

Yennihi Nguyen

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Essay 4

Christian Sacred Spaces

Sacred space played a vital role in several societies. These sacred spaces symbolized several things for the different eras during the Christian time period. Three examples of sacred spaces during this time frame is the Late Antiquity Old Saint Peter's Basilica (300 CE), the High Gothic Chartres Cathedral (1100 CE), and the Early Byzantine Hagia Sophia (300 CE) by Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorius of Miletus.

Old Saint Peter's Basilica of the Late Antiquity era was built outside the city limits of Rome. The reason for building this basilica outside of Rome's city limits was to prevent conflict between the Romans and the Christians. Saint Peter's was made to purposely imitate the Roman basilicas and audience halls. They did not want their houses of worship to resemble the Roman pagan gods. Although the Romans did not support Christianity, Constantine did. Constantine held a firm belief that the Christian god was the one who helped guide him towards victory over Maxentius. In gratitude, he felt that it was his duty to protect and further advance Christianity throughout the empire.

Saint Peter's made it possible for the Christian followers to freely worship in public. Instead of having to worship in the catacombs secretly like they had previously done before, they had a building that they could come to publicly. Although it was commissioned by Constantine, the emperor of Rome was still required to safeguard ancient Roman religion, traditions, and monuments.

For both social and political reasons, Saint Peter was assumed to be built where several people believed Saint Peter himself was buried. Astounding enough, this church was capable of housing three to four thousand worshipers during one period of time. During this time, worshipping between genders was done separately. Men worshipped in the middle aisle while the women were positioned into the outer sides.

The Chartres Cathedral was originally a Romanesque cathedral. It was burnt down and later on rebuilt to be a Gothic cathedral. From above, this church resembles the form of a cross. Different from the churches before it, Gothic churches had rib vaulting that helped divide the weight of the building. The round arches that were in the Romanesque era were replaced by pointed arches that represented the churches as being Gothic.

Architectural historians consider the Chartres Cathedral to be the first High Gothic building that planned from the very beginning to have the flying buttresses. The flying buttresses helped give the Gothic buildings its vast height that other buildings before it could not achieve. The Chartres Cathedral was able to get its height through the utilization of flying buttresses to help support the enormous weight that comes with building such a tall building such as this one. The ceiling inside would be enormously high as well, giving the people the sense that they are closer to heaven.

The interior of the Chartres Cathedral holds several stained glass windows and is well known for having majority of its original windows still intact. The famous rose window shows that the Chartres Cathedral is indeed part of the Gothic era, and although it may appear to be a massive rose that lacks color on the exterior, it actually is decorated with vibrant colors when seen from the inside. This also applies for the Virgin and Child and Angels window that resides

in the choir of the Chartres Cathedral. This stained glass window lets in light that gives off the feeling of being enlightened and also the sense of being in a holy sanctuary.

Hagia Sophia meant Saint or Holy Wisdom and was considered to be Byzantium's greatest church. It was built as a square building and was then turned into a circle. The dome was symbolic because it was made to represent the dome of heavens. The original dome was not very strong and collapsed due to an earthquake. However, it was quickly replaced with a newer one that was much more durable compared to the last one.

The vast amount of light that encased the inside of this building gave off the feeling much like that of the Chartres Cathedral. The light that engulfs the entire building by flooding the interior completely, gives Hagia Sophia a mystical quality. Light symbolized the presence of God. The light that filtered through the windows allowed the people to feel a closer connection to God because it felt as if he was present in the church with them.

The Hagia Sophia church was set on a base of windows that let light into the building. This gave the dome the feeling of being so light that it appeared to be floating in midair. Justinian architects used pendentives in order to transfer the weight of the dome away from the walls and to the piers beneath them. The sense that the dome appears to be floating makes it seem as if it is other-worldly. Architects gave the Hagia Sophia this illusion of it floating making it uphold the name "Dome of Heaven."

Sacred space was important to several societies because it upheld vital roles. The Late Antiquity Old Saint Peter's Basilica gave the Christians a place to publicly worship their beliefs away from the hateful Romans. The Chartres Cathedral of the High Gothic era was much bigger in size compared to other churches, allowing one to get the sense that they are closer to the heavens. The Early Byzantine Hagia Sophia contains an enormous amount of light that gives one

the sense that God is present at the church. The illusion that it is floating also adds to the fact that the dome itself is heaven on earth.