Desiderius) Lenz (1832-1928), who had training as an architect and sculptor in Munich before he became a monk at Beuron.⁵⁴ Under Lenz's powerful influence, two painters who also became monks at Beuron developed a recognizable form of artistic and architectural expression that became known as the Beuron school.⁵⁵ Lenz and his followers strove to create a new school based on the primitivism and genuineness of earlier cultures, particularly the pre-Golden-Age Greeks and the Egyptians, with perhaps also some debt due to Rome of the twelfth century and to selected Italian artists of the Quattrocento (that is, 15th-century Italy). This hieratic approach was possibly inspired by the French artist J.-A.-D. Ingres (1780-1867), who started his career under Napoleon and was recognized with a retrospective exhibition in 1855. What Lenz derived from these earlier painters was a sense of order and hieraticism based on obvious dependence on geometric modules.⁵⁶ Order, Lenz believed, should be valued over all other artistic qualities. In his 1912 work *Ästhetik der Beuroner Schule/The Aesthetics of the Beuron School*,⁵⁷ for example, he remarked, "God is the God of Order. The ordered, certain, secure, and harmonic is to be found there."⁵⁸ Thus, nature in itself was not to be disdained, but rather to be regarded as a source of initial principles and inspiration that the artist would then appropriately elevate. If this sounds like the distinctions often drawn between classical and romantic art and poetry, that's probably accurate: what the Beuron artists strove for was a measured, normative art, an art that would please the intellect, as opposed to a unique art that would move the senses. The monks at Beuron found Egyptian and pre-Renaissance western works

sympathetic to their own goals, since these proclaimed the primacy of the Ideal form over simple nature.

Between 1868 and 1870 Lenz and his associates were responsible for designing and executing the small chapel of Saint-Maur at Beuron, whose form evokes early Christian basilicas and whose frescoes, which depict aspects of the life of Saints Benedict and Scholastica and the Blessed Virgin, are notable for their hieratic quality and deliberate archaism, to say nothing of their obvious dependence on geometric ordering systems.⁵⁹ Lenz depicted the human form according to a proportional grid, which he also applied to his analysis of historical buildings. Bellot was fascinated by such artists and quickly adapted the techniques for his own work. At Saint-Benoît-du-Lac, for example, we see repeated geometrical forms, such as the pentagon and the equilateral triangle, that are, as we have seen, derived from the golden section. This evidence clearly demonstrates that Bellot had developed a very sophisticated knowledge of geometric design systems, and it seems incontrovertible that Bellot developed this knowledge as a result of his awareness of the Beuron School. Indeed, he went somewhat further: here is a reproduction of what Bellot called the “mysterious square,” a complex design tool with which he was able to incorporate many different proportional systems into his work. This square allowed Bellot to explore many, many different ratios in what might be termed a symphony of proportional systems.

7.10. Sacred Geometry—Some Possible Explanations for its Use in Bellot’s 20th-century Benedictine Architecture

If the Beuron School introduced Bellot to a system that he adapted and developed further in his own architectural works, we are still no further ahead in determining why Bellot would have felt drawn to explore sacred geometry. I would like now to speculate as to why Bellot and his predecessors at Beuron became adepts of sacred geometry. I will explore with you three possible explanations. What might Bellot have admired about Lenz and the Beuron school? First, architecture based on sacred geometry was consistent with Catholic intellectual patterns during the first half of the twentieth century—specifically, the neo-Thomist character of this period of Benedictine formation. The European Benedictines at the end of the nineteenth century, following the lead of the Church in general under Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903), reigning from 1878 to 1903, were anxious to reestablish their intellectual and spiritual centres. They found such a centre in the theological writings of St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274). Thomism was a philosophical and theological movement that attempted “to systematize revealed truths in a human manner so as to make revelation better appreciated by the orderly, logical, scientific mind.”⁶⁰ In St. Thomas’s formulation, God is beauty, and our human senses, if we perceiving something as beautiful, are specifically responding to that of God within it. “Beauty is that which pleases in mere contemplation,” observed St. Thomas.⁶¹ From our point of view, the most important aspect of St. Thomas’s teaching is his conviction that “wherever there is beauty, there is proportion or order.” Beauty consists in due proportion, delighting the senses. To attain beauty, three elements are necessary: integrity, suitable proportion, and clarity. God and God’s creatures are beautiful; beauty is cognitively delightful. From the visible things of the universe the human mind can know the existence of God as the first efficient, supreme exemplar, and ultimate final cause of all creation. If such attitudes underlay the Thomistic revival, it seems reasonable to speculate that sacred geometry functioned as a tangible reflection of Thomistic thought.⁶² Bellot developed both a theological and an intellectual

attraction to beauty and order. Geometry was proof of order; that in itself was considered a demonstration of God's graceful decision to become incarnate in the world.

A second possibility: Bellot may also have been attracted to the Beuron school because both he and they were beleaguered Benedictines. Perhaps Bellot and other adepts of sacred geometry used geometry as a way of subtly stating the values to which they adhered, in a manner that secular authorities could not understand. The monks of Beuron and Solesmes had made immense achievements in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Yet both Beuron and Solesmes were familiar with persecution and hostility towards monastic life. The memory of hostility from secular authorities hung in the air like miasmal fog, and perhaps spurred the monks on to greater heights in respect to studies on liturgy, art, and architecture, as a conscious way of showing their way of life in a positive manner.

I have tried to imagine what it might have been like for Bellot and the rest of his community to have been expelled from Solesmes, having rebuilt it nearly from the ground up. The words of Psalm 137 have come to mind. The Israelites, having seen their national symbol, Solomon's Temple, destroyed, suffered exile in Babylon. The psalmist wrote plangently: "How can we sing our song in a foreign land?" Might this not have been how Bellot and the others felt, living in exile at Quarr Abbey, in a land where their fellow monks, however well-meaning, did not even speak the same language? Yet both the psalmist and Bellot *did* sing: they persisted despite (or perhaps because of) persecution.

Bellot writes that he encountered the Beuron school when he and his community were attempting to devise a new architectural identity for themselves at Quarr Abbey. Did the secret language of sacred geometry provide Bellot and his community with a sort of coded language against the secular oppressor—a kind of architectural free-monk-masonry, as it were? Geometry might be regarded as a tool of the oppressed, a way that the monks could demonstrate their values even to those who oppressed them. The period of geometric fascination among Benedictines flourished coincidentally with the hostile climate for monasticism, then disappeared when more propitious conditions redeveloped. What better language to choose than the powerful yet secret language of sacred geometry, and thereby simultaneously reinforce the separateness of monks from the laity and the "rightness" of their chosen path as religious? In support of such a possibility, we know from archival sources that Bellot surely intended to use geometry as a powerful language, and he did not want just anybody to become aware of how its properties worked. Bellot tells his disciples that his golden section design system was not easy to learn. They were to learn it as a secret language, and not share it with the secular world.

It must be admitted, however, that this proposal suggesting that Bellot used sacred geometry as a means of secretly commenting on secular oppression conveniently glosses over an important point: although Bellot and his Solesmes congregation were in exile at Quarr Abbey when Bellot discovered sacred geometry, Beuron was not suffering oppression when Fr. Lenz first developed an interest in sacred geometry. Even so, the argument about geometry being a secret language cannot be quickly dismissed. I find it provocative that the monks influenced by Beuron and by the Solesmes congregations were so firmly attached to sacred geometry at a time when their reputations in the secular world had reached an ebb.

My third and final explanation with respect to why Bellot used sacred geometry has to do with his understanding of a monk's daily practice of *lectio divina*, or daily prayer. Sacred geometry was suitable to meditating upon the divine, and thus constituted a sort of architectural *lectio divina*. This is consistent with the spirit of Thomist thought, which was pleased to find theological significance in

beauty. For Bellot, sacred geometry was a way of calling the monks to become attentive to the contemplation of the divine. And while meditating upon the ordered forms of the monastery's design, the monks could become ever more appreciative of the truth beyond appearance, the deeper truth of faith. That is, Bellot responded initially to the Beuron works because of their geometric ordering system. The hieratic style of Beuron found a perfect foil in Bellot's geometrically based architecture. He recognized a consanguinity between these works and his own, which was similarly oriented towards the timeless, that which did not change, rather than the ephemeral, the changing. The goal of the artist who professes to be Christian, wrote the noted twentieth-century Thomistic philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), in a comment that Bellot cited with approval in his autobiography, is to look beyond appearances to seek the truth of matters that do not change. To Bellot, as for the monk-artists at Beuron, a religious art worthy to be called thus would seek to expound the larger truths of qualities that are forever true—reason, geometry, order, balance—as opposed to the smaller truths of the changing instant.

Did this preoccupation with sacred geometry resulted in a sort of bloodless art and architecture, purely hieratic, and devoid of the spark of life? Many people have formed this opinion, particularly with respect to the Beuron School paintings. One might decry Bellot as a refined yet abstruse intellectual, a person whose work rejects nature and promotes a cerebral simulacrum of reality. This is a fundamental misapprehension. Bellot's architecture attempts to bring together spirit and matter, and is therefore in no way anti-nature, nor is it dualistic. Bellot wanted to create an architectural expression in which matter and spirit were conjoined, to their mutual pleasure and benefit. I would like now to recall to you the title for this chapter—"The Beauty of Order, the Order of Beauty." The Benedictines found a beauty in order, and this beauty was conducive to their monastic traditions of contemplation and *lectio divina*. In this chapter about the "Order of Beauty" I mean to evoke St. Thomas's view that beauty is a distinct category of experience, something unique to itself. Perhaps a biological analogy will help. Just as human beings are in the Order of Primates, or pine trees in the Order of Coniferales, the Order of Beauty is that unique category which is closest to the spirit of God, in the sense of God's essence. By referring analogously to Beauty as an order in this biological sense, I want to reinforce the point that beauty is an immutable category distinct from all other forms of aesthetic experiences. The artist-monks such as Bellot regarded their role as being dedicated first to providing a beautiful place within the monastic setting so that the monks—and this is important—*could use architecture as a form of anagogic contemplation*, leading them from the beautiful setting to the God that made all things beautiful; they were led to the Order of Beauty *through* contemplation of the beauty of order.

The artist-monks' secondary goal was to set that sort of beauty before the eyes of the public, just as the monastic life itself has always been a sort of example for non-monastics. The artist-monks did not expect the public to understand fully all that lay behind the complexity of the geometrical designs, any more than the monastic communities in general expected the public to understand the full nature of their consecrated life. Order for the sake of example was very much in the minds of these subtle artist-monks.

I observed earlier that the monks had used sacred geometry as a secret code that outsiders would not have understood. So was the sacred geometry underlying the architecture of the monastery to be revealed to visitors, or was its very presence a sort of code that hid from the visitor the profound depths of monastic subtlety? These two points of view might be reconciled by suggesting that Bellot didn't

really want casual visitors to know every detail of how the architectural system functioned (we know this for a fact); but if they persisted in visiting the monastery, and as they became initiated into the mysteries of faith, they would also be initiated into the mysteries of its architecture as well. This initiation would only take place gradually, and as their spiritual formation deepened, whether as oblates, interested lay persons, or potential monks. I can testify to this as a sojourner at Saint-Benoît-du-Lac over a period of four months: as I became more versed in the context, I was deliberately initiated into the monastery's architectural secrets. The sole criterion by which I was judged as worthy of these traditions was a sense that I, too, felt compelled to explore the geometrical foundation of the monastery's design.

If one accepts the proposition that Bellot used sacred geometry to mediate between the human and the divine, perhaps one will also be receptive to a related argument: that Bellot sought to humanize the architectural system based on sacred geometry, and thereby to bring the "natural" world into conscious, crafted harmony, with the divine. Bellot did this by means of two complementary stratagems: color, and light. Both color and light were strategic tools that Bellot employed to humanize the abstract properties of geometry. Anyone who has seen Bellot's architecture will have been impressed by its rich palette of colors. Where and why did he develop this interest in color in architecture? It is now generally thought that Bellot's interest in color came about as a result of his visits to Mozarabic Spain, where buildings frequently had many different colors. Then too, French and English architects of the Victorian period were very interested in color as a way of animating architecture. Bellot was influenced by this tradition as well. Similar palettes are seen at Saint-Benoît-du-Lac. The polychromed surfaces, particularly in interior spaces, were essential components in Bellot's conception of an architecture for monastics. By introducing color, he wanted to symbolize nature, and thereby include the human being into the setting. Far from being bloodless, this is an architecture of ruddy hues, saturated tints, and fully living, breathing creatures. Sacred geometry is an *underlying* order, but color is immediately perceptible; even the viewer who never senses the geometrical order of the building will nonetheless be aware of rich palette of colors on the walls and floors. This rich color makes Bellot's architecture much more accommodating to the human than if it were solely dependent for effect upon sacred geometry.

Light plays a similar role in the building. Bellot carefully manipulated the windows in the monastery so that light penetrates within the cloister and interior spaces, resulting in a great many different effects. Sunlight provides very different effects according to the seasons and the times of day, and thus the perception of the user or visitor is also changed. Bellot wanted the monk to perceive the delicious theological interplay between that which does not change—God, symbolized here by sacred geometry—and that which does change—symbolized here by nature, and by the created world in which we live.

Bellot has frankly confused his critics, who have often been distracted by tangents, such as whether he is a medievalist or a modernist at heart. His use of reinforced concrete attracts some, and repels others. Such preoccupations are tangential: Bellot's interest in sacred geometry lies at the heart of his approach as a priest-architect. Bellot perceived a theological significance in the very presence of order, *as simultaneously symbolized and realized by geometry*.

Bellot's most significant contribution to monastic architecture was therefore to have conceived of an architecture that was able to *harmonize* the ineffable divine with the mundane—not seeing one as

better than the other, or as being estranged from each other, but as a complex and beautiful interweaving of intellect, sentiment, and form. Bellot was a monk; architecture to him was a means, not an end. The means were implacable, unchanging geometry married, paradoxically, to mutable, evanescent nature. The end was nothing less than the union with God, every monk's avowed and most-beloved task. Bellot's work simultaneously pays tribute to the divine, as symbolized by sacred geometry, and also accommodates the human worshipper, as symbolized by color and light. Architecture stands at the intersection between the human and the divine.

Bellot never lived to see the abbey of Saint-Benoît-du-Lac completed. When he died in 1944, the abbey church was still on his drawing board. Only in 1994 was a church finally dedicated at the monastery. This church was designed by another architect, Dan S. Hanganu, who deliberately eschewed the golden section design system. The simple forms and deliberate austerity of the new church provide a subtle commentary on the rich polychromy and sacred geometry of the earlier portions of the monastery—as if a Cistercian architect had incongruously been permitted to build at Cluny. (This church is published in the October 1998 issue of *Architectural Record*.) And so Bellot's sacred-geometry-based designs for the monastery of Saint-Benoît-du-Lac, and the Beuron school that provided a inspiration to him, remain isolated expressions in the history of twentieth-century Benedictine architecture. That does not make Bellot's achievement any less significant. In this abbey, sacred geometry was married to the color and light of the natural world as a means of stressing the immutable order and yet also the evanescent beauty of God's creation. Just as light animates otherwise unchanging stone and tile surfaces, so do human beings exist amid the seasons of nature and the cycles of human existence that are part of the unchanging world of God. Bellot designed a church that could accommodate and exemplify these complex theological positions. In a fitting tribute to Saint Thomas, Bellot's design is a *summa* in stone.

8. Beyond Programmed Spaces: Deep Ecology or Green Spirituality

8.1. Overview of Issues

In this chapter we will consider the ways that some contemporary recent theologians have critiqued traditional religious attitudes to nature, and have attempted to promote an alternative spirituality. We will consider the historical development of this attitude, particularly through Arcadian writings of the ancients, and also through nineteenth-century American pantheists. We will also be considering the pros and cons of the New Age, and of Sacred Sites tourism more generally.

8.2. Nature, Arcady, and Spirituality

Behind current attempts to define spirituality according to nature and the universal precepts of physics lies a long tradition of Arcadian spirituality. The ancient Greeks, for instance, were convinced of the sacredness of groves and of forests, and many of their most sacred shrines are located in natural settings. Arcady was thought to be a place in the Peloponnesus, an idealized region of rural felicity, and by extension a paradisiacal realm of peace and harmony. The Romans took over this concept of Arcadian peace. One of the most famous literary examples is Virgil's bucolic poem *Georgics*, which praises the value of harmonious husbandry (used in its old sense of agricultural practice). We might find Virgil's rustic maids and shepherds difficult to relate to, but a serious theological intent lies behind the sun-filled skies and happy maids and swains: God created the world in harmony, and our role as humans is to fulfill that vision.

Roman and early Christian graves frequently showed images of the good shepherd: although Christians adopted the good shepherd as a particularly Christian image, originally the good shepherd simply had connotations of bucolic peace and harmony.

It is not hard to see an extension of these ideas of harmony with nature in the context of Christians' short-lived paradise in Eden. The difference, however, is that Christians have believed consistently that they have lost paradise, whereas the classical world felt that Arcadian paradises existed in the real world (in the shrines) and also presaged some idea of a happy afterlife.

Such attitudes have demonstrated a remarkable persistence in western culture. Painters such as the seventeenth-century French master Poussin frequently painted Arcadian realms. So too do we find such realms described in literature, drama, and in songs. Here, for example, is a simple yet moving song by Georg Friedrich Handel, his "Care Selve" (Beloved Forests), from *Atlanta*.

Italian Text

Care selve,
ombre beate,
vengo in traccia del mio cor.

English Text

Blessed forests,
blessed shade,
I come in search of my heart.

Behind the simple words of this song lies a complex concept of nature conceived of as bliss and harmony.

We find similar sentiments expressed in Alessandro Scarlatti's "Già il sole dal Gange" (Already the Sun Sparkles on the Ganges):

Italian Text

Già il sole dal Gange più chiaro sfavilla
e terge ogni stilla dell'alba che piange.
Già il sole dal Gange più chiaro sfavilla.

Col raggio dorato ingemma ogni stelo
e gli astri del cielo dipinge nel prato.
Col raggio dorato ingemma ogni stelo.

English Text

Already the sun is sparkling more clearly from the
Ganges.
and every tear is wiped away from the weeping dawn.
Already the sun is sparkling more clearly from the
Ganges.

It adorns every stem with a golden ray
and paints the stars of the sky above the field.
It adorns every stem with a golden ray.

8.3. The Judeo-Christian Attitude to Nature

One of the most enduring questions that this persistent pantheistic and Arcadian tradition raises is whether mainstream Jews and Christians have ever had much use for nature. Many recent writers have felt that Jews and Christians have a hopelessly paternalistic and distanced view of nature. We owe it to both religions to consider the extent to which this is really true. Many Christians feel apologetic about the way that Christians have treated nature. Underlying this dis-ease is a sense, I am sure, that somehow the current ecological crises are linked somehow with the prevailing Judeo Christian attitudes of paternalistic ownership of nature.

8.3.1. *The Book of Genesis*

There are three key passages found in the book of Genesis. First, in Genesis 1:26–28 (RSV), we find introduced the idea that humans should have “dominion” over the earth, and that humans should “subdue” it:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it;

and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Then, in Genesis 2:15, we find (RSV):

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.” This certainly has been interpreted in a way that supports the idea the world was created for humans to control and use to their advantage and as they wish.

A passage in Genesis 2:26–30 seems even more explicitly to allow for human ownership of the earth, and all upon it:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth,

and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.

And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.”

Many Jews and Christians today are made uneasy by the words “dominion” and “subdue” and even “stewardship.” This uneasiness, I would suggest, is what has resulted in the widely held apologetic attitude that I alluded to above, even among informed members of both faiths.

I was therefore very happy to come across two complementary articles that challenge this point of view: Daniel Swartz’s “Jews, Jewish Texts and Nature: A Brief History”; and David Kinsley’s nicely balanced twin texts, “Christianity as Ecologically Harmful,” and “Christianity as Ecologically Responsible.”⁶³ Both texts make a compelling case that while certain passages of the Bible, and certain exegetical traditions stemming from these texts, can be made to argue that humans can possess the earth and use it as they will, many other texts make a case for a reverential, celebratory partnership with nature.

Swartz’s main argument is that the Bible is full of lyrical passages that praise nature, and also many passages that call for careful use of its bounties. He cites the Psalms of praise (particularly 104 and 148), Deuteronomy (20:19), which expounds the principle of *bal tas-chit*, do not destroy, and shows how the Jewish cycles of celebrations were intimately tied with the seasons of the land (Leviticus 23).

During the era of the Mishnah and the Talmud, Jewish scholars crystallized the belief that “‘you and what you possess are God’s.’ ... The doing of *mitzvot* (obligatory religious social acts of charity, devotion, etc.) acknowledges that we live in a God-centred and not a human-centred universe, that because of God’s ownership, we have a variety of obligations to the Divine will.”⁶⁴

Swartz also quotes from medieval Jewish mystics, many of whom rhapsodized about nature, and then carries his argument forward to Zionist writers, who saw nature in holy (and of book also political) terms. The main point to draw from Swartz’s argument, it seems to me, is that Jews hold a balanced position in which nature must be respected *because it is of God*, no more and no less than we are. Judaism stakes out a position calling for respect, for sensible usage, and for constant thanks to the maker of it (and us) all. Swartz’s conclusions about the issue of “stewardship” offer a trenchant defense of the traditional theological implications of the Genesis passages in question, and are so apropos of this general discussion that they are worth citing in full:

Lately, certain followers of ‘deep ecology’ have subjected the notion of stewardship to harsh criticism. They ask, isn’t it inherently and arrogantly hierarchical, placing humanity at the centre of the universe? Doesn’t it assume that the world cannot function without us, when evidence suggests, in fact, that ecosystems frequently work better without human interference? In the end, doesn’t stewardship serve as a justification for dominion and exploitation?

Understood in context, however, the Jewish notion of stewardship is a moral category, one that speaks of responsibility rather than of unlimited privilege, of a theocentric rather than an anthropocentric universe. In Genesis 2:15, the first humans are commanded to ‘till and to tend’ the Earth. This formulation hints at a kinship with the rest of creation that becomes even clearer when we look at the Hebrew more closely. *Avad* means not only to till, or even to work in a more general sense; it means also, and more powerfully, to serve or to participate in worship of the Divine. Thus our ‘tilling’ is more properly understood as service to God’s Earth, a service that is not only a profound responsibility but a direct and critical part of our connection with and worship of God as well. And *shamar*, or ‘tend’ means not only to tend, but more commonly to guard or watch over. What these meanings have in common is that the *shomrim* guard property that does not *belong* to them, but that is *entrusted* to them.

... all humans can indeed live in such a harmony with that which we serve and tend. But we also have the capacity—some might say the tendency—to destroy, merely by stepping out of the ordained relationship that assigns us a covenantal trusteeship rather than raw dominion.

The urge to such domination, however, not only violates the insights and commands of our tradition, a tradition that goes so far as to interpret the very words ‘rule’ and ‘subdue’ in Genesis 1:26 and 1:28 as signifying limited stewardship.... It is also, in a word, stupid. For it is that urge, unencumbered by religious sensibility, unencumbered by responsibility for future generations, unencumbered by concern for our neighbours, that hastens the destruction of the very world that we seek to master.⁶⁵

So what about the case for Christianity? Obviously, many of the same arguments advanced by Swartz can apply here, particularly the sections analyzing Genesis. But there are also particular circumstances unique to Christianity. In Kinsley’s “anti-nature” discussion, he puts forward three reasons why Christianity has been regarded as ecologically harmful:

First, in the Bible and Christianity nature is stripped of its gods, goddesses, and spirits and ceases to be regarded as divine. Second, the Bible and Christianity are strongly anthropocentric and teach that human beings are divinely ordained to rule over and dominate all other species and nature generally. Third, many Christian writings, and much Christian theology, relegate nature and matter generally to a low status relative to the divine, which is equated with spirit alone.⁶⁶

Kinsley paints a damning case for Christianity’s active dislike of nature, including a discussion of many theologians’ writings, from Origen to Aquinas and beyond, all of which expressed a decidedly low opinion of the material world. But then Kinsley returns in his second argument to some of the same evidence adduced by Swartz—the reverential attitude to nature found in the psalms. Psalm 148:1–13 is particularly notable:

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights!
Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars!
 Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!
 Let them praise the name of the LORD! For he commanded and they were created.
 And he established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds which cannot be passed.
 Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps,
 fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command!
 Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!
 Beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!
 Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!
 Young men and maidens together, old men and children!
 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and
 heaven.

Kinsley then cites from what might be termed “nature-friendly” theologians: Irenaeus (ca. 130–200),
 St. Francis of Assisi (1186–1226), whose “Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon,” is without doubt
 one of the most beautiful hymns of praise in all Christendom.

Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord,
 All praise is Yours, all glory, all honour and all blessings.
 To you alone, Most High, do they belong,
 and no mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your Name.
 Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures,
 especially Sir Brother Sun,
 Who is the day through whom You give us light.
 And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour,
 Of You Most High, he bears the likeness.
 Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
 In the heavens you have made them bright, precious and fair.
 Praised be You, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
 And fair and stormy, all weather’s moods,
 by which You cherish all that You have made.
 Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water,
 So useful, humble, precious and pure.
 Praised be You my Lord through Brother Fire,
 through whom You light the night
 and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
 Praised be You my Lord through our Sister,
 Mother Earth
 who sustains and governs us,
 producing varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.
 Praise be You my Lord through those who grant pardon
 for love of You and bear sickness and trial.
 Blessed are those who endure in peace,
 By You Most High, they will be crowned.
 Praised be You, my Lord through Sister Death,

from whom no-one living can escape.
 Woe to those who die in mortal sin!
 Blessed are they She finds doing Your Will.
 No second death can do them harm.
 Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks,
 And serve Him with great humility.

Perhaps surprisingly, Kinsley also includes St. Augustine in his “pro-nature” discussion. Admitting that Augustine is associated with a dualistic thinker who had a low opinion of creation and of the human body, Kinsley argues that Augustine subsequently developed a more holistic attitude that is not widely recognized:

In his mature thought, Augustine wrote that the ultimate purpose of the whole creation is beauty and that the purpose of creation is to glorify God in all his [*sic*] splendour. The creation, that is, for Augustine, is meant to reflect the wonders, goodness, and glories, of God, and as such it is beautiful. Writing against the views of heretics who denigrated the creation, Augustine said: ‘They do not consider how admirable these things are in their own places, how excellent in their own natures, how beautifully adjusted to the rest of creation, and how much grace they contribute to the universe by their own contributions, a commonwealth.’⁶⁷

Perhaps Christians have become overly apologetic and have the right to reclaim a theological position based on respect of nature. This will require close attention to exegesis of the passages of Genesis considered above. What is the goal of such thinking? It is ambitious. To Swartz, an ecologically sensitive Judaism would serve the ends of Sabbath Peace—contentment and harmony for all humans. Christians mean much the same thing when they speak of “Gospel Order”—something worth striving for, even if it never is (or can be) realized.

8.4. The Unitarian-Universalist Contribution

If some recent writers make a compelling case that there is nothing inherently “anti-nature” in Christianity or Judaism, some earlier writers had already made similar arguments, albeit from a theologically dissenting point of view. Nineteenth-century Unitarian Universalists in the United States contributed to these debates by conceptualizing God in pantheistic terms. God was seen through nature. They return to an ancient Judaic archetype of the Wilderness: God is not in the temple, but in the fields.

Here is an excerpt from “Walking,” by Henry David Thoreau:

I believe in the forest, and in the meadow, and in the night in which the corn grows.... Life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest. Not yet subdued to man [*sic* throughout], its presence refreshes him.⁶⁸

This was written when the United States was involved in its triumphant march across the western plains: clearly Thoreau’s voice is celebrating something else besides the subjugation of nature that we associate with nineteenth-century Americans. Similar pantheistic sentiments are found in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson; again, the larger text form which this is excerpted is cited below:

The stars awaken a certain reverence, because though always present, they are inaccessible; but all natural objects make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence. Nature never wears a mean appearance. Neither does the wisest man [*sic* throughout] exhort her secret, and lose his curiosity by finding out all her perfection. Nature never became a toy to a wise spirit. The flowers, the animals, the mountains, reflected the wisdom of his best hour, as much as they had delighted the simplicity of his childhood.

8.5. Inter-Faith Perspectives on Nature

Recent writers in the Hindu tradition make a case for an environmentally proactive religious base from within this tradition as well.

8.6. Deep Ecology

It seems obvious, though, that many people are convinced that traditional biblical perspectives cannot offer much hope for the present state of the world. A movement has arisen that brings together ecology, feminism, environmental ethics, and earth-centred spirituality. It is usually described as Deep Ecology or Green Spirituality. The Centre for Deep Ecology describes deep ecology thus:

Deep ecology encourages a fundamental shift in the way we experience nature and how we respond to the environmental crisis. Deep ecology rises from a belief in the essential value and interdependence of all forms of being. Supporters of deep ecology are committed to minimizing humanity's destructive interference with the rest of the natural world and to restoring the diversity and complexities of ecosystems and human communities. The deep ecology vision promotes practices to help change old patterns of thinking and acting. It reconciles us with the larger natural world that is our home.

There is a clear moral imperative here—to preserve the earth becomes a spiritual gesture. Can such a stance be reconciled with traditional religions?

8.7. Sacred Sites Tourism

The popularity of the deep ecology movement, when combined with the general perceived mistrust of traditional Christian attitudes to nature, have resulted in a sincere desire to seek inspiration in older, often pre-Christian, sources. Thus we see a proliferation of books and Internet sites available on ancient forms of worship—Celtic, aboriginal, and pre-Christian everywhere. Sincere people of all faith stripes feel compelled to visit sacred sites as a means of connecting with some sort of power that has felt to be lost in contemporary life. Pilgrims are beating a path to the farthest reaches of the world, rediscovering sites that have lain dormant for years, sometimes centuries. Motivating this search for meaning is an implicit distrust and dissatisfaction with sites in mainstream religion that have been deemed to be sacred. In my classes on sacred spaces, for example, people are quite often willing to speak about their experiences in nature as sacred, but rarely speak of their experiences in architectural settings as having any power or efficacy or even meaning.

There are pros and cons to this grasping for meaning beyond the Judeo-Christian tradition. On the one hand, it's probably valuable if people want to connect with the spiritual. But on the other we have to remind ourselves that physical pilgrimages have been regarded in a skeptical light by many spiritual

leaders. We should remember the Buddha, and Sikhdom's Guru Nanak's feelings that physical pilgrimages were spiritually worthless.

To continue this cataloguing of the pros and cons of rediscovering (and visiting) ancient sacred sites: on the pro side, the rediscovery of ancient, long-discredited spiritual avenues, particularly goddess worship, points to the vigorous pluralism of religious traditions, many of which have been forgotten and suppressed. And since many of these sites were located in nature, visiting them can have the benefit of inculcating a greater respect with nature. Similarly, since many of these sites (we believe) may have encouraged harmonious view of the world, in concert with nature, this coincides with a feminist vision of the world, which calls for models of harmony rather than conflict. I would have to regard all these developments as beneficial and helpful.

On the other, negative, side of the ledger: many of the visitors to these newly sacred sites seem to be overly credulous. Anything ancient is thought to be automatically better than anything in the present. Stories with little or no historical basis are accepted without demur. Blue-painted neo-pagans scrambling around ancient stone circles at the solstice seems, to me at least, both quixotic and naive. Such preoccupations tell us more about our own fears about the present than anything about the past.

The issue of appropriation is also relevant. "Appropriation" means to take over, usually without asking, traditions that don't belong to you. A notable example is native teachings. Some non-natives, although purportedly respectful of native traditions, are taking them over and designating themselves as experts on native sites.

Then there is simply the physical wear-and-tear on native sacred sites, particularly in North America. These sites are fragile and simply cannot handle the traffic that they are receiving. Add to the physical deterioration of the sites the natives' beliefs that too many people can in effect drain away the power of a sacred site, and you have a clear invitation to stay away.

8.8. Painful Sites—Sacred or Shameful? Or Both?

Some sites associated with painful memories have been transformed by worship and good will. This is an unexpected development. We could point to Hiroshima, which has a peace garden there. One could also point to the ways that certain artists have used their work to attempt to render innocuous painful sites. Bill MacDonnell and Melvin Charney are two examples of Canadian artists who do this. Both are Canadian. MacDonnell is from Calgary, and Charney from Montréal. Both, however, are conceptually citizens of the world. Charney has executed a series of works that deal with the theme of the Holocaust. Bill MacDonnell paints scenes that are deceptively beautiful, yet were formerly places of pain and destruction. For example, a painting of his entitled *Tragedy On A Country Road* marks a place where Canadian soldiers, while driving, hit a landmine in the former Yugoslavia. I have felt the same odd disconnectedness from pain when travelling around World War II sites in Normandy and Brittany. How can such verdant sites conceal their painful past? MacDonnell also paints sites where slaughters have taken place. He frequently paints angels who hover above the painful site, like the guardian angels in Wim Wenders' memorable film, *Wings of Desire*. Sometimes, MacDonnell paints only the name of an angel. To me, these angels imply the presence of God, and the implication that even the most tragic sites contain within them the seeds of hope for the future. MacDonnell's paintings have a clearly cathartic intent: by ritualizing the dreadful event, it can be rendered harmless. There may be

possibilities for each of us to do the same thing with sites we find painful, as we will explore below in the chapter on Personal Sacred Spaces.

Suggested Further Reading:

Daniel Schwartz, “Jews, Jewish Texts, and Nature: A Brief History.” From *To Till and Tend: A Guide to Jewish Environmental Study and Action*, original source not cited, rpt. Gottlieb, ed., *This Sacred Earth*, 87–103.

David Kinsley, “Christianity as Ecologically Harmful;” and “Christianity as Ecologically Responsible.” From David Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion*, 1994, rpt. Gottlieb, ed., *This Sacred Earth*, 104–124.

O.P. Dwivedi, “*Satyagraha* for Conservation: Awakening the Spirit of Hinduism.” (excerpt). From *Ethics of Environment and Development*, Ronald Engel and Joan Gibb, eds. (London: John Wiley, 1990). Rpt. Gottlieb, ed., *This Sacred Earth*, 151–163, excerpt from pp. 160–2.

“Walking,” by Henry David Thoreau (excerpt). From Roger S. Gottlieb, ed., *This Sacred Earth* (London: Routledge, 1996), 18–9. (Original source not cited.)

“Nature,” by Ralph Waldo Emerson (excerpt). From *Nature: Addresses and Lectures*, 1849, rpt. Gottlieb, ed., *This Sacred Earth*, 25–6.

9. Literary and Scriptural Conceptions of the Sacred and Non-sacred (Heaven and Hell)

9.1. Overview of Issues

In this chapter we will consider scriptural and literary descriptions of Heaven and Hell, and Paradise. Although not many people today believe in a literal place of endless bliss called Heaven, and fewer still believe in a place of punishment and purgatory known as Hell, these concepts have been extremely important in the book of Jewish and Christian thinking. Considering the ways in which various writers have talked about heaven and hell, and comparing them to other cultures, is a useful way of showing why people have symbolized heaven as the most sacred place, and hell as the place furthest estranged from the sacred. First, though, prepare for paradise.

9.2. Paradise Lost, and Paradise Found

Did Paradise ever exist on earth? In Judeo-Christian tradition, it did, but fleetingly: it was lost due to the fall. And yet, as I will attempt to show below, Jews and Christians held onto a surprisingly rich belief system based on the concept of paradise here on earth, not just waiting for the Second Coming.

9.2.1 Paradise Delayed?

In the poignant case of former African-American slaves, whose music often speaks of a Paradise to come, it is obvious that they identified strongly with the Israelites in the captivity. Thus we find a fascinating richness of imagery and songs that all address the theme of a paradise that some day will be ours, if not in this life, then certainly in the next.

9.3. Dictionary Definitions of Heaven and Hell

The Encyclopedia of Religion makes the following introductory remarks in its entry on Heaven and Hell:

As symbolic expressions found in various religious traditions, heaven and hell suggest polar components of a religious vision: a state of bliss and/or an abode of deity or sacred reality on the one hand, and a state of spiritual impoverishment and/or an abode of evil or demonic spirits on the other. As a spatial referent, Heaven is generally considered to be 'above' informed by the human experience of the sky as the expansive space or dome encompassing the earth and also including the sun, moon, and stars. Just as Heaven is 'above' the earth, so then is deity 'higher' than the human or earthly plane for those traditions in which Heaven is viewed as the abode of deity. On the contrary, Hell is generally regarded as a realm 'below' a meaning reflected in the derivation of the English *hell* from the Old English *helan*, with a root meaning of 'hide,' 'cover,' or 'conceal.' Thus, Heaven is often symbolized by light or brightness as a realm of bliss, whereas Hell is characterized as dark or shadowy, a realm of anguish and suffering.⁶⁹

9.4. Conceptions of the Sacred among Different Cultures

Scriptural conceptions of both heaven and hell change over time.

9.4.1. Jewish

According to Jewish thought, the world and the heavens above were part of God's divine plan. Under the earth was *She'ol*, an indeterminate place used to refer to the grave or the tomb and at other times to refer to the shadowy world of the dead. At first, the Jewish worldview did not emphasize an afterlife: we were simply clay into which spirits were breathed. Upon death, the spirit departed, and we returned to a shadowy world. There was no conception of a hell as a place of punishment.

All this changed during and after the Babylonian exile of 597 BCE, and the Jews' experience of the sophisticated dualistic religion (particularly Zoroastrianism) of the Persians. After this point, it was widely believed that humans were judged at death, and according to their actions while alive, were sent to one or another place for eternity. This is the beginning of the later widely held concept of hell as a place of punishment.

Gregory Riley's book, *One Jesus, Many Christs*, shows the way that later books in the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly Daniel, start to expound a dualistic view of the world, in which considerations of an afterlife became more pronounced.

The Greeks contributed to the debates by emphasizing their concept of the immortality of the soul. If the soul was immortal, it would have something to answer for. Divine judgment was thought to be inevitable. Indeed, multiple heavens (seven or ten) are mentioned in Jewish apocryphal literature of this time.⁷⁰ Paradise was thought to be located in either the third or the seventh heaven (which, by the way, explains our English idiomatic expression—to be in seventh heaven).

Heaven was reserved for the righteous, who were thought to dwell in a state of spiritual fulfillment and bliss, in harmony with God. By contrast, a place of punishment, now known as *Gehenna*, awaited the unrighteous. Post-Temple Judaism, however, has not tended to stress either of these concepts to a great extent. While it is hoped that we humans may know God, and it was believed that we would have to answer for our deeds in a place of judgment, there was much that could be done on earth to prepare for these eventualities. The Jewish high holy days of repentance, or atonement, for example, leading up to Yom Kippur, stimulate the imagination of the faithful to consider their deeds on earth here and now, as a means of thinking ahead to any sort of divine judgment. In essence, modern Judaism does not emphasize either heaven or hell: our moral comportment on earth should be periodically reexamined, as at Yom Kippur, and this is felt to be sufficient preparation for eventual judgment. Jews have certainly never shared the slightly morbid emphasis on divine judgment that is found in medieval Christianity.

9.4.2. Christian

Early Christians inherited the dualistic system of Judaism, with its emphasis on an eventual judgment, and married that to their apocalyptic vision of the Second Coming of Christ that is described in Revelations 21. The central message of Christianity—that Jesus had been resurrected bodily, and now dwelt in the heavens—meant that Christians cared deeply about what happened to both the body and the soul after death. The soul and the body were felt to be immortal, patiently waiting for the Second Coming and the bodily resurrection of all. There was, however, a lingering conception of heaven on earth—or rather, a Paradise Lost. The four Paradisiacal rivers are depicted in some Christian art; a particularly famous example is the *Ghent Altarpiece* by the brothers Hubert and Jan van Eyck.

As religious dogma crystallized in later centuries, there was an increasing obsession with Hell and theme of Last Judgment. We could consider Romanesque churches and abbeys, e.g., the 12-century French pilgrimage abbey of Saint-Pierre of Moissac, etc. More importantly, the Roman Catholic church expounded the concept that hell was a place of unending punishment for the unrepentant who die without God's grace, as transmitted through the sacraments. This was used to frighten the faithful and exerted an incalculable effect on people's view of a vengeful God. Later still, refinements to this dualistic system of either hell or heaven resulted in the concept of purgatory, where those who committed misdeeds were meted out punishment in exact proportion to their misdeeds. If we can ignore the cruelty with which this system was employed to keep people in line, we can admire the complex and abstractly beautiful constructions of heaven and hell, and consider them to be one of the highest achievements of the late medieval mind.

Protestants rejected the concept of purgatory, and rejected also the necessity of the sacraments to protect the soul from eternal damnation, but Protestants certainly did not reject either heaven or hell out of hand. Calvin's conception of predestination is one of the most curious legacies of protestant thought. In this conception, the soul was predetermined by God to either heaven or hell, and nothing the soul could do on earth would change that. Modern Protestants have generally emphasized the importance of grace and faith as keys to salvation.

Modern conceptions of hell and heaven have tended to allegorize and symbolize the hitherto geographically real conceptions. The Protestant theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968), stressed that Jesus had offered salvation for all humans, and rejected eternal damnation. Nowadays, hell is often seen as an estrangement from God's presence, while heaven denotes the presence of God. Such conceptions exist uneasily with the wishes of many church-goers, for whom eternal life and the bodily resurrection are still cornerstones of their faith. How does your religious tradition interpret heaven and hell? What about you personally?

9.4.3. *Islamic*

Islam, which adopted and adapted the Christian and Jewish scriptures, has a cognate view of heaven and hell to theirs. Most important in Islam is the idea of the perfect justice of God. We will all die, and will all be resurrected, after which we will face divine judgment (as in Judaism). Our deeds will be transparent to us. We will accept and know the rightness of God's decision to send us either to heaven or hell, according to our lives on earth. Mohammed, Prophet of God (Peace be upon him [P]), ascended once to heaven to hear the will of God. This is described in Islam's holy book, the *Qu'ran*. Here is how the graphically idyllic and sensual paradise is described:

There is a Remembrance; and for the god-fearing is a fair resort,
Gardens of Eden, whereof the gates are open to them,
wherein they recline, and wherein
they call for fruits abundant, and sweet portions,
and with them maidens retraining their glances of equal age.
This is what you were promised for the Day of Reckoning;
This is our provision, unto which there is no end.⁷¹

The ecstatic awareness of the presence of God is an important aspect of the Islamic conception of paradise—something that some Islamic mystics, particularly the Sufi's, turned into a paradise on earth.

By contrast, hell is truly awful:

All this; but for the insolent awaits an ill resort, Gehenna, wherein they are roasted—an evil cradling!
All this; so let them taste it—boiling water and pus, and other torments of the like kind coupled together.⁷²

However, it does not seem that the followers of Islam become preoccupied with hell, at least to the extent that Christians did. By contrast, heavenly references are found in many contexts, particularly architectural. The infinite mystery of God is symbolized by the complex geometric motifs found in most mosques. Islamic secular architecture frequently includes paradisiacal references, particularly through the use of water motifs. Fountains and rivers symbolize the paradisiacal realm awaiting us. A good example of this is the Alhambra, in Cordoba, Spain.

9.4.4. *Hinduism*

The Hindu pantheon is complex; so, too, are the Hindu conceptions of heaven and hell. Early gods and some heroes dwelt in the skies, which were coeval and coequal to heaven. Eventually, the conception of a cyclical worldview developed. Humans lead a series of earthly existences, a cycle of births and deaths in which, to a large extent, our future lives are dictated by our current activities—the famous karma. Western thinkers popularized this conception in the idea of reincarnation—either as worms or as transcending humans, according to our worth. There is no permanent heaven, and no permanent hell: each is relative to where we are in relation to our own self-realization. Eventually, the cycle of human lives and deaths will be swept up in the larger cycle of the incarnation of the gods' world: the world will cease to exist, but will be reborn. In light of this cosmic scale, the suffering of individual humans (and even their individual destiny) fades into relative insignificance.

9.4.5. *Buddhism*

Buddhism shares the Hindu conception of the cyclical nature of the world. But given that one of the key tenets of Buddhism is that the world consists of pain, we can expect to suffer on earth—that is part of being human. We can only be freed of this by freeing ourselves of our attachment to the passions; eventually, we might share the happy fate of the *bodhisattvas*, or enlightened ones, and know Nirvana, or paradise, in which we will float in a sea of bliss. And yet the Buddha himself, we are told, standing at the point of achieving Nirvana, refused to enter into it; he returned to earth in order to help all others achieve Nirvana before he accepts it for himself. This is one of the key concepts of Buddhism, which is much more socially engaged, at least in some traditions particularly Mahayana Buddhism, than typically is admitted by Christian interpreters of Buddhism. Infinite compassion moves the soul of the Buddhist. Heaven and hell become scarcely relevant; what matters instead is the moving towards eventual enlightenment for all sentient beings.

9.5. Literary Conceptions of Heaven and Hell and Paradise

9.5.1. Augustine

Many literary works have addressed the theme of sacredness, and have attempted to situate them within a theological construction. As early as the fifth century CE, Augustine devoted part of *The City of God* (chapter 21 of book 13) to the question of whether the Garden of Eden stories were allegorical or literal. His conclusion: they were probably not literal, but they were useful to point out how God made God's plans evident to humans in the context of free will.

9.5.2. Dante

The most memorable western literary treatment of Heaven and Hell is found in Dante's *Divina Commedia*, completed in CE 1321. In this epic poem, Dante provides us with insight into the sort of complexity of the late medieval mind. In Dante's system, there are three distinct realms: hell, purgatory, and heaven. In each realm are found the souls of the dead, to each of which has been meted out a punishment (or reward) in exact proportion to the deeds they committed on earth. Some deeds, however, are worse than others, and there are circles of hell, descending down in some sort of awful rhythm from the merely damned to the damnably cursed. Near the top are found the adulterous pair Paolo and Francesca; their crime of passion is deemed to be less heinous than many others, such as fratricide or treason. I've always found it heartless that Dante had to place in hell all the people who came before Jesus Christ, such as his admirable and noble guide, the ancient poet Virgil.

Here is a small part of Canto V, in John Ciardi's powerful and poetic translation:

So we went down to the second ledge alone;
 a smaller circle of so much greater pain
 the voice of the damned rose in a bestial moan.
 There Minos sits, grinning, grotesque, and hale.
 He examines each lost souls as it arrives
 and delivers his verdict with his coiling tail.
 That is to say, when the ill-fated soul
 appears before him it confesses all,
 and that grim sorter of the dark and foul
 decides which place in Hell shall be its end,
 then wraps his twitching tail about himself
 one coil for each degree it must descend.
 The soul descends and others take its place:
 each crowds in its turn to judgment, each confesses,
 each hears its doom and falls away through space.
 'O you who come into this camp of woe,'
 cried Minos when he saw me turn away
 without awaiting his judgment, "watch where you go
 once you have entered here, and to whom you turn!
 Do not be misled by that wide and easy passage!''
 And my Guide to him: 'That is not your concern;
 it is his fate to enter every door.'

This has been willed where what is willed must be,
and it is not yours to question. Say no more.”

This is writing to cry over, beautifully crafted, richly detailing the great epic sweep of lives lost and torn asunder by wayward passions. And behind it all lies Dante’s precise and mercilessly just vision of divine judgment.

In contrast to the morbidly fascinating world of Dante’s Hell, most people find that the remaining portions of Dante’s great poem, purgatory, and heaven, in which he describes the soul’s eventual purification, are less compellingly interesting. Certainly that is what I found. By the end of the book, when Dante is led upward to heaven by his spirit-guide Beatrice, we have entered into a rarefied realm that is as cold and lifeless as a snowy mountain top. Dante’s book nonetheless remains recommended reading for all who want to gain some understanding of the almost unbelievably complex world of the medieval Christian’s conceptions of heaven and hell.

9.5.3. *Blake*

Another much later writer who was fascinated by the concepts of heaven and hell is the early nineteenth-century English mystical artist and Christian, William Blake (1757–1827). This artist was a visionary for whom the Bible and Dante were his daily reading material. He had seen visions since childhood, and frequently spoke with his dead brother, Robert. He and his wife were, to put it mildly, religious eccentrics. One story is told, for example, of a visitor who entered Blake’s back yard only to find Blake and his faithful Catherine sitting nude in a bower, reading from the Bible. “Come in,” Blake is reported to have said. “It’s only Adam and Eve!”

Blake is often considered to be the quintessential Romantic artist. If we mean by this that he used his senses and his own sensibility to explore the world of the imagination, then I can easily accept him as a Romantic artist. But I would also find him to be a spiritual brother to Dante, and therefore as much a late product of the medieval world, in which spirit and matter moved unceasingly back and forth. Blake was fascinated by Dante and illustrated his great work.

But even if Blake was inspired by Dante, Blake was a true original, in that he mediated on heaven and hell and came up with his own definitions. For him, heaven was the world of the senses (including pure physical pleasure, such as sexual union); by contrast, hell was a place that impeded our spiritual development, and tried to impose a deadening sameness on all of us. Here is a quotation from Blake’s *Heaven and Hell*:

All Bibles or sacred codes, have been the causes of the following Errors.

1. That Man has two real existing principles Viz: a Body & a Soul.
2. That Energy, call’d Evil, is alone from the Body, & that Reason, call’d Good, is alone from the Soul.
3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.

But the following Contraries to these are True.

1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.
2. Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.
3. Energy is Eternal Delight.

Blake therefore tackles the theme of Heaven and Hell from a unique perspective—in terms of energy.

9.5.4. James Joyce

The twentieth-century Irish writer, James Joyce (1882–1941), provides us in his 1914 semi-autobiographical novel *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* with a memorable portrait of how young people in Dublin were presented with a horrifying prospect: either the bliss of heaven, or the frightening abyss of hell. This was used to keep the young people in line morally. There is one memorable section in which the young Stephen Devalues, hero of the book, is listening to a sermon. Stephen has an uneasy conscience; the priest's words pierce him like a knife. Here's a lengthy citation from chapter three of Joyce's book; its crescendoing baroque splendour (and dark mood) is perhaps unsurpassed in all of English literature:

The preacher's voice sank. He paused, joined his palms for an instant, parted them. Then he resumed:

'Now let us try for a moment to realize, as far as we can, the nature of that abode of the damned which the justice of an offended God has called into existence for the eternal punishment of sinners. Hell is a strait and dark and foul-smelling prison, an abode of demons and lost souls, filled with fire and smoke. The straitness of this prison house is expressly designed by God to punish those who refused to be bound by His laws. In earthly prisons the poor captive has at least some liberty of movement, were it only within the four walls of his cell or in the gloomy yard of his prison. Not so in hell. There, by reason of the great number of the damned, the prisoners are heaped together in their awful prison, the walls of which are said to be four thousand miles thick: and the damned are so utterly bound and helpless that, as a blessed saint, saint Anselm, writes in his book on similitudes, they are not even able to remove from the eye a worm that gnaws it.

'They lie in exterior darkness. For, remember, the fire of hell gives forth no light. As, at the command of God, the fire of the Babylonian furnace lost its heat but not its light, so, at the command of God, the fire of hell, while retaining the intensity of its heat, burns eternally in darkness. It is a never ending storm of darkness, dark flames and dark smoke of burning brimstone, amid which the bodies are heaped one upon another without even a glimpse of air. Of all the plagues with which the land of the Pharaohs were smitten one plague alone, that of darkness, was called horrible. What name, then, shall we give to the darkness of hell which is to last not for three days alone but for all eternity?

And so on! On an on it goes, in fact, towards an awful crescendo: "God had called him. Yes? What? Yes? His flesh shrank together as it felt the approach of the ravenous tongues of flames, dried up as it felt about it the swirl of stifling air. He had died. Yes. He was judged. A wave of fire swept through his body: the first. Again a wave. His brain began to glow. Another. His brain was simmering and bubbling within the cracking tenement of the skull. Flames burst forth from his skull like a corolla, shrieking like voices:

"Hell! Hell! Hell! Hell! Hell!"

Poor Stephen! Poor us for creating a world in which such a foul vision was propounded to the young!

Modern literature such as this reinforces the persistence of ancient archetypes. Joyce's book shows that we humans have not yet abandoned our long-seated fears of divine judgment and punishment—which always seem to be more real to our thoughts than any prospect of heaven, whether we imagine it to be characterized by fluffy clouds and banality, or by the ordered, beautiful harmony of the Islamic tradition.

10. Personal Sacred Spaces

10.1. Overview of Issues

All that we have done in the book so far has been preparation for this chapter. What does the sacred mean to *you*? In this chapter we will consider a number of ways that people have tried to bring the sacred into their lives. As we will see, there is no doubt that you can do so without rebook to churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, or indeed to any sort of architectural or extraordinary setting.

10.2. Definitions and Historical Examples

Many different traditions emphasize that the sacred can be brought into our daily world. This is found in the Confucian tradition, which emphasizes the presence of benign house gods. In Shinto tradition, there are shrines to one's ancestors. Hindus develop small prayer altars, which are ornamented with statues of gods and goddesses. Buddhists also have small household prayer niches. Certain Jews do so by means of offering small prayers of thanksgiving during the day. Christians can also do this, but many don't. Each of these traditions serves as a way of keeping the sacred within our view. Do you do so?

Wealthy and devout Christians, at least during pre-modern traditions, sometimes had prayer chapels on their properties. Known as oratories, or chantries, these were usually small buildings built right onto the property. But these have fallen out of favour in modern times, and it is doubtful that very many Christians have altars in their homes. So, too, do Buddhists. How, then, can we call our attention to the divine, to the sacred, in our ordinary lives?

10.3. Sacred Spaces Within

Again and again we read in the major faith literature that sacredness, that the holy, is not distant from us, but is as close to us as our bodies. The Holy *Qu'ran* puts this well, when the Prophet Mohammed (P) remarks that God is "as close to us as our jugular vein." What a powerful, evocative concept! If divinity is as close as this, then we need not look beyond ourselves.

One of the most persistent traditions of evoking the sacred found within Christian tradition is that of the Quakers, or the Society of Friends. This group focuses on the "light within." Prayer is usually done quietly by oneself, or at least (by most Quakers) without the mediation of a priest or worship leader. In this case, God is truly both within and without, but the experience of the sacred can take place anywhere, so long as one can wait in silence upon God. This stance was radical, even subversive, in seventeenth-century England, because it removed the need for any sort of church hierarchy, for any priests to mediate between humans and God. Quaker practice might be a way that people could evoke the possibility of retrieving the sacred in their lives.

Some people remain attached to external experience, to architecture and geography, and balk at the possibility that they themselves could be sacred, or at least be a conduit to sacredness. Others assert that the holy and the sacred were to be found within us. There was no need for trappings of the holy: it could be experienced without mediation. We can possibly look for the sacred in places where we perhaps aren't used to seeing it.

John Dominic Crossan, the Irish-American theologian and student of the historical Jesus, spent twenty years in a religious order before leaving that order for other pursuits. Asked by a United Church interviewer how he (Crossan) prayed, he replied that for him there was little distinction between prayer and study. He spoke of the “transcendent ordinariness” of the everyday.

Another practice within Christian history is termed the “Wisdom tradition,” as exemplified by the teachings and writings of the noted American priest and hermit, the Rev. Dr. Cynthia Bourgeault. Author of *The Wisdom Jesus, Transforming Heart and Mind* (2008), and many other works, Bourgeault invites readers within—within themselves, and also within the deep traditions of Christian mysticism, which she suggests stem from Christ’s own teachings as a wisdom teacher.⁷³ Drawing on the Gospel of Thomas and other texts, including the Gospels themselves, as a retreat leader and adjunct professor at the Vancouver School of Theology, she invites searchers to become aware of the enigmatic yet powerful practices that have existed as an alternative stream within Christian tradition—practices that focus on the deep wells of silence that can lead to individual insights. Such practices are both fundamentally part of the Christian tradition, yet serve also to link its practices with those of other faiths, particularly Buddhism and all other faiths that practice contemplation and meditation.

The great prayer masters of all world faiths have reached similar conclusions: that we can tune our lives to the sacred possibilities of even the tiniest current of life, so that all becomes a symphonic epiphany of love and connection with the divine. I think that this might explain the Jains and their quixotic desire to harm no living creature: they are no doubt inspired by a holy love for all creation.

10.4. Suggestions for Activities while Waiting for Enlightenment

If you are reading this section and wondering whether you can ever aspire to such a pure and disinterested spirituality, the paradoxical answer is that none of us can, and that all of us can. That is, while I don’t discount the possibility that a reader might become a great spiritual leader—the Book of Revelation, to me, is not sealed—I do not think that we have to aspire to such lofty heights in order to take some good from the idea of the sacred within.

Another approach beloved by mystical Christians is to fulfill 1 Thessalonians 5:17—“Pray without ceasing.” This has given rise to many prayer practices, particularly the “Prayer of the Heart,” which starts when the worshipper repeats phrase along the lines of, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” The goal was to repeat the prayer within until the worshipper’s very being, his or her breathing and pulse, resonated in time with the words. Some mystics, such as the seventeenth-century Brother Lawrence, developed a beautiful prayer life in which everyday circumstances were imbued with the aura of sanctity. “I turn my little omelet in the pan for the love of God,” he was reported to have said.

Richard J. Foster, a contemporary Christian writer, has expressed similar sentiments quite lyrically and powerfully, when he observes:

The discovery of God lies in the daily and the ordinary, not in the spectacular and the heroic. If we cannot find God in the routines of home and shop, then we will not find him [*sic*] at all. Ours is to be a symphonic piety in which all the activities of work and play and family and worship and sex and sleep are the holy habitats of the eternal. Thomas Merton urges us to have an ‘unspeakable reverence for the holiness of created things.’

Foster suggests that we can establish a private prayer centre in our homes, and observes that this would return us to our earliest practices as humans worshipping:

The earliest altar was the hearth whose open fire burned in the centre of the home. Even today the family table can be a significant altar where meals are celebrated and all the great and small events of our personal histories can be recounted. Here mothers and fathers fulfill the priestly role.

We can also establish a 'hermitage' in our home. A hermitage is a house especially set aside for silence and solitude. In ancient Russia every village had its hermitage, or *poustinia*. We today lack such a religious sanctuary in the community, which argues all the more for having one in the home. It could be a den or a study or an attic room. It could be almost any quiet place in the home, which, when being used as a hermitage, remains off limits to the rest of the family.

This tradition of the *poustinia* has become rooted firmly in Canadian soil. Many people have visited the Catholic Retreat Centre known as Madonna House, located near Combermere, Ontario, in the wooded lands three hours west of the city of Ottawa, which Catherine de Haeck Doherty and her husband established. The practice of *poustinia* is a central element of Madonna House's spiritual practice.

Even if you do not resonate with this specifically mystical and Christian approach, perhaps you might think about creating a private shrine that includes objects meaningful to your life. Such a shrine could house repositories that evoke pleasant memories for the people concerned. This might be a quite reasonable way of conceiving the sacred for ourselves—to develop a shrine that has meaning for us. Personal photos, mementos of the past, and symbols of our hopes and aspirations, could all well form part of such a portable shrine.

This shrine could well have religious artifacts in it, and these religious symbols need not be restricted to one faith. I think of the Rev. Klaus Ohlhoff, Lutheran chaplain at the University of Calgary. I attended his weekly prayer meetings for some time. Klaus always set up his altars in intriguing and unexpected ways. For some weeks the prayer group was greeted by a serene Buddha who sat amid the leafy fronds of a luxuriantly healthy potted plant. Eagle feathers sacred to native tradition sat beside a crucifix, and a couple of smoothly polished stones beside that. Ganesh, the ventripotent elephant god beloved of popular Hinduism, sat beside a statue of Shiva. The effect, for me at least, was pleasant and harmonious evocation of the sacred. Klaus's point of view was definitely Christian. But he is definitely one of the most ecumenical persons I have met and the shrines resonated with respectful tribute to the sacred, wherever it is to be found. Some might find such a congeries indigestible, or theologically objectionable. If you do, don't even think of making a shrine like that. But if you don't, why not experiment with developing a personal shrine of sorts?

In case you wonder whether such personal shrines are somehow not permitted by religious tradition, I assure you that this is not a new idea. In the Middle Ages, Christians often traveled with folding portable altarpieces that featured, typically, a painting of the crucifixion and some other stories from Christ's or from Mary's life. And we've already mentioned in passing the Hindu and Buddhist tradition of including small household shrines. Perhaps people don't *need* any intermediaries. Many Buddhists would suggest that meditation alone is sufficient. But these tangible symbols are usually useful for most of us who have not yet reached a spiritual maturity that sees the divine in everything. So the shrine seems to me to be a good idea for helping us focus on the sacred.

Suggested Further Reading:

- Bourgeault, Cynthia. *The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind—A New Perspective on Christ and His Message*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 2008 [and other publications by this author].
- Richard J. Foster, “Praying the Ordinary,” in *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* San Francisco: Harper San Francisco 1992: 169-178.
- E. Glenn Hinson, “Praying Without Ceasing,” *Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life*, 13, no. 3 (May/June 1998): 34–43.
- Denise Linn, *Sacred Space: Clearing and Enhancing the Energy of Your Home*. New York: Ballantine Books 1995.

11. The Sacred Space of Music

11.1. Overview of Issues

In this chapter we will consider the way that people have found sacredness within music.

11.2. Music as a Doorway to the Sacred

People have connected with the sacred through music through time immemorial. The psalms were often sung; David, after all, was a musician. It is helpful when reading the Psalms to imagine them sung. And probably danced, accompanied by a percussion instruments, harps, and woodwinds. Indeed, so many different traditions have included sacred music in their worship services that one wonders whether it is not a nearly universal human sentiment. The ancient Greeks sang and danced an ecstatic celebration known as dithyrambs. The connection between movement and music and the evocation of the sacred was very close. Sufi dancers (an esoteric sect of Islam) celebrate the dances of universal peace. Movement becomes a key to attaining (or at least reaching for) harmony and peace. Certain Buddhists and the Hari Krishna Hindus are known to chant as a means of achieving ecstatic union with the sacred. Jewish cantors are an essential element of most forms of Jewish worship. The singing helps the congregation enter into a spirit of worship.

I wonder, frankly, whether we have not impoverished modern sacred music by divorcing it from dance and movement. I wonder whether liturgy is not richer when there is a clearer connection between the mind and the body. I also wonder whether there isn't a puritanical element, a hangover of the dualistic mind-body mistrust that some trace to St. Augustine, which has affected our perceptions of the importance of movement in worship. Most westerners not of African origin restrict themselves to a decorous swaying. Watching African-American or African-Canadian choirs dance and celebrate the divine through voice and movement can be an enlightening as well as a possibly humbling experience for those not of that tradition.

William A. Barry, S.J., has written about the importance of music in scripture:

Recall the song of Moses and Miriam after God saved the Israelites from the army of the pharaoh at the Red Sea (ex 15:1–2) or David dancing 'with all his might' before the ark as it is brought into Jerusalem (1 Sam 6:14–15) or Psalm 149, 'Let them praise God's name in a festive dance; let them sing praise to God with timbrel and harp.' My favorite such image occurs in Acts 3 when the crippled beggar is cured. 'He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.'

Richard J. Foster, in an interesting book entitled *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, describes the importance of music in historical liturgical practices:

Sacred dance is another form of body prayer that is once again being utilized in Christian celebration. One of the best things in this renewed emphasis is the mingling of liturgical forms with charismatic expressions of praise, adoration, and prophesy. I am delighted.

For a thousand years, Christians did a dance called the *tripudium* to many of their hymns. As worshippers sang, they would lock arms and take three steps forward, one step back, three steps forward one step back. In doing this, they were actually proclaiming a theology with their feet. They were declaring Christ's victory in an evil world, a victory that moves us forward, but not without setbacks.

Sacred dance can either be done as part of private prayer and worship or in corporate settings. Like the Psalmist, we praise God with lute and harp, with timbrel and dance, with strings and pipe. We celebrate the goodness of God with our viscera!

11.3. Music in My Life

Music moves me to tears. I have learned to welcome the tingling of the spine and skull that I experience (entirely unpredictably) when listening to a wide variety of music. In fact, I now think that my first experience of the sacred came through music. I love making music with others, and I particularly enjoy choral music and have sung with the Calgary Philharmonic Chorus. My favourite music of all time has to be Handel's *Messiah*. Although my fellow choristers wrinkle their noses at the mere mention of this hoary work (many of them have sung it dozens of times), I never tire of it. I always find it disappointing to attend sing-along Messiahs that end with the Hallelujah chorus. What follows ("I know that my redeemer liveth...").

Other people find sacredness in music that is ostensibly secular. The people of the late middle ages and early Renaissance also found this to be true, and frequently adopted secular tunes. This was true, for instance, of Josquin des Prez's *Missa l'Homme Armé* (Mass of the Armed Man), which was adopted from a secular tune. So if you have music that you are attuned to—whether folk or world beat or organ music or accordion, or whatever—then I think you should listen to it. My rule of thumb is that music that transports you to another place, makes you happy and sad at the same time, can be in a sense called sacred.

I find Italian eighteenth-century art songs—for example, interpreted by Luciano Pavarotti or Cecilia Bartoli—to be supremely lyrical and yes, sacred. I think of Pavarotti, singing Handel's "Care Selve" (Beloved Forests) on an old 1980 live recording (London 417006-2). The same recording also features a version of Scarlatti's "Già il sole dal Gange" (Already the Sun Sparkles on the Ganges), a panegyric to the glory of nature. We considered these songs a little earlier in the context of Arcadian spirituality. Both of these are purportedly secular, yet both evoke the sacred.

And some have argued that the great symphonies of the nineteenth century—from Beethoven to Bruckner—were in a sense secular attempts to claim the sacred for a public disenchanted with contemporary religion, and that the great performance halls built during this period were in a sense the temples of the age.

11.4. Sacred Music in Western History—A Partial and Personal View

What follows is an abbreviated, personal, and very partial history of sacred music, mostly concentrating on the western tradition, as this is what I know. The earliest form of sacred music within the Christian

tradition is the Gregorian Chant. This is named after the pope and saint Gregory, a prodigious organizer who not only sent the first Christians to Britain, but wrote a biography of Benedict, founder of western monasticism, and gave his name to the musical style that bears his name. Essentially Gregorian chant is a single line (monophonic) form of music designed to sing the Psalms. Singing the Psalms cyclically formed the basis of western monastic musical practice. There are many versions of Gregorian chant available on CD. Have you listened to any? If you do, have you ever tried to see how these formed part of a liturgical context—that is, when did they sing what they sang?

Music was not notated during the first many centuries of Gregorian chant. There really wasn't a need to, since most of the chants were sung according to certain scale-progressions, which the singers learned by heart. It is interesting to compare this form of corporate group singing with the cantor-led singing of Judaism. I am not sure when the latter disappeared from Christian practice.

By the Middle Ages, some attempts to develop notational systems for music were developed. These tended to emphasize only the relational qualities of notes ... the higher a note on a scale, the higher it was sung, and so on. But there were no time signatures and no bar lines. This is why it's difficult to know, precisely, what the music of composers from the Middle Ages sounded like.

Were there female as well as male composers? Yes. One of the most famous (at least nowadays) was the great mystical abbess, Hildegard of Bingen. She was an ecstatic twelfth-century visionary who not only was an artist but also a composer. For her, God was harmony; her music offers lilting, meditative lines. I have one CD by her that creates a harmonious vision that is suddenly interrupted by a discord—the Devil, which to her mind had to sing out of key. It's a marvelous, disturbing and somehow modern musical conception. Her music was forgotten for centuries, but has been recently resurrected and is now particularly beloved by New Agers. The ex-Dominican priest and founder of "Creation Spirituality," the American Matthew Fox, has written a book on her illuminations. It helps that she penned such memorable phrases as, "The soul is a feather on the breath of God," and that her musical compositions bear such evocative names as "The Fire of The Spirit," and "The Canticles of Ecstasy."

Here's a selection from her sacred poetry—Hildegard of Bingen, "O virga ac diadema," translated by Nick Flower:

Stem and diadem of regal purple,
 you are shut up like a breastplate.
 Blooming, you flourished in another change
 when Adam brought forth the whole human race.
 Hail, hail,
 from your womb came forth a new life
 by which Adam laid bare his sons.
 Flower, you did not sprout forth from the dew
 nor from the drops of rain,
 and the air did not fly round above you,
 but divine clarity produced you on the noblest stem.
 Stem, God foresaw your flourishing
 on the first day of his creation.
 And from his word he made golden material,
 praiseworthy virgin.

The dawn of the Renaissance (14th and 15th centuries) brought with it a new interest in secular music. Polyphony—many voices at the same time—also crept into sacred music. There are many compilations available of early music. One composer you might want to look into is Guillaume de Machaut (ca. 1300–1377). Perhaps even better known is Josquin Des Prez (ca. 1440–1521).

The Baroque period (seventeenth-eighteenth centuries) brought with it a combination of circumstances perfect for the development of large-scale sacred music: wealthy royal patrons had the means and the social attachment to music to commission large-scale sacred musical compositions. This was the age of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), who wrote many sacred pieces. Perhaps chief among these was his *Mass in B Minor*, and his *Magnificat*, as well as his two great oratorios, the *St. John Passion*, and the *St. Matthew Passion*. But some people feel that Bach achieved a sacred presence in everything he wrote; even secular pieces like the *Wedding Cantata* resonate with sacred beauty.

Another composer renowned for his sacred compositions was Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (ca. 1525–1594), who is known for his *Alma Redemptoris Mater* (Loving Mother of Our Savior), the *Missa Papae Marcelli* (Mass of Pope Marcellus), and his powerful *Stabat Mater*. It was also the period when English composers such as William Byrd (1543–1623) wrote beautiful and sorrowful songs. Another composer famous during this period was Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643).

During the eighteenth century, a number of famous composers wrote sacred music. Among them: Alessandro Scarlatti (1660–1725); known for his *Salve Regina* (Hail Mary), Georg Friedrich Handel (1685–1759), who wrote many other sacred oratorios than the one he's best known for, the *Messiah* that I've already mentioned; Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–1787); and Joseph Haydn (1732–1809). Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) wrote much sacred music, including his sublime *Requiem*.

There were also simple songs sung by ordinary congregations. The majority of people in many of these congregations may have been illiterate, but they could sing in four-part harmony! This was true of both Europe and the U.S. In America, simple songs by dissident groups such as the Shakers have entered into the general choral repertoire. Do you know the song "Simple Gifts"? That was originally a Shaker song.

African-American spirituals are one of the most memorable expressions of sacred music. So much of it expresses a longing for the promised land—a poignant sentiment for those who were enslaved at the time. There are many, many good interpreters of African-American sacred music. Many people are moved to tears by the great American bass, Paul Robson; his CD's are widely available. The fluting voice of Barbara Hendricks is an acquired taste for some, but I think she does an excellent job of interpreting sacred music. Aaron Copeland once did a suite of American songs; I have the recording featuring the composer and the American bass-baritone, the late William Warfield (1920–2002). I particularly love Warfield's interpretations of the stately "Shall We Gather By The River," and the sprightly "Ching-a-Ring" (*Copland conducts Copland*, CBS Records masterworks, MK 42430).

Back in Europe, the nineteenth century witnessed the development of the virtuoso performer and the virtuoso composer—epitomized by Paganini and Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) respectively. Many composers wrote sacred music. Aside from Beethoven, and Franz Schubert (1797–1828), whose sacred works are well-known, I would point to composers with a lower profile, but who deserve to be better known. One such would be Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921), the French piano virtuoso who devoted much of his life to sacred musical compositions. Another would be Anton Bruckner (1824–

1896), who wrote not only bombastic symphonies, but also sensitive masses, such as the *Mass in E Minor*. And of book any catalogue of nineteenth-century sacred musical composers would have to include Johannes Brahms (1833–1897), whose *Deutsches Requiem*, A German Requiem, is one of the highlights of the western choral repertoire.

During the twentieth century, there were many sacred musical composers. Composers such as Stravinsky and Poulenc contributed compositions that have entered into the permanent choral repertoire. During recent years there has been a revival of sacred choral music with a melodic orientation. Sergei Rachmaninoff's *All-Night Vigil* was a pioneering composition in this regard. It showed how powerful and beautiful the enduring traditions of Orthodox music could be. Benjamin Britten (1913–1976) wrote beautiful choral music. Some of the leaders of the new sacred musical school of been Europeans—composers such as the Estonian-born Arvo Pärt (b. 1935), and the Polish-born Henryk Górecki (b. 1933). A good introduction to music like this can be found on a compilation by Robert Shaw, entitled, *Evocation of the Spirit* (TELARC 20 CD-80406). Much of this music seems very ancient in its tonalities, and it seems no coincidence that both Hildegard and Pärt have risen to the tops of the sacred music charts. Clearly there is a great interest in music like this: the Górecki “Symphony of Sorrowful Songs,” for instance, topped the best-seller chart for months!

Music like this—evocative, melodic, sacred in its outlook and impact—seems to have had some influence on resurrecting the careers of somewhat neglected twentieth-century sacred composers, such as the Toronto Anglican composer and organist Healy Willan (1880–1968), whose work has been reissued in several CD's.

11.5. Musical Suggestions

Some rather arbitrary musical suggestions (in addition to those mentioned in the text):

11.5.1. Compilations

An Introduction to Early Music: Hildegard of Bingen, Ockeghem, Francesco Da Milano, Josquin, Byrd, Arcadelt, Palastrina, Jenkins. Various interpreters. Naxos 8.551203.

Renaissance Masterpieces: Ockeghem, Josquin, Morales, Lhéritier, Rogier, Clemens. Oxford Camerata. Jeremy Summerly, conductor. Naxos 8.550843.

The World of King's: Allegri, Miserere, Handel, Zadok the Priest; Byrd, Tallis, Palestrina, Bach, Vivaldi, and Gibbons. King's College Choir, Cambridge. Sir David Willcocks, conductor. London 430 092-2.

Passage to Paradise: 33 Highlights from Great Sacred Music. 2 CD's. EMI 7243 5 6924123.

At Heaven's Gate: Great Sacred Music Throughout the Ages. EMI 7243 5 69748 2 1

11.5.2 Historical and Contemporary Classical

J.S. Bach, Selections from *Mass in B Minor* (Gloria and Donna Nobis Pacem), *Magnificat*, and *St. John and St. Matthew Passion*: many versions available.

J.S. Bach, “Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied,” BWV 225: many versions available.

Evocation of the Spirit. Robert Shaw Festival Singers. Robert Shaw, conductor. TELARC 20 CD-80406.

Elektra Women's Choir. *Classic Elektra.* Skylark 9402 CD. (And anything else by this marvelous Vancouver women-only choir.)

Henry Górecki, *Symphony No. 3 Op. 36* [Symphony of Sorrowful Songs]. Dawn Upshaw, soprano. London Sinfonietta. David Zinman, conductor. Elektra Nonesuch. CD 79282.

Mozart, *Requiem, Op. 626*, and Charpentier, *Te Diem*. La Grande Écurie et la Chambre du Roi. Jean-Claude Malgoire, conductor. Sony Essential Classics. LSBK 46344.

Arvo Pärt. *Passio. Passio Domini Nostri, Jesu Christi Secundum Johannem*. The Hilliard Ensemble. ECM 1370 837 109-2.

Arvo Pärt. *Te Deum*. Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, Tannin Chamber Orchestra, Tonu Kaljuste, conductor. ECM New Series. 78118-20003-2.

Giovanni Battista Pergolesi and Alessandro Scarlatti. *Stabat Mater, Salve Regina*. June Anderson, soprano; Cecelia Bartoli, mezzo-soprano. Sinfonietta de Montréal. Charles Dutoit, conductor. London 436 209-2.

Sergei Rachmaninoff, *Vespers [All-Night Vigil]*. Robert Shaw Festival Singers. Robert Shaw, conductor. TELARC CD-80172.

P. I. Tchaikovsky. *Liturgy, Op. 41*. Various versions.

Antonio Vivaldi, *Sacred Music for Solo Music and Orchestra*. Chamber Orchestra, Vittorio Negri, conductor. Philips 432 104-2.

Healy Willan, *An Apostrophe to the Heavenly Hosts*. Vancouver Chamber Choir. Jon Washburn, conductor. Virgin Classics 7243 45183 2 4.

Healy Willan, *Missa Brevis 11, Sancti Johannis Baptistae, Missa Brevis 4, Corde natus, Motets*. The Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Toronto. Robert Hunter Bell, conductor. Virgin Classics 7243 5 45109 22.

11.5.3 Folk traditions

Simple Gifts: Shaker Chants and Spirituals: Shakers of Sabbathday Lake. The Boston Camerata. Schola Cantorum. Joel Cohen, conductor. Erato 4509-98491-2.

11.5.4 New Age

Jan Gabarak and The Hilliard Ensemble. *Officium*. ECM New Series. 1525-78118-21525-2.

Suggested Further Reading:

Wilson-Dickson, Andrew. *The Story of Christian Music from Gregorian Chant to Black Gospel: An Authoritative Illustrated Guide to All the Major Traditions of Music for Worship*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press 1996 [1992].

Selected Bibliography

- Apostolos-Cappadona, Diana, ed. *Art, Creativity and the Sacred: an Anthology in Religion and Art*. New York: Crossroad, 1984.
- Bennett, Clinton. *In Search of the sacred: Anthropology and the Study of Religions*. London: Cassell, 1996.
- Bourgeault, Cynthia. *The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind—A New Perspective on Christ and His Message*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 2008. [and other publications by this author]
- Breffny, Brian de. *The Synagogue*. New York: Macmillan, 1978.
- Buscemi, John. *Places for Devotion*. Meeting House Essays Number Four. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993.
- Christ-Janer, Albert and Mary Mix Foley. *Modern Church Architecture: A Guide to the Form and Spirit of Twentieth-Century Religious Buildings*. New York: Dodge Book Dept., McGraw-Hill, 1962.
- Cohn, Robert L. *The Shape of Sacred Space: Four Biblical Studies*. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press 1981.
- Dalmais, Irénée-Henri. *Eastern Liturgies*. Trans. Donald Attwater. New York: Hawthorn 1960.
- Debuyst, Frédéric. *Le Renouveau de l'art sacré de 1920 à 1962*. Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Mame, 1991.
- DeSanctus, Michael E. *Renewing the City of God*. Meeting House Essays Number Five. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993.
- Dillenberger, John. "Artists and Church Commissions: Rubin's The Church at Assy Revisited." *Art Criticism* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 72–82.
- Davies, J.G. *Temples, Churches and Mosques: A Guide to the Appreciation of Religious Architecture*. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982.
- Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harper & Row, 1961 [1948].
- Fisher, Eugene J., ed. *The Jewish Roots of Christian Liturgy*. New York: Paulist Press, 1990.
- Frishman, Martin, and Hasan-Uddin Khan, eds. *The Mosque: History, Architectural Development & Regional Diversity*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1994.
- Giles, Richard. *Repitching the Tent: Re-Ordering the Church Building for Worship and Mission in the New Millennium*. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1997.
- Gottlieb, Roger S., ed. *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Hammond, Peter. *Towards a Church Architecture*. London: The Architectural Press, 1962.
- Holm, Jean, and John Bowker. *Sacred Place*. London and New York: Pinter Publishers, 1994.
- Hoffman, Lawrence A. *Sacred Places and the Pilgrimage of Life*. Meeting House Essays Number One. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991.
- Humphrey, Caroline, and Piers Vitebsky. *Sacred Architecture: Symbolic Form and Ornament Traditions of East and West, Models of the Cosmos*. London: Duncan Baird Publishers, 2003.
- Jones-Frank, Michael. *Iconography and Liturgy*. Meeting House Essays Number Six. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994.
- Kinsley, David. "Christianity as Ecologically Harmful," and "Christianity as Ecologically Responsible," in Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, 104–115, and 116–124.
- Linn, Denise. *Sacred Space: Clearing and Enhancing the Energy of Your Home*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1995.
- Mann, A.T. *Sacred Architecture*. Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element 1993.
- Milne, Courtney. *Spirit of the Land: Sacred Places in Native North America*. Toronto: Viking, 1994.
- Molyneaux, Brian Leigh, and Piers Vitebsky. *Sacred Earth, Sacred Stones*. London: Duncan Baird, 2000.
- Robinson, Martin. *Sacred Places, Pilgrim Paths: An Anthology of Pilgrimage*. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997.

- Rykwert, Joseph. *Church Buildings*. Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Catholicism, 120. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1966.
- Seasoltz, R. Kevin. "Contemporary Monastic Architecture and Life in America." In *Monasticism and the Arts*, edited by Timothy Gregory Verdon with the assistance of John Dally; foreword by John W. Cook. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1984.
- Scott, Jamie, & Paul Simpson-Housley, eds. *Sacred Places and Profane Spaces: Essays in the Geographics of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1991.
- Söwrick, Edward. *Architecture for Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1973.
- Swartz, Daniel. "Jews, Jewish Texts, and Nature: A Brief History." In Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, 87–103.
- Twiss, Sumner B., and Walter H. Conser, Jr., eds. *Experience of the Sacred: Readings in the Phenomenology of Religion*. Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England for Brown University Press, 1992.
- Vosko, Richard S. *Designing Future Worship Spaces: The Mystery of a Common Vision*. Meeting House Essays Number Eight. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1996.
- White, James F. *Introduction to Christian Worship*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1980.
- Wilson, Colin. *The Atlas of Holy Places & Sacred Sites*. Harmondsworth, Mx.: Penguin, 1996.
- Wilson-Dickson, Andrew. *The Story of Christian Music from Gregorian Chant to Black Gospel: An Authoritative Illustrated Guide to All the Major Traditions of Music for Worship*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1996 [1992].

Glossary of Terms Related to the Book *Sacred Spaces and Sacred Places* and to Sacred Architecture Generally

Term	Explanation
Agora	Open space used as a meeting-place in ancient Greece and the Hellenistic cities.
Altar	Central focus of Christian church, because here the celebration of the Eucharist takes place. In the Early Christian Church, the altar was often associated with martyrs' burial places; in St. Peter's in Rome, for example, an ancient tomb, possibly that of St. Peter himself, was found beneath the Baroque altar.
Ambon	A platform in front of the choir, which holds a pulpit. In early churches, ambons appear in pairs.
Ark	Place where scrolls of Torah (Pentateuch, or first five books of the Hebrew Bible) are stored in a synagogue.
<i>Ashkenazim</i>	Jews who originally lived in the Rhineland and spread through central and eastern Europe; now designates all Jews who observe the "German" synagogue ritual (as opposed to Sephardic rite, designating Spanish or Portuguese Jews).
Baldachin	From Italian, <i>baldachino</i> . A canopy, suspended or placed on columns, set over an altar, a venerated place, a throne, or even a bed. Seen frequently in both Jewish and Christian contexts, e.g., the wedding baldachin of Jewish ceremony, or the baldachin over certain altars, e.g., St. Peter's, Rome.
Basilica	Either a domestic or civic rectangular building characterized by an atrium and a raised apse at one end. Originally used in Roman civil architecture, and adapted for Christian use following Constantine's acceptance of Christianity in 313 CE (the Edict of Milan).
<i>Bema</i>	The raised platform that constitutes the sanctuary in early churches. (Cf. <i>Bimah</i> .)
<i>Beth Midarch</i>	Place where rabbinical literature is studied; meeting place of a study group.
<i>Bimah</i>	Platform from which the Torah is read to the assembly in a synagogue, and Benediction is recited.
Catacombs	Subterranean place for the burial of the dead. Important for insights they provide into worship practices in the Early Christian Church, because many were decorated with paintings, most of which emphasized the healing and miraculous aspects of Christianity.
Cathedral	From Latin, "cathedra," or chair. The seat of a bishop.
Chancel	From Latin, "cancellus," or screen: portion of the church reserved for the clergy.
Chantry	Separate chapel, often containing the tomb of the founder or builder of a church or a monastery. Often used for private devotions.
Choir	Portion of a church that marks change from congregation to ministry. Also, more loosely used to describe place for group of singers officially involved in the service. The architectural term "quire" is now sometimes used to designate the architectural, as opposed to the musical, connotation of the term.
Clerestorey, or clearstory (both variants are acceptable)	An upper row of windows, typically in a church, standing above an adjacent roof, admitting light into the main vessel (nave) of the building. Note: pronounced KLEER-story in North America, and often Kler-ESS-story in the U.K. Either is OK.
Cloister	The Penguin <i>Dictionary of Architecture</i> defines a cloister thus: "An enclosed space, usually a quadrangle or open court, surrounded by roofed or vaulted passages or ambulatories with an open arcade or colonnade on the inside and a plain wall on the other; it connects the monastic church with the domestic parts of the monastery." Figuratively, an enclosure (winemakers use the term "clos," whence our English word enclosure), used to signify the enclosed lives of monks and nuns. Usually the place where members of the religious community would walk between devotional duties.
Confessional	Area of a church reserved for sacrament of penance. Could be priest's chair, a place near the altar, or in a separate chapel. Modern usage has frequently seen the confessional built as a closet-like structure. Currently, the term has fallen out of use; one hears the term "reconciliation" instead.
<i>Domus ecclesia</i>	Latin: Literally house-church. A house used for religious worship by early Christians. Ecclesia, the word for church, means a coming out from, as in set apart; it was the term early Christians used to designate their community. Important because it shows that early Christian structures were very modest, focusing on the Eucharist rather than on an impressive architectural experience.
Dossals and Riddels	Vestigial remains of the back and side curtains used in Byzantine altar, which actually had curtains on all four sides of the ciborium. Technically, these all form what is

	known as the “English altar.”
Eucharist	From the Greek word for “Thanksgiving”: the central act of worship in liturgical churches. Also known as the Great Thanksgiving, Mass, the Holy Mysteries, the Holy Oblation, Holy Communion, and the Lord’s Supper.
Font	Ceremonial tank, basin, of metal or stone, designed to hold water for the administration of baptism. Ancient fonts were deeper, in keeping with concept of full-immersion baptism.
<i>Gemilut Hasadim</i>	Hebrew: “Deeds of loving kindness.” According to the online <i>Jewish Virtual Library</i> , “The Talmud teaches that <i>gemilut hasadim</i> is more important than <i>tzedakah</i> (charity) for three distinct reasons: charity can be provided only to the poor, while <i>gemilut hasadim</i> can be given to the rich and poor; charity can only be given to the living, while <i>gemilut hasadim</i> can be bestowed upon the living or dead (by attending a funeral service); and, charity can only be offered with money, while <i>gemilut hasadim</i> can be given through money or assistance.”
Gradine	A raised ledge behind the altar (and, technically, free of it) in which reliquaries were placed in ancient times. Also called a “super-altar.”
<i>Haalakah</i>	Hebrew: the laws, rules, and regulations that govern Jewish life.
Hasidim	Hebrew: A popular religious movement which began about 1740 in southern Poland as a reaction against rabbinical intellectualism. Stresses faith, trust in God, religious emotion and ecstatic prayer as the principal ways to approach God.
<i>Hazzan</i>	Hebrew: Cantor or Reader who leads the congregation in prayers in the synagogue.
Icon	Greek: image. A two-dimensional picture of a holy person, painted under strict theological guidelines. In the Orthodox church, debates were held over whether icons were worshipped for their own properties, or for the divine spark that they were said to reflect. This led during the eighth-century CE to the Iconoclastic controversy in the Eastern Church, when Icons were banned. Similar sentiments later inspired Protestants in the west to destroy images.
Iconostasis	Greek: literally, icon wall. Used in Orthodox churches (Russian, Greek, Ukrainian Catholic) to divide laity from clergy. The central of three doors are known as the “Royal Doors.” The deacon’s movement in and out of the sacred area accounts for his being referred to as “the angel of the congregation”—the one who transmits messages to heaven, and, in turn, from heaven to earth.
<i>Iwan</i>	Arabic: Vaulted portal, on four sides of a courtyard in a mosque, e.g., royal mosque of Masjid-i-Shah in Isfahan, Iran, begun by Abbas the Great in 1612 CE.
Ka’bah	Arabic: The most sacred site in Islamic worship, believed to be built by the Prophet Abraham (Peace be Upon Him [P]), and the object of the obligatory religious pilgrimage to Makkah (Mecca). The other main holy sites are Madinah (where Prophet Mohammed’s mosque was located [P]), and Jerusalem (the Temple of the Rock, from where Mohammed [P] was said to have made his miraculous night journey to the heavens.)
Magen David	So-called “Star of David” superimposing triangles forming a six pointed star.
Menorah	Hebrew: Seven-branched candlestick of Israel. Note that the Chanukah lamp has eight candles rather than seven.
<i>Midrash(im)</i>	Hebrew: Rabbinical literature containing homiletic interpretations.
<i>Mihrab</i>	Arabic: Niche in the <i>qibla</i> wall (q.v.) of the mosque, indicating the direction of Makkah (Mecca). These could achieve considerable magnificence, e.g., the one in the Friday mosque in Isfahan, Iran.
Minaret	Tower in a mosque from which the call to prayer (<i>adhan</i>) could be delivered by the muezzin, or chief prayer official. Many urban mosques feature now recorded messages. The minaret, together with the dome, are often considered to be the signs of the worship of Allah and the presence of a mosque.
<i>Minbar</i>	Arabic: Seat or pulpit in the mosque to the right of the mihrab. It often takes the form of a miniature flight of stairs rising away from the congregation whom the preacher faces down the steps. Canopies are sometimes seen, as are railings, and other decorative variations.
<i>Minyan</i>	Hebrew: Ten Jewish males over the age of thirteen, the minimum attendance required for congregational worship. (Liberal North American congregations sometimes include women.)
<i>Mishnah</i>	Hebrew: The authoritative digest of the oral Torah, elaborating and interpreting the laws of the Pentateuch.
Mosque	Arabic: the special building devoted to prayer for Muslims. The word derives from the Arabic <i>masjid</i> , meaning prostration.
Narthex	Originally, a deep porch at the entrance to a church. Now any vestibule, or enclosed

	porch, at the entrance to the nave.
Nave	Central vessel of a church. Derived both from the Greek <i>naos</i> , which means principal area in a temple, and from Latin “ <i>navus</i> ,” or ship, with an obvious reference to the Ark of Salvation, as in Noah’s Ark.
<i>Ner Tamid</i>	Hebrew: The lamp that burns continually before the Ark. It is commonly called the Eternal Light. Eternal lights are also used in Christian contexts, either over a main altar, or, in some cases, chapels. In each case, the lamp symbolized the divine presence.
Orientation	Direction towards which a sacred space is turned. In aboriginal tradition, entrances were typically oriented towards the east. In Islamic tradition, Muslim <i>Qiblah</i> , or the direction of prayer, is oriented towards Makkah, and the <i>Ka’bah</i> . In Christian churches, the sanctuary is generally oriented (even the word means this) towards the east, which often was felt to be towards Jerusalem. In practice, however, this varies widely. The liturgical “east” is always the altar-end of the church, regardless of its direction on the compass. This is referred to as the “liturgical east end.” The Gospel was traditionally proclaimed on the right side of the altar (that is, the north), because that was anciently the land of barbarians.
<i>Paroketh</i>	Hebrew: Curtain hanging in front of, or sometimes inside, the doors of the Ark.
Parousia	Greek: The Second Coming of Christ.
Parclose	An area of a church separated from the main body by a screen.
Pews	In early times, a separated and completely protected enclosure (containing chairs and kneelers) built for the principal family of a parish. In the seventeenth century, the term came to be used for any bench for two or more people that did not have separations between the seats.
Presbyter	Officer of the congregation who was responsible for the management of local affairs.
Presbytery	Originally, the semi-circular bank of seats behind the freestanding high altar. The bishop’s cathedra (chair or throne) was located in the centre of this bank. Now the word is often applied to a space for seating that is provided between the choir and the altar.
Propylaeum	Entrance to a temple or sacred enclosure.
Prothesis	Small chapel on side of altar used for preparation of Eucharistic elements. Of importance in Russian Orthodox and Sarum (the Diocese of Salisbury, England) rituals.
Pulpit	A raised platform for public speaking. In early practice, a preacher sat rather than stood; hence the phrase <i>ex cathedra</i> . Many variations of pulpits exist, including some of three-stages, which included, on different levels, a clerk’s desk, a lectern, and a pulpit. Pulpits generally had sounding boards above them. They were particularly popular in Puritan and Preaching Order churches.
<i>Qiblah</i>	Arabic: The direction of prayer, hence the wall of the mosque which was directed towards Makkah (Mecca), and the <i>Ka’bah</i> .
<i>Qu’ran</i> (also <i>Qu’ran</i>)	Arabic: The sacred text of Islam, containing the revelations made by Allah to his prophet Mohammed (P).
Rood Screen	The figures of Christ crucified, the Blessed Virgin, and St. John the Evangelist (also known as the Deesis). Divides chancel from nave. Usually seen in Anglo-Catholic (High-Church Anglican) churches.
Sacred vessels	Chalice, paten, ciborium, and flagon: used in the Eucharist.
Sacristy	Room set apart for the immediate preparation for a religious service.
<i>Salat</i>	Arabic: the ritual of prayer, which devout Muslims are required to observe five times each day. While these devotions can be carried out anywhere, every Friday the <i>salat</i> must be congregational.
Sanctuary	The altar area, whether enclosed or not. From CE 693, the term had a different meaning: a West Saxon law of that date meant “refuge in a church building or some special area thereof.” A person fleeing justice could spend up to forty days within the safety of the church building, free from persecution, during which time she or he was expected to make compensation for an offense. Failing this, she or had to abjure and quit the realm. As a matter of archaeological importance, the great bronze door knocker at Durham cathedral was installed for the use of a person seeking sanctuary.
<i>Shofar</i>	Hebrew: Ram’s horn, symbolizing the call to repentance, for example, during Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement in Jewish tradition.
<i>Shtibl</i>	Yiddish: “small room”: a Hasidic prayer room.
Stoa	A colonnaded roofed hall.
Tabernacle or ambry	A structure for housing the reserved Sacrament. These have frequently been very elaborate.
Talmud	Hebrew: the encyclopedic collection of the decisions and arguments of the Jewish

<i>Tirtha</i>	<p>sages from the close of the biblical era to the seventh century CE.</p> <p>Sanskrit: to cross. The term literally means a ford or a crossing place; symbolically, it means a place where crossing over to the other shore means the world beyond. Term used to describe the sites of Hindu as well as Jain temples. The purpose of a pilgrimage to a <i>Tirtha</i> is for ritual bathing, as in, for example, the Ganga (Ganges)—the acme of sanctity and auspiciousness in Hindu belief. The <i>Tirtha</i> is conceptualized as a network of forces running from east to west and from north south. A temple is usually built around the nodes and foci of that network (<i>yantra</i>), thereby enhancing its sanctity. A <i>Tirtha</i>, therefore, operates as a canopy under with the overarching patterns of Hindu religious and cultural values are spatialized and preserved. Most <i>Tirthas</i> are associated with a prominent deity, such as Visnu, Siva, and Devi. In popular Hinduism, the concept of <i>Tirtha</i> is extended to include sites commemorating persons of high spiritual status; thus, temples are often located at a <i>Tirtha</i>.</p>
Transept	<p>A transverse arm in a church, usually at the crossing. Not seen in all churches, but rather in the Latin Cross (as opposed to the centralized, or Greek-cross, plans).</p>
<i>Yeshiva</i>	<p>Hebrew: Theological academy for mature students.</p>
<i>Yom Kippur</i>	<p>Hebrew: The feast of humans' reconciliation with God—the holiest festival of the Jewish calendar.</p>
<i>Ziyadah</i>	<p>Arabic: The outer enclosure of a mosque.</p>

Notes

- 1 Rev. Donald Axford, in conversation with the author.
- 2 Holm and Bowker, *Sacred Place*, 3 (please note: please refer to bibliography for full citation, for this and for other cited publications).
- 3 Courtney Milne, *Spirit of the Land: Sacred Places in Native North America* (New York: Viking, 1994), 16.
- 4 J.G. Davies, *Temples, Churches and Mosques*, 23.
- 5 Judith Thurman, "Letter from Southern France: First Impressions. What does the world's oldest art say about us?" *The New Yorker*, 23 June 2008, 56–67.
- 6 This information comes from Jeannette Mirsky, *Houses of God* (London: Constable, 1965), 6.
- 7 The following discussion is informed principally by: Robert L. Cohn, *The Shape of Sacred Space: Four Biblical Studies* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981).
- 8 Walter Brueggeman, *The Land* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 3, cited here, 2.
- 9 Seth Kunin, "Judaism," *Sacred Place*, 116.
- 10 New York, Harper and Rowe, 1959, 37, cited here, 67.
- 11 Eugene J. Fisher, *The Jewish Roots of Christian Liturgy* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 47.
- 12 Sharon L. Sobel, "Community as Sacred Space," *Ecumenism*, 123 (September 1996), 20.
- 13 Anuradha Roma Choudhury, "Hinduism," in *Sacred Place*, 63.
- 14 The reference is to Yeats's 1928 poem, "Sailing to Byzantium," in the collection *The Tower*, third stanza: "O sages standing in God's holy fire/As in the gold mosaic of a wall./ Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,/And be the singing-masters of my soul./ Consume my heart away; sick with desire/ And fastened to a dying animal/It knows not what it is; and gather me/ Into the artifice of eternity."
- 15 Jean-Louis Bourgeois, "The History of the Great Mosques of Djenné," *African Arts*, 20, No. 3 (May, 1987): 54-92 (article consists of 13 pages).
- 16 Jeannette Mirsky, *Houses of God* (London: Constable, 1965), citing Heine, no source, 105.
- 17 Michael White, *Building God's House in the Roman World: Architectural Adaptation among Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).
- 18 See Mark Rose, "Early Church at Aqaba," *Archaeology* 51 No. 6 (November/December 1998), available online at: <http://www.archaeology.org/9811/> (accessed 31 December 2008).
- 19 Rose, "Early Church at Aqaba," *Archaeology* 51, no. 6 (November/December 1998), available online at: <http://www.archaeology.org/9811/> (accessed 31 December 2008).
- 20 Cited in Davies, *Sacred Place*, 41.
- 21 Esther de Waal, in *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1984), 69.
- 22 De Waal, *Seeking God*, 55.
- 23 Cited in *Seeking God*, 155.
- 24 Mirsky, *Houses of God*, 117.
- 25 Clinton Bennett, "Islam," in *Sacred Place*, 89.
- 26 "P" here stands for "Peace be Upon Him," a phrase of respect associated with reference to Mohammed, the prophet of God.
- 27 George Mitchell, *The Hindu Temple: An Introduction to its Meaning and Forms* (London: Paul Elek, 1977), 61–77.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 61.
- 29 Mirsky, *Houses of God*, 44.
- 30 Martin Boord, "Buddhism," in *Sacred Place*, 8.

-
- 31 Marion Geisinger, *The House of God* (New York: Ridge Press, 1979), 191.
- 32 Alexis Vinogradov, "The Orthodox Christian Experience of Liturgical Space," *Ecumenism*, 123 (September 1996), 34.
- 33 *Passion and Resurrection* (New Skete, 1995), xxvi–vii.
- 34 Thomas F. Matthews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press [1980]), 7–8.
- 35 For the monastery of Saint-Benoît-du-Lac, see Claude Bergeron and Geoffrey Simmins, *L'Abbaye de Saint-Benoît-du-Lac et ses bâtisseurs* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1997).
- 36 For Dan Hanganu, see Susan Bronson, "The eloquent language of Dan Hanganu," *Canadian Architect* 35, no. 5 (May 1990): 37–41; and *Dan S. Hanganu, architecte, projets et réalisations, 1980–1990* (Montréal: Centre de design de l'Université de Montréal, 1990).
- 37 This unsigned statement comes from the brochure commemorating the ceremony marking the opening of the Cedars on 5 September 1996.
- 38 On reading this, Bob Chodos remarked: "In Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism, however, and in most Conservative congregations, the *minyan* has been redefined as ten adults, male or female. Orthodox and some Conservative Jews still restrict the *minyan* to males."
- 39 Dianne O. Esses, "Transmitting the Law: Paradoxes of Authority," in *Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Biblical Themes in Life*, II (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997): 317–22.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 320 and 321.
- 41 The key numbers and their reciprocals are: 0.145, 0.236, 0.382, 0.618, 1, 1.618, 2.618.
- 42 Let $AC = r$; let $AB = 1$. $r : 1 = (1-r) : r$, or $r^2 + r - 1 = 0$, $r = \frac{1}{2}\sqrt{5} - \frac{1}{2} = 0.618$.
- 43 $3.336/2 = 1.6103$. Mathematically, $a + b : a = a : b$ whence $a : b = b : a - b$.
- 44 After Leonardo Fibonacci (filius Bonacci), alias Leonardo of Pisa, (c. 1170–c. 1250). He brought the Arabic numeral system to the west, among other achievements.
- 45 Fibonacci also solved the so-called rabbit-breeding problem, a means of predicting the progeny of a single pair of rabbits, by using the golden ratio projections.
- 46 *Divine proportion: oeuvre nécessaire à tous les esprits perspicaces et curieux, où chacun de ceux qui aiment à étudier la Philosophie, la Perspective, la Peinture, la Sculpture, l'Architecture, la Musique et les autres disciplines Mathématiques, trouvera une très délicate, subtile, et admirable doctrine et se délectera de diverses questions touchant une très secrète science.* [Paris]: Librairie du Compagnonnage [1980].
- 47 Huntley, "Nature's Golden Numbers," 151–63.
- 48 $a : b = b : a - b$. If b is cut off from a , $b + a - b$ are again parts of a golden section.
- 49 Wolfgang Braunfels, *Monasteries of Western Europe: the Architecture of the Orders* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), 240–41.
- 50 For Paul Bellot, see: Dom Paul Bellot, *Propos d'un bâtisseur du bon dieu*, Cahiers d'Art Arca IV (Montréal: Fides 1949); *Dom Bellot: moine-architecte: 1876–1944*, edited by Maurice Culot and Martin Meade (Paris: Éditions Norma 1996); Peter Willis, *Dom Paul Bellot, Architect and Monk, and the Publication of Propos d'un bâtisseur du Bon Dieu, 1949* (Newcastle Upon Tyne, Elysium Press Publishers 1996).
- 51 *Orate Fratres* [a journal published from St. John's Abbey, in Collegeville, Minnesota]. 19 (25 February 1945): 150–56.
- 52 Bellot, *Propos*, 109: "... je reçus quelques images de Beuron, l'Abbaye Benedictine Allemande où travaillait le R.P. Didier Lentz [*sic* – Lenz]; puis peu après, on me donna un modeste fascicule traitant de ses théories." It is not clear which publication Bellot is referring to, but it is possible that he might

- have meant a book by Abel Fabre, *Pages d'art chrétien: études d'architecture, de peinture, de sculpture, et d'iconographie*, which was published, according to a note in the 1927 edition in the monastery, p. vi, in five separate fascicules between 1910 and 1915. The fifth chapter of Fabre's book, "La Décoration Moderne," discusses Lenz's work in some detail, 575–82 (pagination from the 1927 edition). See also Josef Kreitmaier, s.j., *Beuroner Kunst: Eine Ausdrucksform der Christlichen Mystik*, 1914 (?), fourth and fifth enlarged edition (Freiburg: Herder, 1923). Kreitmaier (p. xvii) cites a publication by Fabre on the Beuron school which apparently appeared in Paris in 1913 in what may have been a journal entitled *Pages d'Art Chrétien*.
- 53 See P. Ansgar Dreher, "Zur Beuroner Kunst," in *Beuron, 1863–1963: Festschrift zum hundertjährigen Bestehen der Erzabtei St. Martin* (Beuron/Hohenzollern: Beuroner Kunstverlag, [1963?]), 358–94. For complete illustrations of the fresco cycle at Beuron, as well as for a few limited views of architecture, see Kreitmaier. The first plate of Kreitmaier's book shows a reproduction of a painting by Maurice Denis of Lenz, sitting before some geometric figures and with a compass in his hand – which suggests strongly that this German school was known in France among the group of Catholic artists that Denis associated with.
- 54 For a convenient overview of Lenz's life and work, see the Thieme-Becker *Künstler Lexicon*, XXIII, 64–65.
- 55 Fabre, 574: Peter Lenz took the name of Father Desiderius; the painter Jacques Wuger became Father Gabriel; and Luc Steiner, also a painter, became Father Luc (the patron saint of painters). As Fabre notes, this school was itself influenced by earlier 19th-century religiously oriented painting confraternities, such as the Nazarene Brotherhood.
- 56 Lenz had an obvious interest in developing an art form based on underlying geometric principles. See, for example, Dreher, *Beuron, 1863–1963*, plate 4, Plan for a proposed Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Berlin, 1871; and pl. 18, an idealized male and female couple overlaid with geometric forms. The Berlin church project, a remarkable Egyptian-inspired project with many sculptures on the facade, was apparently unrealized: for elevations, see Kreitmaier, plates 35–36.
- 57 P. Desiderius Lenz, *Zur Ästhetik der Beuroner Schule* (Vienna and Leipzig, 1912). It is possible that this text was published in an earlier French edition, since according to Fabre, 580, in 1905 the painter Paul Sérusier prepared a French translation of this publication entitled *L'esthétique de Beuron*.
- 58 Cited in "Kunst und Künstler im ersten Jahrhundert Beurons," *Das hundertste Jahr: Zur Hundertjahrfeier der Benediktiner in Beuron 1963, Herausgegeben von der Erzabtei St. Martin*, P. Coelestin Merkle, ed. ([Beuron]: Beuroner Kunstverlag [1963]), 115.
- 59 The School of Beuron later influenced the painting cycles undertaken at the crypt of Monte Cassino and elsewhere, including Maria Laach; see Fabre, 577–81, and Kreitmaier, *passim*.
- 60 *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Thomism."
- 61 Cited in E.F. Carritt, *The Theory of Beauty*, 4th ed. (Methuen, 1937), 6, cited in Huntley, *The Divine Proportion*, 59.
- 62 Maritain was later to have a profound influence on some American artists who designed sacred arts: the best-known of these is surely William Schickel, who named his studio in Loveland, Ohio, the Maritain Center.
- 63 See: Daniel Swartz, "Jews, Jewish Texts, and Nature: A Brief History," in Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, 87–103; and David Kinsley, "Christianity as Ecologically Harmful," and "Christianity as Ecologically Responsible," in Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, 104–15, and 116–24.
- 64 *Avot* 3:7, cited in Swartz, 90.
- 65 Swartz, 100–101.

- 66 Kinsley, 104.
- 67 Kinsley, 120.
- 68 Henry David Thoreau, Excerpt from “Walking,” in Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, 18–21.
- 69 *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, editor in chief (London: Macmillan, 1987), VI, 237–43, 237.
- 70 *Encyclopedia of Religion*, VI, 238.
- 71 *Surah* 38:50–54, as cited in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, VI, 239.
- 72 *Surah* 38:55–58, as cited in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, VI, 239.
- 73 Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind—A New Perspective on Christ and His Message*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 2008.