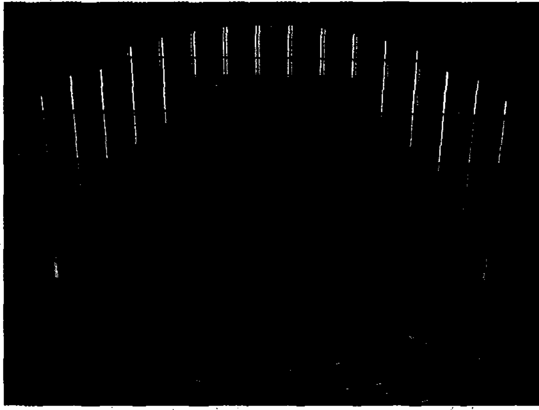
Seeking the Sacred in Contemporary Religious Architecture

Douglas R. Hoffman

Foreword by Michael J. Crosbie



A compelling study of what makes a sacred place sacred

From ancient temples to modern churches, synagogues, and mosques, architects throughout history have invested their creative energies to design sacred spaces. Many cultures devoted considerable resources to their sacred architecture, and sacred spaces are among the most impressive and permanent structures created by humanity.

Author Douglas R. Hoffman explores sacredness in houses of worship and examines the critical question of what architectural elements contribute to make sacred space. His underlying premise is that sacred space, while ephemeral, can be perceived and understood through a careful investigation of its architecture. After laying out the definition and architectural attributes of sacred space, Hoffman examines four contemporary American examples: the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles, Adath Jeshurun Synagogue in Minnetonka, Minnesota, the Islamic Cultural Center in New York City, and Riverbend Church in Austin, Texas.

Illustrated with dozens of color photographs, *Seeking the Sacred in Contemporary Religious Architecture* presents the notion of the sacred in a cogent, engaging way that can be understood and appreciated by all, even as it will be valued by religious and architectural historians and scholars.

Seeking the Sacred in Contemporary Religious Architecture

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Seeking the Sacred in Contemporary Religious Architecture

Douglas R. Hoffman

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Acknowledgments

Every story has its genesis, its defining moment of discovery, the event or experience that triggers a thirst for more knowledge and that somehow manages to reshape our intended pathway. For me, as a young architecture student traveling in Europe, that epiphany occurred the first time I entered the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. I felt the hairs on the nape of my neck stand up; I was awestruck. I felt the presence of the numinous. Granted, this is a magnificent cathedral rife with beauty, history, artistic excellence, and age, but for me the experience was less about the art and architecture than the sense of the sacred it evoked in me. Somehow, entering that cathedral awakened my consciousness in a way that I had never before experienced.

Now, after thirty-five years of practicing architecture, I have come to realize the import of that event. In the course of my practice and through coincidence or destiny, I have worked with diverse faith groups to create places for worship, fellowship, and communal gathering. Having practiced for a while as the denominational architect of the United Methodist Church, I spent a great deal of time trying to solve pragmatic problems of meeting spatial program needs and reconciling budgets. While these are meaningful pursuits and certainly within the domain of the architect's responsibilities, they miss an essential element of any true religious experience, the need to evoke a new consciousness, an experience of the sacred.

Midcareer I took a two-year sabbatical and went back to college, so to speak. I enrolled at Penn State University to seek a graduate degree and teach architecture as an adjunct professor. Since Penn State's graduate architectural program was focused on research, and the post-professional degree was one of inquiry, I chose to investigate the architectural markers of the sacred. My experience as a student twenty-five years earlier was still brewing.

With the able counsel of my thesis adviser, Jawaid Haider, and the former head of the Graduate Department of Architecture, Sid Cohn, I concentrated my energy on first understanding the theological and philosophical underpinnings of twentieth-century thought on sacred space and then identifying those architectural markers that potentially trigger that sense of the sacred. The culmination of that effort was a graduate thesis that wove the various writings of theologians, architects, and philosophers with my own interpretation of how these drive the design for realizing the sacred.

Thanks to a chance encounter, with a professor at Cleveland State University, I befriended Michael Tevesz, an incredibly erudite fellow and kindred spirit. Trained as a paleontologist but keenly interested in sacred architecture as an avocation, Mike founded the Center for Sacred Landmarks within the Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs. This center is one of the only college-level educational programs focused on the role of religious facilities within the community, both as anchors and stabilizing forces within transitional urban neighborhoods and as treasure troves rich with artistic and architectural heritage. From our first meeting in 2001, Mike inspired me to continue my interest in religious architecture through speaking engagements, writings, and editorship of a monograph series for the center. It is at his urging that I renewed my investigation of architectural markers of the sacred, which led to this publication. I am indebted to him.

No acknowledgment is complete without thanking all those who contributed to the venture in some fashion. Allow me to name a few: the Reverend Cindy Evans Voorhees of Voorhees Design; the Reverend Joseph Mann of the Duke Endowment for Rural Churches; Michael Crosbie, editor of *Faith & Form* magazine; David Kuhar, graphic artist and media consultant; Father Richard Vosko, liturgical consultant; and Maurice Finegold of Finegold Alexander Architects. Last, the inspiration to all my ventures, my partner, Ron Stach.

Foreword

Michael J. Crosbie

Making a sacred place seems such a simple thing. For Christians, it is as easy as Jesus' instruction: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Everything else is glory, laud, and honor—dazzling, but ultimately nonessential. Or we might think of it this way: The making of sacred place is, for humans, critical—yet otherwise unnecessary. Sacred place is a human construct, not a divine one. We say we build for God, but we build for ourselves. Sacred space makes us human. This is why the places we create to meet the divine are so fascinating.

In this book, Douglas Hoffman carefully explores this human project. His primary focus is how we define a sacred place, where we locate it, how it is nurtured, what are its elements, how it is preserved. He draws upon some of the greatest thinkers and writers who have considered why we do what we do when we attempt to make a holy place on earth: Mircea Eliade, whose book *The Sacred and the Profane* is one of the most important works ever written about the human understanding of the sacred; Rudolph Otto, whose *Idea of the Holy* takes us to the very core of what is so human about divine space—silence, darkness, emptiness; and Carl Jung, who plumbed the psychological dimensions of religious belief.

With these giants as guides, Hoffman brings us along in delicately dissecting the elements of sacred place—its essential elements, which cut across most religions and cultures; the role of pathway, threshold, sanctuary, and column in creating a place we will accept as sacred; the importance of sacred geometry—and how contemporary religious architecture takes these ancient elements and uses them in new ways.

What are most reassuring are the sacred patterns that Hoffman writes about. They occur again and again in sacred places and spaces, spanning millennia, down to the present day. They remind us that we are not so different from those who built the Temple Mount, Angkor Wat, Machu Picchu, Stonehenge, Hagia Sophia,

Delphi. We continue to make places where we can meet the holy, encounter the divine, lose ourselves in the mystical.

Hoffman's insights will be valuable both to those who are not experts in the field and those who are well versed in the art of making sacred space. He is an excellent teacher of the character of the sacred and how it is manifested across many denominations and faith communities. It is this cross-cultural dimension that demonstrates that the urge to create sacred places is universal, that the methods are shared, and that our spirits are likewise fed in mosques, churches, shrines, temples, and synagogues.

We build our sacred places to God, to saints and mystics, to all that we deem holy. Yet we ultimately create them to deify ourselves. Into them we pour our hopes, dreams, fears, and wishes. Through them we hope to petition a creator whom we dare to impress with our own creations. These shells of faith then live beyond us in time and space.

Michael J. Crosbie is the editor of Faith & Form: The Interfaith Journal on Religion, Art and Architecture *and the chair of the Department of Architecture at the University of Hartford.*

Introduction

> When one enters a temple, one enters marked-off space . . . in which, at least in principle, nothing is accidental; everything, at least potentially, demands attention. The temple serves as a focusing lens, establishing the possibility of significance by directing attention, by requiring the perception of difference. Within the temple, the ordinary becomes significant, becomes "sacred," simply by being there. A ritual object or action becomes sacred by having attention focused on it in a highly marked way.
>
> —Jonathan Z. Smith

Throughout history, architects, builders, craftspersons, and artists have labored to create sacred sites. While some have been more successful than others, there is no denying the preeminence of such sites as the Acropolis, the Pantheon, Hagia Sophia, St. Peter's Basilica, or even the remains of Solomon's Temple. Not all subscribe to the faiths espoused in these places, but most acknowledge these as sacred sites. It is difficult to imagine these temples, churches, and mosques without recalling specific architectural characteristics that distinguish them from other buildings of their period. One needs only visit a site to confirm the inherent aura of sacredness that enshrouds this noble building. Clearly, there is a longstanding link between architecture and our understanding of sacred place.

In more recent times, however, this link between architecture and the sacred has been clouded by the advent of nontraditional architecture for houses of worship. Twentieth-century modern and postmodern religious buildings often confuse people, leaving them uncertain about the appropriateness of the design for their worship needs. In some circles there is a backlash and reversion to architectural styles of past centuries, including neo-Gothic and neoclassic. While these styles

may appeal to some, they are neither easily nor authentically replicated with today's building materials, costs, and trade skills.

As with the art and architecture of all historic periods, there are those buildings that are worthy of our esteem and those that simply serve a need of the time. Contemporary religious architecture can transcend issues of style and fashion and evoke a deep and profound sense of the sacred. These buildings resonate in ways we simply cannot explain, yet they convey meaning and beauty we sense from our first encounter.

The new Cathedral of Los Angeles, Our Lady of Angels, serves as a case in point. Clearly monumental in scale, and benefiting from the accomplishments of many talented artists and architects, the completed building has become a pilgrimage site, daily attracting thousands who visit for worship, ceremony, artistic appreciation, and even simple curiosity. This building serves its people and its time as effectively as Chartres served twelfth-century worshippers and those of succeeding generations.

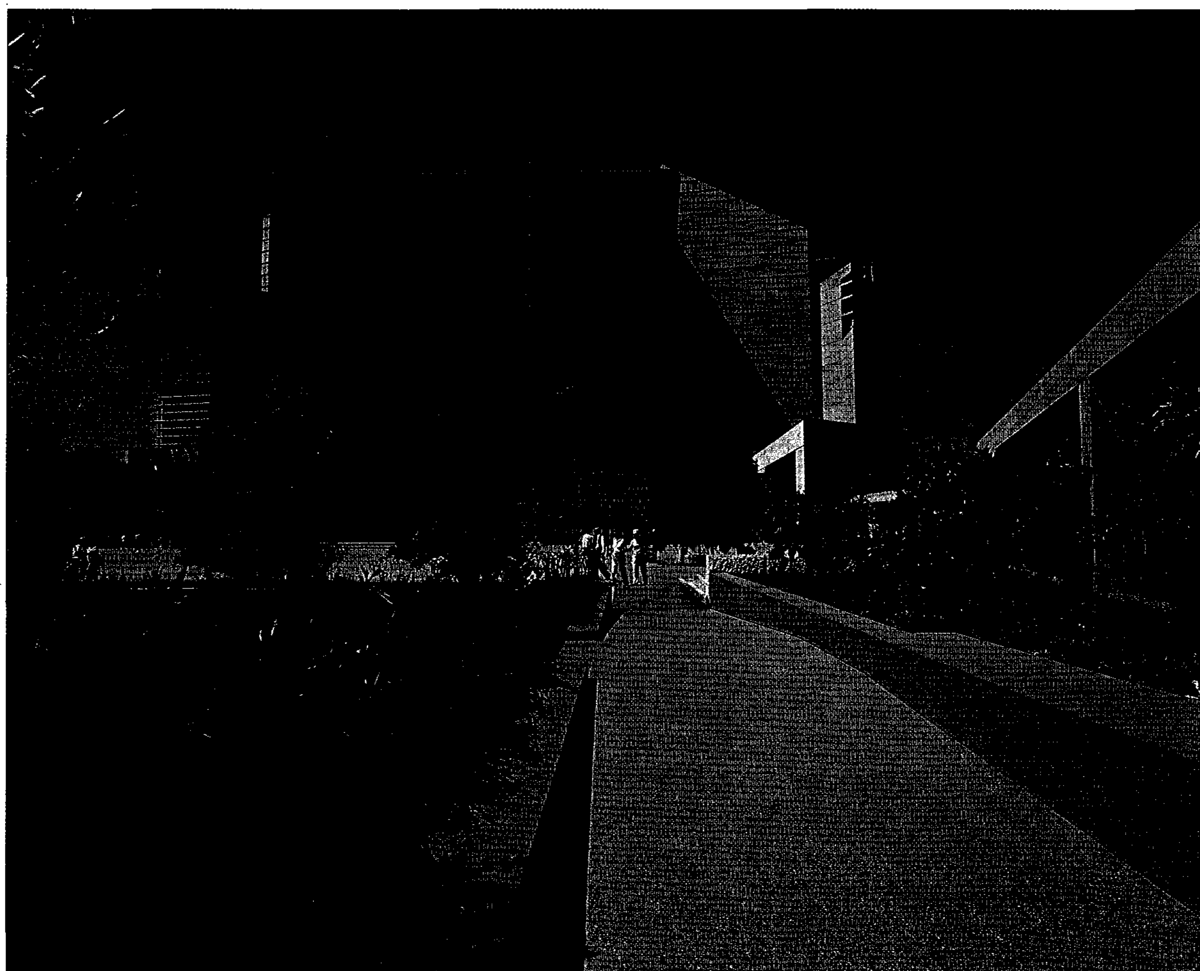


Figure 1. The Cathedral of Los Angeles: Our Lady of the Angels.
Photograph by Julius Shulman & David Glomb.

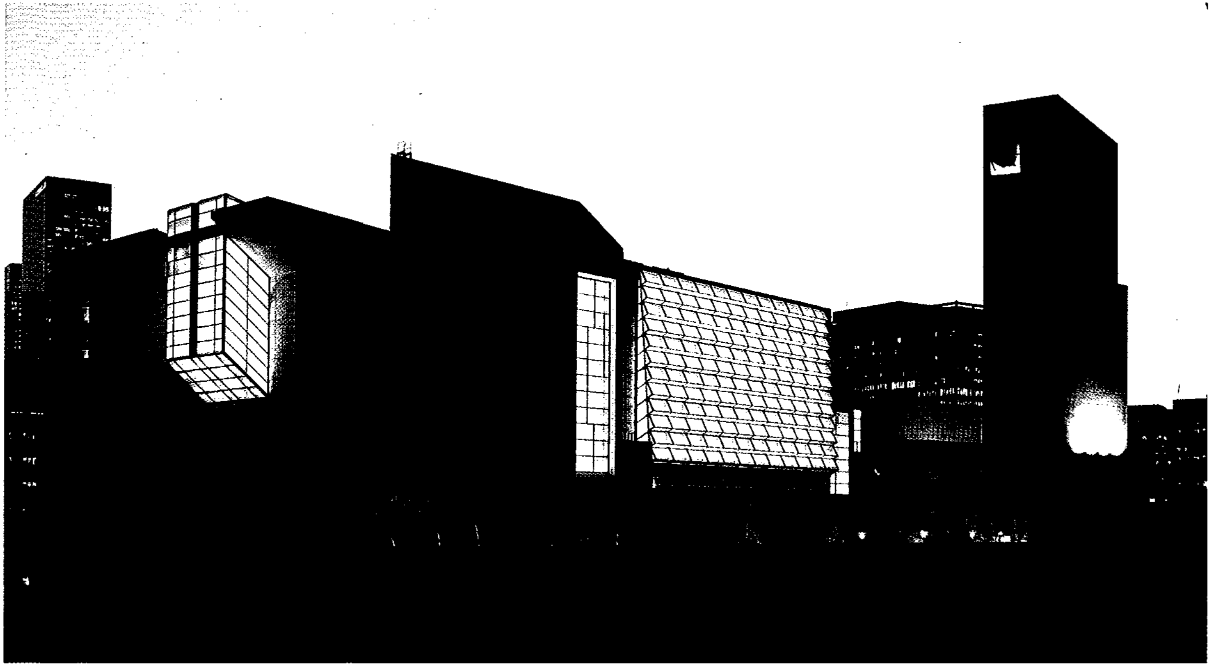
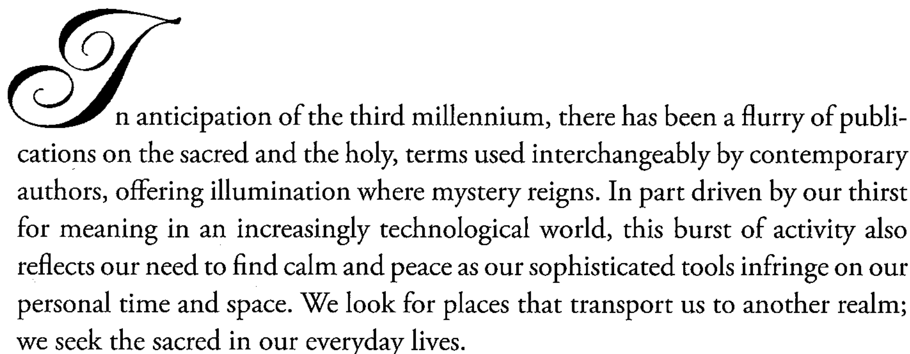


Figure 2. The Cathedral of Los Angeles at night.
Photograph by Julius Shulman & David Glomb.

This publication attempts to reconnect the elusive link between architecture and "the sacred," especially in contemporary places of worship. The premise is simple: certain physical elements of architecture act as symbolic markers transforming ordinary place into sacred sites. The task has been to isolate and identify these elements and then to evaluate them in the context of their contemporary settings. Are they effective markers of the sacred, and do they serve a larger purpose of enhancing our experience of the holy? This is the challenge and crux of this venture. While we may conjecture that certain buildings successfully evince the sacred in their composition and their architectural elements, it is for you to decide. I encourage you to visit these sites and determine for yourself whether the architecture does in fact evoke the sacred.

Chapter One

Sacred Places



In anticipation of the third millennium, there has been a flurry of publications on the sacred and the holy, terms used interchangeably by contemporary authors, offering illumination where mystery reigns. In part driven by our thirst for meaning in an increasingly technological world, this burst of activity also reflects our need to find calm and peace as our sophisticated tools infringe on our personal time and space. We look for places that transport us to another realm; we seek the sacred in our everyday lives.

In his book *Sacred Places,* James Swan delineated three types of sacred places: the natural setting that derives its sacred identity from nature itself; the places where the larger whole seems condensed into a symbolic statement, "a microcosm of the macrocosm," such as Stonehenge; and the human-crafted building "which by its presence, and regardless of its form and size, marks a place as special for religious reasons."[1]

Given this broad canvas for identifying sacred place, it becomes essential to begin narrowing the lens aperture to those places we can easily access—to our local churches, synagogues, and mosques. If we recognize that humans can construct sacred spaces and accept that architecture has played a contributing role, as in the historic examples of Solomon's Temple, the Pantheon, St. Peter's Basilica and others, questions arise: Can modern houses of worship become sacred? What are the atmospheric qualities and physical attributes evoking the sacredness of space? Do they act independently or in concert? Does sacredness of the worship setting transcend the distinctions between religious faiths?

Jonathan Smith, a philosopher and theologian, states that an object becomes sacred when attention is focused on it in a highly marked way. If this premise is true, then the possibility exists that employing these elements enhances the sacredness of the worship environment. This statement is particularly relevant because architecture, as an art and a physical science, provides the opportunity

to direct attention, embed the marker, and give physical emphasis to make the ordinary significant.

Setting the Borders

The difficulty in pursuing this topic is the ephemeral and enigmatic nature of sacredness. A definition of sacred space is tantamount to expressing the ineffable, presenting the unpresentable, or describing the divine, which in many cultures and faiths is taboo.[2] Another difficulty in tackling the issue of sacred space is that many faiths eschew the concept. For example, some groups give little or no importance to the architectural environment. A simple pre-engineered metal-clad building is all that is needed, since the action of worship is the focal point of the gathering; the sacredness is the gathered community, not the physical structure that houses it.

Other groups, particularly those unaffiliated with denominations, have consciously strived to avoid a churchlike appearance. Prime examples of this approach are the mega-churches, large-membership churches that began appearing in suburban and metropolitan areas during the 1980s and 1990s. Attempting to attract the unchurched, these sprawling campuslike facilities frequently accommodate thousands in worship but have been designed to resemble suburban malls, with auditoriums, food courts, galleries, bookstores, and recreational centers that rival local fitness centers. These are decidedly and conscientiously nonsacred spaces. Nevertheless, some of these facilities employ the same techniques honed by architects over the centuries to cast a particular sense of otherness, an inexplicable sense of place.

Many other faith groups and religious traditions do emphasize the architectural environment and seek sacredness in the setting for worship. Some of history's most meaningful architecture has served as places of worship or shrines of devotion. Since the foundation of the United States, both by the Native Americans who first lived here and the immigrants who later settled here, religious sites have had special meaning, and the architecture that houses them continues to anchor our landscape. Faith traditions with roots throughout the world have been transported here, invested with new meaning and new cultural traditions. The architecture of these faiths has also evolved as both reminiscent of the past and evocative of a new, uniquely American presence. While one can tour the cathedrals of Europe or the shrines of Asia and recognize symbols, signs, and architectural styles employed in American churches, it is less common to find American-style churches overseas except as direct transplants initiated by American missionaries. Thus, in the United States there has evolved a distinctive style of church architecture that echoes its citizens' faith, heritage, and ability to assimilate diverse cultures.

This inquiry primarily focuses on these American-style faith traditions of sacred space. While the majority of buildings examined are examples of new or relatively

new religious architecture, several are venerated American sites of sacred space. One site in particular, the Santuario de Chimayo in the rolling hills of Chimayo, New Mexico, is a remote chapel that draws thousands of pilgrims every year. Famed for the story of its founding but also for the healing earth it enshrines, this humble adobe building embodies a wealth of overlapping markers of the sacred.

It is important to note that the attempt has been to identify those markers that transcend faith and geographic boundaries, while recognizing that diverse faiths and cultures customize these markers differently. For example, in the Islamic faith the image of the divine cannot be literally represented, so many architects of mosques generate a sacred environment through extensive use of precise and sacred geometries.

In synagogues, the pattern of sacred enclosure often reflects that of Solomon's Temple, where a series of enclosed areas differentiates the level of holiness, culminating in the Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant. In most synagogues, that pattern of progressive sacred enclosure culminates with the ark that holds the sacred scrolls, or Torahs. The ark is the most sacred location within the room for worship, and its presence is frequently denoted with elaborately decorated doors, curtains, and torah coverings.

In many Christian churches and cathedrals, numerous architectural elements have been employed to generate a sense of sacred space, including the manipulation of space, pathways, and light to direct attention or the creation of architectural ambiguities to give pause for reflection. Medieval cathedrals, in particular, dramatize atmospheric qualities such as darkness, emptiness, and monumentality. These attributes awe congregants and instill a humility their builders deemed appropriate for a house of God.

Certain aspects of the religious setting, such as artwork, sculpture, stained glass, and music significantly contribute to the atmosphere for worship and enhance the sense of the sacred. While these undoubtedly contribute to a sacred environment, this analysis focuses on the specific architectural elements of the building design that mark the sacred. However, the study also notes where it is apparent the architect and artist collaborated in the design and markers of the sacred. This collaboration frequently resulted in an enhanced layer of meaning and an increased sense of awe. These partnerships between architect, master craftsperson, artist, liturgist and sacred musician yield some of the most outstanding examples of religious architecture in our time.

To pursue this topic there are certain terms that require definition. The first and most obvious is *sacred space,* which is so integral to this work that it demands its own chapter. Chapter 2 defines *sacred space* in detail, but suffice it to say here that people build sacred spaces to symbolize the meaning and accommodate the rituals of their particular belief systems.[3]

Archetype is a frequently used term in this publication. Its definition here is borrowed from Carl Jung: "forms or images of a collective nature which occur

practically all over the earth as constituents of myths."[4] Archetypes are inherent potentials in the psychic structures of all individuals and represent first patterns or prototypes.[5]

Symbol and *sign* appear throughout the text, but not interchangeably. A *sign* as used here indicates the existence of a thing, event, or condition and is symptomatic of a state of affairs.[6] *Symbols* are special kinds of signs that possess specific connotations in addition to their conventional and obvious meanings. They imply something vague, unknown, or hidden. Because there are innumerable things beyond the range of human understanding, symbolism is used to represent concepts that elude definition or comprehension.[7] Symbol-making is one of humankind's basic needs and primary activities, and as this publication argues, the religious building is rife with opportunities for practicing this in a meaningful way.[8]

Axis mundi refers to the imagined world center, a concept Mircea Eliade extensively documented in his analyses of historic religious practices. The axis mundi is frequently symbolized physically by poles, trees, ladders, and other vertical elements to convey the essential concept of an axial center marking sacred place.

Ritual in the context of this study refers to something done to achieve a specific end. If a symbol is a meaningful sign, then *ritual* should be thought of as meaningful *action.* In *Philosophy in a New Key,* Susanne Langer states, "Ritual is a symbolic transformation of experiences that no other medium can adequately express."[9] *Sacred ritual,* or *rite,* refers to a formalized pattern of ceremonial movements and verbal expressions that are carried out in a sacred context.[10]

Chapter Two

Defining Sacred Space

Philosophical understanding of sacred space has evolved over the course of the twentieth century and into the beginning of the twenty-first. An elusive and ambiguous concept at best, many noted philosophers and theologians of our era have discussed, dissected, and opined on sacred space. Because of this, any representative definition of "sacred space" must necessarily be a distillation of a variety of viewpoints.

Harking back to the turn of the twentieth century, the German theologian Rudolph Otto introduced in his seminal work on spiritual psychology, *Das Heilige* (*The Idea of the Holy*), several concepts that have helped shape our contemporary understanding of the sacred. Otto believed that holy (or sacred) was an experience peculiar to religion and fundamentally nonrational and ineffable "in the sense that it completely eludes apprehension in terms of concepts."[1] In his writings Otto struggled with the inexpressible nature of a higher power and sought descriptive terms that communicated the awe, fear, purity, and danger experienced when encountering the sacred. Citing the relationship of *ominous* to *omen,* Otto hypothesized that *numinous* somehow conveyed the deeper, more intense meaning of *numen,* a Latin term implying a deity or spirit.[2]

> For this purpose I adopt a word coined from the Latin *numen. Omen* has given us *ominous,* and there is no reason why from *numen* we should not similarly form a word *numinous.* I shall speak, then, of a unique *numinous* category of value and of a definitely *numinous* state of mind, which is always found wherever the category is applied. This mental state is perfectly *sui generis* and irreducible to any other; and therefore, like every absolutely primary and elementary dictum, while it admits of being discussed, it cannot be strictly defined.[3]

According to Otto, an encounter with the holy was a primal, irreducible experience: "It is the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures." Attempting to describe the emotion, Otto defined "mysterium tremendum" as embodying the mystery, awe, spontaneous joy, and dread inherent in an encounter with the holy. He identified places where this feeling could be evoked as "in the fixed and ordered solemnities of rites and liturgies, and again in the atmosphere that clings to old religious monuments and buildings, to temples and to churches."[4]

In addressing religious art and architecture, Otto identified three characteristics that point to the numinous: darkness, silence, and emptiness (or empty distance). "The darkness must be such as is enhanced and made all the more perceptible by contrast with some last vestige of brightness, which it is . . . on the point of extinguishing; hence the 'mystical' effect begins with semi-darkness." The silence he referred to was the spontaneous reaction to the feeling of an actual numinous presence. Otto derived emptiness, or empty distance, from his observation of Asian art and architecture: "Chinese architecture . . . does not achieve the impression of solemnity by lofty vaulted halls or imposing altitudes, but nothing could well be more solemn than the silent amplitude of the enclosed spaces, courtyards, and vestibules which it employs."[5]

Thus, Otto clearly identified places for worship as sites for encountering the sacred. More specifically, he clarified that experiencing the sacred "cannot, strictly speaking, be taught, it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes 'of the spirit' must be awakened."[6] This understanding of the need to evoke or awaken the spiritual experience proves instrumental in comprehending the relationship of architecture to the sacred. As a physically inert form, architecture cannot teach per se, but it can provide the markers to awaken consciousness.

At the midpoint of the twentieth century, Mircea Eliade defined "sacred space" as a manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world. "For religious man, space is not homogenous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others."[7] According to Eliade, at the point that one encounters sacred space there would be a break in the continuity of time and space, with sacred space at the center of existence and all other space relegated to an amorphous, marginal status.

Spiritually, the sacred space provides the paradoxical point of passage from one mode of being to another. "Every sacred space implies a hierophany, an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different."[8] Eliade defined a "hierophany" as a holy manifestation, a deeper and more profound understanding where something sacred reveals itself.

Eliade emphasized a second important concept that helped to define our common understanding of sacred space. In his extensive studies on the history

of religions, including some primal and archaic religions, he discerned many commonalties. One was the tendency to create a center point of sacred space, to "refound" the world. Eliade determined that revelation of a sacred space made it possible to obtain a fixed point and acquire orientation in the chaos of homogeneity. "The experience of sacred space makes possible the "founding of the world": where the sacred manifests itself in space, *the real unveils itself,* the world comes into existence."[9]

This center or fixed point of the sacred was marked by an axis mundi that represented the attempt to create the world center. As the cosmic axis around which the world revolved, it provided the link to the three worlds of above, here, and below, or heaven, earth, and the underworld. Symbolically, this connection was also represented by a mountain; a column; or a tree, its branches reaching into the heavens, and its roots embedded in the earth below.[10] The symbolic use of a tree seems particularly entwined with many western religious traditions, among them the biblical stories of human origins and the Garden of Eden.

Eliade also explored other religious markers of the sacred, especially water and its symbolic content. His interpretation was that water acted as a universal symbol of rebirth and renewal. "In whatever religious context we find them, the Waters invariably preserve their function: they dissolve or abolish the form of things, 'wash away sins,' are at once purifying and regenerative."[11] Water, and the visibility it is given in the worship environment, has a significant role in marking sacred space.

For Eliade, sacred spaces are a hierophany, a break in the continuity and temporality of space. They become a new order, a cosmic center marked with an axis mundi, which gives orientation to the chaos of the secular world. Water also bears powerful symbolic content in the history of religions and connotes, among other things, origin, sustenance, and purification.

Eliade clarified that a hierophany is not always necessary to mark a sacred space. "Often there is no need for a theophany or hierophany properly speaking; some *sign* suffices to indicate the sacredness of a place."[12] This is an important distinction, since the sign is a marker that may trigger the sacred experience, but not automatically so. It is particularly relevant because it places emphasis on creating markers or signs that reinforce the role for an architectural solution.

More recent writings on sacred space revealed a noticeable shift from "sacred space" to "sacred place." In *To Take Place,* Jonathan Z. Smith distinguishes between the two: "Space is more abstract than place. What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value. . . . If we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place."[13]

Smith argues that place is made sacred by ritual and defined ritual as "first and foremost a mode of paying attention. It is a process for marking interest. . . . It is this characteristic . . . that explains the role of place as a fundamental component of ritual: place directs attention." Elaborating on this idea, Smith developed a

theory of "emplacement," to conceptualize the sacralizing of place through sacred ritual performed in place. "Sacrality is, above all, a category of emplacement."[14]

The contribution Smith makes to the dialogue of the sacred is the importance of ritual in endowing sacredness to what are otherwise ordinary objects or places. Emplacement, or ritual in place, transforms and elevates the ordinary to sacred. This is particularly meaningful when discussing ritualized movement as a means to encounter the sacred.

In *Placeways,* his book on the theory of the human environment, Eugene Walter approaches the concept of sacred place as a phenomenologist and defines it as "one that leads the mind somewhere else. Perceptions and sensations in religious environments are ambiguous." Walter theorizes that encounters with the sacred can be precipitated by the architectural environment: "Mosques as well as churches have surfaces that dematerialize the walls or use other techniques to draw the believer into a meditative mood or even an altered state of consciousness." He cites the hypnotic quality of Byzantine mosaics or the play of light and shadow in Romanesque churches as examples of a single topistic intention, "to inspire an ecstasy of place change. This impulse leads the soul toward heaven, but it also changes the place, turning the building into a mystic interior that represents the heavenly Jerusalem."[15]

As the title, *Placeways,* implies, Walter's focus is on place, or topos. He clarifies that while a place has no feelings apart from human experience there, it is a location and unity of experience: "It evokes and organizes memories, images, feelings, sentiments, meanings, and the work of imagination."[16] This distinction emphasizes the role of architecture in creating place, as the container or envelope for individual and collective experience. The house of worship, as a place for religious experience, can organize and evoke images, memories, and meanings. By intentionally introducing ambiguity in the design, the opportunity arises to lead the mind elsewhere, to facilitate a hierophany.

Since the turn of the twentieth century, the definition of *sacred space* has evolved from an identifiable numinous presence enhanced by darkness, silence, and emptiness to a hierophany that became an irruption of the time-space continuum, accentuating the distinction between sacred and profane. Later, the spatial representation of sacred was transformed into place, or topos, either as a locus for sacred ritual or as an environment that leads the mind elsewhere.

Reviewing these descriptions we can formulate an operative definition for sacred space. Paraphrasing Walter, *sacred space is a specific environment that supports the imagination, nourishes religious experience, and conveys religious truth. It organizes sight and sound, introduces light to present clarity and order, or makes things dark to suggest unseen presences and hidden power.*[17]

Chapter Three

Discerning the Elements

The thread through these descriptions of sacred space is the role played by the architectural environment. It is through the use of light or darkness, silence, emptiness, ambiguity, and using the building as a stage for ritual that the sacred is indeed experienced. Otto, Eliade, Smith, and Walter recognize this and acknowledge it in their writings, as the brief examples cited below indicate:

> The semi-darkness that glimmers in vaulted halls, or beneath the branches of a lofty forest glade, strangely quickened and stirred by the mysterious play of half-lights, has always spoken eloquently to the soul, and the builders of temples, mosques and churches have made full use of it.[1]

> Technicians of the sacred—the builders of megaliths, temples, churches, cathedrals, and other sacred place—have creatively used the ambiguities of space to move the mind.[2]

With this support of architecture in creating sacred space, it is appropriate to explore how architects have responded to this challenge. A review of recent writings by architects indicates a strong revival of interest in creating sacred places. Several architects have already begun to identify the distinguishing architectural elements framing sacred space.

In his 1982 doctoral dissertation, "Sacred Space: An Aesthetic for the Liturgical Environment," Dennis McNally investigated design issues for post–Vatican II Roman Catholic churches. He concluded that the design must respond not only to the reformed liturgical and functional requirements but also to a deeper aesthetic concern for the sacred environment.

McNally named five functional relationships that delineate sacred space in Catholic churches: presiding from a seat (cathedra), reading the scripture from

a pulpit (ambo), worshipping the Lord at an altar (kyrios), accommodating the community (ekklesia), and all within the confine of one house (domus). However, in attempting to reach the mystery of the sacred environment, he moves beyond functionalism and proposes that archetypal and atmospheric elements are critical to the aesthetic for worship. He defines aesthetic as an ordered perception and identifies the archetypal elements as stone; tree (cosmic pillar, or axis mundi); water; sky; earth; and mountain-city-temple, or "cosmic center." McNally lists the atmospheric elements of sacred space as silence, darkness, emptiness, profusion, and monumentality.[3]

These conclusions are informed by the writings of Otto—who draws attention to silence, darkness, and emptiness—and by Eliade—who shows the importance of archetypal elements in our cultural understanding of sacred. McNally's argument underscores the importance of reaching a deeper level of understanding to shape sacred space. In other words, the religious building architect must respond not only to physical and functional criteria but also to metaphysical concerns of archetype and atmosphere.

The architect Anthony Lawlor makes a case for achieving sacredness in ordinary existence through a series of exercises outlined in his book *The Temple in the House: Finding the Sacred in Everyday Architecture:* "Sacredness becomes a living reality when we learn to see its elusive qualities within physical form and develop the skills to shape the immediate surroundings in a holistic manner."[4]

Although his work was intended for the domestic environment, Lawlor's choice of physical attributes is derived from a religious setting. He focuses on specific elements he believes form and frame a sacred environment. These elements include the gate (threshold), path (ritual entry), lotus seat (cosmic house), steeple (axis mundi), and sanctuary (place of healing). The first three represent the desire, search, and fulfillment of the spiritual quest. The last two epitomize the physical manifestation of the sacred experience and draw upon archetypal forms.[5]

According to Lawlor, architecture externalizes a fundamental pattern of thinking—that is, desire, search, and find—through the experience of the gate, path, and lotus seat. He argues the gate illustrates experiences of transcendence, the departure from one set of circumstances to another. "Offering a promise, a lure, the gate invites us to let the spiritual trek begin." The path symbolizes the initiation of the journey and a time of transformation. It provides a way to gain knowledge and awaken consciousness. The lotus seat signals arrival at the goal where "the contradictions of the path are transcended, unity is discovered, and peaceful fulfillment is achieved."[6]

Lawlor expands his interpretation by subdividing steeple and sanctuary into three categories. The archetypal forms of steeple are identified as: axial pillars, sky doors, and world mountains. "Axial pillars mark the centers of psychic power and energy," while "the sky door offers another means for heart and mind to ride the rising energies of the spirit." The world mountain stands at the psychic center of the cosmos, since it connects heaven and earth.[7]

The sanctuary experience, as a place for healing, is defined by three components: portal, center aisle, and altar. "The portal . . . signals the transition from the chaos of the outer world to the peace of the inner one. . . . The center aisle passing through the middle of the sanctuary marks the passage to enlightenment, the process of healing." Using *altar* as a generic term for the locus of the sacred, Lawlor notes that "the altar signals the place of arrival and rebirth. It is the focal point of the sanctuary."[8]

Because Lawlor directs his work to finding the sacred in the secular and domestic environment, the elements that he selects for emphasis are relatively common to well-designed space. The importance of his contribution is not that he identifies certain physical elements, rather that he succeeds in providing strong associations tying these to a sense of sacred.

Excerpting this portion of his argument and combining it with Eliade's emphasis on symbolic representation as the path to sacredness creates a special significance of these elements in houses for worship. Thus, gate, path, and seat transform from the ordinary to the sacred through the richness of archetypal associations and symbolic representation. Similarly, steeples and sanctuaries transcend from objects and places to symbolic markers of the sacred enriched with archetypal imagery.

In *Spiritual Path, Sacred Place,* architectural historian Thomas Barrie reduces the architectural sacred denominators to *path* and *place.* Borrowing from Kevin Lynch's definition of path in *Image of the City,* Barrie states, "Path needs to have a distinct identity, with a clear sense of directionality and continuity that includes both origins and destinations." He theorizes that our identities are related to the sense of belonging to a place: "A sense of community based on shared values is typically connected with a specific place, and thus religion and mythology are often deeply rooted in the definition of meaningful place."[9]

Barrie's emphasis is on symbol and sign; and therein lies the unique contribution of architecture to the quality of sacred space: "The totality of the architectural experience, however, is a powerful synthesis of the various media used to communicate symbolic themes. . . . Moreover, it is not a static experience, such as the viewing of art, nor a passive one such as listening to the retelling of a folkstale [*sic*], but a dynamic experience in which the participant, moving through the architecture apprehends its messages both spatially and temporally."[10]

Recapping, Otto uses the term *mysterium tremendum* to express the ineffable mystery, awe, joy, and dread encountered in the sacred. He identifies the numinous as a manifestation of the holy, evoked in art and architecture by darkness, silence, and emptiness. Eliade deals extensively with symbolism and myth in relation to sacredness for primitive cultures, in particular, and all cultures in general. The axis mundi acts as a potent symbol of the link between the powers above and the dark forces below and speaks to the mythology of the founding of the world. Symbolism and mythology are interwoven and inextricably tied to a culture's understanding of the sacred.

Jonathan Smith emphasizes the need to know better the undifferentiated space to endow it with value. "Ritual is not an expression of or a response to 'the Sacred'; rather, something or someone is made sacred by ritual."[11] Walter introduces ambiguity as a device to achieve the sacred. The house of worship as a place for religious experience organizes images, memories, and meaning, but ambiguity leads the mind elsewhere, ripe for an encounter with the numinous.

McNally links the aesthetic experience of the worship environment to archetypal and atmospheric qualities. Lawlor imbues physical elements with spiritual meaning. Gate, path, and place become metaphors of the quest for spiritual enlightenment. Barrie supports the importance of path and place and interjects symbol and sign as architecture's unique contribution to the quality of sacred space.

Architecture offers the opportunity to embed the markers and present symbolic content. The mystery and awe of the sacred can be awakened through the architectural setting for worship, but to facilitate this sense of the sacred, the architecture must provide meaning in both the physical and metaphysical realms. Archetypal forms are evocative of the sacred and provide substance for symbolic representation. Atmospheric qualities, particularly those of an ambiguous nature, such as light at the point of extinguishing into darkness, sensitize the aesthetic perception of the worship environment. They lead the mind to the numinous. Ritual as a formalized pattern of ceremonial movements can confer a sense of the sacred to the ordinary. Architecture for worship can capitalize on this understanding, enhancing ritual and providing an additional dimension to the worship experience.

Chapter Four

Identifying the Architectural Attributes

o organize these diverse philosophical viewpoints, this book builds a new model that groups markers of sacred space into three categories: architectural, archetypal, and atmospheric. While all three have a physical form, architectural and archetypal elements also dwell in the domain of allusive imagery. The architectural elements category draws from the concept of ritualized movement conferring a sacredness to an ordinary pathway. Archetypal elements draw on primal forms of the collective unconscious. Atmospheric elements embody the ambiguities of transition from one state as it becomes another; for instance, light becomes darkness.

Grouping these ideas into broad categories may help our understanding of sacred space, but it is not meant to imply distinct borders among these elements, nor are the categories mutually exclusive. In fact, they overlap and enhance our sense of the sacred in our places of worship.

Architectural Elements

A recurring theme throughout architectural and philosophical literature is the importance of three physical aspects of the architecture of sacred spaces: gate, pathway, and place. These aspects of architecture mirror the pilgrim's progress in a spiritual quest; the *gate* represents the desire, *path* the journey, and *place* the attainment of spiritual insight. This path to enlightenment is never a single occurrence, rather it is a cycle repeated almost mantralike in the life of the devotee to achieve ever-higher levels of spiritual fulfillment.

The architecture of houses of worship can enhance this experiential cycle, both on the exterior and in the interior. Significant design attention to entry, path, and destination reinforces the symbolism of the gate, path, and place as significant contributors to the atmosphere of sacred space. The descriptions below illuminate

these possibilities, first describing the exterior elements, then transforming them in the interior to *portal, aisle,* and *place.*

Exterior

GATE *Gate* is expressed as a well-defined entry point beyond the building entrance, preferably leading into a courtyard or ritual pathway. Age-old experience on the part of all religions suggests worship celebrations demand preparation from the participants. Expressing this takes manifold architectural forms, for example, in the East the devotee must pass through numerous gates before permitted entrance into the temple.[1]

PATH In *Temples, Churches, and Mosques,* J. G. Davies offers a very precise definition of *path,* indicating the need for strong edges, continuity, directionality, recognizable landmarks and a sharp terminus distinctive from the point of entry.[2] The essence of *path* emanates from ritualized movement framed by the architectural environment but not dictated by it. Medieval cathedrals often had complex, labyrinthine inlaid stone patterns in the floor near the main entry, figuratively symbolizing the pilgrimage and literally directing a ritualized path of entry.

PLACE *Place* is a readily comprehensible shape, limited in size, concentrated in form with pronounced borders, and serves as a focus for gathering.[3] The worship space as the terminus of the path becomes the place of fulfillment, symbolizing transcendence.

Interior

PORTAL A significant point of entry, strengthened with a physically commanding door reiterates the gate experience. This emphasis on *portal,* or crossing the threshold into the sanctuary, reinforces the sacred nature of the journey and establishes this as the last threshold before one beholds the sacred.

PATH *Path* within the house for worship is the entry sequence, directed by the aisle from threshold to the focal point. Whether axial, radial, gridlike, or circumambulatory, it is an extension of the pathway experience and most importantly frames ritual movement within the sanctuary.

PLACE The central focal point of the worship room is the *place* within. It is the altar, pulpit, ark, reading table, or mihrab. It is the center point, the locus of the sacred.

Archetypal Elements

Archetypal elements are symbols of a cosmic order and an unconscious link to the realm of the sacred. The symbolic references to archetypes operate in many realms, but this study explores *universal, religious (or mythic),* and *geometric.* The *universal* refers to the ancient concept of four primary elements: earth, air, water,

and fire. *Religious/mythic* refers to those archetypes most commonly associated with cultural identification to religious beliefs. Derived in part from Eliade's extensive study of the history of religion, they are identified as axial pillar, tree, stone, and sacred mountain. The final subcategory of archetypes is *geometric,* referring to the use of "sacred geometries," that is, pure geometric forms such as squares, circles, triangles, and composites of these.

Universal

EARTH The representation of earth takes many forms, including actual earthen areas such as gardens, or earthen-made products such as adobe construction or clay pottery. Symbolic of life-giving renewal, earth represents fertility and healing and is pan-culturally known as Mother Earth.

AIR (OR SKY) The metaphorical representation of sky is most often achieved through domes, skylights, clerestory windows, or other devices for making the sky present in the interior. The sky represents the heavens and, in many cultures, the afterlife.

WATER Water is perhaps the most common element woven into the tapestry of religious imagery. "The waters symbolize the entire universe of the virtual; they are the *fons et origo,* the reservoir of all the potentialities of existence; they *precede* every form and *sustain* every creation."[4] A symbol of renewal and rebirth, water is represented in fonts, streams, pools, and lakes.

FIRE Whether through the flickering of candles in a cathedral or the light of the eternal flame in a synagogue, fire is omnipresent in most religious architecture. Few worship or prayer services commence without ceremonial candle lighting. Some special services, such as the Easter vigil in Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches, incorporate building a bonfire as a prelude to worship.

Religious/Mythic

James Livingston writes, "Every breakthrough to the sacred is effected by a hierophany, symbolized, for example, by a sacred pillar, tree, mountain, altar, temple, or city, perceived as the center of the world."[5]

AXIAL PILLAR (AXIS MUNDI) A vertical element that physically symbolizes the centering, or "founding of the world." Christian Norberg-Schulz, an architectural theoretician, states that "the vertical dimension represents a rising-up or falling down, and has since remote times been considered the sacred dimension of space. The vertical axis, the *axis mundi,* is therefore an archetypal symbol of passage from one cosmic region to another."[6]

TREE In much religious mythology and crossing many cultural borders, the tree relates to human origins, symbolizing growth, renewal, and knowledge. As Eliade notes, the tree also serves to center or refound the world: "The most widely distributed variant of the symbolism of the Centre is the Cosmic Tree, situated in the middle of the Universe, and upholding the three worlds as upon one axis."[7]

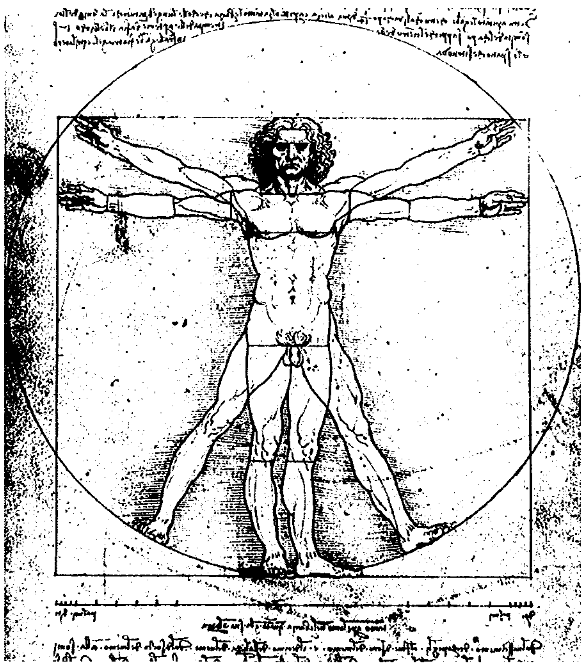
STONE From the time that Jacob used a stone to mark the site (Beth-el) where God's presence was revealed to him in a dream, as told in chapter 28 of the Book of Genesis, stones have been used to mark sacred places. "Stone, maybe more than any other material, has been known forever to be magical, to have powers to heal, guide, house divinity, and mark places of burial."[8]

MOUNTAIN (SACRED MOUNTAIN) Mountains reach up to the sky and figure in religious mythology as stepping stones to the beyond. In polytheistic cultures, mountains are often seen as the dwelling of the gods. Mountaintop aeries are also the sites of sacred rituals, temples, and monasteries.

Geometric

Densely packed geometries, or even crystal-clear forms of intermingled circles and squares, have been used throughout history to convey the sense of a higher power and the dialogue of human with the divine. Geometry as an avenue of study in Hellenistic times was thought to lead to spiritual insight. This includes the most basic geometers: square, circle, triangle, and their volumetric equivalents: cube, sphere, and pyramid. Robert Lawlor writes, in his extensive study of sacred geometries, "In geometric philosophy the circle is the symbol of unmanifest Unity, while the square represents Unity poised, as it were, for manifestation."[9] The interplay of square and circle is viewed as symbolizing the dialogue between humans and the divine.[10] Da Vinci's famous *Vitruvian Man* illustration epitomizes this interrelationship (figure 4.1). Squaring the circle, placing the circle within the square, was believed to mark the place of human divine interchange, where God speaks to humankind.

Figure 4.1. Leonardo da Vinci's illustration of man as described by Vitruvius in his architectural treatise.



Carl Jung notes that ancient philosophers believed God was manifested first in the creation of the four elements, symbolized by the four partitions of the circle. His extensive work in the psychoanalysis of dreams revealed a consistent importance with the number four, represented primarily through squares, but also through divisions into four, four colors, etc. He concluded that "the quaternity as understood by the modern mind directly suggests not only the God within, but also the identity of God and man."[11] The square also represents the four primary orientations of north, south, east and west, which make space comprehensible.[12]

Triangles figure prominently in the teachings of Pythagoras, and since ancient times the pyramid has been believed to hold sacred powers. In Christian symbolism the triangle connotes the trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Atmospheric Ambiguities

Multiple interpretations of space are said to serve as a threshold to the sacred experience.[13] Expressed ambiguously, the meaning lies not in the final state but in the transition zone between. The state of "becoming," the transitions of light becoming darkness or noise dimming to silence are the portals to the sacred experience.

SILENCE AND NOISE The quietude of a sanctuary prior to the noise, music, and song of worship is an example of this point of departure, a threshold to the sacred. Otto defined silence as the involuntary reaction to the presence of the numinous. Hence, a moment of silence amid a worship service could signal an interruption of the space-time continuum, a hierophony.

DARKNESS AND LIGHT The exchange between light and dark also signals the numinous, as one becomes the other, or the effective and dramatic interplay of shadows and sunlight. The English architects Peter Smithson and Alison Smithson were enthralled with the importance of shadow and sunlight when commissioned to design a mosque in Saudi Arabia. They noted that the shadow at certain times of the day allowed worshippers to move out into the mosque courtyard and use the shadowed area as an extension of the worship room, the shadow essentially sanctifying ordinary ground.[14]

EMPTINESS AND PROFUSION Sparseness and scarcity contrasted with profuse decoration and rhythmic elements. The spartan interiors of southwestern adobe churches and, in contrast, the vividly painted altar screens are dramatic illustrations of this concept.

HUMILITY AND MONUMENTALITY This seeming contradiction is illustrated by massive, enduring, or historically notable spaces that inspire humility as if in the presence of a higher power. Physically commanding as the realm in which God dwells, these spaces are also humble enough for human worship.

Chapter Five

Exploring the Markers of Sacred Space

People build or discover sacred places to experience hidden presences. In the feelings and meanings of a sacred space, and in the sacred places of all times, worshipers express a religious longing to recover a lost unity.

—Eugene Victor Walter

In chapter 4 the markers for sacred space were organized into three prime categories, architectural, archetypal, and atmospheric. In this chapter images and descriptions at a variety of religious buildings are used to broaden the understanding of these elements and how they may evoke the sacred in a worship setting.

Architectural:
- Exterior: Gate, Path, and Place
- Interior: Portal, Aisle, and Place

Archetypal:
- Universal: Earth, Air (or Sky), Fire, and Water
- Religious/Mythic: Axis Mundi, Stone, Mountain, and Tree
- Geometric: Square, Circle, and Triangle

Atmospheric Ambiguities:
- Silence/Noise
- Darkness/Light
- Emptiness/Profusion
- Humility/Monumentality

Gate

The gate marks the beginning of the spiritual experience with a definitive entry to the sacred zone. In ancient times, when new cities were formed, the founding members determined a site and then ceremonially plowed a large furrow to define its boundaries. This action marked the sacred territory.[1] Only the gate was left untrenched, representing the portal between the protected precinct and the world beyond.

The gate symbolically functions to define the entrance to the precinct of the sacred. In El Santuario de Chimayo, a pilgrimage site in Chimayo, New Mexico, the gate serves as this threshold to the sacred, a message reinforced by the adobe

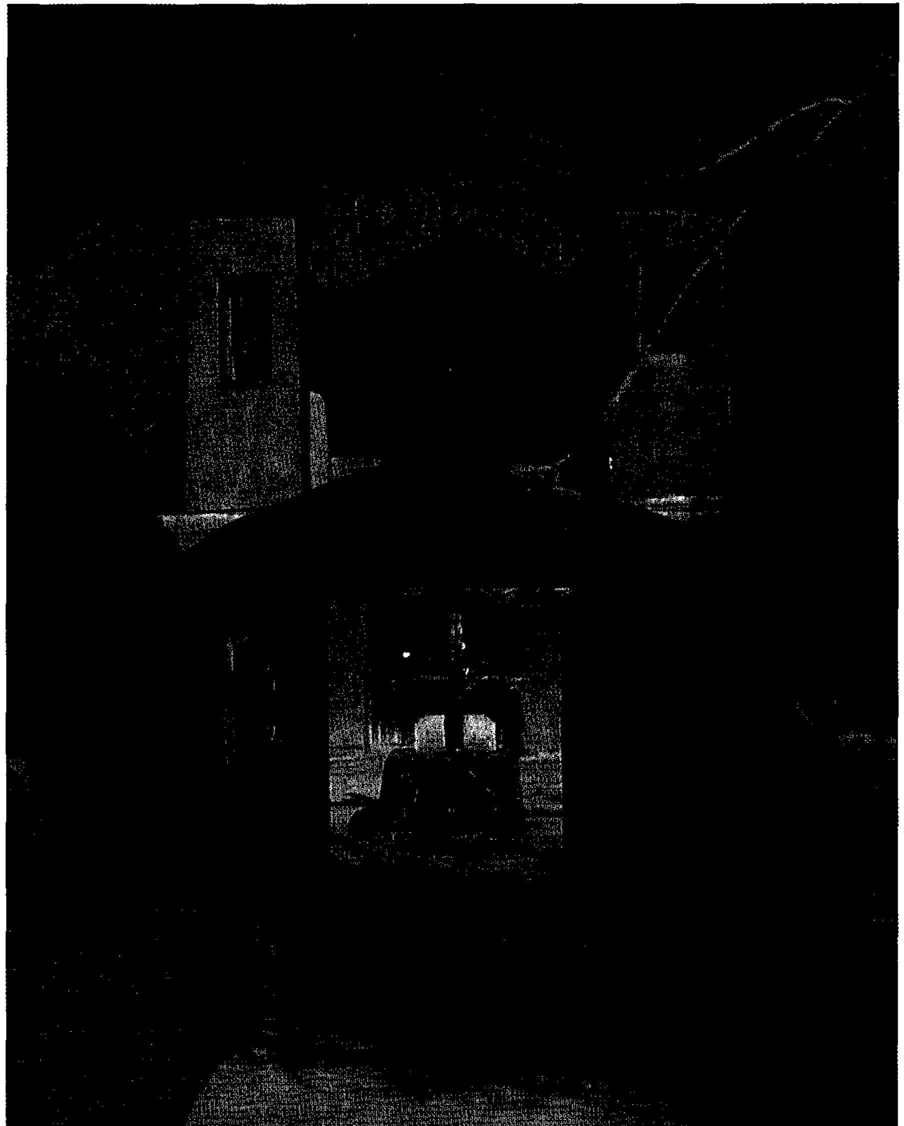


Figure 5.1. Courtyard entry gate at El Santuario de Chimayo in Chimayo, New Mexico.

wall completely enclosing the outer courtyard. The aged and weather-beaten wooden gate doors are now permanently held open by a concrete path securing the base, a gesture of welcome to the site's thousands of annual visitors. Even though the doors no longer close off the courtyard, the adobe wall bridges the top of the gated entryway, effectively providing closure to the entry court.

Why is this a pilgrimage site? The story of the church founding clearly enhances the moniker "the Lourdes of America," but ultimately time, tradition, and the sense of this as a healing site permanently seals it as a sacred destination. According to the caretakers of the site, the documented story begins in 1813, when local priest Sebastian Alvarez wrote the bishop that people were traveling there from long distances to cure their ailments, and its reputation as a healing site rapidly spread.

The undocumented story begins a few years earlier, when a local farmer, Don Bernardo Abeyta, was performing penances during Holy Week and witnessed a flash of light from a hillside.

> Don Bernardo went to the spot and noticed that the shining light was coming from the ground. He started to dig with his bare hands, and there he found a Crucifix. He left it there and called the neighbors to come and venerate the precious finding. A group of men was sent to notify the priest, Fr. Sebastian Alvarez at Santa Cruz.
>
> Upon hearing the extraordinary news, the priest and people set out for Chimayo. When they arrived at the place where the Crucifix was, Fr. Sebastian picked it up and carried it in a joyful procession back to the church. Once in the church, the Crucifix was placed in the niche of the main altar. The next morning, the Crucifix was gone, only to be found in its original location. A second procession was organized and the Crucifix was returned to Santa Cruz, but once again it disappeared. The same thing happened a third time. By then, everyone understood that El Sefior de Esquipulas wanted to remain in Chimayo, and so a small chapel was built.[2]

Parishioners erected the chapel between 1814 and 1816, and descendents of the same families, several of whom live in modest adobe homes near the church, have maintained it over the years. Retold stories of healing are amplified by the many devotional shrines and cast-off crutches that adorn the inside walls and alcoves of the chapel anteroom. This church was built by the hands of poor immigrant farmers, and its construction involved no architects, builders, or liturgical consultants, yet it subtly exhibits multiple markers of the sacred.

Traditional southwestern adobe construction often features courtyard entries with simple wooden gates. This fusion of Native American and Hispanic cultural heritages found in religious buildings such as the Spanish mission churches, originated in vernacular domestic architecture. These courtyard entries served essentially the same function, to define a safe area or sanctuary for dwelling and a point of pause before one enters the inner rooms.

Figure 5.2. Gated entry to St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Pacific Palisades, California.

Another example of the symbolic role of gate as threshold can be found at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Pacific Palisades, California. Designed by Charles Moore, former architecture professor at UC Berkeley, Yale, and UCLA, this church embodies many of the architectural philosophies Moore espoused. His work was often characterized by intersecting geometries and by subtle symbolic references and a harmonious integration of building with site.

At St. Matthew's, a stucco-clad masonry wall outlines the site perimeter, while an iron gate marks the point of pedestrian entry. This gated entrance, however, is purely symbolic since the adjacent driveway entrance is open and free of barriers. The gate reminds the users of their entry to a sacred realm.

The message of security conveyed by a gated entrance remains relevant in contemporary urban settings. The Islamic Cultural Center in New York City sits oasislike amid the urban cacophony of upper Manhattan. A granite wall topped with an iron fence completely encloses the mosque site. Entry is afforded through two gated enclosures, one at the lower level, serving staff and guests, and one at the upper (or main) level, serving those coming to pray. Passage through a small ceremonial building at the main entrance dramatizes the entry experience (figure 5.3). Here, similar to at El Santuario de Chimayo, one passes under a solid covering to reach the courtyard beyond. The compressive scale of both examples acts to humble entering worshippers, preparing them for the journey beyond.

Path

In his exploration of spiritual pathway and place, Thomas Barrie writes, "A legible path sequence not only orients one physiologically, but psychologically and spiritually as well. Traditionally it has symbolized a going forth from the known to the unknown, the content of which is still present today."[3]

Figure 5.3. Gate at entrance to Islamic Cultural Center, New York City.

The path represents the journey from initiation to transformation. It provides a way to gain knowledge and, perhaps more importantly, to awaken consciousness.[4] It also provides the design opportunity for emplacement, or "sacrality" through ritualized passage. Architecture has the capacity to frame this environment and determine the ritual entry sequence.

For example, after passing through the gate at El Santuario de Chimayo, one enters the cloistered courtyard on stone pavers bounded on either side by a small grouping of junipers. Immediate passage directs one to a central monument crafted in adobe and stone and topped with a hand-hewn wooden cross. The monument's location forces a circular route, which in turn exposes the carefully tended garden. Closer inspection on either side reveals tombstones dating back to the early 1800s. The sense of sacred place becomes palpable; the mystery, awe, and wonder of the numinous feel imminent. The pathway subtly leads one to experience the garden yet axially directs one to the main sanctuary door.

Using a less direct approach, the entrance path at St. Matthew's leads the worshipper up a series of steps to an outdoor court bordered with a lush pergola (figure 5.4). A simple open wooden latticed and canopied structure grown thick with plantings, this pathway invites one to pause and reflect. Reminiscent of the wisteria-clad pergola entry to Bernard Maybeck's First Church of Christ, Scientist in Berkeley, California, the organic blend of wooden construction and natural plant growth provides an excellent transitional setting for the preparation to

worship. The California climate facilitates year-round use of the broad entrance court as an informal gathering area, but the meandering design of the pergola with its shaded alcoves encourages individual reflection. In both the churches illustrated, pathway is integrated as a meaningful, organic experience.

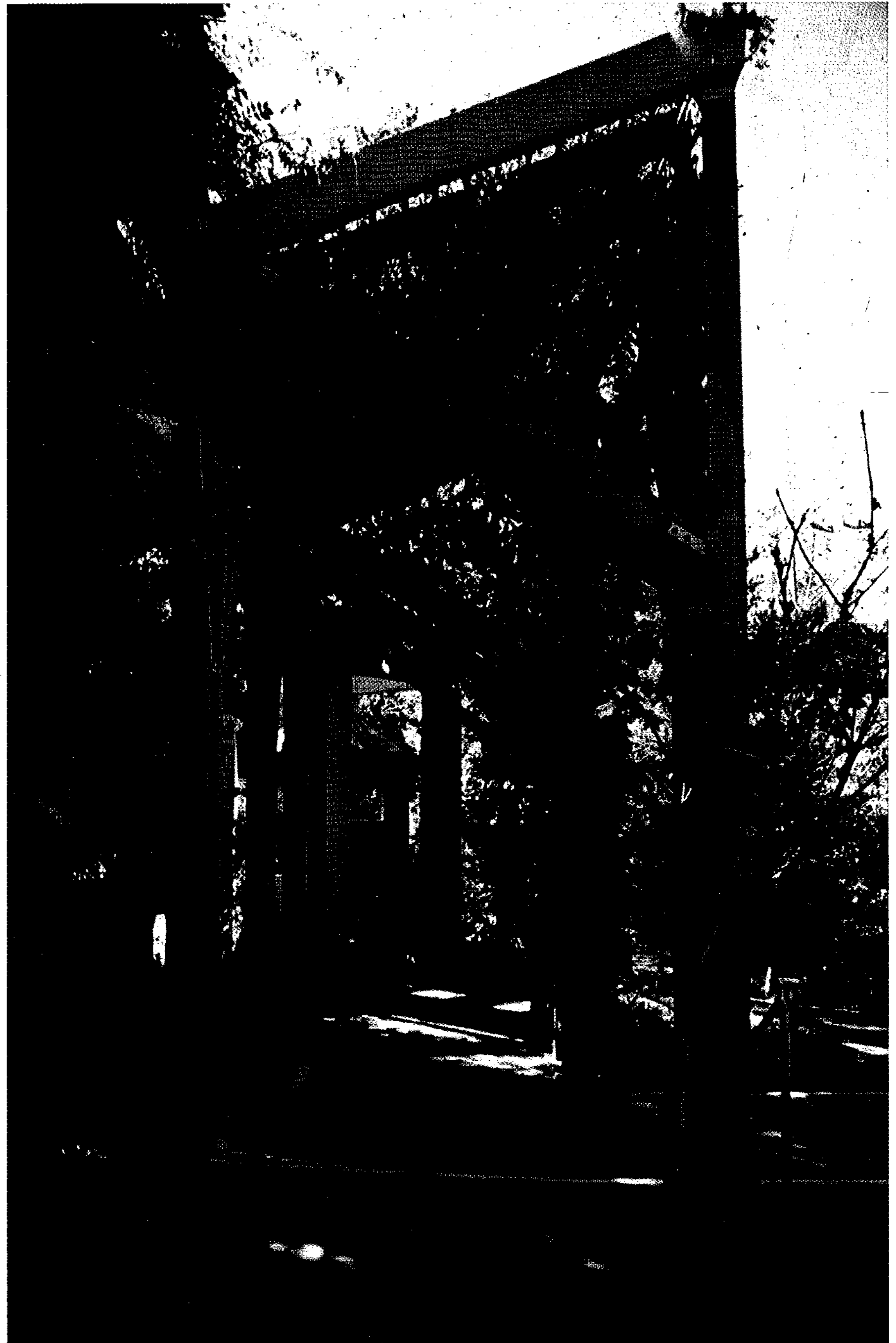


Figure 5.4. Pergola at entry courtyard in front of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church.

In the often inhospitable climate of Minnetonka, Minnesota, the design of the Adath Jeshurun Synagogue provides a year-round protected internal pathway. Starting from the entrance nearest the parking lot, a gently curved and inclined corridor rises and widens as it approaches the main sanctuary and adjacent chapel. The corridor functionally connects fellowship, educational, and worship areas but symbolically reminds the worshipper of the spiritual journey. The reward at the end of the corridor is access to the chapel and worship room and to the memorial wall engraved with the names of deceased family and friends. A reminder of the Holocaust, this significant integration of art with architecture achieves the objectives of stirring consciousness, imparting knowledge, and preparing one for worship.

Place

Place, in an architectural context, is imbued with meaning: "The physical enclosure creates the context for the experience, and the meanings communicated by the elements that form the space help us to identify with the place. . . . Architecture has traditionally aided in establishing a sense of meaningful place and articulating people's beliefs."[5]

Place is the destination, the culmination of the spiritual journey. It is the Bodhi tree under which Buddha had enlightenment; it is the lotus seat of fulfillment. As Anthony Lawlor states in his *Temple in the House,* "Here the contradictions of the path are transcended, unity is discovered, and peaceful fulfillment is achieved."[6]

In Chimayo, sense of place is achieved through a simple sanctuary of adobe construction, situated at the terminus of the courtyard. Rough wood doors weathered by almost two centuries of age and erosion belie the richness of detail beyond. The thickened adobe walls isolate the interior from the sounds and bright sunlight of the outside, secular world. Overhead, rough timbers rhythmically span the narrow nave. This place speaks of humility, yet a richness of memories, tradition, and sanctity permeate the air. The simplicity and honesty of the architecture conspire to enrich the experience of the sacred.

Establishing place in an entirely different locale, an internationally renowned architect of the twentieth century, Eric Mendelsohn, designed Park Synagogue in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. One of only four religious buildings he did in the United States, the synagogue was designed in 1950, when the Jewish population of Cleveland was largely relocating to the eastern suburbs. The congregation commissioned Mendelsohn to plan a synagogue within a large tract of undeveloped land, and he responded with an outstanding design in which the temple was integrated naturally into the hilly terrain of the site.

Although the site can be entered on foot, the entry sequence is essentially framed for the automobile, which in 1950 was a sign of prosperity and the future. One drives through an entry gate marked by brick pylons on either side and then up a gently sloped and curving driveway that provides glimpses of the main sanctuary dome through a web of trees and landscaping. The topography

Figure 5.5. Park Synagogue in Cleveland Heights, Ohio.

allowed Mendelsohn to create a two-story form that appears to thrust out into the natural swale on which the synagogue is sited. The destination, or place, in this scenario is the iconic form of a hundred-foot blue-green weathered copper dome atop the main worship space. The driveway brings one past the building and then wraps around to the formal forecourt on the upper level (figure 5.5).

Entry at this point leads to a large gathering area separating the main sanctuary from an outdoor court encircled by classrooms and other meeting spaces. The courtyard serves as a place for pause and reflection but also as a teaching site at Sukkot for the temporary shelters (sukkah) used for eating and dwelling during the seven-day harvest festival.

Architectural (Interior)

Gate (Portal)

The portal to the worship space mirrors and underscores the gate experience. The threshold to the sacred precinct, the entry door symbolizes spiritual transformation. The design of the door, that is, its size, style, and hardware, signifies the importance placed on this transition. Perhaps the best historical examples of this are the entry portals of cathedrals: arched openings adorned with extensive figural sculpture frequently frame enormous bronze or carved wood doors, many with elaborate detail. Clearly sized to maintain the grand scale that underlies the cathedral construction, the emphasis directs attention to the act of entry.

A contemporary iteration of this same dedication to a grand scale, the entry portal to the Islamic Cultural Center features fifteen-foot-high bronze doors; when open, they signal the five-times-daily call to worship. Beyond these doors, layers of etched glass cut in geometric patterns characteristic of the Byzantine roots of Islam further enhance the entry sequence. One passes through the layered glass to enter a small foyer space concealed from the main prayer hall by an etched-glass wall. As the foyer sits beneath the balcony (used by the women during prayer services), the space remains compressed until one passes through to the large, open room beyond.

At Santa Maria de la Paz, a contemporary Catholic parish church in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the narthex gathering area adjacent to the sanctuary was designed to resemble the traditional outdoor courtyard of the Spanish mission churches. Hence, the entrance to the sanctuary appears as an exterior facade, the illusion enhanced by a wash of light admitted through the clerestory windows. The passage from narthex to sanctuary is through three pairs of doors, the enlarged center pair reserved for ceremonial entrance during worship services (figure 5.6). As in the Islamic Cultural Center, one passes under a balcony before entering the nave. Thus the ritualized use of larger doors, the ambiguous indoor/outdoor nature of the entryway, and the compression of the pass-through all buttress the notion of transition, moving from one realm to another.

Path (Aisle)

Pathway, or aisle, within the worship room is as meaningful as the process of entry from the exterior. It may take many forms, including linear, radial, circular (or spiral), and diffuse.

Figure 5.6. Entry from narthex to nave at Santa Maria de la Paz.

Many Christian faith communities use axial alignment to determine path, such as a center aisle axially aligned to intersect with a communion table or altar and centered on the main entrance doors. Alternatively, mosques are designed for prayer on hands and knees; hence seating is eliminated, and the worship space is barrier-free. Alignment is achieved by the orientation of the mihrab facing the direction of Mecca, and this in turn may also determine the alignment of the primary entry point. Jewish services frequently rely on circular pathways to allow the Torahs to be moved through the congregation and returned for the reading at the bimah.

Although patterns vary from faith to faith, there are predetermined paths intended for ceremonial procession and ritualized movement. Not uncommonly, many faiths have a dedication service that includes a ritual circumambulation to define the perimeter of the sacred space.

The nave at Santa Maria de la Paz has both fixed pews and movable chairs, with the fixed seating arranged radially around three sides of the raised sanctuary platform (or bimah). From the perimeter, the floor slopes down to the communion table, giving the illusion of moving into the earth. All the movable chairs are located near the center on the level portion surrounding the chancel, affording flexible use of this center stage area.

Just beyond the entry doors, one encounters the baptismal font before moving down the center aisle. The ceremonial doors, font, table, and aisle are all axially aligned. The processional entry for service is along this central aisle to the level area, around the sanctuary, and ending at the cathedra (bishop's chair) located beyond and to the right of the sanctuary platform (figure 5.7).

There are three elements to this pathway worth noting. First, the prominence of the baptismal font just beyond the primary entry (figure 5.8) reminds the gathering congregation of renewal, as the baptismal rite symbolizes a rebirth within the community of faith. Second, the sloped floor accentuates the action of movement and focuses attention on the destination point, the communion table where the Eucharist is celebrated and Christ's presence is embodied. This moving down "into the earth" evokes a psychic memory from the collective unconscious; traditional worship structures for Native Americans in the southwest were often partially underground. As this congregation is an amalgam of Native Americans, Anglos, and Hispanics, the message is not lost on the congregants.

Finally, the placement of the Eucharist table on a raised platform at the spring-point of the radial seating plan marks the altar as the focus for sacred ritual. The alignment with entry and font reinforces this importance, as does the processional path around the table to reach the cathedra where the priest presides during worship.

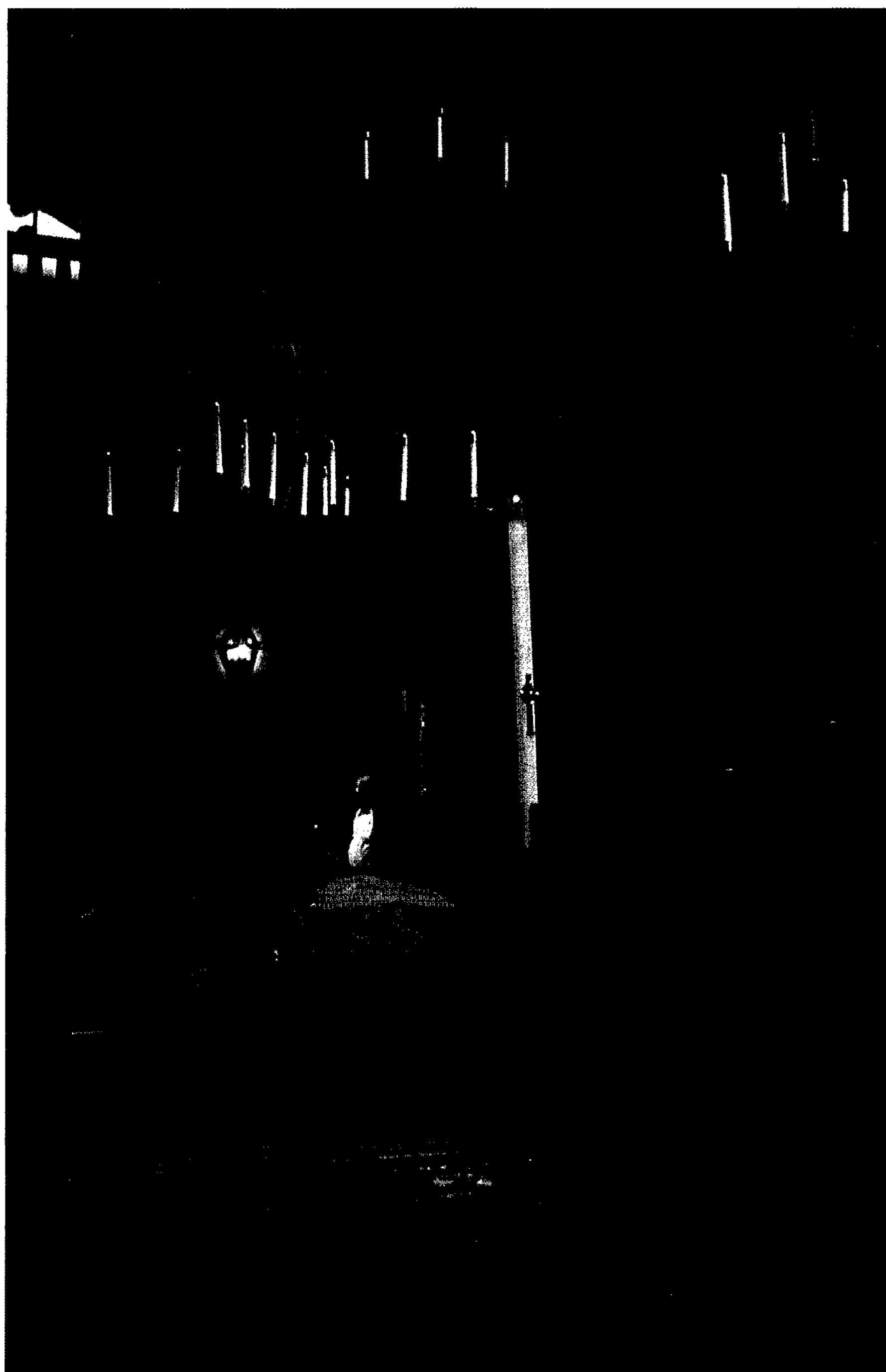
Place (Altar/Pulpit/Ark/Mihrab)

While the destination point within houses of worship varies among religious faiths, the practice of focusing attention dominates the interior design. The altar or pulpit within a Christian church, the ark within a synagogue, and the mihrab within a mosque all represent the locus of the sacred.

At a synagogue the decorated ark doors signal the importance of this enclosure, while at El Santuario de Chimayo the profusion of color and richness of detail in

Figure 5.7. Nave, Santa Maria de la Paz.

Figure 5.8. Baptismal font, Santa Maria de la Paz.



the painted altar screen directs one's attention to it. In a highly marked way, attention is drawn to the complexity of the screen and the simple altar table set before it (figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9. Altar screen at El Santuario de Chimayo.

Archetypal Elements

Universal (Earth, Air [or Sky], Fire, Water)

"Archetypes are rooted in the form of primordial images. . . . An archetype presents ideas, which are universal, reside in the collective psyche, and define the essence of an artifact."[7] The four primary elements of earth, air (or sky), fire, and water are essentially universal archetypes; they permeate through most cultures. Predating modern religions, these elements are so basic as to be woven into the fabric of these faiths and continue to be manifested. These elements are architecturally embraced in many ways, from simple gestures to careful manipulation of light, path, and volume.

EARTH—El Santuario de Chimayo has earned a reputation for healing through the powdery earth found there. Many make the pilgrimage to this shrine just to experience the small room adjacent to the nave, where a hole has been cut into the floor to reveal the healing earth below. The earth is mixed with water and applied to a person's afflicted area. The anteroom boasts canes, crutches, and walkers cast aside as testimonials to this healing earth. The dimly lit room flickers with light from the racks of candles lit by those who have prayed for recovery. A single window to the outside admits air, or sky, and shafts of light filter through

the tree canopy outside. In this small, modest room, earth, air, water, and fire mix together to form a powerful marker to the sacred (figure 5.10).

AIR—Introducing these universal elements in contemporary religious architecture is frequently the guiding principle of the architect's design. For example, the dome of an Eastern Orthodox church intentionally represents the sky overhead, with the image of Christ adorning its interior to signify his domain over all things. Similarly, most mosques also have domed roofs to denote the sky. The Adath Jeshurun Synagogue has a large glass dome directly over the worshipping congregation, while the solid, ribbed dome over the Islamic Cultural Center in New York rests atop twelve large etched-glass clerestory windows. At the Santa Maria de la Paz Church there are numerous clerestories and sky doors.

> The sky door offers another means for heart and mind to ride the rising energies of the spirit. It takes the form of a central roof opening that connects a building to the sky's dynamic freedom by allowing solar rays to ignite human aspiration. The image of a ladder let down through an opening in mid-sky—as if through a golden sun door to the navel of the earth—is a universal mythic prototype.[8]

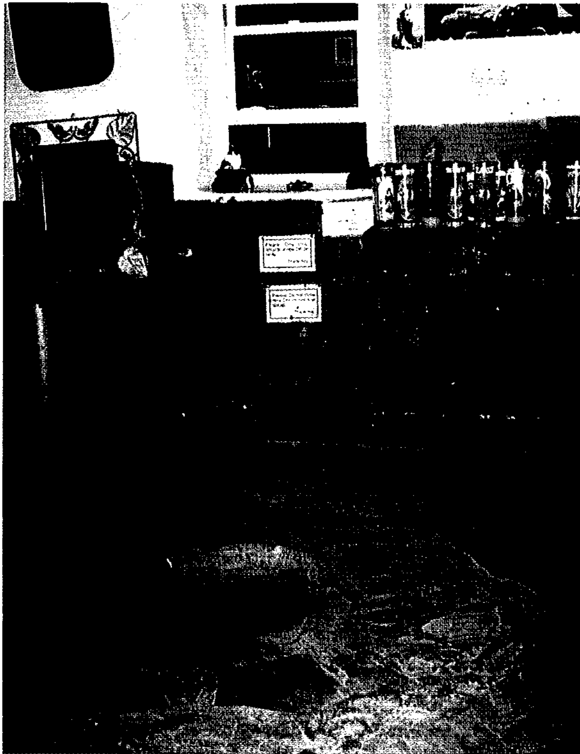


Figure 5.10. Anteroom with a hole in the floor at El Santuario de Chimayo.

FIRE—Fire exists in many forms throughout faith traditions. In synagogues the eternal flame reminds all present of this universal archetype. Worship services in most faiths begin with ceremonial lighting of candles marking the advent of sacred ritual and end with extinguishing of the flames to signal a return to ordinary time. Catholic tradition introduces tiers of votive candles for individual devotional prayers, offerings, or intentions. At the Santa Maria de la Paz Catholic Church, a traditional adobe style fireplace warms the reception area adjacent to the nave. At the First Church of Christ in Berkeley, California, a large stone hearth welcomes all who enter.

WATER—Water remains the most pervasive of the four universal elements and is associated with cleansing, renewal, and rebirth in most religious and cultural traditions. In the nave of Santa Maria de la Paz, the baptismal font is the first object encountered upon entry. Water constantly flows from a basin crafted from precious metals donated by members and cascades down the face of a large, indigenous stone (figure 5.8). The integration of design concept and symbol, hammered by local craftspersons, creates a powerful and meaningful emblem for this congregation.

Figure 5.11. Indoor baptismal font at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church.

Similarly, water plays an important visible role at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church. On the interior, the baptismal font sits on axis with the chancel table and has been framed in a southeastern alcove at the edge of the worship room.

Figure 5.12. Outdoor font at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church.

During morning worship, sunlight filters through the colored and etched glass to create an almost mystical effect (figure 5.11). The design of the font allows water to continuously flow from the basin into a trough that feeds through the exterior wall to a triangular receptacle on the outside (figure 5.12). This exterior basin is positioned directly in the path of those entering for worship, as a reminder of all that water symbolizes.

Water also figures prominently in the Islamic faith, as one cannot enter the mosque for prayer without prior ablutions. Passage for prayer necessitates ritual washing, reinforcing the symbolic connection of water to sacred prayer.

Religious/Mythic (Axial Pillar, Tree, Stone, Mountain)

Certain symbols of mythic origin are intrinsically tied to religious beliefs. As religion seeks to answer the most basic question of our origins, religious mythology develops symbols and signs that represent our understandings. According to religious anthropologist Mircea Eliade, the axial pillar or axis mundi is the most common form of designating a point for sacred ritual. It appears to be our way as humans of designating space as sacred, to "refound" the world. By marking a rotational hub, we "center" ourselves and see the world as revolving around this center point.

The tree also figures in the centering act, according to Eliade: "The most widely distributed variant of the symbolism of the Centre is the Cosmic Tree, situated in the middle of the Universe, and upholding the three worlds as upon one axis."[9] The tree has roots in the earth or the underworld, a trunk in this world, and branches in the sky to heaven beyond. Thus, as does the axial pillar, it bridges all three worlds; like Jacob's ladder it reaches down from the sky and provides access to the heavens.

Another symbol of this ascension into heaven is the sacred mountain. Mountains penetrate the sky, and mountaintops are often above the clouds, or symbolically in the realm of the gods. Even the air thins as if to ward off human intervention in this heavenly sphere.

Yet another common symbol marking sacred space is stone. In the Book of Genesis, the patriarch Jacob has a dream in which he sees angels ascending and descending a ladder to heaven and he is visited by God, who grants him the land in which he settles. When he awakens, he names the spot Beth-el (House of God) and marks it with the stone on which he laid his head. A stone also marks the most sacred site in Islam: the Ka'aba at Mecca contains a sacred black stone said to have been given to Abraham by the archangel Gabriel.

Returning to the courtyard outside the nave of El Santuario de Chimayo, the central monument contains a millstone embedded in adobe (figure 5.13). This stone symbolically presents several themes; it is a marker for sacred space, and as a millstone it represents life, ever turning. It also stands for the desire for centering, with its axle acting as the axis mundi.

Stone also bears significance based on its point of origin. For example, the facing wall of the bimah at Adath Jeshurun Synagogue is made from Jerusalem stone, said to be quarried from the same area as the stone used to build Solomon's Temple. The large lintel over the ark doors was cut as one piece and left undressed to reinforce the image of natural stone (see chapter 6). This single piece weighs so much it had to be placed with a crane.

The tree as marker for the sacred and as a symbol of life and knowledge provides the backdrop for worship in St. Matthew's Episcopal Church (figure 5.14). This soaring wooden sculpture serves as an altar backdrop, a modern iteration of the reredos or retables of the past. In fact, trees played a notable role in the site planning, with the building placed to protect favored trees from destruction. In the entry courtyard, a new tree was planted in axial alignment with the font and table within the sanctuary.

This importance of the tree symbolism is also evident in the entry pathway to the main worship space at the mother church of the Community of Christ in Independence, Missouri. Trees etched in glass frame the main entry portal (figure 5.15), which leads to a semicircular ramped pathway that ascends to the sanctuary entrance.

The axial pillar is perhaps the most commonly identified symbol for marking religious sites. Bell

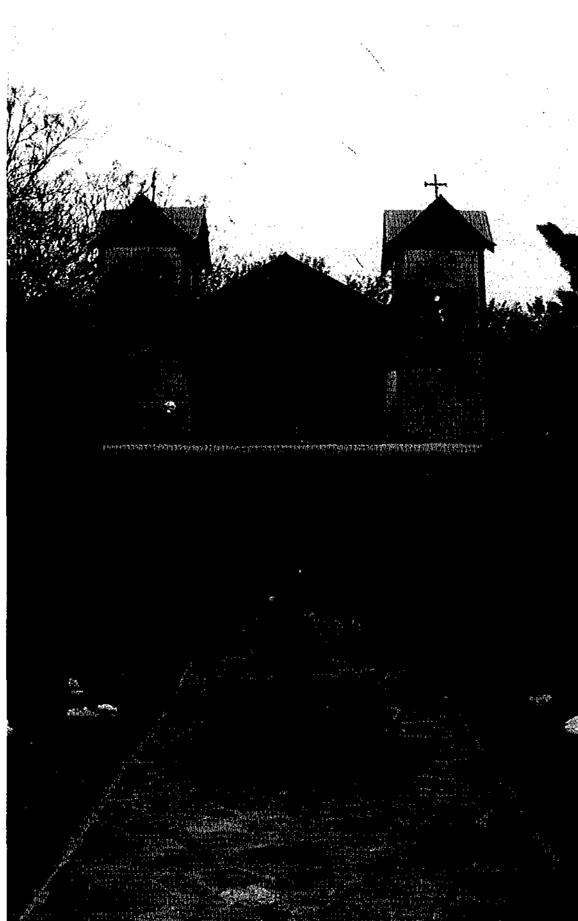


Figure 5.13. Millstone in courtyard at El Santuario de Chimayo.

Figure 5.14. Tree behind chancel at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church.

Figure 5.15. Tree etched into glass at entry to sanctuary, mother church of the Community of Christ in Independence, Missouri.

towers, campaniles, steeples, and spires cleave the sky, seeking spiritual energy to transmit to earth. The minaret at a mosque site functionally serves to announce the call to prayer and symbolically marks the sacred site. The minaret at the Islamic Cultural Center in New York is positioned to cast a shadow across the entry path, reinforcing the message of pathway and axis mundi.

The bell tower at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church was placed between the driveway and beginning of the paved pathway leading to the worship space, marking this as the entrance to a sacred site. Because of the terrain, only the tower is readily visible from the street (figure 5.16).

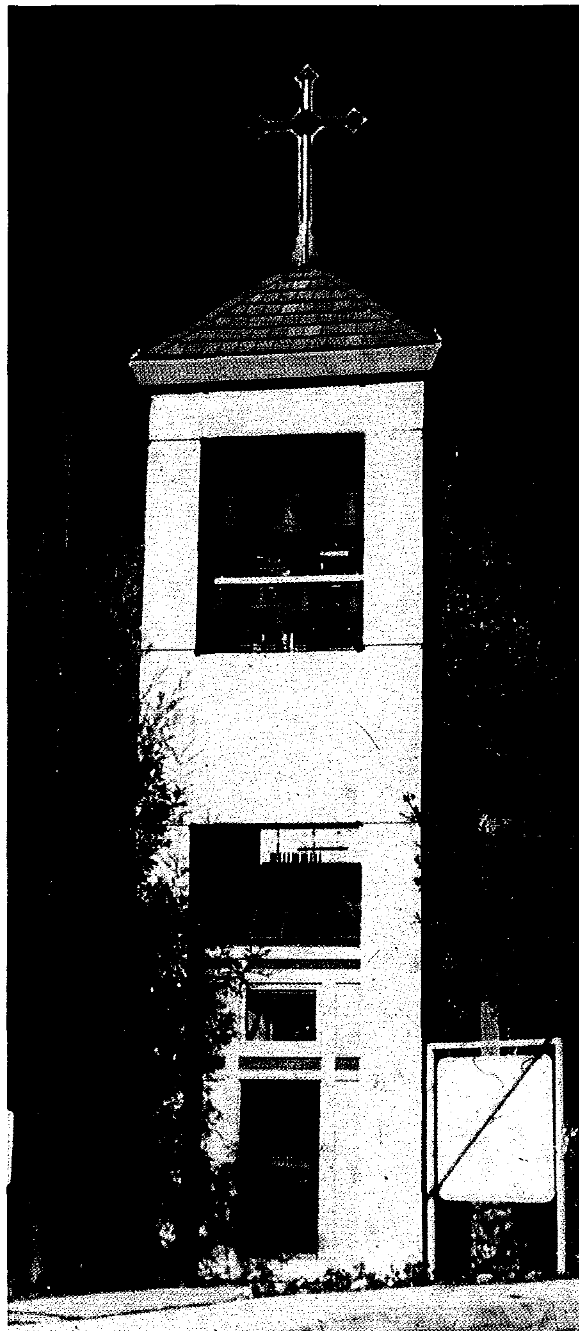


Figure 5.16. Bell tower at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church.

Geometric (Square, Circle, Triangle)

Certain pure geometric forms derived from archetypal and mythic origins are interwoven into the designs of many well-known religious sites. Universal geometers have influenced religious architecture from time immemorial. The square, circle, triangle, and their volumetric equivalents have fascinated designers of sacred space and are essentially makers and markers of the sacred at Stonehenge, the Pyramids, the Pantheon, Solomon's Temple, and the Ka'aba at Mecca. A. T. Mann suggests in *Sacred Architecture* that it is through the reconciliation of the primary shapes of square and circle that the essence of sacred architecture emerges: "The symbolic relationship between square and circle is that of human and divine, between physical world and spiritual world, imperfect and perfect, qualities."[10]

On opposite coasts of America, St. Matthew's Episcopal Church and the Islamic Cultural Center are excellent contemporary examples, displaying myriad geometries mostly derived from the interplay of the square and the circle. At St. Matthew's a modular repetition of the square appears to have determined all the essential intersections, offsets, and edges of the plan (figure 5.17).

A closer analysis reveals either the intentional or unconscious use of the dodecaïd, a twelve-sided figure composed of three overlapping squares on a 45-degree angle and superimposed on two base squares, one with its center point at the

Figure 5.17. Graphic illustration of geometry at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, based on squares.

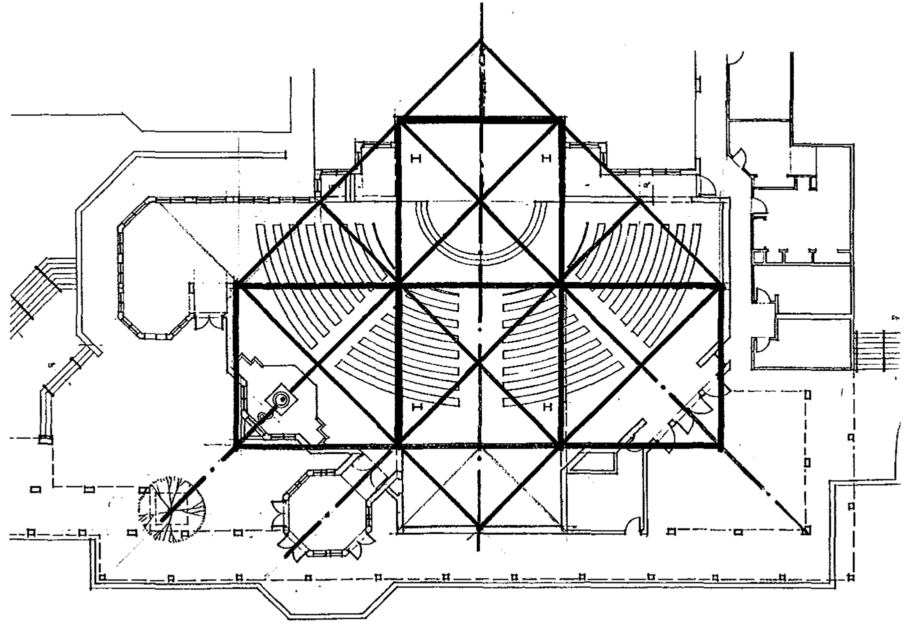
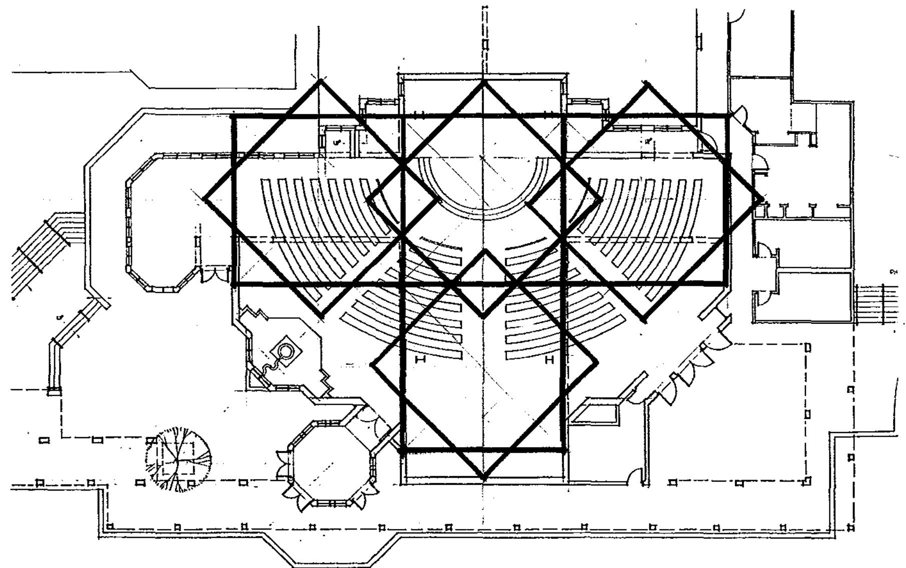


Figure 5.18. Graphic illustration of dodecaïd at St. Matthew's.



roof crossing. In George Lesser's analysis of Gothic cathedrals, he determined the dodecaïd may have been the guiding geometry of the Masonic lodges, since it appears prevalent in so many cathedral designs.

Applying the principles of the dodecaïd to St. Matthew's reveals major alignments, with the floor plan, building edges, roof crossing, and the symbolic arches

framing the nave (figure 5.18). Establishing whether these particular analyses were intended or accidental is not entirely relevant, since basic geometry clearly influenced the plan development.

As chapter 6 will discuss, the design of the Islamic Cultural Center is dominated by the repetitive use of squares and overlaid with a circular dome, introducing the concept of squaring the circle and creating a place for the dialogue of the human and divine.

Atmospheric Ambiguities

Silence/Noise, Darkness/Light, Emptiness/Profusion, Humility/Monumentality

The atmospheric quality of a place for worship changes constantly with the time of day, the movement of people, and the activities that occur and subside. The delicate balance between silence and sound or darkness and light contributes to the mystery and complexity of experience. Atmospheric elements, more than any other, convey the sense of mysterium tremendum. They speak to the mystery and ignite the awe; they move our minds, our consciousness, to other places.

While it is difficult to identify all the transitory states conveying a sense of the sacred, four seemingly contradictory atmospheric elements that most frequently inspire are: silence and noise, darkness and light, emptiness and profusion, and humility and monumentality. The apparent ambiguity, the contrast between these elements, sparks the sense of sacred.

The mystical effect begins with semidarkness, darkness enhanced by contrast to a last vestige of brightness.[11] For example, a shaft of light penetrating the darkness of a prayer alcove, and a silent corner within a crowded worship room are atmospheric ambiguities triggering an eruption of the sacred.

Planning for these requires particular sensitivity to the worship environment. While atmospheric ambiguity can contribute at any point throughout the worship space, the "leftover" spaces of alcoves, side chapels, rear aisles, and so forth, may be the best beneficiaries of these contradictory forces. The side aisles of Gothic cathedrals seem custom designed to facilitate the sacred through atmospheric ambiguity. They tend to be acoustically alive yet remote from the nave, darkened or in shadow, empty amid the profusion of tracery throughout the nave, and humble in a sea of monumentality.

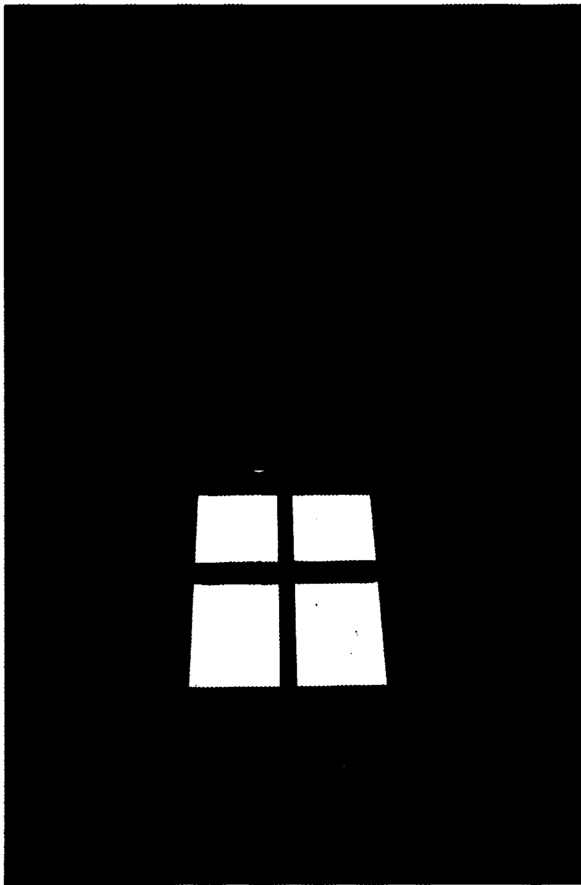
Modern iterations of this concept are evident in a variety of locations, but two mid-twentieth-century examples can be found in Columbus, Indiana. Home to many outstanding works of contemporary architecture, Columbus boasts two churches designed by a father-and-son team, Eliel and Eero Saarinen. First Christian Church, designed by Eliel Saarinen in 1942, exhibits a noticeable darkness-to-light transition with a concealed window illuminating the cross on the rear wall of the chancel. The initial impression of emptiness conveyed by the

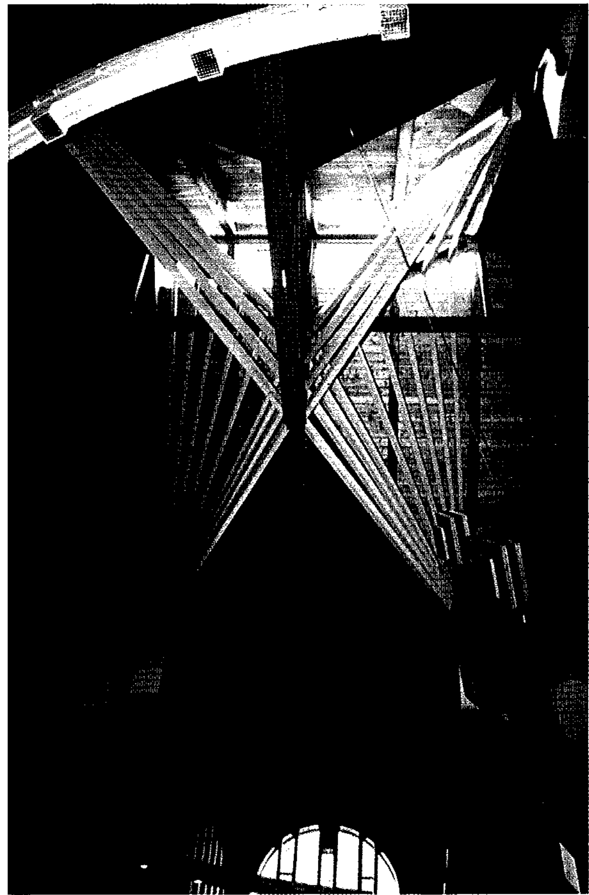
Scandinavian simplicity of the interior gives way to a sense of profusion through the richness of wood detailing and complexity of the composition.

On the outskirts of Columbus, Eliel's son, arguably the more famous of the two, Eero, designed North Christian Church for a breakaway group from the downtown congregation. This newer building, constructed in 1964, embodies several aspects of atmospheric ambiguity. As the photograph suggests, and an onsite visit truly confirms, there is an inspiring contradiction between the monumentality of the space and the humble quality of the central table placed beneath the oculus of the towering spire (figure 5.19). The large column-free room sits perched under a tentlike enclosure ostensibly suspended from the heavens above. The spire window projects a focused beam of light onto the table, a vivid contrast with the mysterious quality of the indirect light emanating from unseen windows at the perimeter and reflecting a glow on the underside of the sloped ceiling.

The Santa Maria de la Paz Church demonstrates these ambiguities in two distinct side chapels, one open to the worship room and the second entered through a gate off the rear aisle. Each is lit independently of the worship room through clerestories, or sky doors (figure 5.20). Shafts of light interrupt the relative darkness of the chapels. Each provides a place for quiet meditation despite ongoing

Figure 5.19. Worship space at North Christian Church, Columbus, Indiana.





Left: Figure 5.20. Side chapel at Santa Maria de la Paz illuminated by bright New Mexico sunlight.

Right: Figure 5.21. Exposed structural framing at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church.

activity in the nave. One of the chapels houses a richly decorated traditional altar screen like that at El Santuario de Chimayo. The ornateness of the painted design contrasts with the striking simplicity of the stucco-clad walls, stone floor, and wooden chairs. The alcoves achieve a humility of scale even though attached to a 10,000-square-foot sanctuary.

The design for St. Matthew's Episcopal Church also effectively employs atmospheric ambiguities, most noticeably at the baptismal font. As the light filters through, a mesmerizing darkness-to-light contrast emerges. The simplicity of the font remains humble amid the complexity of the intersecting beams overhead (figure 5.21).

Chapter Six

Recent Examples

The evocative ambiguity of atmosphere, the symbolic content of archetypes, and the ritualized setting of architectural pathways are players in the drama of creating sacred space. As the illustrations in chapter 5 emphasize, these elements can become the thresholds to the sacred in very diverse places of worship. No single example cited addresses all the concepts discussed, yet each clearly benefits from the attempt to integrate architecture, symbol, atmosphere, and ritual. As these descriptions illustrate, the path to the numinous is developed in a highly marked way.

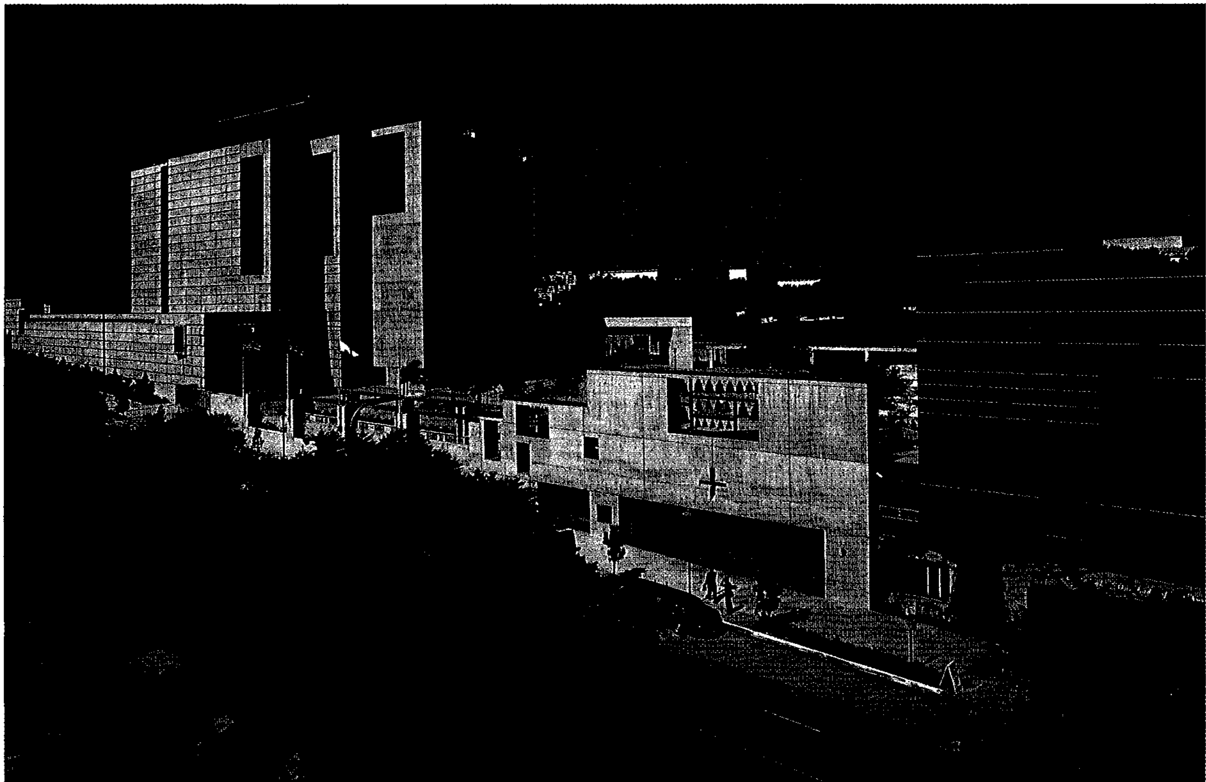
Having explored the markers of the sacred as elements within a variety of existing traditional and contemporary settings, it seems reasonable to approach a few signature religious buildings of different faith traditions and view them through the lens of this construct of architectural, archetypal, and atmospheric elements. This will help determine whether the argument survives the scrutiny of more intense focus and whether these markers truly transcend faith boundaries.

While there are innumerable faith traditions in America today, the preponderance of newer religious buildings continues to fall into the mainline paths of Christianity and Judaism, and to a lesser but growing extent, Islam and Buddhism. Within each of these categories are myriad traditions that range from traditional, orthodox, and conservative, to nontraditional, evangelical, and/or fringe sects. Since it is impossible to visit all of these in one publication, this chapter highlights significant buildings from several more prominent faith traditions, including a Roman Catholic cathedral, an Islamic mosque, a Reform Judaism synagogue, and a protestant mega-church. These choices are by no means an attempt to limit the extent to which the architectural marker criteria can be applied, rather an acknowledgement of what can be reasonably reviewed here.

Designed by the world-renowned Spanish architect Jose Rafael Moneo and constructed between 1999 and 2002, this cutting-edge architectural iconic building has received both acclaim and criticism. In the architecture world, the building has been well received as the first new, dynamic, contemporary Catholic cathedral in America for many decades. With the Catholic faith already divided over contemporary versus traditional architectural settings for worship, this unique building fans the flames of dissent. The public, if judged by the number of visitors annually, has overwhelmingly adopted this as a must-see site, in spite of the objections of those who ponder the construction expense at a time when many Catholic churches in urban areas are closing, or worse, being asked to close by the church hierarchy. Dissent notwithstanding, the cathedral is a testament to careful planning, artistic collaboration, diversity, and masterful design.

The cathedral sits atop a high point at the confluence of several key highways in a city known for its fondness of the automobile. The architect recognized the importance of this site for its ability both to project a presence onto the cityscape and to serve as a visual benchmark for the passing traffic. He romanticized the highway as a continually flowing river and designed the site wall facing the road to be fortresslike against a moat of moving vehicles (figure 6.2).

Figure 6.1. Cathedral of Los Angeles.
Photograph by Julius Shulman & David Glomb.



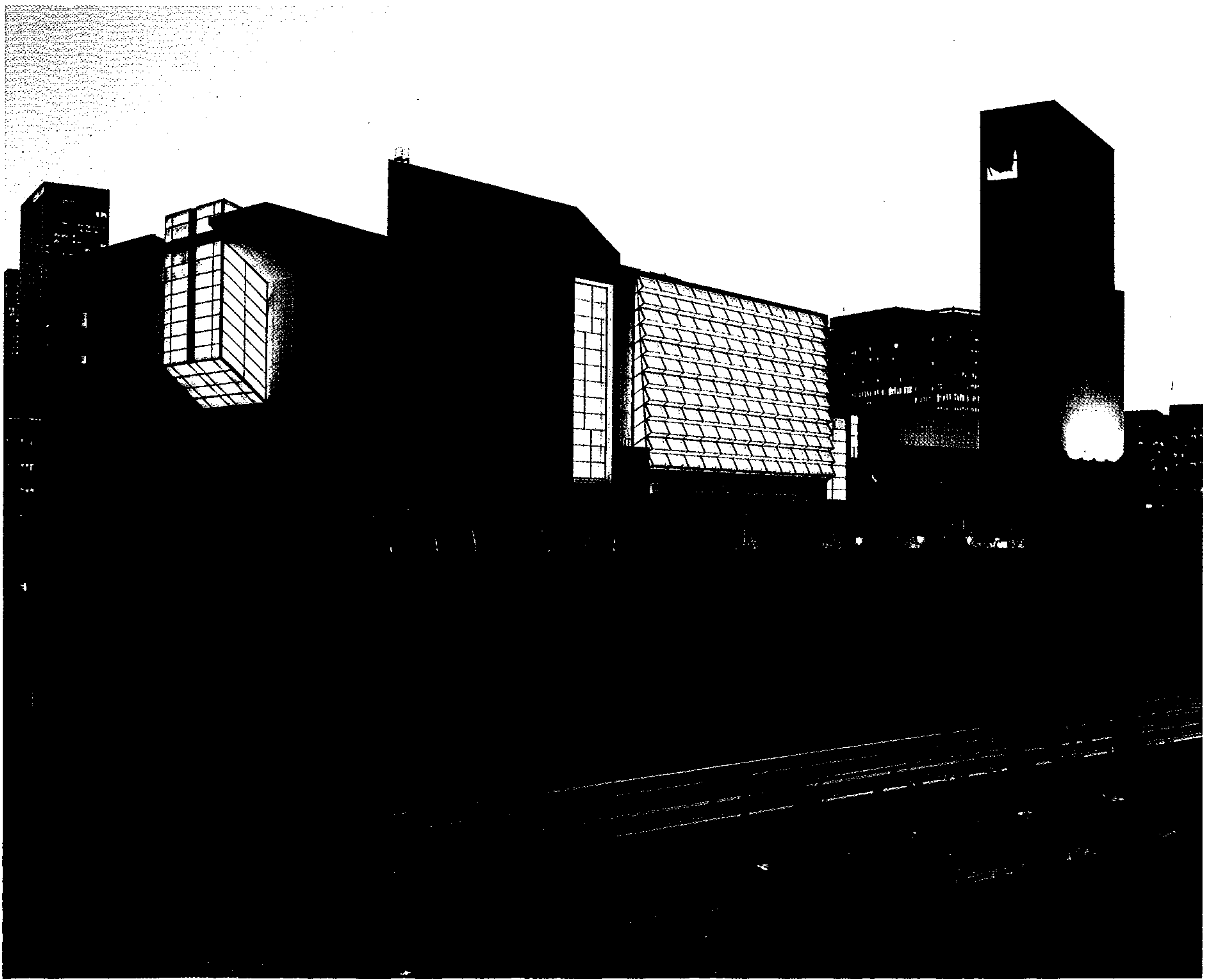
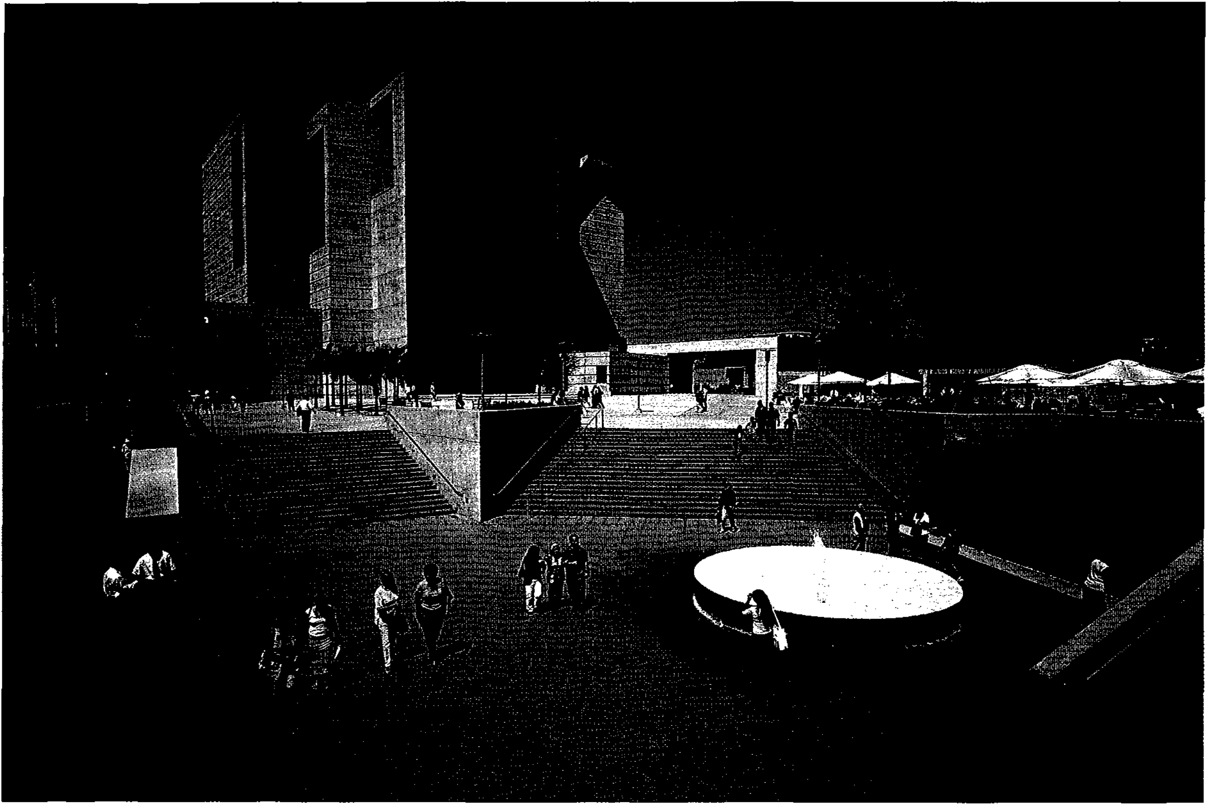
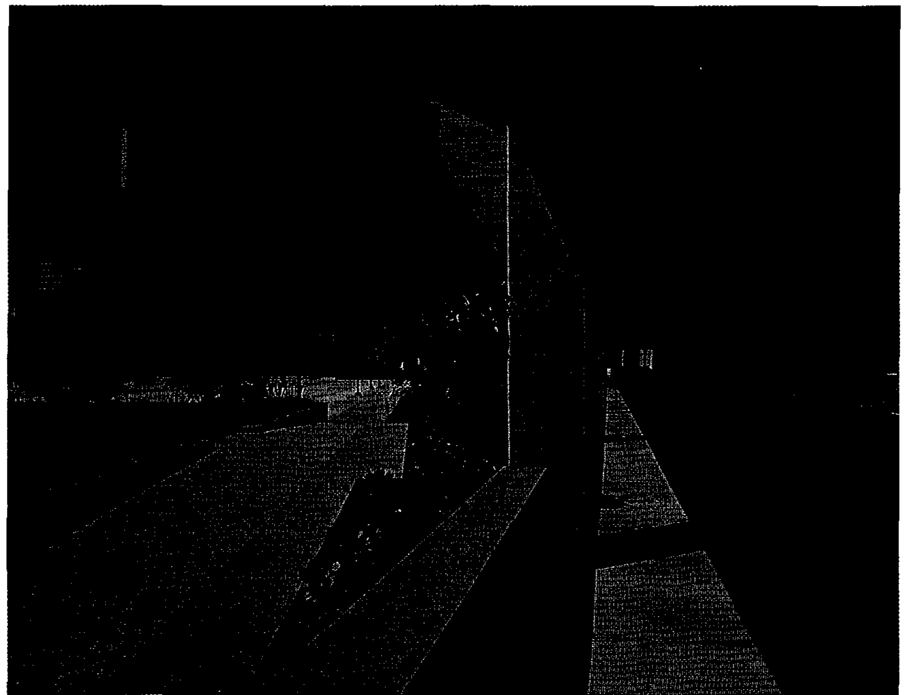


Figure 6.2. A river of traffic flows adjacent to the cathedral.
Photograph by Julius Shulman & David Glomb.

The street entrance to the property is intentionally not axially aligned with the cathedral's main entry doors, allowing those who enter the courtyards to explore and move through the grounds before reaching their destination. One enters from the southwest corner through a very pronounced gated entry at the lowest point of this hilly site. Inevitably, to enter the building one ascends through a series of courts and plazas, each affording opportunities for pausing individually or en masse. The process of ascending to reach the destination is an obvious reference to seeking enlightenment by climbing to the mountaintop. Mentally we link climbing or rising up with spiritual enlightenment.

At the base of the cathedral entrance a significant fountain and waterwall provide a welcome relief physically and metaphysically (figure 6.3). The water, as a symbol of renewal, resonates as an archetypal symbol, at the same time providing relief visually, aurally, and physically with a gentle cooling through evaporation. There is ample room to collect one's thoughts and prepare for the ascent to the





Above: Figure 6.3. Entry courtyard with fountain and waterwall.
Photograph by Julius Shulman & David Glomb.

Right: Figure 6.4. Exterior ambulatory and ramped entrance to the cathedral forecourt.
Photograph by Julius Shulman & David Glomb.

main building. It serves as a transitional point in one's journey from the domain of the secular to the sacred.

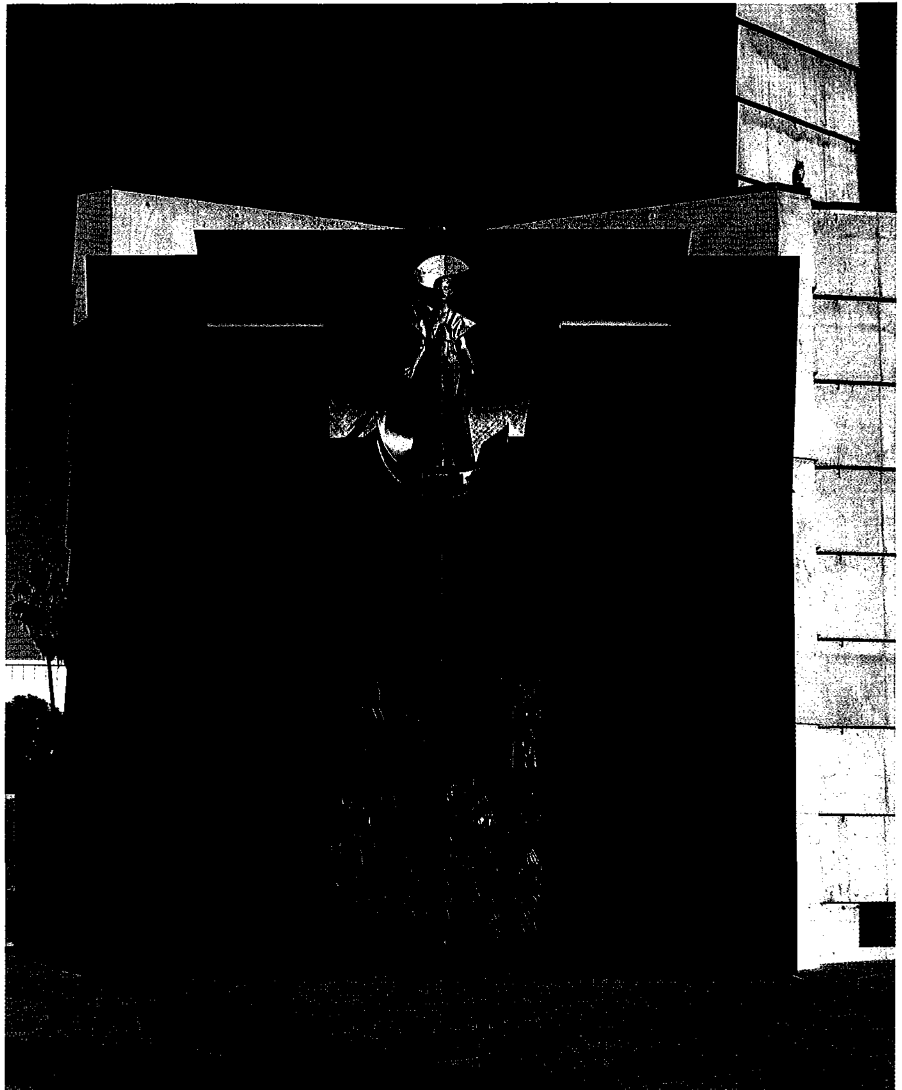
The pathway to the cathedral offers choices: a direct route via stairs to the main plaza or a more circuitous and accessible route through landscaped gardens (figure 6.4). There is no question as to the planners' intent—these are pathways, or pilgrimages, for those seeking renewal as they converge on the place of worship. A pergola and quiet garden along the eastern edge of the property also afford a place of repose and reflection.

The destination of this pilgrimage is the cathedral, of course, but the entry point is unmistakable, with its remarkable twenty-foot-high bronze doors crafted and designed by more than 150 artists. The doors, conceived by the Mexico-born Los Angeles sculptor Robert Graham, are actually two sets of doors within the same frame. The first set, the inner doors, are about fourteen feet high and are adorned with the art and symbols of diverse cultural heritages. These are described on the church's Web site:

> Beginning at the bottom of the inner doors, Graham has sculpted in relief a grapevine, symbolizing the Church. Folded in the grapevine are 40 ancient symbols that represent pre-Christian images from Europe, Asia, Africa and North America. The images include the eagle, griffin, goose, Southwest Indian Flying Serpent, bee, hand, ostrich, dove, Chinese turtle, Samoan kava bowl, the Native American Chumash man, the dolphin, the Tree of Jesse, Tai Chi, and many others. The number 40 is a mystical number in Scripture from 40 years of the Israelites wandering in the desert, Jesus' 40 days in the desert, and His ascension 40 days after Easter, among others.
>
> Numerology played an important part in the design of the doors in abstract connotations. He considers the most important being 3 for the Trinity in the triangle shape and 4 for the Gospels, and their combination equaling 7, also an important number in Scripture.
>
> Progressing above the ancient part of the doors are different visions of the Virgin from images that are European in origin, but have been filtered through the indigenous cultures that the Europeans brought to Christianize the New World. They include such images as the Immaculate Conception, the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Pietà, the Mater Dolorosa, the Virgin of Pomata, Virgin of the Rosary of Chichinquira, Divine Shepherdess, Virgin of the Cave, Virgin of the Candlestick, Virgin of Mercy, and others.

The outer doors form an inverted L over the inner doors, and are only opened for large ceremonial gatherings (figure 6.5). Above the doors in the tympanum stands an eight-foot bronze statue, a contemporary iteration of the Virgin Mary (figure 6.6).

Figure 6.5. Main entry doors to the cathedral.
Photograph by Julius Shulman & David Glomb.



Her facial features are intentionally multicultural, and her head is framed by a circular opening in the rear wall, the void creating a halo of sunshine and sky. The symbolism works on many levels and conveys a welcoming sense of grace as one passes beneath. The monumentality of the entrance doors connotes the importance attached to the realm beyond and instills a sense of the sacred upon all who enter.

With its symbolic markers of gate, pathway, water, garden, ascent, and portal, the pilgrimage to the cathedral seems to inspire an awe capable of affecting even the casual tourist. The architectural markers of gate, pathway, and place are exceptionally well defined, underscoring the gravity of the entrance sequence and setting the stage for a religious experience.

Figure 6.6. The Virgin Mary over the main entry doors. Photograph by Julius Shulman & David Glomb.

The ritual pathway directing movement into the cathedral repeats the experience of gate, pathway and place on the interior. Entrance through the bronze doors leads into an ambulatory that parallels the main nave but intentionally moves the viewer past a series of niches and side alcoves featuring artwork and religious iconography (figure 6.7). A large traditional altar piece at the north end of the ambulatory draws one's attention and leads one naturally to this point. While there are side access aisles to the nave, they discreetly angle away from the path of entry and are sufficiently deep to avert a casual sideways glance directly into the nave. Instead, the pathway leads to the north end and makes a ninety-degree right turn, which leads one into the baptismal area at the rear of the nave, a perfect transition that again reinforces the message of water as a symbol of renewal and rebirth (figure 6.8).

While the baptismal area is artistic in its own right, the tendency is to turn from it and view the nave from the intended vantage point at the rear, where one can appreciate for the first time the full magnitude of this huge worship space. Tall alabaster-clad walls, with angled side aisles flank both sides and direct attention to the sanctuary at the south end of the nave. A monumental cross formed in the architecture of the south facade becomes the iconic device drawing the viewer into the nave. As one approaches the sanctuary, or center of worship, a single large bronze crucifix marks place and directs attention to the altar. The altar is scaled appropriately to the space but not overwhelming as are those in the more

Figure 6.7. Ambulatory surrounding the nave.
Photograph by Julius Shulman & David Glomb.

Figure 6.8. Baptismal font.
Photograph by Julius Shulman & David Glomb.

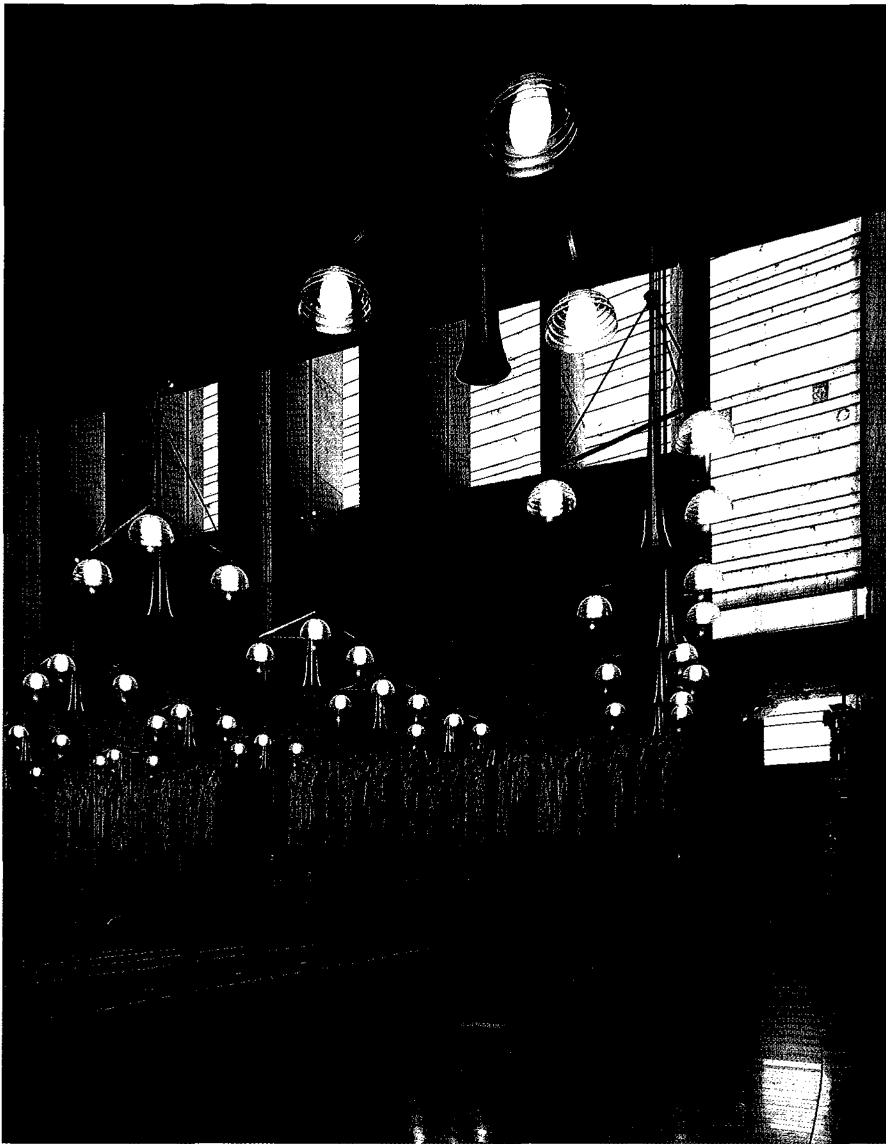


Figure 6.9. Side walls adorned with tapestries.
Photograph by Julius Shulman & David Glomb

ornate altars of historic European cathedrals. Nevertheless, it is the centerpiece of the cathedral. According to the cathedral Web site, "There is a deep Catholic theology that underpins the meaning, purpose, beauty and quality of the altar. As a result, the altar in the new Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels is the most important and central liturgical feature of the entire Cathedral. Our belief and understanding is that the altar is the representation of Christ our Lord."[1]

Artistically crafted symbols of the church abound but are sufficiently placed apart and muted to not compete with the purpose of the experience: to provide a place for worship. Perhaps the most spectacular of these are the tapestries adorning the long walls of the nave. Designed by the artist John Nava, they join

Figure 6.10. Diverse faces woven into a tapestry in the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe.
Photograph by Richard S. Vosko.

the long tradition of illuminating church history through narrative illustrations (figure 6.9).

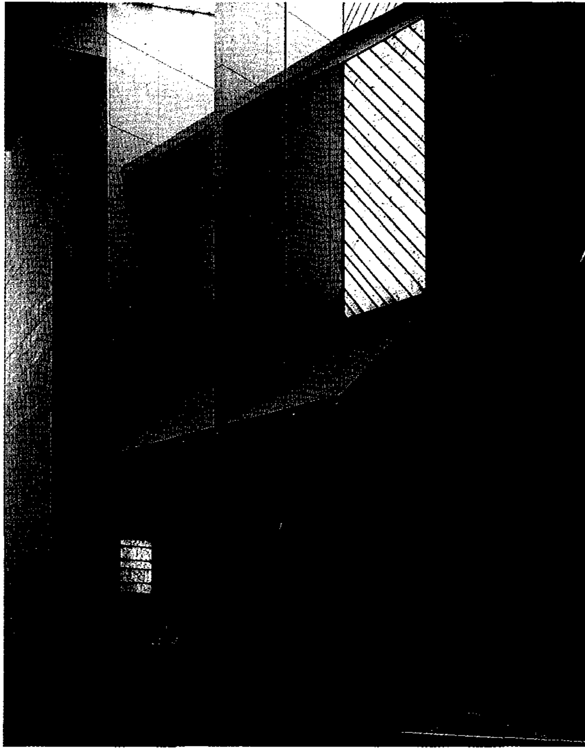
The artist portrays an almost pilgrimagelike path of penitent worshippers, intermixing images of revered saints, contemporary persons of note, and children of all races dressed in contemporary garb (figure 6.10). This creates an effect of worshipping amid the entire legacy of the church with its saints, notables, and common man, while embracing and celebrating the multiculturalism of this cathedral parish. At the baptismal font, five tapestries depict Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. Behind the sanctuary, another set of tapestries forms an abstract map of Los Angeles. The cathedral's Web site includes this description: "The seven tapestries behind the altar depict a schematic map of the streets of Los Angeles converging with an overall circular 'Cosmati' pattern traditionally associated with the divine. Fittingly, a quote from the Book of Revelation is sewn into the tapestries that reflects the union of God and man here and now as the New Jerusalem. They are inscribed with the words, 'See, God's dwelling is among mortals. God will dwell with them. They will be God's people and God will be with them.'"[2]

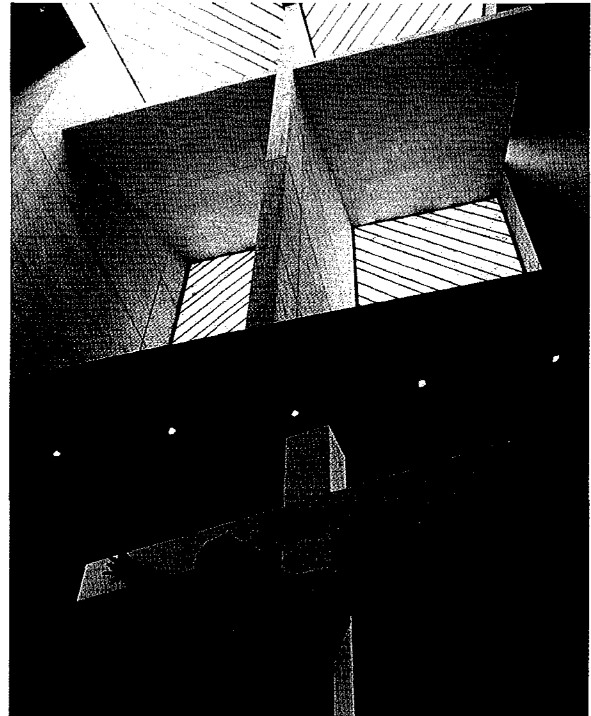
This tapestry serves the function Mircea Eliade describes as common to so many of the religious faith traditions he studied over the years, the need to "found the earth," to mark a center point with an axis mundi, implying a center point to the universe around which all else revolves.

Thus, the architects and artists for this huge undertaking collaborated in the best of traditions to invoke the sacred through their art and artistry. The architecturally directed movement allows for a transition from secular to sacred while reinforcing the ritualized pathway to place. The use of art to convey archetypal symbols underscores the message that water, stone, and cosmic center (axis mundi) play significant roles in marking sacred sites.

Regarding atmospheric ambiguities, there are a multitude of contrasts that lead the mind elsewhere. For example, the striking juxtaposition of the monumental cross at the east wall with the simple, human-scale crucifix and the magnitude of the space compared to the spareness of the interior are evocative triggers to contemplation (figures 6.11 and 6.12). Phyllis Richardson writes in *New Sacred Architecture*,

> With the staggered, soaring ceiling heights, thousands of alabaster panels, glowing stone, and the presentation of the building across a wide courtyard with palm trees and a buffering window-wall along the freeway side, the building bespeaks grandiosity without actually claiming it. Perhaps this is to do with the spare interior and the exterior's Modernist assemblage of boxes that divert attention to separate spaces rather than focusing on a single image. For in Moneo's new cathedral, and not unlike much of the western U.S., the strongest sense is of the space in which to divine one's own belief.[3]





Left: Figure 6.11. Monumental-scale cross juxtaposed with a human-scale crucifix. Photograph by Julius Shulman & David Glomb.

Right: Figure 6.12. Closer view of the cross and crucifix. Photograph by Julius Shulman & David Glomb.

Throughout the building, side aisles and distinctive alcoves provide the contrast of scale and darkness to the warm embracing sunlight within the larger worship area. The effect is mesmerizing and stimulates the sense of significant place in a setting already imbued with the sacred.

Adath Jeshurun Synagogue, Minnetonka, Minnesota

From the time one enters the drive to the Adath Jeshurun Synagogue in Minnetonka, Minnesota, it is apparent the views and movement are being directed by the architectural design. The architect, Maurice Finegold of Finegold Alexander of Boston, describes the entry sequence:

> Situated in the highest point of this 26 acre site, the synagogue is approached by a long entrance drive focused on the sanctuary's domed roof. A row of hemlocks helps focus this view and screens the parking lot. While there is a motor drop off and separate school entrance, the principal entrance to the building complex is found at the corner of the parking lot. This portal leads to an enclosed street, curving and rising, faced on one side by local limestone and on the other by a glass wall looking out on a sacred garden.

Figure 6.13. Adath Jeshurun Synagogue in Minnetonka, Minnesota.
Photograph copyright Don F. Wong.

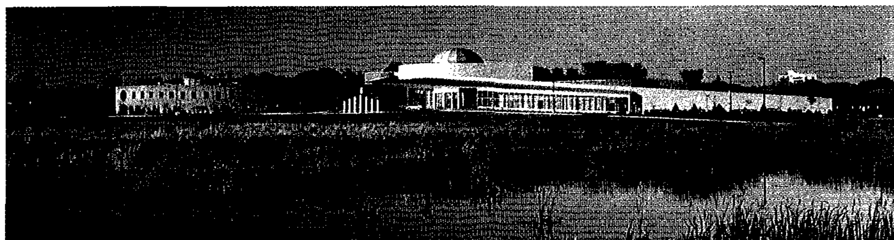
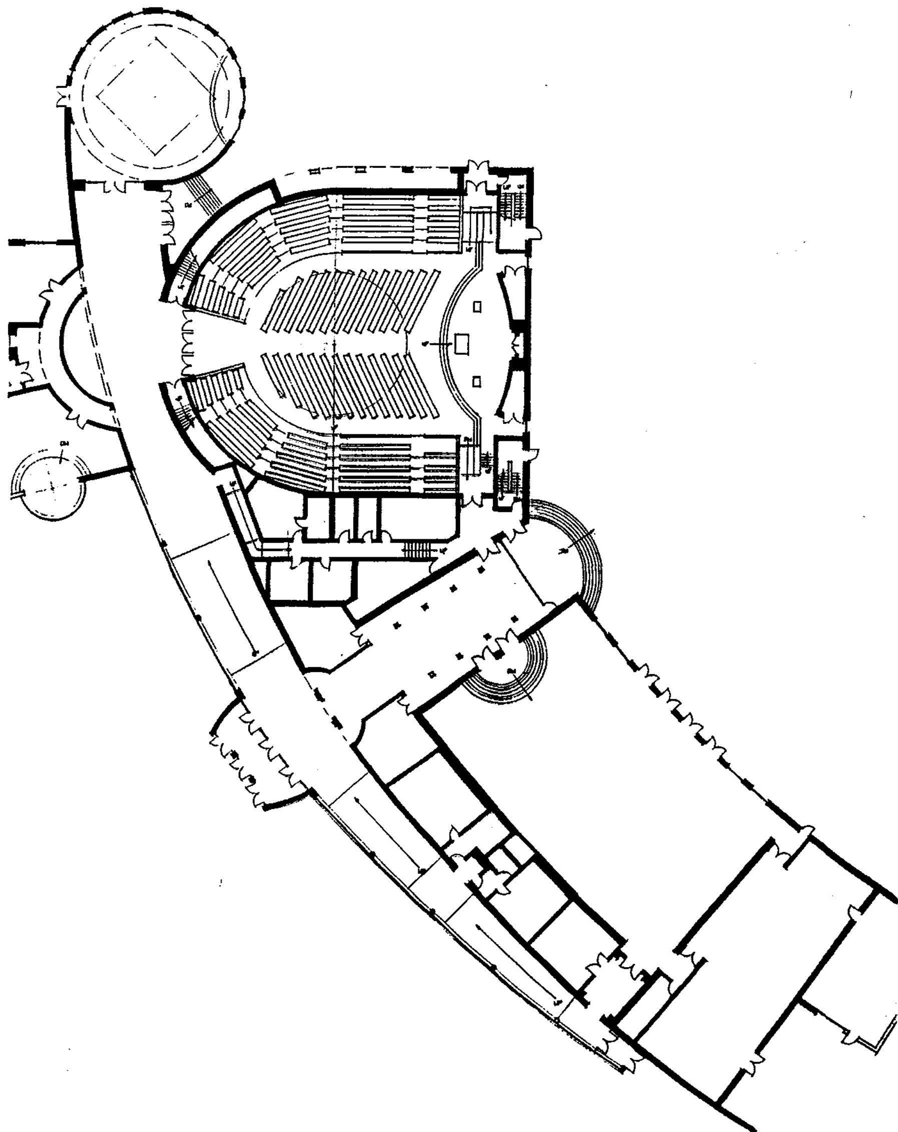


Figure 6.14. Floor plan.



Left: Figure 6.15. Entry corridor gently curves and ascends.
Photograph copyright Don F. Wong.

Below: Figure 6.16. Gallery overlooking the lake beyond.
Photograph copyright Don F. Wong.

> The stone enhances the texture of memory and the journey evokes the ingathering of the exiles.

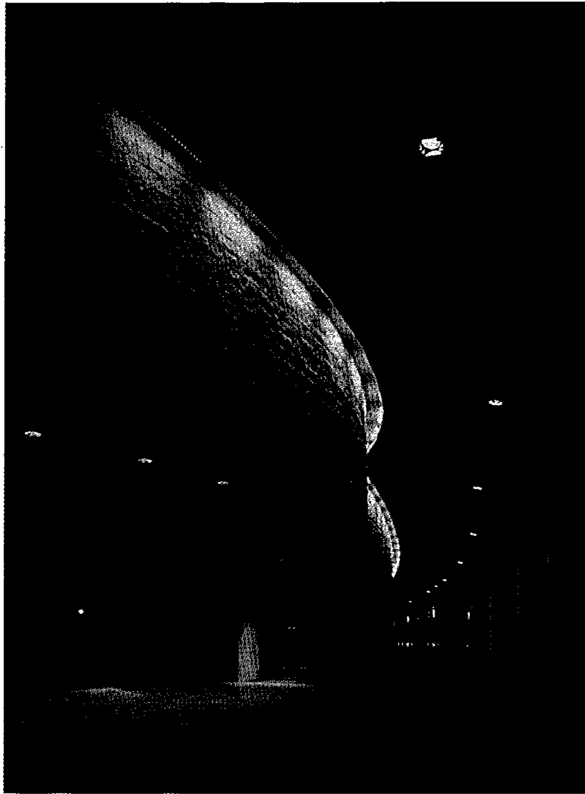
As the floor plan illustrates, the entry from the parking lot is through a pair of double doors at the end of a long, curving pathway (figure 6.14).

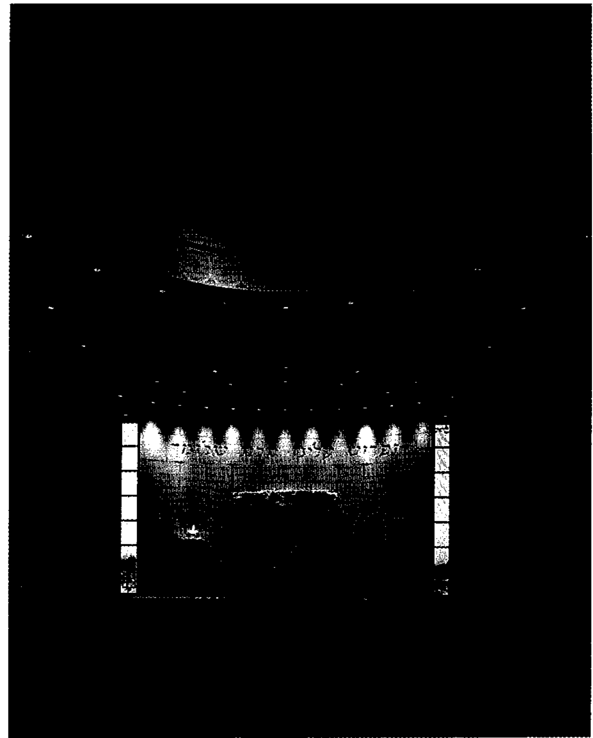
The corridor is more than a means to an end; as Finegold aptly suggests, it is a place of reflection. The curved glass wall reveals a garden beyond, the textured stone wall triggers memory, and the pathway invokes a sense of gathering for those whose history is marked with exile and the Diaspora (figure 6.15).

At the midpoint of the ascent is the canopied drop-off entrance and pre-function vestibule to the social hall. The journey is interrupted but for good reason, as this point of pause also provides a panoramic view of the lake beyond (figure 6.16).

Continuing on the pathway, one enters the forecourt to the sanctuary and chapel, both places of worship and reflection (figure 6.17). As with many of the examples cited before, the destination point becomes the portal to an inner sanctum. The preeminence of the sanctuary entrance is achieved with three pairs of bronzed doors that provide access to the worship space. The visual impact of these handsome doors confers a status to the room beyond, foretelling the importance of the area for gathering.

Passing through the doors, one enters the sanctuary, a U-shaped room focused on the bimah, from which the action of worship and reading of the Torah takes





Above left: Figure 6.17. Forecourt to the sanctuary and chapel.
Photograph copyright Don F. Wong.

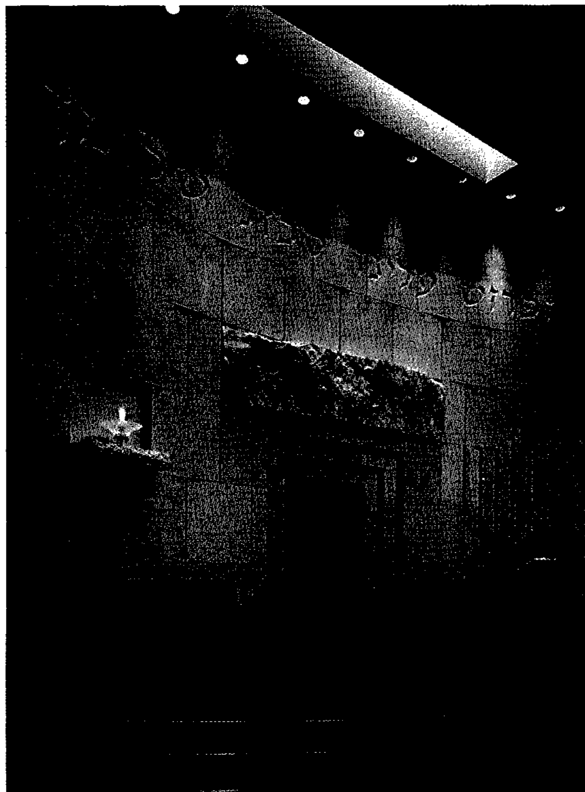
Above right: Figure 6.18. Sanctuary with its overhead skylit dome and ark on an axis with the center aisle.
Photograph copyright Don F. Wong.

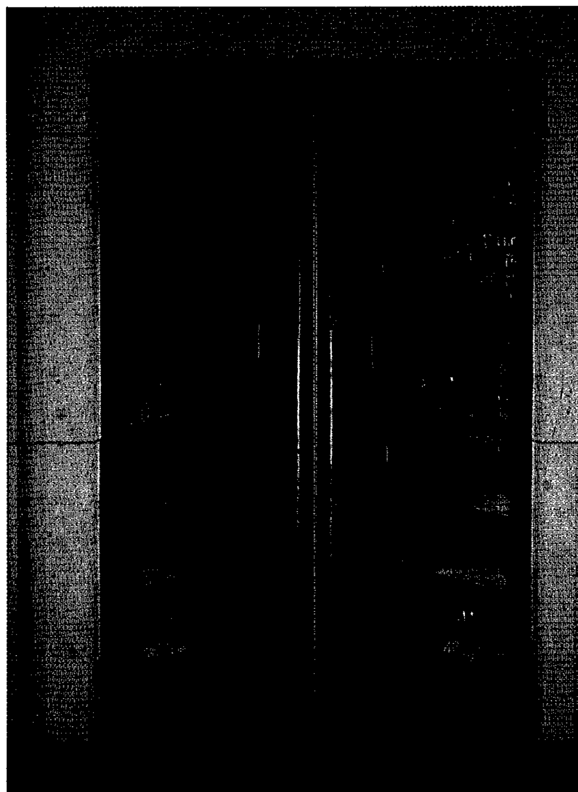
Left: Figure 6.19. Rear wall of the bimah.
Photograph copyright Don F. Wong.

place. The center of the room has a large, raised dome skylight, another reference to the sacred, as the circle is perceived as a symbol of the divine and skylights are windows to the heavens above (figure 6.18).

Forty-eight-inch-square limestone blocks form the rear wall of the bimah (figure 6.19). The curvature of the wall creates shadow lines, evoking a basket weave of open books, an appropriate metaphor for a service intended for educating those assembled by readings from sacred text.

A key element of the design is a magnificent segment of Jerusalem stone that forms a lintel over the entrance doors to the ark (figure 6.20). The rough,

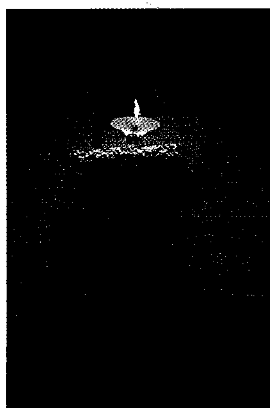




natural texture of the stone contrasts vividly with the gracefully articulated bronze doors to the ark, created by the California artist Laurie Gross (figure 6.21). The solidity of the large doors contrasts with the subtle fluid pattern of the raised ribbing and Hebrew lettering on the doors.

The eternal flame is placed on a cantilevered stone tablet projecting from a niche on the rear wall. The backdrop of the bimah is framed by vertical slots of leaded glass windows, affording views of the lake beyond (figure 6.18).

Thus, the universal archetypal elements of water, earth, air, and fire are all present within one view. The symbolic content of stone as a marker of the sacred is accentuated by the lintel over the ark doors. It carries layers of meaning, as the Jerusalem stone also triggers memories of the Western Wall in Jerusalem and of Solomon's Temple, the original and to some the only true temple of the faith. Thus, this single reference



Above left: Figure 6.20. Rear wall of the bimah with Jerusalem stone over the ark doors.
Photograph copyright Don F. Wong.

Above right: Figure 6.21. Ark doors designed by Laurie Gross Studios.
Photograph copyright Don F. Wong.

Left: Figure 6.22. The eternal flame, cantilevered on a stone tablet.
Photograph copyright Don F. Wong.

links all present to the holiest site, a building built, and destroyed, nearly three thousand years ago and still revered today.

The perimeter seating in the sanctuary is curved and tiered around the center section, facing both the bimah and the congregation. This section is normally reserved for women in this Conservative synagogue, but it also provides the necessary overflow seating for the High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The center seating area, used during normal Sabbath services, has a center aisle leading to the bimah and the table where the Torah is placed for reading. It is separated from the perimeter seating by a wide, semicircular aisle that serves both as access to the side seating and for circulating the Torah when it is removed from the ark and brought through the congregation.

The process of retrieving and replacing the Torah in the ark is also a ritual intended to evoke the sacred. The Torah is stored in a sealed enclosure, the ark, the repository of the sacred text, which mirrors the enclosure in Solomon's Temple for the Holy of Holies. As the Ark of the Covenant was the container of the most sacred text, the Ten Commandments, so too the ark in a synagogue contains the sacred text used in worship.

The ark doors are frequently designed by artists to convey the importance of what they contain and to provide a visual clue or narrative to sacred text (figure 6.21). In Adath Jeshurun, the doors, cast in bronze, are inscribed with the Song of the Sea from Exodus. They both protect and illuminate the sacred.

During services, the doors are opened to reveal a curtain (or veil) that shrouds the Torah. This is drawn back and a Torah scroll is removed. This is generally sheathed in an elaborate fabric liner, which is capped with an ornate finial that includes a yad, or pointing device for reading from the text. Once the scroll is removed from the liner, it is brought down to the congregation and ritually moved in a circle around those seated. After moving through the congregation, the Torah is returned to the table for the reading and then returned to the ark. This ritual of circumambulating the Torah inscribes the congregation in a sacred precinct, the domain of the circle or the divine.

Architecturally directed movement is a keystone of the design in this synagogue, with its articulated entrance, elongated pathway and bronze entry doors. Transitioning from the entry sequence of secular to sacred domain, the experience repeats within the sanctuary. The entry doors become the portal marking the threshold, the aisles the pathway, and the bimah the destination. Yet another sequence unfolds when the ark doors are opened, the Torah revealed, and its wisdom shared through the readings.

The Jerusalem stone over the ark doors marks this sacred site. The universal elements—earth, air, water, and fire—are visibly combined in the sanctuary to evoke a sense of the sacred. Atmospheric ambiguities are more visibly evident in the chapel to the west of the sanctuary, enhanced by the stained glass artistry of Ellen Mandelbaum, an accomplished New York City artist (figure 6.23). Her

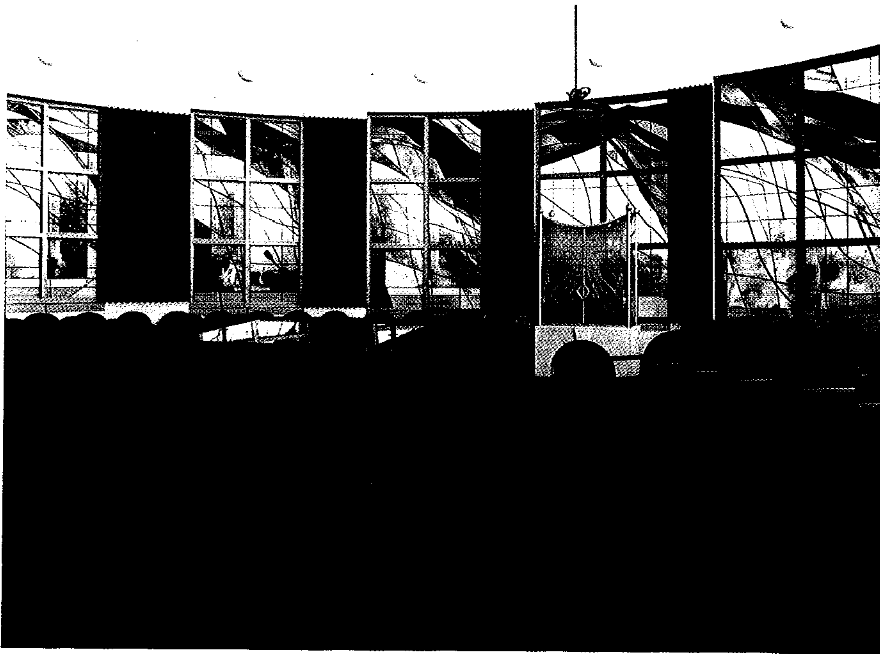


Figure 6.23. Chapel with stained glass windows by Ellen Mandelbaum.
Photograph copyright Don F. Wong.

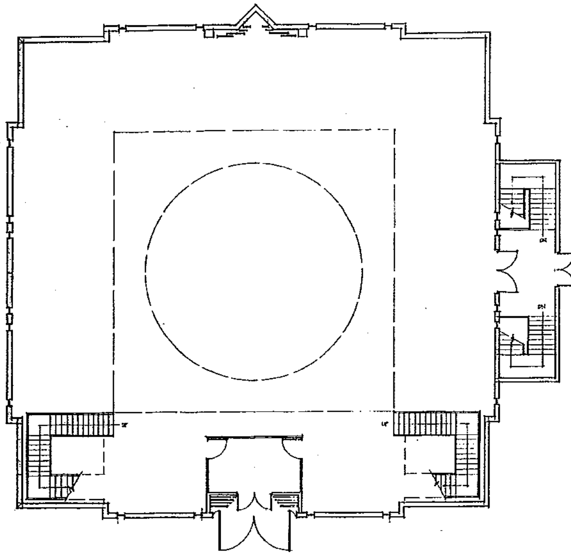
windows form a narrative while transmitting shafts of multicolored light through contemporary designs, providing contrasting points of detail and simplicity.

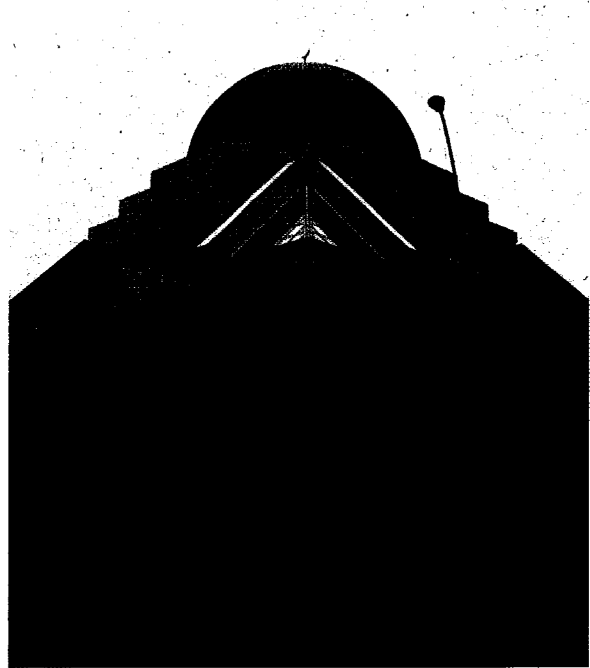
Throughout the building there are framed views of the landscape with its natural lakes and gardens. This naturally draws one's eye to these selected view ports and leads the mind elsewhere. Paraphrasing from the writings of Otto, Eliade, and Walters, this affords the prerequisite opportunity for experiencing the sacred.

Islamic Cultural Center, New York, New York

Perched atop a sloping site near the crest of a hill on Manhattan's Upper East Side, the Islamic Cultural Center is indicative of the growing influence of Islam in America. Constructed in 1991 and paid in part by Islamic nations, this pancultural center was the first mosque to be designed for New York City's Muslim population. Although located at the intersection of two major thoroughfares (Ninety-sixth Street and Third Avenue) in a city famous for its rectilinear city block gridiron, the mosque is rotated off the grid for proper orientation to Mecca. The architect, Mustafa Abadan of Skidmore, Owens and Merrill, carefully calibrated the correct orientation to ensure that the qibla wall did indeed afford the most direct path to Mecca.

The building, ninety feet square in plan and a perfect cube of ninety feet high in volume on the interior, resonates with inherent geometries and the interplay of the circle and the square (figure 6.24). Each facade of the exterior has a composition



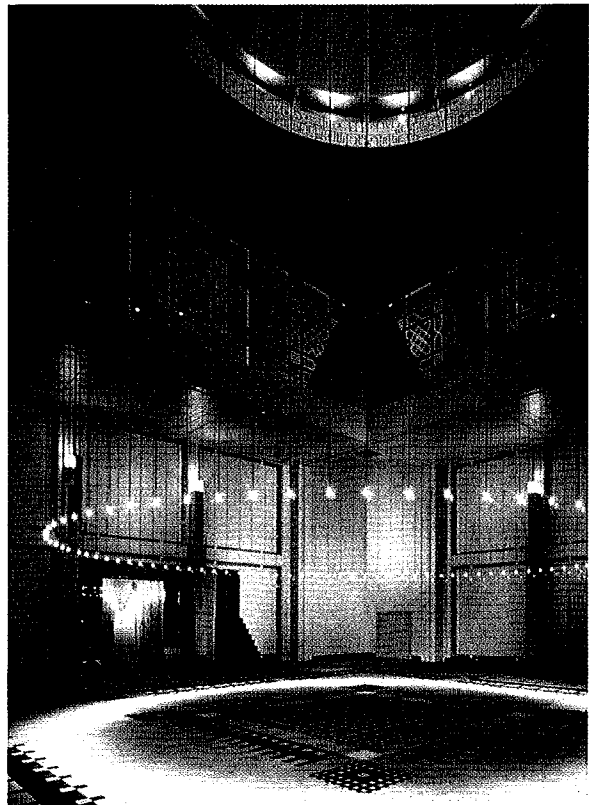


Above left: Figure 6.24 Floor plan of the Islamic Cultural Center in New York City.

Abover right: Figure 6.25. Exterior view of the Islamic Cultural Center.

Near right: Figure 6.26. Islamic Cultural Center, with freestanding minaret bordered by a stone wall and iron fencing.

Far right: Figure 6.27. Main prayer room with its qibla wall facing Mecca, mihrab for directing prayers, and kursi for the Imam to stand on while leading prayers.



of nine squares (a religious and mythical combination), buttressed by solid corners topped with triangular skylights (figure 6.25).

The exposed structural grid delineates the network of squares, which are subdivided into concentric squares that scale down to the stone wall tiles. The upper tier of squares is recessed and supports elaborately detailed clerestory windows etched with geometric patterns. According to the architect, "The design relies completely on geometry, geometry in its most idealized and fundamental forms—the square, the intersections of the square and the circle—to create stability, unity and harmony."[4]

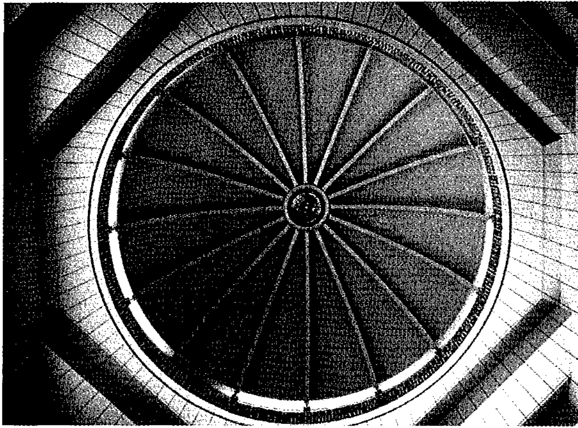
The cultural center complex is bounded by a stone-clad wall with iron fencing and gated entries, but the freestanding minaret announces the presence of the mosque on the cityscape (figure 6.26). Public admittance to the main entry is secured by a modest gate structure on Third Avenue, a passageway that defines the threshold experience and regulates entry. An angular pathway directs the visitor to the southwest facade where a set of very tall dark bronze doors frame the entry. Etched and patterned glass layers frame the entrance, a theme repeated on the interior at the mihrab, a niche highlighted with layers of etched glass.

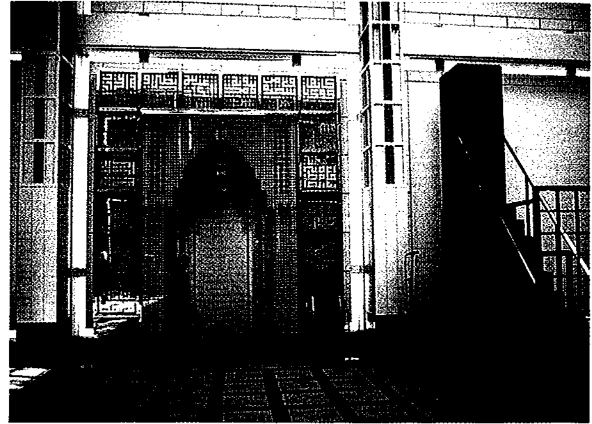
The gate, pathway, and place sequences are clearly defined by the architectural and landscaping elements. The huge bronze doors are used to convey the sense of the sacred and the importance of entering this domain. When open, the doors reveal the patterned layers of glass that communicate an intricacy, complexity, and beauty associated with the natural beauty of the environment. The message transmitted is one of totality.

Upon entering, the faithful are expected to remove their shoes and prepare for prayer through ritual washing. This is accommodated in rooms to the side and below the main prayer room. The central space is a light-filled cube with recessed niches on the side and a large dome overhead (figure 6.28). All four sides of the main hall are composed of square panels bordered with narrow bands of glass and positioned between structurally expressed steel columns. The center raised ceiling portion is defined by large expanses of etched glass, three panels across and three panels high, which admit filtered light into the hall throughout the day. Geometric patterns of squares and rectangles in mazelike density provide the only visible decoration on the exterior facade.

The architect's intent was to use the building itself as an axis mundi that evokes both the world here and the world beyond: "The mosque interior divides into thirds, a physical and metaphysical trinity of sorts. The lower part is intended to disassociate congregants from the city . . . there's light, but no noise, and the space is inward oriented. The clerestory in the middle section reconnects you to the world, to today. The dome is an uplifting element, connecting the human with the almighty."[5]

The square floor plan is as wide as it is high on the interior, and the diameter





Left: Figure 6.28. Dome over the Islamic Cultural Center.

Right: Figure 6.29. The mihrab at the Islamic Cultural Center, with its rich detail in layers of etched glass.

of the dome overhead is one half the height, thus two perfect spheres mounted vertically would fit neatly into the void the dome creates. This may be an homage to the geometry of the Pantheon in Rome, where the dome would frame a perfect sphere within the space.

The squares of the architecture are reiterated in the carpet pattern, and the circular form of the dome is dropped from above as a pattern by a ring of ninety suspended light fixtures (figures 6.27 and 6.28). This creates the intersection between the square and the circle, or symbolically the dialog of the human (earthbound) with the divine (heavenly above).

The simplicity of the setting contrasts with the rich detailing of the mihrab (figure 6.29). Repeating the layered and geometric cut glass at the entry, the mihrab becomes a focal point for those engaged in prayer. To the right of the mihrab is the kursi, or stand from which the Imam leads prayer and offers the khutbah, or sermon.

In the Islamic faith, adherents are expected to pray five times daily wherever they are, not necessarily in a mosque. "Prayer in a group, however, is considered more virtuous," thus services in the mosque are generally held weekly on Fridays.[6] Worshippers must remove their shoes before entering the prayer room. Services are observed by men or women kneeling in rows (women and men are normally separated), and worshippers pray by prostrating themselves in the direction of Mecca. At the Islamic Cultural Center, the architect suspended a balcony for women to participate in prayer. After services, members meet and greet each other, as is also common in other faith traditions.

Islamic tradition forbids the representation of Allah with figural images or icons, thus all the mystery and awe of the faith is often embodied in the intricate geometric detailing of the architecture. At the Islamic Cultural Center in New York, the sense of sacred is primarily conveyed by the harmonious use of geometry, by the simplicity of the worship space and by the beauty of architectural environment.

In this facility, architecturally directed movement is accomplished with the

gated entry, pathway, and imposing exterior doors. Entering into the facility, the layers of patterned glass form a threshold experience and the pathway is through a vestibule and into the main hall from a side door, rather than a direct axial entry. The mihrab serves as the focal point and holy center, or destination point, the "place" of gate, pathway, and place.

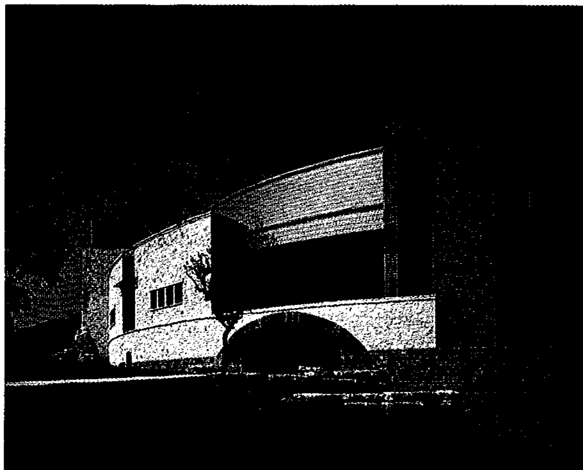
The environment is rich with natural light diffused through intricate geometries etched into the glass. The monumental scale of the room contrasts with the size and scale of the mihrab, while the rich density of glass detailing at the mihrab contrasts with the simplicity of the overall space, an interesting instance of oppositional forces. It is perhaps this contradiction of complexity and simplicity that yields the sense of sacred. This, together with the geometries and the symbolic integration of circle and square, again reinforces the message that one has entered sacred space.

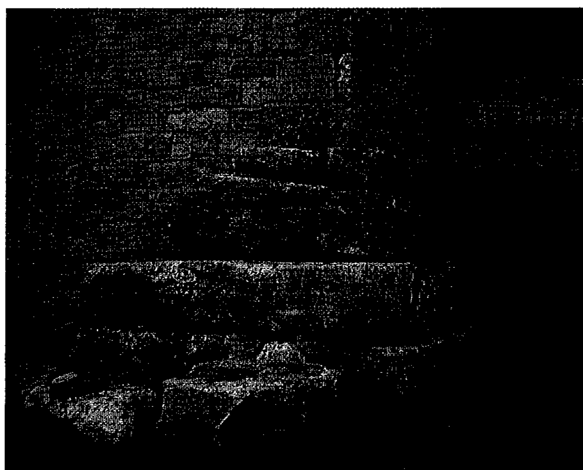
Riverbend Church, Austin, Texas

A great deal as been written since the late 1970s of the phenomenon of mega-churches, large membership churches that generally eschew Christian iconography while espousing an essentially Christian message. Most mega-churches are nondenominational, although there is an informal link especially between Four Square churches and others following in the footsteps of Willow Creek, an early mega-church in Illinois. Other mega-churches are simply breakaway congregations from mainline faiths, as is Riverbend Church in Austin, Texas, which was formerly a Southern Baptist congregation.

Some within mainline denominational churches view this phenomenon as a potential passing fad, dependent on charismatic leadership, yet they recognize the appeal of these congregations and have even modified their own patterns of worship to capitalize on the strengths of mega-church services. Large screen displays for video projection, media-rich worship environments, and hip band performances are no longer the exclusive precinct of mega-churches. Many of these same devices are found in large and small parishes throughout the United States.

While many early mega-church congregations were housed in simple large-span steel structures, the recent tendency has been to build more substantial structures. The Riverbend Church in Austin, designed by Overland Partners of San Antonio, is an outstanding example of this (figure 6.30). The award-winning building was erected in 1998 as a worship center and began serving also as a performance venue in 2002. The Riverbend Centre (as it is now known) hugs the edge of a rocky hillside overlooking a wooded gorge and neighboring communities. The architects successfully integrated the native limestone cladding into the base of the building to afford an organic quality that makes the center appear to grow right out of the hillside (figure 6.31).



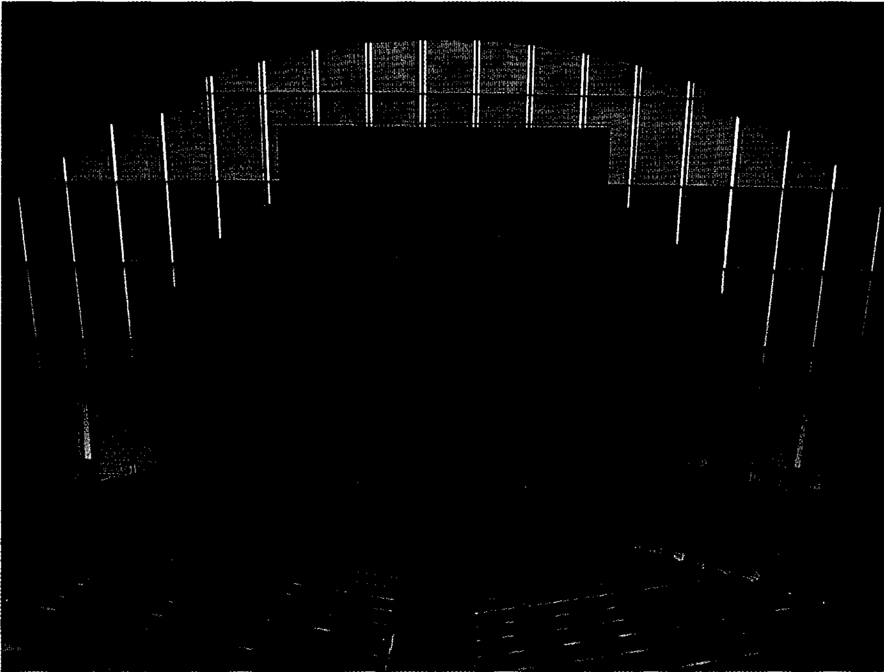


Clockwise from top left: Figure 6.30. Riverbend Church in Austin, Texas; Figure 6.31. Native stones near entry points lend an organic quality to the design while harkening back to the archetype of stone as marking sacred space; Figure 6.32. Outdoor gathering area and forecourt to the main entry; Figure 6.33. Semicircular seating area and planter with a tree for shade to mark sacred space.

This stand-alone center is the most recent addition to a campus of facilities, including several educational buildings, a fellowship hall, an administrative center, and outreach ministry facilities. All the buildings in the complex share ample amounts of the native limestone and form a common thread of contemporary southwestern architecture. Many of the adjacent parking lots that encircle the complex are tree shaded and unpaved, furthering the illusion of a campground where the community gathers to worship and learn.

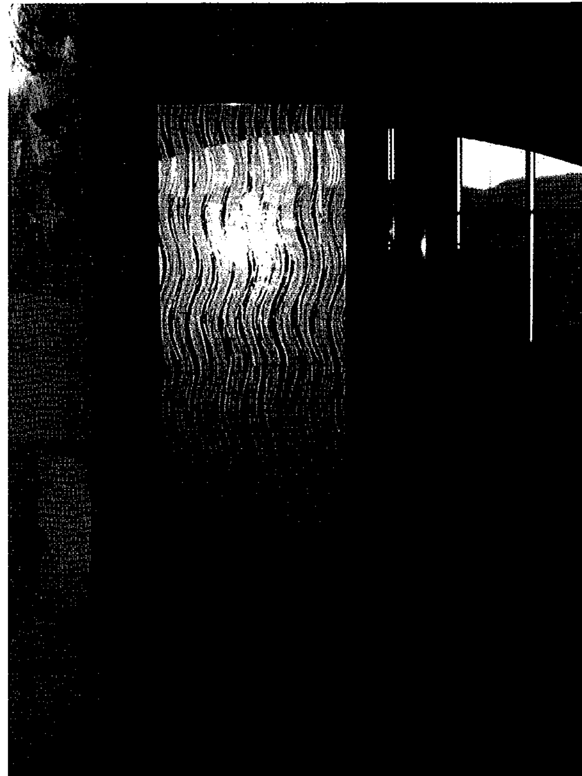
Because of the size of the complex, there are a variety of entry pathways from the parking lots to the main sanctuary. Nevertheless, they all lead to a central gathering forecourt framed by a series of pergolas and featuring the broad stone archway signifying the primary entrance (figure 6.32). Within the forecourt is a simple circular seating area, with a single tree serving for shade and indicative of a sacred place of repose (figure 6.33).

The shallow sloped entry arch acts as a significant marker of place and a distinct portal to the worship space beyond. The numerous wood and glass doors



Left: Figure 6.34. The rear wall of the nave overlooks the adjacent gorge and hillside landscape. Since the Riverbend congregation owns over fifty acres on this site, there is little chance of future structures interrupting their view.

Below: Figure 6.35. The Austin Symphony Orchestra leads a Christmas sing-along.



Above: Figure 6.36. Semicircular ambulatory leading to the many entry points.

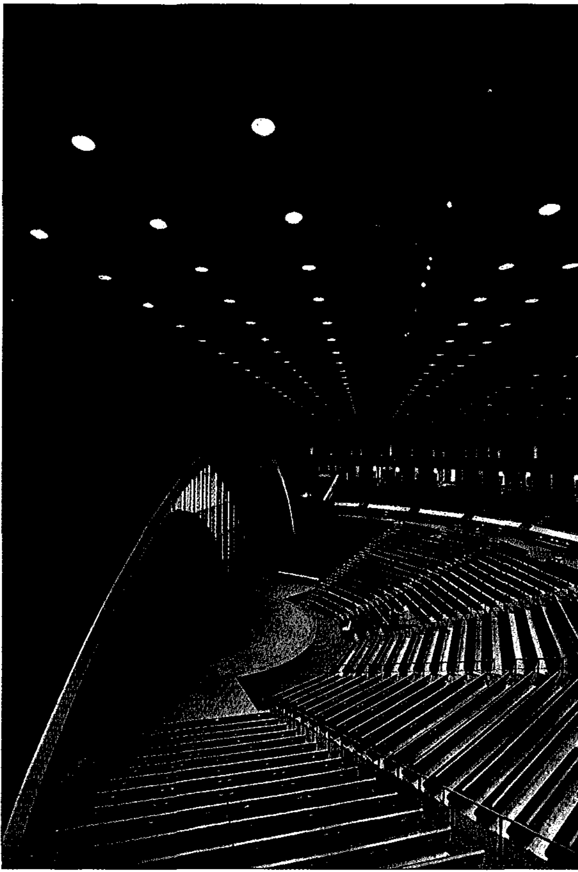
Right: Figure 6.37. The etched waves on the glass connote running water, a reference to baptism for this formerly Baptist congregation.

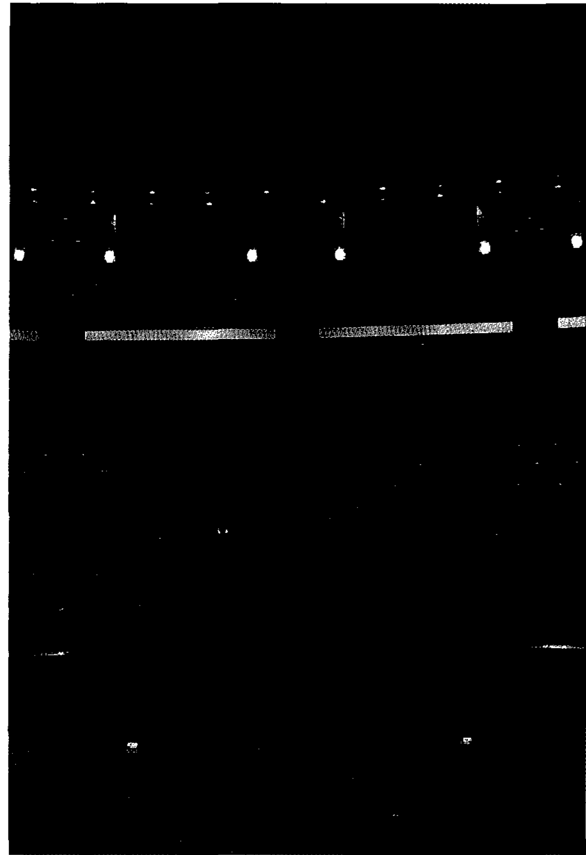
bespeak the volume of persons moving in and out of this center; the nave has a seating capacity of 2,300, and a future balcony has been sized to accommodate another 1,400 people.

Once inside the building, the journey to the worship center is not direct, rather, everyone moves around a semicircular ambulatory. There are multiple entrances to the sanctuary through large wood door portals flanked by glass sidelights etched with a wave pattern suggesting moving water. Walking into the space, one has an immediate sense of the magnitude of the worship room and a very intentional focal point created on the far wall. The archway of the main entry is magnified, framing both the center of worship and the vista beyond (figure 6.34).

The semicircular pattern of the floor plan becomes a completed circle as one views the arched windows and backdrop to the stage. The main platform is intentionally simple and accessible, providing an excellent setting for performances as well as Sunday-morning services (figure 6.35).

While this building serves both for worship and performance, it successfully exhibits ample instances of the sacred. First, the entry sequence leading from the parking lots to the forecourt and gathering area exemplifies the gate, pathway, place sequence. The process is repeated once, passing through the main entries as visitors circumambulate the sanctuary (figure 6.36).





Left: Figure 6.38. All aisles lead to the center stage.

Right: Figure 6.39. Main aisle, as seen from the stage.

Each individual doorway with its etched-glass sidelight reminds those entering of the symbol of moving water, the waters of baptism, and ritual cleansing before entering the realm of the sacred (figure 6.37).

Once inside the space, the radial aisles serve as directional markers to feature the stage as the locus of worship activities. The back wall completely reinforces this directing of attention in a highly marked way (figures 6.38 and 6.39).

Regarding atmospheric ambiguities, the profusion of the seating and the overhead lighting contrast with the stark simplicity of the main stage. The broad arched window behind the stage creates a sharp contrast between light and darkness. As Eugene Walter suggests, "Churches have surfaces that dematerialize the walls or use other techniques to draw the believer into a meditative mood or even an altered state of consciousness."[7]

Finally, the sense of the sacred is also conveyed by archetypal symbols used throughout the facility. The intentionally piled stones at the entries not only suggest the organic quality of the architecture but also refer to stone as a marker of the sacred. The single planted tree in a semicircular seating area within the entry

forecourt is a natural axis mundi, a centering device to mark the sacred center of the cosmos. It metaphysically reminds us of both our earthbound roots and our desire to reach out to the heavens beyond. The image of moving water framing each portal to the sanctuary harkens back to that most fundamental element of water as an element that cleanses before one enters the sacred realm.

Chapter Seven

Marking Sacred Space: Putting the Pieces Together

Chapter 2 presented the definition of sacred space articulated by Eugene Walter in *Placeways* as a specific environment that supports the imagination, nourishes religious experience, and conveys religious truth. It organizes sight and sound, introduces light to present clarity and order, or makes things dark to suggest unseen presences and hidden power. The extent to which the architectural setting can create these things varies, but one intention of this study has been to refine the design precepts to facilitate better architectural solutions.

Having established architectural, archetypal, and atmospheric categories, the question arises as to their relative importance and interdependence. For example, is it necessary to create an architectural setting that addresses each of these categories and its respective subcategories previously described?

Observation suggests these elements are interdependent, both between categories and within the subcategories identified. This interdependence may be observed more by omission than inclusion, confirming the need to address the elements in relation to each other.

In the category of architectural elements, the articulation of gate, path, and place is the most pronounced physical device and perhaps the easiest to accomplish. However, introducing archetypal elements adds a symbolic layer that provides depth to the architectural design. The additional dimension of atmospheric ambiguities sets the stage for the tangible experience of the sacred, an irruption of the extraordinary out of the ordinary.

Exterior Architectural Elements

The sequential ordering of the path experience on the building exterior affords a challenging design opportunity. Framed by the gate at the entry threshold and

place at the terminus, the designs of each site observed emphasize a process of movement, or ritual entry sequence.

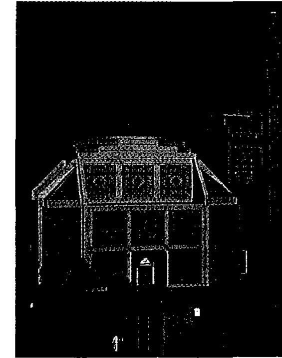
Perhaps the most successful of the examples given in chapter 6 is the Cathedral of Los Angeles, with its clearly defined gated entry, courtyards, pathways, and gardens. The process of moving through the gated entry then ascending the stairs and rampways automatically guides those who enter past water features, sculptures, and gardens into a central piazza. The artistic excellence and monumentality of the entry doors clarify the destination and point of entry. The entire entry experience is rich with artistic imagery, refreshing views, and symbolic content.

The perception of entering a sacred precinct seems to be proportionate with the clarity and significance of the entry threshold. Reducing an entrance to a weakened architectural gesture, a remnant or mere shadow of a traditional form, results in a devaluation of the entry experience. Without the defining moment of entry, the pathway becomes less focused and, therefore, less understood. From observation, the gate must be addressed as a physically imposing experience that marks the start of the spiritual journey beyond.

Addressing *gate* but ignoring *pathway* further reduces the experience of progression. For example, the Islamic Cultural Center has a gated entry enclosure, well defined and artistically executed. However, once it passes through the gate, the pathway as a ritual entry process is abandoned. The simple paved sidewalk from gate to entry doors does not constitute a meaningful passage. Although the building siting skewed from the New York City street grid (figure 7.1) does create some interest, it could be considered an accidental benefit of meeting a theological need for orientation to Mecca. Considering the importance Islam places on ritualized movement, such as the required circumambulation when approaching the Ka'aba at Mecca, it is disappointing to find so little emphasis on the pathway from the entry gate to the main building doors.

Perhaps as the site continues to be developed and landscaped, this deficiency will be corrected. Ironically, at the end of this exterior path the neatly defined geometry of the sanctuary and the massive bronze doors leading to the prayer room underscore an emphasis on place. One recognizes this as a special place because of the extraordinary attention to design and detail.

Charles Moore's design for St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Pacific Palisades, California, resonates with a carefully crafted approach to architectural, archetypal, and atmospheric elements. Nevertheless, some weaknesses in defining the elements diminish the effectiveness of the markers of the sacred. Here "gate" is achieved with an iron stile gate entrance coupled with a bell tower and the pathway loosely articulated by the pergola (see figure 5.3). The physical presence of place, however, is marginalized because the primary approach through the entry court leads one to the side of the building rather than the intended vestibule. The proper passageway into the building is unclear, since the side chapel door makes a more appealing entrance than the rather diminutive entry vestibule (figures 7.2



Left: Figure 7.1. Exterior view of the Islamic Cultural Center. Note the importance of gate and place, but the lack of attention to the pathway.

Above: Figure 7.2. Chapel entrance at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church.

Below: Figure 7.3. Primary entrance at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church.

and 7.3). The confusion over which to enter extinguishes the anticipation built by the journey through the pergola.

Thus, the elements of gate, path, and place are interdependent. Without the gate, the journey has no point of origin and remains unfocused. Architecturally defining the gate but not the path results in a lost opportunity, that is, the spiritual journey must be postponed until one enters the house of worship. Developing the gate and pathway without clarifying or distinguishing the importance of place reduces the expectation for a spiritually fulfilling experience.

Interior Architectural Elements

The ambiguities of the interior design of St. Matthew's are the strength of its design and serve to lead the mind elsewhere. Here, the sequence of entry, path, and place work as a unit and supplemented with the archetypal and atmospheric ambiguities create a fertile environment for the sacredness of space.

The entry in St. Matthew's is through a small, low-ceilinged vestibule off the courtyard. The compression of this passage humbles the person entering and increases the importance of the large volume of the nave beyond. Rather than through a direct or axial approach to the sanctuary focal point (altar table), one enters behind curved pews that automatically redirect the path to the perimeter. This route marks the outline of the sacred precinct.

Traditionally in Episcopal worship, the ritual of the Eucharist is the culmination of the worship service. Therefore, the symbol of that ritual, the altar table with the host and chalice, becomes the focal point of worship. This is the interior *place* described in the review of elements in chapter 3. At St. Matthew's, the table sits elevated on a semicircular chancel platform and is located at the visual and geometric cross point of all the major regulating lines. There are three primary axes radiating from the table, one terminating at the baptismal font, the second at the organ, and the third at a secondary entrance used for informal gathering and reception after worship. The placement of the table is directly beneath the roof crossings and at the intersection of the primary support trusses. All the architectural devices reinforce the importance of this place, from entry to path to altar.

The worship rooms at Santa Maria de la Paz, Adath Jeshurun Synagogue and Riverbend Centre also successfully link entry, path, and place. While the entry sequence at each of these sites is more direct than at St. Matthew's, the placement of pews and the room configuration encourage circular perimeter movement, harking back to the ancient tradition of marking the boundaries of sacred space by walking in a circle at the perimeter.

At the Cathedral of Los Angeles the experience of portal, path, and place is successfully introduced on the exterior and replicated several times in the interior. The sense of anticipation is continually enhanced by "found" places, alcoves with

Figure 7.4. Altar table at the Cathedral of Los Angeles. Photograph by Julius Shulman & David Glomb.

artwork, sculpture, or devotional opportunities that lead the mind elsewhere. When one turns the corridor along the main entrance aisle, at the baptismal area is a sequence of gate, pathway, and place. This cycle is repeated as one revolves to find oneself at the rear of the nave, able to choose from several aisles to the sanctuary and embraced by the many faces of the tapestries draped on either side wall. The altar table and crucifix come into focus, compelling one to move forward to the sanctuary (figure 7.4).

In these observed sites, the organization of portal, aisle, and place in the worship space is addressed far more thoroughly in the interior than on the exterior. The interrelationship of these elements strikes a balance that results in the harmonious worship environments described. Emphasis on each respective element enhances the sequential and ritualized movement into the space. This, then, is the core idea for marking sacred space within the worship room: accommodate ritualized movement by emphasizing the elements of portal, path, and place.

While there is a definite value in placing archetypal elements in the design for houses of worship, some contribute more meaning because of overlapping religious traditions. Invariably, water is the most commonly used element and appears to have the highest visible presence. Whether represented in a lakeside vista, a font to pass upon entry, an etched glass sidelight, or a place for ablutions before prayer, water is an integral theme at synagogue, church, and mosque.

Sky is also omnipresent through the devices of direct or indirect daylighting, clerestory, and overhead skylighting. Many of the contemporary sites observed utilized domes or skylights to bring this representation of the heavens directly into the sanctuary space. At the Cathedral of Los Angeles, the large panels of backlit alabaster contrast with the striking clerestory window framed by the large cross on the south wall over the sanctuary. At Riverbend Centre, the large arched window frames the center of worship.

Fire and earth play smaller roles in all of the reviewed structures, although flickering candles and adobe-style earthen construction are reminders of each. Santa Maria de la Paz in Santa Fe and First Church of Christ Scientist in Berkeley demonstrate this connection with fireplaces in the narthex and gathering areas.

The prevalence of water and sky versus fire and earth may be explained by the religious connotations of these elements that stretch their universal meanings. Water as a purifier and sky representing the heavens have positive symbolic content. Fire, however, may be associated with fear and damnation. Earth may be associated with the darker forces of the underworld or may simply be too pagan for contemporary religious interpretation. Thus, the universality of these four primal elements is constrained by religious meanings that may diminish their presence.

The universality of the axis mundi does not require extensive explanation. Whether evidenced as a bell tower, a steeple, a minaret, or a sky door like the dome at Adath Jeshurun, the axis mundi represents the connections among heaven, the earth, and the underworld. It provides an opening either upward to the divine or downward to the underworld, or world of the dead. The axis mundi has been the most common and visible physical device to mark sacred space. The issue appears to be not whether to include a symbolic presentation of the axis mundi but how best to design it. The design responds to this issue most effectively when it is guided by historical precedent, theological appropriateness, and contextual setting.

The tree, the column, and the mountain are essentially recastings of the same principle of centering and interruptions of ordinary time and space. The stone historically marked sacred place, and it continues to convey that message, as when used dramatically as at the entrance to Riverbend Centre, the font of Santa Maria de la Paz, or with the lintel over the ark doors at Adath Jeshurun.

Since many of the religious archetypes convey similar intent, it would be reasonable to question whether a single, forceful symbolic presentation better serves than several, lesser references. However, at the sites observed, and at St. Matthew's in particular, the overlapping axis mundi gestures of bell tower, symbolic tree, and sky door neither appear in conflict nor do they dilute the content of the others. Additionally, St. Matthew's provides a multitude of ambiguities; yet, the abundance does not overwhelm the space, rather it enhances the intensity of the spatial experience. Because the design recognizes the plurality of the intended users, the congregation, there appears to be something symbolically meaningful for everyone.

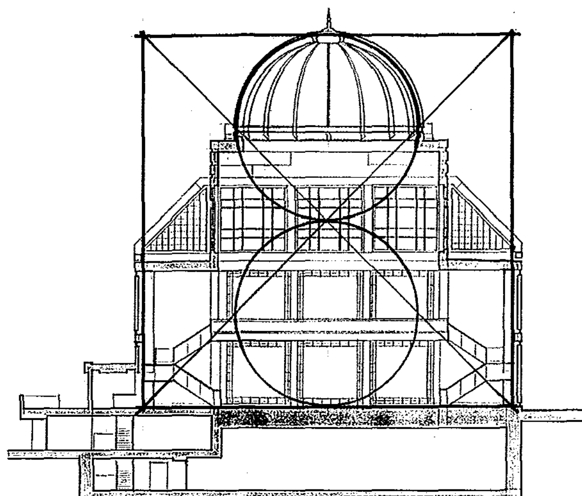


Figure 7.5. Cross-section of Islamic Cultural Center illustrating the dome diameter as one half of the height of the room.
Photograph by Julius Shulman & David Glomb.

There is a very conscious effort to address the issue of geometry at the Islamic Cultural Center and at St. Matthew's. Nevertheless, it is also an integral part of the other contemporary sites, and it consistently plays off the reconciliation of the square and circle. Even the mosque, with its infinite use of squares and rectilinear forms, is capped with a circular dome and lit on the interior by a suspended circle of lamps.

The role of geometry in relation to the other archetypal representations is a subtle undercurrent that proves more powerful as the sophistication of the geometric harmonies grow. The Islamic Cultural Center best illustrates this with two-dimensional representations of the square, reflecting the three-dimensional reality of the cubic volume containing double-height spheres that form the dome (figure 7.5). In the observed sites, integration of "sacred geometries" seems justifiable and desirable. The regulating lines, the axial symmetries, and the repeated presence of recognizable geometry provide an aesthetically and intuitively satisfying clarity and complexity.

Atmospheric Elements

Finally, there are the atmospheric ambiguities (or transitions) that Otto, Eliade, and Walter identified in their writings. These appear the most difficult to include in the design yet are evocatively effective when successfully integrated. The atmospheric ambiguities observed do not necessarily interrelate, and they do not need to. Each stands as a unit of oppositional forces, the spiritual energy transmitted through the dynamic tension between them.

The transition of light-to-darkness is prevalent at each site visited, where very conscious efforts are made to control and manipulate natural light sources (figure 7.6). What becomes apparent is that the "leftover" spaces, such as alcoves and

Figure 7.6. Reservation Chapel, where light and darkness mix to create the sacred, Cathedral of Los Angeles.

unusual junctures, readily result in unique lighting and acoustical conditions. This is particularly evident at the Cathedral of Los Angeles, where alcoves reveal artwork or shrines, providing opportunities for pause and reflection.

In many places, these side chapels, niches, or alcoves appear almost as accidents of the design, yet as special places imbued with the mystery lacking in the larger volume of the naves. The baptismal alcove at St. Matthew's, the wedding chapel at Adath Jeshurun, and the ambulatory at Riverbend Centre are all effective settings for atmospheric ambiguity. Each adjoins the larger spaces but establishes its own character through contrasts of light and darkness or silence and noise.

Thus, atmospheric elements contribute in a meaningful way to creating the sacred environment. Whether occasioned by intent or by accident, their role is evocative; they awaken our consciousness. As Rudolph Otto stated at the begin-

ning of the twentieth century, the sacred cannot be taught, it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind.[1]

Summary

The architectural elements that dwell in symbol and ritual are interdependent. Each aspect of gate, path, and place supports the others. Archetypal elements are independent but subject to overlapping and sometimes conflicting messages. Atmospheric ambiguities stir the senses by setting tone and accentuating the flavor of the worship experience.

The interplay of these three elements (architectural, archetypal, and atmospheric) adds depth and dimension to the worship environment. All of the cited examples employ aspects from all three categories. In fact, architectural markers to the sacred transcend the differences among these diverse faith groups. Only the functional requirements specific to each faith truly distinguish these examples from each other.

Finally, what do the architectural markers accomplish? As symbols of the sacred, they direct attention in a highly marked way, support the imagination, nourish and enhance religious experience, and convey meaning to elicit truth. Simply stated, these elements when combined and crafted with care, make ordinary space *sacred.*

Notes

1. Sacred Places

1. James Swan, *Sacred Places* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1990), 35.
2. Ironically, "taboo" comes from the Polynesian word *tapu,* meaning to make holy. James C. Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 47–48.
3. Thomas Barrie, *Spiritual Path, Sacred Place* (Boston: Shambhala, 1996), 1.
4. Carl G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1938), 63.
5. Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred,* 90.
6. Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1963), 57.
7. Carl. G. Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 20–21.
8. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key,* 41.
9. Ibid., 49.
10. Livingston *Anatomy of the Sacred,* 105.

2. Defining Sacred Space

1. Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1950), 5.
2. Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred,* 56.
3. Otto, *Idea of the Holy,* 7.
4. Ibid., 10, 12.
5. Ibid., 8, 69.
6. Ibid., 7.
7. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959), 20.
8. Ibid., 26.
9. Ibid, 23, 63.
10. Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991), 42.
11. Ibid., 152.
12. Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane,* 27.
13. Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987), 28.
14. Ibid., 108, 104.
15. Eugene Victor Walter, *Placeways: A Theory of the Human Environment* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1988), 72, 75, 76.
16. Ibid., 21.
17. Ibid., 75.

3. Discerning the Elements

1. Otto, *Idea of the Holy,* 68.
2. Walter, *Placeways,* 72.
3. Dennis Edward McNally, "Sacred Space: An Aesthetic for the Liturgical Environment" (PhD diss., New York Univ., 1982), 2–6.
4. Anthony Lawlor, *The Temple in the House: Finding the Sacred in Everyday Architecture* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1994), xiii.
5. Ibid., 56.

6. Ibid., 15, 19, 32, 44.
7. Ibid., 52, 57, 59.
8. Ibid., 64, 72.
9. Barrie, *Spiritual Path,* 38, 52.
10. Ibid., 16.
11. Smith, *To Take Place,* 105.

4. Identifying the Architectural Attributes

1. Theodor Filthaut, *Church Architecture and Liturgical Reform* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1965), 97.
2. J. G. Davies, *Temples, Churches, and Mosques: A Guide to the Appreciation of Religious Architecture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 240.
3. Ibid.
4. Eliade, *Images and Symbols,* 151.
5. Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred,* 63.
6. Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Meaning in Western Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 224.
7. Eliade, *Images and Symbols,* 44.
8. Thomas Moore, *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 32.
9. Robert Lawlor, *Sacred Geometry* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 82.
10. A. T. Mann, *Sacred Architecture* (Rockport, Maine: Element Books, 1993), 34.
11. Jung, *Psychology and Religion,* 74.
12. Lawlor, *Sacred Geometry,* 82.
13. Walter, *Placeways,* 72.
14. Peter Smithson and Alison Smithson, "Working with Shadow: Damascus Gate, Jerusalem," *VIA* 11 (1990): 79.

5. Exploring the Markers of Sacred Space

1. John E. Stambaugh, *The Ancient Roman City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1988), 244.
2. Official Web site of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, www.ArchdioceseSantaFE.org, 2008.
3. Barrie, *Spiritual Path,* 40.
4. Lawlor, *Temple in the House,* 32.
5. Barrie, *Spiritual Path,* 52.
6. Lawlor, *Temple in the House,* 44.
7. Husain Alam, "Representing the Contents of Collective Unconscious in Architecture: An Integrative Perspective" (master's thesis, Penn State University, 1992), 3.
8. Lawlor, *Temple in the House,* 57.
9. Eliade, *Images and Symbols,* 44.
10. Mann, *Sacred Architecture,* 34.
11. Otto, *Idea of the Holy,* 7.

6. Recent Examples

1. Our Lady of the Angels Web site, www.olacathedral.org, 2008.
2. Ibid.
3. Phyllis Richardson, *New Sacred Architecture* (London: Laurence King, 2004), 169.
4. Dominique Browning, *House of Worship: Sacred Spaces in America* (New York: Assouline, 2006), 75.
5. Ibid., 75.
6. Rudolf Stegers, *Sacred Buildings: A Design Manual* (Boston: Birkhauser, 2008), 46.
7. Walter, *Placeways,* 72.

7. Marking Sacred Space

1. Otto, *Idea of the Holy,* 7.

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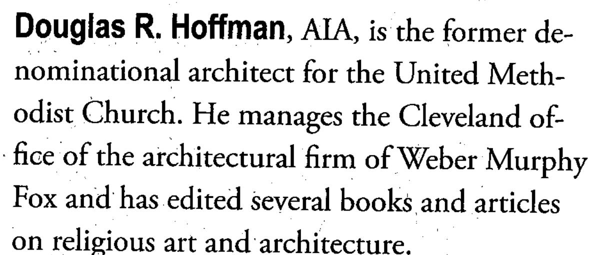

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Front cover, top: Islamic Cultural Center in New York City, main prayer room with its qibla wall facing Mecca, mihrab for directing prayers, and kursi for the Imam to stand on while leading prayers; bottom left: Reservation Chapel, where light and darkness mix to create the sacred, Cathedral of Los Angeles; bottom right: Adath Jeshurun Synagogue in Minnetonka, Minnesota. Sanctuary with its overhead skylit dome and ark on an axis with the center aisle. Photograph copyright Don F. Wong. Inside flap: Riverbend Church in Austin, Texas. Back cover: Cathedral of Los Angeles. Photograph by Julius Shulman & David Glomb.

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