

To the Centre of the Sky: Polar Symbolism and Sacred Architecture

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Perhaps I could have more appropriately called this paper "From the Center of the Earth to the Center of the Sky," as there is a sense of interpenetration that lies at the heart of its matter that can be easily overlooked if we think of the relationship as merely unidirectional. The union between Earth and Sky is *performed* in sacred spaces. The pole, in its terrestrial and celestial aspects *tethers* the Earth and Sky. In the fourfold, these are indispensable elements of the ways in which we *dwell*. That Earth and Sky belong together is of vital importance for human dwelling, and the manner in which they are related lies at its very core. Earth and Sky cannot be thought except in relation to each other, and the two are always in tension. I submit that the ways in which we represent the connection between the two has everything to do with polar symbolism. My aim here is to lay out the importance of the symbolism of the center or pole both terrestrial and celestial, and the ways in which particularly in the Gothic cathedrals the two are brought into relationship with each other, forming a nexus between the earthly and the divine. While Heidegger may seem to fall to a certain extent into the background in the face of the phenomenology of the cathedral and the pole, I think that what lies essentially at the center of this project is his notion of the indwelling of the fourfold in our built spaces: not just our temples, but our homes and offices, factories and theatres, roads and bridges as well; in all of the edifices we erect and the spaces we open up. Heidegger's late thinking brings to the fore our dwelling as a way into the question of Being, which is the fundamental question of Dasein, the being which interrogates its own Being, and which we ourselves in each case are. (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 1962, 67) In this paper, I will attempt to use Heidegger's fourfold and the symbolism of the pole to reciprocally explicate each other: to deploy each to open up a field in which the other comes to the fore in greater coherence. If we keep in mind the role our dwelling plays in making our own Being susceptible to interrogation, we can

begin to await the divinities here on earth in a profound way, and make all of our dwelling places sacred space.

I will attempt in this paper is to bring together the thinking of Heidegger on the fourfold with some of traditionalist thinker René Guénon's notions of the sacred pole in relation to the topology of the Gothic Cathedral. At first blush, this may seem an odd pairing: Guénon is deeply committed to precisely the metaphysics which Heidegger's work seeks to undermine and deconstruct. His language is essentially Scholastic, and stands in almost diametric opposition to Heidegger's attempts to think something in closer proximity to the open question of Being. Yet, the two share a sense of the divine and the relationship of finite beings to the sacred. Demonstrating the complementarity of these thinkers will hopefully contribute the understanding of both. My argument should imply neither that Heidegger is a crypto-metaphysician nor that Guénon is insufficiently invested in his metaphysical claims.

By no means is my focus on the Gothic Cathedral as a site for the revealing of dwelling in a particular way meant to be a claim for the centrality or superiority of that form of sacred architecture peculiar to the Roman Catholic Church or its accompanying dogmatic and sectarian agendas: I would hope that my claims in fact go beyond the particularity of Christian sacred space and certainly of the unique manifestation of it in the Middle Ages.

I. The Fourfold

The language of Earth and Sky is a conscious reference to Heidegger's notion of the fourfold that is most cogently laid out in the late essay *Building Dwelling Thinking*. First, what does Heidegger mean by the fourfold? Simply put, the elements of Earth, Sky, Divinities and Mortals form the basis of our authentic dwelling as human beings. This is admittedly a sweeping statement: for Heidegger, these four elements cohere in all things and

constitute our stay among them. When Heidegger refers to these four, he is investing them with extraordinary power and importance. Just as when the medieval alchemists spoke of the elements of Air, Water, Earth, and Fire they did not mean the ordinary substances that we encounter every day, but rather the principles that underlie particular qualities of things; so too does Heidegger mean more than just soil and air when he speaks of Earth and Sky. This is not to say that these withdraw into the realm of the merely allegorical or symbolic. This would be to introduce a reductionist element of representation into Heidegger's thought which as we shall note below is fundamentally out of place. Each of these elements has about it something sacred.

"Earth," he nearly chants, "is the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal." (Heidegger, *Building Dwelling Thinking* 1977, 351) Earth for Heidegger here is so much more than a sphere of rock orbiting around an unexceptional star. Earth refers to the whole of the world of nature, of *physis*, that which springs up of its own accord. In the background I think we can certainly hear the echoes of the distinction between *physe onta* (natural things) and *techne onta* (artificial things). Earth is the whole of this seething, writhing world of change and growth. Earth is not simply a platform upon which we walk, but rather that which nourishes and protects us, and ultimately the place in which we dwell and face our mortality.

So too the Sky is more than the just the atmosphere. His invocation is similarly poetic: "The sky is the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing, moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year's seasons and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, the drifting clouds and blue depth of the ether." (Heidegger, *Building Dwelling Thinking* 1977, 351) In order to think the Sky along with Heidegger, we must take ourselves out of our

ordinary mindset and approximate something like the awe with which ancient peoples must have experienced the Sky: it is the world of the gods, transcendent and sacred like themselves, but also like them subject to the limitations of finitude and history. The Sky for all of its unreachable beauty is still determined by fate, still set in its course by necessity. Earth and Sky name not objects of scientific inquiry, but primordial deities.

The Divinities and the Mortals round out the four: these mirror Sky and Earth, and the parallels are clear: the Divinities are the deathless ones; the Mortals are, simply, we human beings in all our frailty and precariousness.

In "Building Dwelling Thinking," the fourfold functions to explain our authentic and appropriate dwelling: we *save* the Earth, *receive* the Sky. In doing so, we *initiate* our own nature as Mortals and *await* the presence of the Divinities. It calls us to a particular kind of activity, an activity which opens up a space in which these elements can be secured and safeguarded. This activity is building. Not just the erection of edifices, the laying of stone upon stone, but also the creation of a space wherein dwelling can take place. This building is a kind of cultivation: a uniquely human activity that makes something possible, creates a space for something, but does not *make* something happen. When I cultivate a plant, I make it possible for it to grow and to become what it is. Without me, the plant will not come to fruition. At the same time, though, I do not make the plant as I would craft a piece of furniture or forge a sword. I build and dwell when I make a space where "things are let be in their essence." (Heidegger, Building Dwelling Thinking 1977, 353)

When we let the fourfold itself be, it appears in its own essence. The fourfold properly speaking is a unity, "[t]he simple oneness of the four." (Heidegger, Building Dwelling Thinking 1977, 352) We build in order to make possible the cohering of the fourfold, the experience of it not as four, but

as one. Our proper dwelling binds together the fourfold in order to make it manifest in our experience of the world. It cannot be drawn simply to one element or another. This is particularly, though not uniquely, true of our building of sacred spaces: they are explicitly oriented toward the sky and the divinities, in both their ornamentation and their theological purposefulness. However, they must also be places that form gathering points for a human community, places where people can come together to share in the social interaction that is an essential part of what it means to be human, and these buildings must take account of the landscape of physical space as well as the natural world by which they are enfolded, and make present. What our authentic building and dwelling does is create a space in which we can have a free relationship without ourselves and our own being. As it opens up, it opens us up to ourselves and to the beings among which we have our stay in the world. Only in and through this engagement can we even begin to do what we do in our essence: interrogate the Being of beings.

In thinking about the fourfold, it is important to acknowledge that it is not some special form of engagement that we create, not something technological or manmade that is deployed for some particular purpose: it is part of our own essential nature. It occurs properly not under unusual or extraordinary circumstances but rather in our "staying with things" (Heidegger, *Building Dwelling Thinking* 1977, 353) in our everyday lives. If in some sense it appears as exceptional, that is only because we ourselves have lost touch with our inmost essence, because we have ceased to be what we authentically are: builders and dwellers. Neither is it one form of structuring among others: it is something *primal* and *primordial*. There are not several fourfolds or different fourfolds in differing circumstances. It is *the way* in which we properly dwell. The elements of the fourfold are not incidental or arbitrary: they form a fundamental unity that determines our experience of our own human being. Our human being is *Da-sein*, to be in

place, to be in a place, to dwell and linger among the beings that make up a world.

The idea of the fourfold is typical of the quasi-mystical turn that Heidegger's work increasingly takes in the wake of the Second World War. This is not to relegate Heidegger's later work to the realm of nebulous speculation and imprecise musings or new-age meanderings. Take for example the deeply logical and rigorous 1953 essay *The Question Concerning Technology* which nonetheless bears the hallmarks of the mystic. One can see in the call to authentic or holistic dwelling a proleptic answer to the problem of "enframing" which Heidegger will identify as "the essence of modern technology." (Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* 1977, 328) This enframing reduces our experience of the world to one in which all things appear as resources to be made use of, in Heidegger's words as "standing-reserve." (Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* 1977, 329) One of the clearest effects of this enframing is our loss, in the modern world, of our sense of the sacred. In a world where nothing that cannot be reduced to quantity has meaning or significance, the sacred or transcendent is relegated to a position of at best irrelevance, if not unreality. The sacred in the modern world becomes a luxury item, something with which we can just as well do without. The mode of dwelling Heidegger outlines is a call to embrace the sacred in our material world, to open up a space for the divine. At the end of the day, it is this that is at the heart of our authentic dwelling: the cultivation of a relationship with that which reaches beyond the grasp of calculative reason, a free relationship to our inmost Being.

II. Sacred precincts

The building of sacred precincts which explicitly are founded to cultivate that relationship, to hold up the human to the divine, the celestial to the terrestrial, illustrate our connection to the fourfold that Heidegger lays out in *Building Dwelling Thinking* in the most explicit and

arguably the highest form. In circles, temples, and churches we gather together, we belong together, to await the coming of divinity, to lift our gaze up to the sky. In our building of these sacred spaces we make room for the indwelling of the spiritual in the material, we open up and allow the Sky to be present to us in its essentiality. More than our homes, our businesses, our bridges and roadways, our temples are the places wherein we dwell in the highest sense.

We expect in some regard that in these spaces we are free from the enframing action that we identified above as so problematic, which has lead us so far away from our own Being. In sacred space we see a site where we are set free in a profound way into our own essential, that is spiritual, essence. In order for us to dwell authentically, there must be a space made open for us to have the free relationship to Being that we are called to in the fourfold. One form of this relationship is religiosity, but we cannot simply reduce the spiritual engagement that we call a relationship with Being to the religious impulse or ecclesiastical practice. One of the most cogent criticisms of institutionalized religion is that it has become fundamentally materialistic, misunderstanding the spiritual nature of human dwelling. Modern churches have become money making corporations, synagogues charge admission for the celebration of High Holy Days, and the airwaves are filled to the brim with evangelists pitching for a larger share of the faithful's almighty dollars.

Our temple precincts are *explicitly* sacred in ways in which our everyday buildings are not. While Heidegger would certainly object to the metaphysical interpretation of these sacred spaces and the radical distinction between the sacred and profane, we nonetheless experience these spaces differently than other forms of building. This should not be taken to imply that it is only in spaces specially constructed or erected for worship or sacred rites that we experience the profundity of spiritual being: in

fact, quite the opposite is true. Our experience of sacredness, of the divine, should occur as much in our homes and businesses, interpenetrating our everydayness. Ultimately, what is at stake is the center of our own dwelling, that around which our dwelling orbits. When we pigeonhole the sacred into a safe and secure frame, separated from the rest of our encounter with the world, we deprive it of its fundamental value in opening up ourselves to questioning. This can occur in any space, be it a sacred circle, a church, a temple, a home, an office, a factory, a bridge: any locale that has a center offers us the possibility of the opening of the place of questioning.

The place for the sacred in any space, and particularly in any building, is the center: that which is undisturbed, at rest, at peace, still. "Ritual orientation...the direction toward some spiritual center, which, no matter what particular center it may be, is always an image of the true 'Center of the World.'" (Guénon 2001, 51) It is this center which forms the connecting thread between the Earth and the Sky, which allows the Sky to be present on the surging growing Earth.

In the center of the home, which would seem to be the most obvious place of our dwelling, we find the hearth, sacred to Hestia, the goddess of the home. Hestia is the representation of the center of the home, the *oikos*, in the midst of the world of the *polis*. She is a figure of both the center and the manner in which the center has become occulted or marginalized in the modern technological world. Clearly at this point we could expand this discussion to include the gender politics of Hestia's occultation or the ways in which the private is increasingly decentered in the technological and economic world. These, however, are beyond the scope of this article. This pole, no matter how hidden, how cast off from our everyday concerns, remains, nonetheless.

In the temples, we find in the center the holy of holies, the *sanctum sanctorum*, the altar upon which we offer our prayers and sacrifices up to the sky. This center is protected from profanation by those who are unworthy to enter: in the case of the temple of Solomon, only the Hebrew High Priest could enter, and that only on one day of the year. The altar stands at the symbolic center of the temple. The altar is the conduit from the Earth to the Sky, from our world to the world of the gods: it is the altar that allows the divine to be present, which brings the sky within the built precincts of stone. The erection of the stone altar by Jacob at Beth-El (the house or dwelling of God) is recounted in Genesis 28: Jacob has a vision of God in a dream, and when he awakes, he exclaims "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the gate of Heaven." So he places a stone as a pillar to mark the spot and anoints it with oil. This action has mythological cognates across a number of different cultures, with remarkable similarity: the black stone of the Kaaba, the symbolic representation of Cybele, the Asiatic Mother of the Gods and symbol of supreme sovereignty by a conical black stone, the *menhirs* of the Celts and the stone altars at Delphi all have a similar symbology. (Guénon 2001, 59) These altar stones all represent a fundamentally polar symbol as we shall see below: they mark a point that is to be taken as an open center, representing the axis of the Earth. At the same time, they gesture toward the Sky, forming a link between the two, as indicated clearly by the Genesis narrative. The spot where Jacob chooses to erect his sacred stone is at one and the same time the Dwelling place of God on Earth and the entryway to the celestial Kingdom of Heaven.

III. The Pole

This gesture of establishing on Earth these sacred stones moves, as by a signpost or line of longitude, from the center of the Earth to the center of the Sky: from the Omphallos or world-navel to the representation of divine immutability, the sun, pole star or galactic center. The symbolism of the center as the eye of the storm, that which does not move while all around it does, which guides and directs movement without itself moving, is simultaneously the geographical or celestial pole and the divine unmoved mover. Rene Guénon rightly observes that "since the world rotates around it, the center in question is the fixed point that all traditions refer to symbolically as the 'Pole,' generally represented by a wheel among the Celts and Chaldeans as well as the Hindus." (Guénon 2001, 10)

The center of the World, the *axis mundi* has been the subject of mythology throughout human history: it is among the most abiding stories, and cuts across times, cultures, languages, religions and peoples. It can be represented as the earthly Paradise, the Garden of Eden, Mount Zion, or the New Jerusalem.

One element that is notable is that most descriptions of the pole make reference to its being somehow not, as one might imagine, immediately present. The pole is at one and the same time the center of all things and hidden from us, just as we saw with the marginalization of Hestia. We are expelled from Eden, we are exiled from Zion, we await the New Jerusalem. Thinkers like Heidegger and Guénon would see in this symbolism a reference to our alienation from our essential Being. We have lost our own spiritual center. Therefore, the occulted pole is a symbol of the rootlessness of the modern world. Our technologically enframed experience of beings in the world leaves us fundamentally without a stable center. The pole, the center of the world,

is that clearing in which we are opened up to beings, where they come forth in their presencing. It calls to us to find our way back to it.

At the center of the world is always a stone or mountain. As we saw in the account of Jacob's encounter with God, his immediate impulse upon discovering the sacred quality of the place in which he stood was to erect a stone. In Hindu and Buddhist symbolism, the center is the dwelling place of the King of The World, located in the sacred hidden city of Agarttha. From this spiritual center the *Brahmatman* or King of the World directs all that happens on Earth. The stories of the Kingdom of Prester John, the Old Man of the Mountain, Shangri-La and even of the polar dwelling of that most mysterious figure, Santa Claus, are all echoes of this primordial mythology. The mythology holds that prior to this age in which Agarttha became occulted, it bore the name of *Paradesha*, clearly etymologically related both to the Hebrew term *Pardes* (the center of the world) and also to Paradise. Guénon recounts this extensively in his "The King of the World," in which he lays bare much of the spiritual meaning of the center of movement in a myriad of forms. The King of the World, the head of the initiatic order headquartered in Agarthha represents the mediation between the Earth and the Sky, between the realms of the earthly and the divine. He is the terrestrial representation of the head of the angelic hierarchy, *Metatron*, the "Angel of the Face" or "Angel of the Presence." Of the King, Guénon writes, "we readily say that just as the head of the initiatic hierarchy is the 'terrestrial Pole,' so *Metatron* is the 'celestial Pole;' the latter his reflection in the former, with whom he stands in direct relation through the 'World Axis.'" (Guénon 2001, 18)

This mythology is present extensively throughout the Hebrew and Islamic traditions: Moses is referred to in certain Sufi traditions as "*al qutb*," the Pole of his time. Similarly the whole of the mythology of Solomon's temple, which became the narrative focus of Freemasonry, orbits around the

"Holy of Holies" at the heart of the temple which is the dwelling place of the *Shekinah*, the manifest presence of God. The Tabernacle is an image of the *Pardes*, the center of the world, and "is therefore called in Hebrew *mishkan*, or 'dwelling of God,' a word having the same root as *Shekinah*." (Guénon 2001, 15) Just as for Heidegger the fourfold cannot be simply understood as a symbolic representation of aspects of our dwelling, the enclosure of the Ark of the Covenant is not for the Hebrews a symbolic representation of the presence of the divine but the real and manifest dwelling place of God. The image of Jerusalem, the place of peace, so important as a fixed place of dwelling for an essentially nomadic people, recurs almost obsessively in relation to Zion, the sacred city-mountain, the ultimate static dwelling place both of the Hebrews and their God.

In the Christianized west, the symbolism recurs both in the Revelation to St. John and in Arthurian and Grail legends: the grail itself is often represented as a stone, or as being fashioned from a stone. Some stories tell that the grail was carved by the angels from an emerald that fell from the Crown (or the forehead) of Lucifer at the fall. This stone is therefore symbolically erected at the spiritual center of the world: from it flows the "cup of salvation," the blood of Christ. The Arthurian quest focuses on bringing the stone, the grail, back to a geographic center represented by Camelot and the round table. The table recalls the wheel symbolism so closely associated with the *axis mundi* or Pole.

The descent of the New Jerusalem at the end of the story of Revelation, has as its heart not the temple, which John explicitly notes is missing entirely, but the real presence of God. This is an image of the always awaited proximal presence of the divinities. The New Jerusalem, which descends from heaven to rest on Earth is described repeatedly in terms of stone: it is itself both a cubic stone and adorned with stones. It is the

final stone erected to mark the center of the world, and the union of the terrestrial and celestial centers.

Anatomically, the Pole is represented alternatively by the heart and by the navel. The terms "world navel" and "heart of the world" appear to be generally interchangeable. Guénon recognizes this anatomical symbolism which will become important in considerations of the Gothic cathedral in particular: "The center of this world, which the traditional symbolism of all peoples likens to the heart, [is] the center of the being and the 'divine residence' (*Brahma-pura* in Hindu doctrine)" (Guénon 2001, 15)

In Greek *polos* refers to any sort of pivot, and as such was a mechanical term, used for example to designate part of a wheel, but also to the axis of the heavens, and by extension to the whole of the celestial sphere. In addition to its everyday mechanical use, it is used in the specifically celestial sense, for example by Plato in *Timaeus*. (Plato 1929, 40C) Celestially, the center point is represented either by the sun, the unmoving center of our solar system; by Polaris, the pole-star; by the dark spot in the galactic center; or most frequently, by the wheel of the zodiac. The zodiac is tied through numerical symbolism to the twelve apostles and the twelve tribes of Israel. The tribes are represented by the gates of the New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: the gates surround the central presence of God which fills the whole of the city-mountain with stellar or solar light. In the development of religious symbolism, Polar symbols are often reinterpreted in terms of the Sun, as is strikingly so in the case of the cross and the Swastika, a symbol almost ubiquitous from the far East to Greece and even the Americas. The Swastika for Guénon is "essentially the 'sign of the Pole' [rather than] an exclusively 'solar' symbol, whereas, if it has occasionally become such, this could only have been by accident, as a result of some distortion." More accurately, the Swastika is represented always as whirling, as a symbol of eternal movement: movement, however,

around a fixed and unmoving axis. As such it is completely consonant with other wheel-like symbols. (Guénon 2001, 10-11) We see this image extensively in archaeological sites around the world, predating its appropriation and perversion by National Socialism in the 20th century. Even that use, though, was a reference to the polar symbol: the Nazis were obsessed with the mythology of the Hyperborean or polar homeland of the Aryan race, and the symbol was surely chosen with this in mind. This motif is featured even within the designs of some of the great cathedrals, such as that at Amiens: the floor pattern, next to the famous labyrinth, features several forms of swastika. It is also featured in other Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals and it is to these architectural marvels that we now turn.

IV. Polar Symbols in Christian Sacred Architecture

Christian sacred architecture, and in particular the Gothic cathedrals, are expressions primarily of symbolic and allegorical structures rather than outgrowths of functional necessity. To this extent we may be excused for deploying the rhetoric of symbolism which is absolutely alien, if not inimical, to Heidegger's understanding of the fourfold. Every element of the Gothic cathedral is symbolic, and the whole of the building and the space it encloses, the site in which we find it, is meant to express the relationship of the sacred space on Earth to the divine. In Heidegger's sense, it is a dwelling place *par excellence* not because of its functional or utilitarian component, which nonetheless cannot be denied, but rather because it expresses in its very structure the cohering of the fourfold, and the relationship between Earth and Sky, the mortal and the divine. Implicit in the architectural composition of the cathedral is the polar symbolism which lies metaphorically at the heart of human representations of the sacred and buildings erected to create a site for the presencing of the divine.

In cruciform churches we can very clearly see a representation of the center of all things, the human and divine center which is Christ and which

is symbolized in the cross as the center point at which, in the church, lies the altar. Even in churches which do not have a cruciform floor plan, the symbolism of the cross is still architecturally present. Richard Krautheimer writes that "The term [*similitudinem crucis; in modum crucis*] may possibly have been applied even to round edifices with cross chapels...." (Krautheimer 1942, 8) A round church, such as those traditionally erected by the Knights of the Temple in the late Middle Ages, perhaps more clearly than even the more common cruciform church bespeaks the polar symbolism in its architecture.

Peter Fingesten argues that the principal model for all Christian sacred architecture in the Middle Ages is the description of the New Jerusalem from John's *Revelation*. He writes, "The allegorism of the mediaeval cathedral, its spiritual *raison d'être*, was mainly inspired by Chapter 21 of the *Revelation* of St. John, who 'saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God....' The first five verses of this chapter were customarily read at mediaeval dedication rites." (Fingesten 1961, 4) The Gothic cathedral is meant to represent the spiritual center, and this is indicated in that its topology seems to suggest both a city and a mountain, two figures which we have previously associated with the idea of the Center of the World, and by extension, the center of the heavens. Fingesten continues, "The idea of the cathedral as a sacred city, holy mountain, and center of the earth derives from the Hebrews, and, through them, from the religious traditions of the Ancient Near East, where the symbolism of the mountain of God (ziggurat) was first conceived." (Fingesten 1961, 4)

Fingesten consistently describes the exterior of the Gothic cathedral in terms of the mountainous, and argues that this is a reflection of the scientific and exploratory interest in mountains and stones in the early Middle Ages. "The typical Gothic cathedral 'rises' like a mountain, from the East to the West, towards the tall towers as towards a peak." (Fingesten 1961, 8) The travel by both ecclesiastics and scientists (as though we could

differentiate these two exclusively) through the mountains of Europe and the impact this had on the travelers becomes part of the cultural language of the middle ages. The center of the Earth, the fundamental pole, is represented by this mountain, and so symbolically every gothic cathedral is a representation of the pole: Fingesten cites the description of Jerusalem from the 5th chapter of *Ezekiel* in saying that "it is symbolically the 'center of the nations with countries round about.'" He is perhaps clearest when he writes that "[f]rom it the truth radiates in every direction and around it, like a cosmic axis, everything revolves; thus every cathedral signifies both the physical and spiritual center of the world." (Fingesten 1961, 4) Thus the external topography of the cathedral represents the magic mountain at the center of the world. However the interior structure too has a polar significance, both terrestrial and celestial.

Clearly, in a cruciform church, if we map the *corpus* onto the ground plan, we can see that there is an anatomical correlation to the interior of the church. The central point of the heart that we have identified with the pole marks the location of the high altar, where takes place the sacrifice of the mass. The focus - spiritually, materially, and visually - of the whole performance of the mass is the altar. Again, Fingesten makes the connection between the polar city or Agarttha and the internal structure of the cathedral: "the interior of the magic city should be interpreted in anthropomorphic terms." (Fingesten 1961, 12) The fact that Christ himself in several passages equates the temple and the body lends a scriptural basis to this reading.

Add to this the prevalence of stellar and solar symbolism, especially that of the zodiac - which we mentioned above, and which often seems peculiar in the context of a Christian church - and also the images of the celestial canopy or globe. As we noted above, while the metaphysical implications of symbolism generally are alien to Heidegger's thought, we are dealing here

with structures that are inherently representational. In addition to the explicitly stellar references, "the lights, small roses, and oculi in the eastern elevation represent the rising sun, or the morning star, another symbol of Christ." (Fingesten 1961, 15) The magnificent Rosettes, the most prominent decoration within the Gothic cathedral, spreading their light throughout the nave, similarly represent a central or polar star. Their central point with the radiating spokes calls to mind the wheel or swastika symbolism that Guénon identifies as a symbol of the pole. It is easy to read the rosette as D'Alviella does. He writes, "The Rosette - whether derived from the lotus or any other flower - forms an essentially solar symbol." (D'Alviella 1894, 45) As Guénon has claimed, solar symbolism is often, if not exclusively, a corruption of fundamental polar symbolism which is more universal and more primordial. The sun is only one expression of the pole. In any case, all of these symbols within the sacred precincts, direct our attention from the mutable changeable and ephemeral world that which is unchanging and metaphysically stable. At the same time, they open up for us the possibility of our highest engagement with the sacred, and thereby with our own being.

V. Conclusion

Heidegger suggests that in our most inward dwelling we live in spaces defined by our stay among things which are the coherence of the fourfold. Earth, Sky, Divinities, and Mortals are all bound together in our fundamental experience of having the world, which is to say our finite and limited engagement with beings that take on meaning for us. In our experience of the fourfold we begin to have a world that is shared, a world that intersects in profound ways with the worlds of others, bringing them into our matrix of meaning as more than simply other objects that take on ramifications for us, but rather as beings who share our interrogation of our shared being. In sacred space, we explicitly join together with others and alleviate the

isolation that seems to haunt us as subjects at the center of a world that is merely external to us.

Heidegger writes, "but 'on the earth' already means 'under the sky.' Both of these also mean 'remaining before the divinities' and include a 'belonging to men's being with one another.'" (Heidegger, *Building Dwelling Thinking* 1977, 327) In our temples and churches, mosques and synagogues, at sacred stones and in sacred circles we await the presence of the Divinities. It is in these places that we make the connection between the Earth and the sky, that we experience and are connected to our most essential nature, that of being mortal, that of our "being capable of death as death." (Heidegger, *Building Dwelling Thinking* 1977, 328) We take account of our death, and save the space for our own living. We initiate, and are initiated into, our most essential nature. And we do so among our fellow mortals, together in a community. Together, we are let be.

The symbolism of the pole expresses our longing for that which is unchanging, that which transcends our life here on earth and orients us toward that which is divine. It is a representation of our experience of the eternal in the very midst of our own finitude: it gestures like a signpost pointing from the earth to the sky. It is also no accident that in the pole symbol we find something that is both central and hidden: in our modern world, that which should be the pole of our dwelling cannot be enframed by technology, and is relegated to an inferior position when it is acknowledged at all. It should come as no surprise then, that the topography and interior space of the Gothic cathedrals should represent in this decisive way the symbolism of the pole, celestial and terrestrial; one of the most primordial ways of experiencing the fundamental oneness of the fourfold. In the carved stone of the Gothic cathedral, we see the fourfold laid bare in its most explicit fashion, in beauty, in joy and in grace. We gather around the pole, and make our way from the Earth to the center of the Sky.

We should take account of the ways in which both historically and philosophically the pole shows itself in our relationship to dwelling. What remains to be considered is the way or ways in which this understanding of the fourfold and its importance to our own dwelling as manifested in our sacred spaces can be brought more closely into our own earthly existence.

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