

5 | Twelve Criteria for Sacred Architecture

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THE FOLLOWING ARE A SELECTION OF CRITERIA which either may be presumed to have existed for the designer/builder of the sacred architectural traditions of the past or may be brought to bear on any sacred building as an aid in unraveling its mystery and design. Further, they may be taken as guidelines by which to test a projected design for a future sacred building, and therefore were the concern of the design team for the Lindisfarne Grail during the evolution of form as it developed in 1979 and 1980.

1. As a Mesocosm

*The whole world is the outward form of universal reason.*¹

We take it as a first principle that we not only live in a cosmos but are ourselves a total reflection of this cosmos. After we acknowledge this reflective principle, the next step is to see the necessity of fabricating or expressing a means whereby we can appreciate the unity between ourselves and the whole, and thereby potentially become whole ourselves. This introduces the principle of the Mesocosm, the Temenos or sacred space into which we enter to contemplate the unity between ourselves as creatures and the One we conceive as Creator. This sacred space,

1. This and the following epigraphs are taken from Rumi, *The Masnavi*, in *Teachings of Rumi*, trans. E.H. Whinfield (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1975).

which represents the paradigm of all time and all space, is the Temple. Naturally it is called by the name appropriate to each genuine revelation, be it Shrine, Temple, Synagogue, Cathedral, or Mosque, yet each expression is intrinsically dedicated to the act of contemplation of ultimate reality. This defining of the Temenos or sacred precinct is in itself subject to universal laws and is therefore also a reflection of the cosmos. Thus we call it a Mesocosm, the link between the macro- and microcosmos. The Mesocosm is an instrument by which the part can appreciate the whole and thus appreciate the wholeness of itself.

2.

As an Anthropocosm

*In outward form thou art the microcosm,
But in reality the macrocosm.
Seemingly the bough is the cause of the fruit,
But really the bough exists because of the fruit.*

The Anthropocosm is one of the most helpful concepts to aid our understanding as to the disposition of parts in a sacred space which is integrated through proportion.

In brief, the head, heart, guts, and limbs division of our bodies is fundamental. The limbs are for motility, poise, and communicative work or movement in the world. The head, heart, and guts aspects are symbolic as well as physiological, the symbolism being triadic and interdependent. Thinking, feeling, and willing are one such symbolic triad, based on the body cavities. Facts, values, and execution are another level of expression, while science, art, and technology are another. All are expressions of the fundamental triad of the ideals toward which those three aspects of our being are directed and upon which their most essential appetites are based. The mind is drawn quite naturally to the ideal of Truth; the heart or our values, is quite naturally drawn to the ideal of Beauty; the guts or will is quite naturally drawn to the ideal of the Good. Each affinity in turn gives rise to one of the triads of the conscious modes of approaching reality: skeptically as in the scientific mode, mystically as in the artistic mode, and dogmatically as in the moral or active mode. These are not restricted to the empirical nor to the ideal, but relate to the scale between the two and include both. Meditation is the craft of the soul, the craft being the contemplative refinement of right action.

In the sacred space we find not only the three ideals cogoverning each part and the whole of the design of the building, but also each expressed as a spatial quality, and in certain cases becoming part of the sequential experience of consecutive spaces in the building itself. The Temple is your body as your body is the Temple.

Thus, the concept of the Anthropocosm expresses the appreciation of the essential human condition as archetype and as the expression of the principle of the Mesocosm in reverse. That the Universe is also a living being with soul and spirit is a traditional doctrine expressed more or less in all revelations, but a misunderstanding of this principle in recent centuries has led to quite unwarranted criticism of the anthropomorphizing of the Creator. Limitation to the purely literal interpretation of the traditional doctrines is virtually guaranteed to debase their meaning. William Blake stated, after Dante and Swedenborg before him, that all scriptures have at least a fourfold meaning. The literal level is not incorrect, but is inadequate and misleading if taken as the sole meaning.

3.

As the Intervals between One and Two

*But within the outward sense is an inner secret one.
Beneath that secret meaning is a third,
Whereat the highest wit is dumbfounded.
The fourth meaning has been seen by none
Save God, the Incomparable and All-sufficient.
Thus they go on, even to seven meanings, one by one.*

Fundamentally, this is a musical analogy that expresses the idea of the relation between unity and diversity. Music teaches us that there are basic ratios or intervals defining the principle of the octave within sound. A single note and its recurrence either above or below in the sliding scale of sound subject the human ear to an inherent sense of the rightness of eight intervals—the octave.

These notes, or the intervals between the notes, represent a universal law of eightness—or the profound relation between seven and eight. From this law of the octave are developed the thirteen notes of the chromatic scale, or the relation between twelve and thirteen.

The proportional intervals of sound, which we call tuning, are analogically related to both the sevenfold and the twelvefold progressions

that characterize the natural qualitative divisions between one and two. One represents a point on the scale of sound, two its octave recurrence.

These intervals are expressed not only in the acoustics of any given sacred building but also in the common ground of number as dimension, symmetry, and proportional ratios between elements of that building.

Plato gave us the finest exposition of the relation between musical intervals and the soul in his cosmological dialogue, the *Timaeus*. The analogy between the sacred space and a musical instrument is implied in the sense that wholeness and harmony can be helped by correct tuning. Health has a common root meaning with wholeness and holiness. In canonic tuning there is a consonance between the architecture and our own bodily and psychological perceptions, not least in the attuning of mind and spirit. Atonement affirms this.

4.

As Containing Its Own Soul

*Though earth and water have cast their veil upon us,
We retain faint reminiscences of those heavenly songs.
But while we are thus shrouded by gross earthly veils,
How can the tones of the dancing spheres reach us?*

This refers to the analogical mode of the soul as the perfect form—the sphere. Both as a principle of unity and a model of the cosmos, the sphere represents the ultimate undivided, undifferentiated whole. Each sacred building exists within its own sphere, which is its metaphysical perfection and from which it represents the physical limitation.

As space is to the soul of the sacred building, so the materials are to the body. It does not follow that sacred buildings should be spherical but that the sphere is the primary and essential form from which differentiations take place. From this point of view all solid figures are special cases of the sphere. There are only five mathematically regular solid figures; they bear the name of Plato, who first committed their facts to writing in his *Timaeus*. In this dialogue, analogy is drawn to the geometric mode of the four states of matter/energy and to the fifth as the ground of being or heavenly whole—the ether. For instance, the Cube represents the molecule of earth in the language of Plato, an analogy which contains both the language of spatial crystallization on the one hand (becoming physics on the manifest level) and the symbolic expression of material perceptibility on the other. Thus "earth" is the symbol of the physical

plane. The scale of symbolic allocations of the regular solids relates both to the physical expression as elements and to perceptual psychological bases in the planes of consciousness: the Icosahedron as "water" and the emotional or rhythmic plane; the Octahedron as "air" and the intellectual or ordinative plane; the Tetrahedron as "fire" and the spiritual, inspirational, or intuitive plane; the Dodecahedron as the ether of the divine level and the ontological state that unifies, embraces, and permeates the other four planes or states. Space thus defined becomes a crystalline, harmonic symbol of the psychic modes.

Form in the sacred space is founded on principles emerging from these archetypal forms. The three fundamental proportional scales emerge from the three primary triangular solids. The Tetrahedron gives birth to the $\sqrt{3}:1$ proportional ratio; the Octahedron gives birth to the $\sqrt{2}:1$ proportional ratio; and the Icosahedron gives birth to the Golden Mean proportional ratio of $(\sqrt{5} + 1)/2:1$. Each of these three relates to bodily proportions within the sacred edifice; together they are the means whereby the principal Anthropocosm can be related to the Mesocosm.

5.

As Reflecting the Steps of Jacob's Ladder or the Stations of Wisdom

*Acts, words, and faith are the food of the King,
So that in this ascent one attains to Heaven.*

In all genuine traditions there is the recognition of the stations of wisdom that express the stages of discontinuity in the scale between Heaven (Unification) and earth (differentiation and uniqueness). Jacob's Ladder is such an image or icon arising out of the Abrahamic tradition of the Old Testament. It has been specifically conventionalized into a form upon which certain aspects of the Kabbala are taught. This image is based on a series of ten stages and eleven intervals, with the ten sephiroth or spheres of light placed on a central axis on a model which is called the "extended tree." This tree of knowledge, or gnosis as it is called, is a scheme upon which the ten interpenetrating levels of subtlety of universal laws are demonstrated. These levels represent the stages, as far as they are defined or definable, of the ascent of the soul to reintegration with its Creator, which may be described as a state of complete unification.

These stages are more or less explicit in the design of a sacred edifice.

As Parts Relating to the Whole and to the Subtle Body

*Its glory is not derived from stones or mortar,
But from being built without lust or strife.*

The parts of any building must by necessity relate in some way to the whole of that building. The significance or profundity in this relationship is dependent upon the subtlety and state of being and knowledge of the designer or designers. However, even this is not enough, as the most profound sacred edifices are also expressions of the fulfillment and perfection of the art of building and craftsmanship. The mark of all truly sacred and profound buildings is an integral dependency and interdependency of part to whole, of design to execution, and of theory to practice.

In the Hindu tradition it is expressly stated that the souls of both the donor and architect are inseparably involved in the success of the final form. This involvement of the subtle bodies of those responsible for the Temple brings the responsibility into a life or death relationship with the Temple's form. The subtle body works on laws of its own which we can take in this instance as those principles that ensure the integration of the spiritual and physical planes. In fact the soul itself can be described as the linking factor between the timeless domain of pure principle and the bodily domain in time—hence its vital significance. The role of the subtle or psychological body is to relate the whole through a direct connection with the spiritual domain.

As the Heart of the Community

When the body bows in worship, the heart is a temple.

Although a hermit's humble cottage or cell is as profoundly a sacred space as a magnificent cathedral or temple, this in no way diminishes the fundamental symbol. The very sacredness or dedication to spiritual values of such a dwelling is as much the heart of the community in the intrinsic spiritual sense as a more obvious major edifice which is also the visual center, such as the cathedral church of a medieval Christian town.

This symbol of the heart is analogically connected to the sun in our solar system—the source of life and light. In the sense of spiritual

nourishment, the divine liturgy and meditational activities which realize the divine presence within the daily life of the hermit-monk and the community are as vital as any bodily nourishment. From the spiritual perspective, such activities are fundamentally vital because they represent the link between the source of the creative order and the creative order itself—a link as vital in the subtle sense as the flow of blood to every tissue in the bodily organ. The analogy of the permeation of spirit to the permeation of blood in the body relates to the Platonic Christian term *perichoresis*, which specifically defines the total permeation of all matter by spirit as the maintaining principle. This cardinal maintaining principle is the only guarantee that all creation is not either dissipated through the action of the proceeding principle or withdrawn completely due to the returning principle—these principles together comprising the fundamental threefold aspect of the creative unity itself.

In summary, whether the heart of a community is the religious hermit or holy man of the village, or whether it is focussed in the divine liturgy of the central temple or cathedral, the important factor is the spiritual presence represented in either case. Sacred space is, so to speak, designed to be as irresistible as possible to spiritual and intelligible presence—the locational heart in the spatial sense and the central organ for the dispensation of grace in the metaphysical sense.

8.

As a Grace-Receiving Space

What is first in thought is last in act.

Thought is the special attribute of the Eternal.

That product goes forth from heaven very swiftly.

The word most appropriate for spiritual presence is *grace*. The grace-receiving space is therefore the space that is specifically designed with the intention of being a receptacle capable of receiving the blessing of spiritual presence. Grace can be variously described as state of consciousness or a state of understanding or a state of serenity out of which specific psychological energies flow. These states have the effect of aligning one's way of life, or the communal life, which results in a more wholesome and enriched existence. Descriptions of grace in itself are not possible, since it is a cause which is effective in a multiplicity of unique ways, yet the common factor is a life-enhancing positivity and sense of rightness and affirmation.

In the Hindu tradition it is stated that if the proportions of a sacred image or building are correct then worship is not only permissible but most likely to be effective. The accent is more on proportion and less on form. Grace cannot be legislated for, yet canonic rules are a common occurrence, like prayer formulae, which the perennial philosophy and the lives of the saints affirm to be effective.

9.

As the Integrality of Permanence and Change in the Time Dimension

*You issue from God's attributes at first;
Return again back to those attributes with all speed! ...
You begin as a part of the sun, clouds, and stars,
You rise to be breath, act, word, and thought!*

There is nothing more timely than the timeless, as S.H. Nasr has said. An understanding of time as the flowing image of eternity is fundamental to understanding the way in which the outer form of a sacred building relates to its inner essence. Traditionally there have always been inner, intrinsic, and hidden rules which govern consciously or transcendently the layout of outer forms of sacred spaces. These rules are expressed through number, geometry, harmony, and the laws of cosmology.

Architecture has been called frozen music, an analogy bringing out the static mode of the principles of harmony in built form, in contradistinction to the necessity of the time dimension for the expression of music. As music is to moving time, architecture is to eternity; through this analogy the principles of harmony common to both can be appreciated as symbolizing the archetypes outside time and reflected in time.

In a similar way the center of sacred space is without dimension, as the central moment of time is without duration. The architecture of the sacred frames the paradigms of both space and time *in potential*. The unfolding from the center of space sequentially reveals the three dimensions, and the periodic repetition of the moment unfolds the dimensions of duration. By analogy, the inner harmonic laws of architecture in time unfold from the architectonic principles outside duration. Thus style and cultural expression are the outer manifestation of principles, laws, and proportionals that are timeless and styleless. Nevertheless, principles cannot exist without manifestation and manifestation cannot be formed without principle, so the two are inseparable in reality. Therefore, we

cannot posit a syncretic archetype outside or separate from the precise emergence of the specific sacred edifice in its time. The hidden cannot be the revealed, as the revealed cannot by definition be the hidden; therein lies the mystery of unity in diversity and the paradoxical nature of unity, as well as the unquestionable rightness of each unique sacred edifice of each unique revelation.

10. As Placing

*Distance and nearness affect only the body
What do they matter in the place where God is?*

In a similar way that time is the flowing image of eternity, place is the unique expression of all space, and the means whereby we can experience the conditions of pure space. Each place is unique yet answers as a central point to the three dimensions of all spatial differentiation. To experience the significance of space as a sacred center, each person is encouraged by the design of the sacred place to experience simultaneously the uniqueness of his or her situation and the unifying significance of this place with all places. Hence each experiencer of the sacred space becomes not only central to his or her own ground of being but potentially becomes absorbed into the totality and thus oblivion of all space—a state of nondifferentiation. In this way each place within the sacred area is a potential source of identification with the essence of the individual and with the creative principle itself. To be “placed” is to know where one is in every sense of the word. To be centrally placed gives one a balanced view of the conditions of existence—hence the value of symmetry in the sacred edifice.

11. As Canonic Proportion

*But if you want an instance of this secret knowledge,
Hear the story of the Greeks and the Chinese.*

The essential role of canons of proportion is to develop a state of being or a state of mind that is poised between the principles of existence and existence itself. There are a variety of ways of describing this proportional

thinking and action: entunement, atonement, right action, and so on. It is also based on the perennial wisdom of the sages who set out rules for conduct that release the spirit rather than imprison, that reduce the numbers of laws of cause and effect rather than increase them. Canonic law is traditionally based on objective laws of harmony, cosmology, number, and geometry which act as a framework for the multitudinous melodies of individuality to discover the common scales on which all melodies are based. All of the senses by which we must experience the physical world have canonic prescriptions which aid the transmutation of impressions into perception, perception into knowledge, and knowledge into wisdom.

It is also an axiom of the oral tradition that each realization of the universal laws requires a unique channel, since realization is based on the co-necessity of the unique and the unified, the part and the whole. Canonic prescription links the knower to the known, the participant in knowledge to the principle of knowledge.

The ancient wisdom would posit that a knowledge of canonic laws is not necessary to an existence but that an access to the significance of existence would require an understanding of canonic law. The true meaning of tradition lies in this knowledge—tradition here meaning that core of truth that is “pulled through” the multifarious outpourings of history, that which makes the permanent knowable in the midst of the changing.

12.

As that Wholeness Embodying the Highest Knowledge Available to be Carried within the Form for Future Generations

*The knowledge of men of heart bears them up,
The knowledge of men of body weighs them down.*

A sacred edifice in the highest or fullest sense is a crystallization of the principles of the civilization that it expresses. This means that the frozen melodies are available, so to speak, to the conscious awareness of any receptive experiencer, regardless of time. The experiencer becomes the musician who is able to release or appreciate the meaning within the sacred building. In this way it is as true to say that a magnificent cathedral is built as much for the single individual's enlightenment as it is for the

experience of a collectivity. It also follows that the wholeness of the edifice or its decay, mutilation, or remodeling in time has a direct bearing on the fullness or lack thereof of the experience of the indwelling spirit. Yet it is also true that even a fractional part can release the significance of the whole to the timely meeting of a receptive soul. Essential knowledge in the sense intended here signifies an understanding of what it means to be fully human: that is, from a theological or wholeness perspective, a cosmological perspective, and an anthropological perspective. Each leads to an integral state of being as well as an outward harmonic expression. This essential knowledge simultaneously answers the three major challenges: How did things arise? What is their nature? How will they resolve? The answers lie not in particular details but in laws that govern particulars, intangible laws that become clad in more or less clarity with the particulars of the age. Such answers specifically unite the outer with the inner, which is the key to the integral state of harmony.

Finally, the definition of a profane space is one that is seen as a falling short of this ultimate knowledge of expression: either a willing or ignorant denying of the principle of wholeness and thus of the realization of the state of integrality. It is not necessarily in opposition to sacred space, but rather a partial state and "false ceiling" to the wholeness of things.

From the perspective of wholeness all space is sacred: it is up to each of us whether or not this is realized. This is the real meaning of *response-ability*.