Article

"'But the Fountain Sprang Up and the Bird Sang Down': Heidegger's Gathering of the Fourfold and the Seven-Sacraments Font at Salle, Norfolk."

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Abstract: My paper analyses the 15th-century seven-sacraments font at the medieval church of St Peter and St Paul at Salle in Norfolk (England). The church guides and gazetteers that describe the font, and the church in which it is situated, owe both their style and content to Art History, focusing as they do on their material and aesthetic dimensions. The guides also tend towards isolating the various elements of the font, and these in turn from the rest of the architectural elements, fittings and furniture of the church, as if they could be meaningfully experienced or interpreted as discrete entities, in isolation from one another. While none of the font descriptions can be faulted for being inaccurate, they can, as a result of these tendencies, be held insufficient, and not quite to the purpose. My analysis of the font, by means of Heidegger's concept of Dwelling, does not separate the font either from the rest of the church, nor from other fonts, but acknowledges that it comes to be, and be seen as, what it is only when considered as standing in 'myriad referential relations' to other things, as well as to ourselves. This perspective has enabled me to draw out what it is about the font at Salle that can be experienced as not merely beautiful or interesting, but also as meaningful to those—believers and non-believers alike—who encounter it. By reconsidering the proper mode of perceiving and engaging with the font, we may spare it from being commodified, from becoming a unit in the standing reserve of cultural heritage, and in so doing, we, too, may be momentarily freed from our false identities as units of production and agents of consumption. The medieval fonts and churches of Norfolk are, I argue, not valuable as a result of their putative antiquarian qualities, but *in*valuable in their extending to us a possibility of dwelling—as mortals—on the earth—under the sky—before the divinities.

Keywords: sacred space; medieval churches; cultural heritage; sacred heritage; seven-sacraments fonts; phenomenology; ekphrasis; Heidegger; dwelling; the gathering of the fourfold

1. Prolegomenon

"FONT. On two steps. The inscription records the donor, who died in 1437. The figures on the base have been chopped off. Against the bowl the Seven Sacraments and the Crucifixion.

FONT COVER. A very tall Perp canopy. Not completely preserved, but very impressive with the remaining fin-like radially set members. The PULLEY on its big arm also survives and is connected with the balcony in the tower". (Pevsner and Wilson 2002, p. 654).

"An interior of immense height and volume frames the crockets of an elegant font cover. This is suspended from a huge bracket projecting from the bell-ringers gallery in the tower, both embellished with tracery. Beneath this cover rests one of the best Seven-Sacraments fonts in Norfolk, its panels excellently preserved. Beneath each scene is a small angel holding the symbol of the sacrament above, such as the scourge as symbol of penance". (Jenkins 2000, p. 546).

"The cover retains traces of original paint, but has lost all the carved work that slid into the grooves that can still be seen in the fretwork. The subjects on the carved panels of the Seven Sacrament font, beginning at the south west corner are: Communion, Ordination, Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, Matrimony, Holy Unction. The eighth panel, facing the west door, is of the Crucifixion. Original paint remains on the crane for lifting the font cover and on most of the ringing gallery rail". A Quick Guide to Salle Church (2016, 30p leaflet at church)

The three font descriptions above come from publications that for visitors to St Peter and St Paul in Salle are among the most likely to have been consulted prior to, or at, arrival at the foot of the font. Gleaned as they are from popular gazetteers (2) and a church guide leaflet (1), they are necessarily brief—and, therefore, incomplete. Only some of the information overlaps, exhibiting a slightly different focus of interest for each author. On reflection it also becomes clear that all three focus only on the material aspects of the font and its cover—their date, style, materials, and state of preservation. While the motifs on the eight panels of the font are mentioned in varying detail in each, none of the descriptions elaborate more generally on the meanings that reside in the forms. They describe the signifier but remain silent about the signified.

While the ocular-centric focus on the material aspects of the font lends the depictions a veneer of objectivity, the value-laden adjectives, such as 'very impressive,' 'one of the best,' and 'excellently preserved,' break through this veneer to reveal a de facto subjective viewing horizon, also suggesting that there is an abstract, ideal form against which this font is being held up for judgement and comparison. The guides' inventories of details also tend towards isolating the various elements of the font and its cover, and these in turn from the rest of the architectural elements, fittings and furniture of the church, as if each could be meaningfully experienced or interpreted as a distinct, discrete substance or entity encountered one after the other, in isolation from each other.[1] This tendency is as old as the Western philosophical project, preoccupied as it has always been with identifying discrete objects and substances as the "building blocks of reality" (Cerbone 2006, pp. 46–47).

The phenomenological project rejects this atomism, arguing instead for the experiential as well as ontological fact of the relationality of all things. While all phenomenologists agree on the importance for sense-making of viewing the world and the things in it as a constitutive unity—that things are what they are only insofar as they stand in particular relationships to other things (and to us)—Martin Heidegger may take the laurel for having made the most of it. He revolts against the idea of the world consisting of discrete substances, perceivable from a position of intellectual detachment and advocates resistance against getting caught up in the "impoverished and impoverishing infinity" of the surface (Sharr 2008, p. 27). I am in sympathy with him in this and shall attempt, in what follows, to offer a reading of the font at Salle that does not separate it either from the rest of the church, nor from other fonts, but acknowledge that it comes to be—and be seen as—what it is only when considered as standing in "myriad 'referential' relations" to other things—as well as to us humans and our various activities and concerns[2] (Cerbone 2006, p. 46). We are, after all, ourselves also implicated in the world and in the things and places we encounter (Malpas 2006, p. 14). We should not mistake ourselves for isolated, neutral agents of observation, but see ourselves as inextricably linked with and sunk into what Juhani Pallasmaa calls the 'flesh' of the world. Once this fact has fully settled in our consciousness, it brings with it a realization that any attempt at apprehending objects objectively and neutrally is delusory.[3] Apprehension cannot be conceived as a matter of merely having our Aristotelian senses give us 'information' about the world around us that we subsequently evaluate and process, but must instead be perceived as a coming into relatedness with things (Šišovski 2013, p. 7; Malpas 2006, p. 15).

While none of the font descriptions can be faulted for being inaccurate[4], they can, I argue, be held insufficient, and perhaps not quite to the purpose. I shall therefore complement the above vignettes with an exposé that aims to draw out what it is about the font at Salle that can be experienced as not merely beautiful or interesting, but also meaningful[5]

to people—believers and non-believers alike—who encounter it. The disclosure I hope to effect can only happen in and through what Heidegger calls poetry. The particular type of 'poetry' I use here is what is generally referred to as ekphrastic writing—in other words, a thoughtful and in-feeling (*einfühlsam*) account that seeks on some level to make sense of existence itself. In Heideggerian semantics, any form of writing that takes what he calls a poetic measure can also be considered poetry. While scientific measuring uses the known as a measure for the unknown, poetic measuring does the opposite: it takes a 'mysterious measure' by using the unknown to measure the known (Šišovski 2013, p. 9). It does this by describing the hidden, the invisible and the absent, using these to create an image of inner—essential—reality, that illuminates the visible and the 'known.' How we measure ultimately of course determines what we see, and what we see determines how we decide to treat what we see. Scientific measuring encourages us to compare a work of art, such as the seven-sacraments font at Salle, (favourably or unfavourably) to other works as well as to abstract categories of being (Sharr 2008, p. 28), whereas taking a mysterious, poetic measure of a work of art acts as an acknowledgment of its operation of setting up a world, of materially enshrining the very meaning of being, and thereby addressing our constant, tacit questions about our place in the world, about how and, above all, why we come to be here at all (Tonner 2014, p. 121; Boetzkes and Vinegar 2014, p. 2).

Church guidebooks tend to owe both their content and their style to art history, a discipline that has since its inception aimed to codify and systematize the aesthetic experience by identifying, classifying, and situating artworks, one in relation to another with regard to periodicity, style, and iconographic category, and has done so at least partly for reasons of evaluation and authentication (Boetzkes and Vinegar 2014, p. 8). Traditional art history can, in other words, be said to always have had scientific or pseudo-scientific (not to mention commercial) ambitions (Boetzkes and Vinegar 2014, p. 16).

Any account of a work of art that aspires to take a scientific rather than poetic measure of it, thereby denying it its capacity to make for us a world, can, however, be said to have confused the work of art with a mere object and, hence, have missed the very point of it (Boetzkes and Vinegar 2014, p. 16). Heidegger was critical of traditional art history for just this reason, that it insisted on objectifying works of art, treating them as a body of forms existing for the primary purpose of having the morphological information that enables their own classification extracted from them (Boetzkes and Vinegar 2014, p. 14).

Heidegger's concerns spanned not only art and architecture, but also notions of place and the sacred and these concerns—all of the first order of relevance for this study—come together in his concept of dwelling (Malpas 2012, p. 1; Boetzkes and Vinegar 2014, pp. 3–4, 13; Schalow 2001, pp. 1–2, 19–20). Analysing the seven-sacraments font at St Peter and St Paul at Salle by means of his concept of dwelling will, therefore, it is hoped, enable a (re)consideration of the proper mode of perceiving and engaging with it as a thing not reducible to being described or explained either as an historical object or as a locus for an aesthetic(-ising) or historic(-ising) experience, but rather as a proper work of art, i.e., as a thinging, worlding thing with the power of mobilising our slumbering disposition to see ourselves as being-in-the-world.

2. Dwelling—A Breviary

Dwelling (*das Wohnen*)[6] is the word that Heidegger uses to describe the way of being that is proper to us as mortals living, as we do, on the earth and under the sky. That is not to say that we are actually dwelling, by his account, at any given time or in any given place, merely that we as humans have the potential to dwell, and thereby possibly also an obligation of sorts to neverendingly seek to do so, whether or not we are ever able to fully arrive at it.

So, what is dwelling? To put it (deceptively) simply, dwelling is a sense of being-in-the-world attained through a proper residence with *things* (Mitchell 2015, p. 256). I have already briefly touched on the difference between object and thing, but as it lies at the very heart of what concerns us, it is worth explaining the distinction a little more assiduously.

Heidegger's definition of a thing pushes back against two insidiously destructive forms of decontextualization, thereby indicating that the critical distinction between an object and a thing hinges on whether it is allowed to stand in relation to other things, whether it is perceived as deriving its being and meaning from contextual circumstance.

The first way of decontextualizing a thing is by objectifying it. Objectification is the result of a perspective, most immediately derived from Descartes,[7] that conceptualises everything, including our own bodies, as constituted of isolated, discretely functioning parts—or pieces, rather. While many of Descartes' individual propositions have long since been refuted, his overall ethos continues to stealthily suffuse the entirety of our perceptual, epistemic, and cultural lives. The second way of decontextualizing a thing is by means of commodification. Heidegger calls the (once) things that have been transformed into units of consumption a 'standing reserve' (*der Bestand*). This standing reserve can be bought and sold; in fact, it exists solely for that purpose[8] (Mitchell 2015, p. 32). The natural result of having been made available is invariably replaceability, which by threatening the singularity of a thing, of course ultimately invalidates its very thingness or being.

Another way of thinking about the difference between thing and object is to say that things are what matter to us. They leave their marks on us and we on them. They concern us, touch us, transform us. We have relationships with them, and they are therefore, properly considered, *part* of human being[9] (Sharr 2008, pp. 29–30).

Relationality is the key to things being things and, hence, the key to dwelling. There may be other ways of conceptualising the fundamental and pervasive relationality of all things, but Heidegger's concept of the fourfold (*das Geviert*) is as fruitful a way as any to illustrate and come to grips with it. There is no simple or facile way to relate what the fourfold and what its component parts are. Heidegger himself changed his mind regarding various aspects of the *Geviert* numerous times during his life. As this essay is not, however, about the ontology of Heidegger's philosophy per se, but merely means to use his fourfold as a prism through which to arrive at a creative and productive, as well as proper and fitting, interpretation of the font at Salle, we need not dig ourselves too deep a rabbit hole. We do, however, need to define the basic terminology.[10]

The fourfold is, re vera, a thinking of things (Mitchell 2015, p. 3). It is an account of the thing as inherently relational, as by definition open to, and defined by, what lies beyond itself. Heidegger often built his ideas on the scaffolding of etymology and it was no different with the word 'thing,' which in both English and German (*das Ding*) is derived from the Old German and Old English *þing*, meaning moot or gathering. Hence, the very word points to mediation and relationality, to the 'beyond' of every stripe—temporal, spatial, affective, associative—that is involved in the thing's coming to be (Mitchell 2015, p. 17). In fact, from an etymological point of view, the word is itself explanation enough.

The gathering of the fourfold is a wholly thing-dependent phenomenon. All (true) things (as opposed to objects) can incite a gathering of the fourfold, but each thing does it in its own way. Heidegger uses a jug, a bridge, and a temple as examples of fourfold-gathering things. Architectural structures, artworks, mountains, and rivers are also capable of preserving, admitting, and installing the fourfold (Mitchell 2015, p. 22).

For the thing to thing and the fourfold to fully and finally gather, however, it also requires that we mortals learn to truly dwell-amongst-things (El-Bizri 2015, p. 17), i.e., to let things be what they are. Dwelling is, in other words, not something we actively do, so much as a particular attitude of affordance on our part. It can perhaps best be defined as the sanctioning of a thing to thing. It is this thinging of a thing that finally and fully gathers the fourfold, the result of which is that the thing is provided with its purchase on the world and we our existential foothold (El-Bizri 2015, pp. 255, 259, 260; Norberg-Schulz as cited in Sharr 2008, p. 99). Rather than conceiving of thinging, gathering and dwelling as causes and effects, as chronologically arranged phenomena, they are to be understood as coming about in simultaneous and wholly reciprocal mutuality, in a sort of mirror play.

When a thing things, when it gathers the fourfold, it doesn't present *itself* to us so much as the world according to it (Sharr 2008, p. 49). When, e.g., viewing a church

in a landscape, we do not, as a result, perceive a loose assemblage of objects consisting of church, wall, lane, daffodil, hedge, bridge, etc., each individually and autonomously located throughout a spatial plane, but a *place* to which they all, instantly and inextricably, belong (Malpas 2012, p. 18).

Having touched on what the fourfold does, and on what principles, we turn our attention to its individual elements. While Heidegger would say that isolating the four elements in description or otherwise is an artificial exercise, and one, furthermore, that misrepresents them as none of the four can ever presence without the other three, it is nevertheless necessary to give a short exposition of each element in order to later see in what ways they are gathered in the font at St Peter and St Paul. The gathering of the fourfold is the intersection of earth, sky, divinities and mortals. These are the elements that Heidegger sees as converging—and why not—in the thinging of the thing, each component contributing to the constitution of its relational life. In his extraordinary book *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, Andrew Mitchell provides an expanded meditation and interpretation on these categories, to which much of what follows is indebted.

2.1. Earth

It feels incumbent on me to begin, as Heidegger does, with the element of earth. Earth (*die Erde*) is rocks and water, flora and fauna—in short, the material basis of things (Heidegger 2013a, p. 147). Heidegger also refers to earth as ground, and—beautifully—as the 'serving bearer' (*die dienend Tragende*), hinting broadly at all our dependence on it. Earth, then, bears all things.[11]

The earth can be said to be the constituency of things, but what constitutes things is their sensuous appearance.[12] The earth reveals itself as the 'sensuous shine of things'—as phenomenality (Mitchell 2015, p. 72). Heidegger does not write of rocks, but of the heaviness and hardness of rocks, not of sound but of the ringing of sound (Mitchell 2015, p. 79). As a result of the phenomenality of earth, things can presence only partially. They are—paradoxically, but beautifully—found to be disclosed or revealed precisely by being allowed to remain (at least partially) unrevealed. To take an example: if the ringing of the vesper bell is scientifically measured—in wavelengths—the ringing of a vesper bell is gone. It is only by simply letting it ring, unmeasured and undisclosed, that it remains a ringing of a vesper bell (Mitchell 2015, p. 80). To put it differently, the earth is the appearance of a 'withdrawal,' and it is this withdrawal that allows things to reach us at all, in their shining and ringing (Mitchell 2015, p. 82).

The verb denoting the most appropriate deportment of mortals towards the earth is saving (*retten*). It is only by sparing it—from objectification, from being turned into a standing reserve, from being used instrumentally, from being scientifically measured—that we free it to be its own nurturing, bearing, serving self.

2.2. Sky

The second element of the fourfold is the sky (*der Himmel*). A close reading will again reward with the realisation that sky, rather than identified by stars and night and clouds, is described as the wandering gleam of the stars (*der wandernde Glanz der Gerstirne*), the dark and bright of the night (*Dunkel und Helle der Nacht*) and the drift or train of clouds (*Wolkenzug*) (Heidegger 2013a, p. 147). It is the phenomenality of the stars, the night and the clouds that constitute Heidegger's sky.

It is also notable that the path of the sun, the course of the moon, and the drifting of the clouds all point to a certain resident temporality (Mitchell 2015, pp. 116–17). While 'earth' constitutes the phenomenal appearance of things, 'sky' is the—heterogeneous, ever-shifting—medium through which things emerge to us in their phenomenality (Mitchell 2015, pp. 117, 144). However, just as earth means that all that shows itself must conceal itself to be properly perceived, so does sky mean that all that conceals itself must show itself (as concealed) in order to remain concealed. While earth is (partial) concealment of revelation, sky is revelation of concealment, a showing of non-showing.[13]

While earth is a mainly spatial realm, sky can be seen as a temporal one. Together, they achieve the spatio-temporality that constitutes the dimension with which we are familiar. What appears under(/among) the medial elements of sky appears in time, but—and this is important to note—in 'phenomenal' time rather than time as homogeneously and abstractly measured and calculated by means of clocks and calendars (Mitchell 2015, pp. 145, 147, 149–50). Phenomenal time, i.e., time as it is lived, is interpreted in concern and intuitively measured by means of a judgement on its 'ripeness,' on whether it is time *for* something—for bringing in the laundry or the harvest, or for a kiss.[14]

Heidegger exhorts us to receive or embrace (*empfangen*) the sky. Just as refraining from instrumentalizing the earth's fruiting bearing implies a humbled stance before the earth as it is, so does the receiving of the sky entail a humbled heeding of its clemencies and inclemencies—and thereby the fourfold and any chance we might have at dwelling. By simply receiving it, we allow the sky to be the ever-shifting medium through which we can perceive the appearance of things on earth, thereby offering us a chance at dwelling.

2.3. The Divinities

The third element of the fourfold consists of the divinities—or gods (*die Göttlichen*). For the secular and atheistic, this might seem an objectionable or even inadmissible category, but belief in one or more gods is not required in order to comprehend the absolute necessity of this element to the fourfold. Heidegger's own God was, if anything, a *Deus absconditus*—a hidden, unknown, and by-default absent deity—who reveals itself precisely as such by the sky, which is a revelation of concealment, of no-thing (El-Bizri 2011, p. 66).

While *die Göttlichen* can be interpreted as the gods themselves, or (a pluralised) God, they can also be interpreted as God's hinting messengers (*die winkenden Boten*) (Heidegger 2013a, p. 149; Mitchell 2015, p. 163). As the message of the *Göttlichen* is not only *about* God, but *is* God,[15] however, the variant interpretation seems, at first glance, to amount to much the same thing. The hint about the inherently messengerial nature of the divinities is, however, key to understanding their role in the fourfold. As things are intrinsically bound to what lies beyond themselves, they are inherently messengerial, i.e., inherently meaningful. It is in other words not we humans who bestow meanings on things by means of an a posteriori hermeneutical-epistemological construct; the presence of the divinities in the thinging of the thing means to imply that meaning is, on the contrary, an a priori ontological fact (Mitchell 2015, pp. 174, 183). Everything that appears, appears not only sensually/sensibly, but also meaningfully, not because of our perception of it as such, but because of every thing's already being enfolded in the fourfold, which includes meaning.

Our appropriate posture with regard to the divinities is one of waiting or biding (*erwarten*), which is, much like sparing and heeding, an essentially non-reifying approach to the world (Mitchell 2015, p. 201). As such, it conveys the notion that the full meaning of things must always be allowed to be in a state of arriving or becoming, and never in a state of having arrived once and for all.

2.4. The Mortals

The fourth and final element of the fourfold comprises mortals (*die Sterblichen*). The most fundamental characteristic of a mortal, as implied by the word, is the ability to die. That is, not merely to expire, but to be capable of death as death (Heidegger 2013a, p. 148). This means more than being intellectually aware that we all eventually die, although this, too, is part of being properly mortal. It also means living in the constant (not-yet) presence of death, a condition that Heidegger termed being-unto-death or, later, being-in-death[16] (Heidegger 2013a, pp. 224–27). As Heidegger himself wrote: we die "*und zwar fortwährend, solange er auf der Erde, unter dem Himmel, vor den Göttlichen bleibt*"[17] (Heidegger 2013a, p. 152).

As all the other elements of the fourfold are interrelated, so are mortals generatively entwined with all the other elements of the fourfold, including one another. What this

means is that the essence of mortals, just like the essence of things, reaches beyond us, into relationality.

The verb that Heidegger uses with regard to mortals is accompanying (*geleiten*). We are bound to other mortals in being-with-one-another-in-the-world (*Miteinandersein*). Mortals must, to be mortal, accompany one another's journey unto death, bearing witness to one another's mortality.

In what follows, I shall without further ado unfold the thingness of the seven-sacraments font at Salle. It is my hope and belief that by framing the Salle font and, *in extensio*, church furnishings more generally, as gatherers of the fourfold—as the very things that enable us to dwell—I will have gone some way towards correcting the perspective that we have lately begun to take on these works and to ensure their survival as what they, properly considered, are.

3. Alètheia

It was the end of a mild and mellow September day and the third day of our Norfolk church crawl. The pears were just ripening in the still-green orchards, the teasel only just gone to seed in the hedge-lined lanes. Grey seals had been bobbing, limpid-eyed, in the oyster-grey swells just offshore; owls calling loudly in the blacker than black night before; and we had seen apple snails, earlier that day, snugging themselves up for winter in the damp, chalky plaster of the church at Little Witchingham.

St Peter and St Paul at Salle was our fifth and final church of the day. The tower of St Agnes at Cawston rose, formidable, in the rear-view mirror, as if braced and buttressed against the sky itself. John Betjeman allegedly once opined that one was "either a Salle or a Cawston man." Not being a man, I claim the prerogative of not having to incline myself either way, but for two large late-medieval parish churches in rural Norfolk, no more than a barley field or two apart, they are indeed remarkably dissimilar in atmosphere, Cawston being austere, dark and sombre while Salle exudes light, grace and serenity (Figure 1). To experience this juxtaposition to its fullest and most thrilling effect, we visited one right after the other, easily done by means of a short series of the narrow, hedge-lined lanes with which every Norfolk traveller is familiar. I do not mean to make it seem as if the churches of Cawston and Salle sit—as addenda—in this landscape of fields, lanes and hedges. They do not merely belong there, but Norfolk only becomes Norfolk, as we know it, by means of these churches being there and being exactly what they are.[18]

Not only were we then winding our way down these lanes in a rental car, having arrived in Norfolk no more than a few days earlier by train, but these early autumn Norfolk scenes are now being conjured by me in my study four thousand miles away in Canada. Yet, as Heidegger so wisely—and so soothingly to those of us who always, wherever we are, seem to find ourselves at great distance from the things among which we feel most at home—noted, "Short distance is not itself nearness. Nor is great distance remoteness." (Heidegger 2013c, p. 163). And "[f]rom right here we may even be much nearer to that bridge and to what it makes room for than someone who uses it daily as an indifferent bridge crossing." (Heidegger 2013a, p. 154). Many others, including Simmel and Bachelard, have also noted how our experiential and emotional place horizon is to a very large extent made up of the places to which we feel a positive emotional attachment, and onto which we project our memories, dreams and associations (Sharr 2008, pp. 63–64).

It would perhaps be easy to mistake Heidegger's philosophy of dwelling as a philosophy to do with staying-put, with putting down roots in a place, but Heidegger was always less a philosopher of the soil than he was one of spiritual awakening. Achieving a sense of dwelling in Norfolk is not then more easily, or automatically, done if one happens to be a resident of Norfolk, or if one can trace one's local ancestry back to the days of Hereward the Wake. It is emphatically not about spatial fixation, far less about heredity. Dwelling does not connote stasis (Roy 2017, p. 29). In fact, movement, both literal and figurative—is the very means by which dwelling may be attained (Roy 2017, pp. 31, 41). One has to take care, however, with what purpose one sets off a-wandering. It is not about being a tourist,[19]

of running about 'seeing' things, but rather of being a pilgrim of sorts—one who forever turns for home. In some sense this wandering, in order to be a dwelling sort of wandering, has to take the form of an affirmation of the innate homelessness of man,[20] and of all our perennial quest for home. It is not, then, so much about arriving at a particular place, as it is about arriving at (the placed character of) being (Malpas 2006, p. 309). It is only to the extent that we journey—physically, but also through an essentially questing attitude to things and places—that we come into true nearness of place (Malpas 2006, p. 310). The attitude of questing ensures our never arriving at journey's end. Journeying is something perpetually undertaken rather than completed—and the home for which we are always turning is, likewise, not a familiar haven so much as a place of wonder, made uncanny and unknown to us by our taking the measure of it[21] (Malpas 2006, p. 311). It is the wanderer's double yearning, to wander (towards home) and arrive (at the uncanny), that enables her to attain a sense of dwelling in the world.

Figure 1. The church of St Peter and St Paul at Salle.

The elegantly pinnacled and parapeted steeple of Salle rose to greet us, first above the hedges from down the road, and then above the oaks and maples among which it sits, a crown among crowns (Figure 2).[22]

Figure 2. The church of St Peter and St Paul at Salle.

While Cawston sat ill at ease, a barely contained wintry force, within her church wall, Salle was all summery ease and affability, the low brick and flint wall an irrelevance between the parklike greensward either side, holding, so it seemed to me, nothing either in or out.

The structure rose and spread before us, its nobility all the more apparent for being faded. Gold and silver lichens stippled the walls, their flint and render correspondingly ennobled by sudden sun.

3.1. The Threshold

Salle's main entrance is from the west, through a pair of medieval, traceried, sun- and rain-silvered wooden doors. These are flanked by a pair of elegantly canopied niches, now poignantly empty but once having housed saints, likely the ones the church is named after and dedicated to. Above the door sits a third, slightly smaller niche, possibly for a seated Virgin Mary, above which runs a sculpted border of heraldic reliefs, appropriate for as well-patronaged a church as St Peter and St Paul. Most memorable and significant are the pair of stone angels, animating the spandrels either side of the pointed arch of the doorway, as feather-garbed and puissant as their fellows standing guard up in the rafters of Cawston, no more than a few powerful wing-flaps away (Figure 3).

The angels are frozen in the act of censing those entering the church, their censors swinging wildly toward the opening door.

Figure 3. Roof angel at St Agnes at Cawston.

Why do I linger on the threshold, at the door, with the angels? In this instance it is perhaps to issue a reminder of the ancient, significant relationship between fonts and doors. Just as it is through the door that you enter the church, it is by means of the font and the rite of baptism that you enter the Church, and ultimately Paradise[23] or at least the possibility of it. In the Middle Ages, when all was sacred, including the community, baptism was also the initiation rite by means of which you entered the sacred body of the commune (Ben-Aryeh Debby 2013, p. 15). The mere sight of the font would therefore have worked to give people both a vivid sense of historical continuity (in contemplating all the people who had been baptised there), and a feeling of belonging—to the community and its place—as indeed it continues to suggest to this day (Bloch 2013, p. 94).

Architecturally, there has also historically been a connection between fonts and the doors of the baptisteries, churches and cathedrals in which the rite of baptism was practiced (Sonne de Torrens 2013, pp. 4, 14; Martin 2013, p. 31). This connection was often underscored in the imagery on and around the doors of the great cathedrals. Why should the west door angels at a great parish church like St Peter and St Paul not also be there to convey a baptismal message? Baptismal imagery is often victorious, with baptism being represented both as the victory or triumph of the Christian faith over other faiths and the supreme victory of eternal life over death (Sonne de Torrens 2013, p. 69). The censing angels at Salle bear a striking resemblance, in both form and position, to the winged victories on the Arch of Constantine in Rome (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Stone angels in the spandrels of the west door at Salle.

If the Salle angles are viewed as baptismal—and, hence, triumphant—imagery, they may be linked to the Roman victories in more than form and position. Although eleven centuries and 2000 km intervene, the two bear a striking resemblance with both structures featuring animated, winged beings in the spandrels. While the victories wield torches (signifying victory) and the angels censers, both sets of attributes work equally to sanctify those processing beneath. Although the context differs a little, we are in both cases looking at winged spandrel creatures enthusiastically wielding apotropaic attributes.[24] Even the context may not differ as much as one thinks, if we bear in mind that the west fronts of churches have from the Dark Ages been associated with triumphal, imperial entries and that the well-patronaged church at Salle is more than likely to have welcomed many an illustrious personage through its west doors, giving the nod twice over to the idea of the Salle angels being victories of sorts.

There is also a ritual or liturgical connection between doors and fonts. The preliminary rite of baptism, consisting of exorcism and purification of either adult catechumens or children to be baptised, had since antiquity, and was often still in the Middle Ages, carried out outside the church doors, in porches or on their doorsteps (Martin 2013, p. 43). After this initial purification, the baptismal party was authorised to proceed into the church building (Martin 2013, p. 44; Bloch 2013, p. 81).

In short, portals and fonts have a great deal to do with one another—architecturally, theologically, and liturgically. In returning to the standard reference works cited at the beginning, however, we must acknowledge there to be no mention at all of the west door or its censing angels in the church's own pamphlet, and in the Pevsner volume, we can read:

Doorway with a quatrefoil band up the jambs and arch. Two angels in the spandrels. A frieze of shields above it and three niches around it.

(Pevsner and Wilson 2002, p. 653)

No connection is implied or proposed between the west door angels and the angels depicted beneath each panel of the font, holding attributes of the sacraments (more on which below), or to the host of C15 roof angels[25] (159 of which survive of the original 276) (Mortlock and Roberts 2007, p. 241), for all the world as if they have nothing at all to do with one another, but find themselves thus as a result of accidental assemblage rather than as the result of a cohesive iconographical programme that begins at the west doors and extends throughout the church.

Angels were after all considered to be particularly associated with baptism. Tertullian (160–220 AD) wrote that angels were at the very heart of the ritual of baptism, as those about to undergo baptism were cleansed and prepared for the ritual by an angel. Angel imagery has, hence, from the earliest centuries of Christianity featured on and in proximity to baptismal fonts. In St Mark's in Venice, there are angels in the cupola above the baptistery, there to carry the child into the bosom of the church (Stanford 2019, p. 159). Salle's iconographical programme was clearly similarly angelological.[26]

Slowly, with a sense of occasion, we crossed the threshold,[27] our journey from exterior to interior, from outside to inside, sanctified by the censing angels. The threshold is a place from which everything unfolds and unspools, both forward and backward, in space and time. As Heidegger has it: a boundary is "not that at which something stops, but ... that from which something *begins its presencing.*" (Heidegger 2013a, p. 152).

3.2. The Clearing

The west door gives onto the ground floor of the tower, the floor of the ringing chamber just above. It is a space suggestive of a breath, a pause or a drawing back before the pouring forth into the nave beyond, which blossoms, fruits, in sunlight.[28] The vastness of this western part of the nave, the unignorable placement of the font at its centre, the lack of any other furnishings, all speak to the immense significance of this clearing (Figure 5).

Yet, it is not that there was once, first, a clearing in which a font was subsequently placed. The western part of the nave cannot in any meaningful way have pre-existed the installation of the font—it is rather the font that creates the clearing and makes the western part of the nave appear as what it is.

This open, cleared space functions as a striking metaphor for Heidegger's conceptual clearing (*Lichtung*). The word *Lichtung* carries a double (or triple) meaning in German, signifying both an open space in the midst of a forest and illumination (literal illumination, as suggested also in the English expression 'clearing skies,' and metaphorical illumination, as in intellectual or spiritual enlightenment). In Heidegger's philosophical usage, the word is meant to signify an open, cleared and bounded place that allows room for what (already) belongs to it (Malpas 2012, p. 19). The purpose of a clearing is to allow the appearance of *things*. A clearing is hence a place that makes room for the fourfold to gather, a place in which we, as mortals, are opened up to the world and the world to us (Malpas 2006, pp. 29, 221). In his late paper "Art and Space" Heidegger uses the related term clearing-away or *räumen*, meaning to free from wilderness (Heidegger 1973, p. 9). When considering that *Lichtung* is what admits dwelling to take place, it is easy to see a state of non-dwelling as a thorny wildwood from which we are freed by means of the clearing-away.

Another property of a clearing is that it withdraws as it allows the appearance of things within itself. We are, as a consequence, often made aware of the things that appear within a clearing rather than the clearing itself. Here, too, it is the font we notice over and above the vast open space of the western part of the nave. The font establishes a centre that makes orientation possible; and it is orientation that makes us experience space as something other than a mere collection of disparate points in Euclidean space—as somewhere significant and meaningful, possibly even sacred.[29] The font gathers all around

it, and it is towards and together with the font that everything else, including the clearing itself, presences ([Šišovski 2013](), p. 14).

Figure 5. The font at St Peter and St Paul at Salle, as seen from the west door.

We saw nothing not foregrounded by the font from this our western vantagepoint.[30] There it stood, right before us, calmly, self-evidently, rootedly, in the middle of the old Norfolk-tiled floor, the Norfolk earth beneath, rooting and anchoring the whole space.[31] Like Heidegger's Greek temple, which does its temple work by simply standing in place, so was the font doing the work of a font by standing there, inviting us to consider the possibility that death may not, after all, be the end. Gently, it was bringing our mortality, and hence the possibility of dwelling, before us.

3.3. The Risers

The font at St Peter and St Paul is raised from the floor by means of two steps or risers. Anyone who has watched "A Passion for Churches,"[32] (BBC 1974) in which John Betjeman takes us on a gentle East Anglian church crawl, will remember the baptismal scene where the priest stands raised above those gathered around, on the topmost step of three at the font at Trunch, and the godfather steps up to hand him the baby (Figure 6).

Figure 6. The font at St Botolph's at Trunch.

　　The two risers at Salle are as high if not higher than the three at Trunch. In comparison to the risers at Morston, however, even the ones at Salle are as nothing—the vertiginous steps at that little church make one imagine vicars as mountaineers, babies secured in slings across vestmented backs as they labour up towards the rim of the font (Figure 7).

　　Making that climb, with or without crampons and ropes, is symbolic of a renunciation of the world, the flesh and the devil (for which reason the steps are often three in number) and a surrendering to the three persons of the Trinity (Ben-Aryeh Debby 2013, p. 17).

　　Both risers at Salle are, like the stem and cup of the font itself, octagonal. In a Christian context, the number eight acts as a reference to the 'eighth day' of the week, on which Christ was resurrected. As a symbol of the resurrection, the number eight is almost as old as the Church itself (Underwood 1950, p. 81). Its association with the rite of baptism, to which resurrection is symbolically linked, and, hence, with baptismal fonts is almost as old. Rising from the tiled floor, up the steps towards the font and the heavens beyond, simultaneously re-enacts Christ's rising from death in this world to eternal life and symbolises the soon-to-be-baptised's rising from the turmoil of earthly life, which ends in death, towards at least the promise of eternal life in heaven.

　　On the lower of the two risers, there is a dedicatory inscription (Figure 8). It reads: "Pray for the souls of Thomas Line [†1437] and [Agnes] his wife and Robert their son chaplain and for those whom they are bound to pray who cause this font to be made." (Mortlock and Roberts 2007, p. 242).

Figure 7. The font at All Saints Morston.

Figure 8. The font at Salle, showing the inscription on the risers.

Pevsner primarily catches on to "who cause this font to be made" pointing out the Lines as the donors of the font. Heidegger is quite likely, however, to have taken issue with his compatriot's attention to this point of fact, stating that, "it is not the 'N.N. fecit' that is to be made known. Rather, the simple 'factum est' is to be held forth ... " (Norberg-Schulz 1983, p. 63). This factum is for Heidegger revealed when a world is opened up. The inscription asking for prayers for the souls of Thomas, Agnes and Robert, and not only for the three of them, but also for the souls of "those for whom *they* are bound to pray", addresses us and those who in turn follow us, creating a virtual chainmail of prayers. As such, it is a powerful reminder that the community of mortals includes more than the presently living; it includes those who have gone before as well as those who come after. The community of mortals, to which we all belong, is radically transhistorical. As that which we build is often made of materials that long outlast us, one of its main roles is holding this transhistorical community together by reminding us of our bonds and duties both to those who have gone before and to those that come after us. The two-step plinth at Salle does just that—it rises from the earth towards the sky, raising mortals past, current, and future towards the gods, holding forth the '*factum est*' of the here gathered fourfold.

3.4. The Stem

'Font' is a late Old English word that traces its origins to the Latin *fons* or *font*—meaning spring, source, well or fountain. The word is also related to 'fount,' which signifies a metaphorical source—of, for instance, a desirable quality or commodity such as wisdom or knowledge.[33] The ecclesiastical Latin phrase *fons* or *fontes baptismi* can be translated, generically, to baptismal water(s) or, more specifically and poetically, to the fountain of life, an expression frequently seen in association with baptism (Sonne de Torrens 2013, p. 69).

While some fonts, not least Saxon tub fonts, often form the idea that they are wellheads sitting directly over the source of a spring in the earth below, fonts with a stem or shaft naturally create an association to fountains. Looking at the font at Salle, it is easy to imagine groundwater welling up into the plinth and then on up through the stem, under pressure, to cascade forth from the bowl above. Like the risers below and the cup above, the stem is octagonal. Separating its eight faces are ribs or miniature shafts, which look a little like pipes, adding visually to the notion of water being pumped upwards. Crouched at the foot of the stem are what remain of the four Evangelists.[34] The idea of a representational connection between the Evangelists and the Four Rivers of Paradise has been around for a long time, and the application of both these symbols to baptism is also of very early origin, appearing already in Patristic thought[35] (Underwood 1950, pp. 47, 73, 106). Looking outward as they do from the stem, around which they are physically joined together, draws attention both to their common source—the fountain of Eden[36]—and to their reach to the 'four corners of the world.' Just as "the whole earth was at that time [the time of creation] watered by a divine fountain" (Theophilus of Antioch) by means of "the four rivers which [arising in the fountain of Eden] cross over into this earth and water a large part of its surface" (Genesis 2:10), so is the Fountain of Life, aka the act and fact of baptism, seen to purge not only the soon-to-be-baptised child but, through her, the whole world (Underwood 1950, pp. 47, 54).

Paulinus of Nola (352–431 AD) described the Evangelists not only as springs but as "*sonorous* springs" (*fontes sonori*) (Underwood 1950, p. 122), an expression that inspired many a musical allusion in the millennium that followed. In the Lindisfarne Gospels, the Evangelists are shown blowing horns and trumpets and in the Soissons Gospels they are depicted as harts with little bells tied around their necks (Underwood 1950, p. 125). Bells, horns and trumpets became associated with the Evangelists, symbolising the harmonious sound of the Gospels heard all around the world as they concurred in the evangelical truth, much like Plato's cosmic sirens had once uttered "one sound, one note" in "the concord of a single harmony." (Underwood 1950, p. 125). At Salle, the relationship between bells and the four Evangelists is ingeniously, if perhaps unconsciously, hinted at: the font, around

which they sit as guardian angels, is attached to the ringing gallery above by means of its soaring font cover and the arm and bracket that hold it in place and are used to hoist it up when the font is in use (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Font cover suspended from bracket attached to ringing gallery at Salle.

As so often in Christian symbolism, one signifier is tied to several signifieds, thus working to enrich each allegory, opening it up to the possibility of nigh infinite inference. Thus, the harts are not only the rivers (/Evangelists/Gospels) but also, as in Miles Coverdale's Psalm 42, those thirsting for the Gospels or the Word of Christ/God. "Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks: so longeth my soul after thee, O God" (Davie 1996, p. 7). These lines have often been understood as the cry of the catechumens, hastening to the grace of the font (Underwood 1950, p. 52). So has T.S. Eliot's poem "Ash Wednesday," likely inspired by the baptismal imagery of the psalm. It ought really always to be read in connection with the eight years older poetry cycle "The Waste Land," with which it stands in contrast—and dialogue. "The Waste Land" was written five years prior to and "Ash Wednesday" three years after Eliot's private, almost clandestine, baptism into the Church of England in 1927. Here first, a few lines of "Ash Wednesday" to sample its cool, Coverdalian, and evidently baptismal imagery of fountains and springs:

> Who then made strong the fountains and made fresh the
>   springs
> Made cool the dry rock and made firm the sand [. . .]
>   restoring with a new verse the ancient rhyme [. . .]
> But the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down[37]
> Redeem the time, redeem the dream. (Eliot 1969a, pp. 94–95)

And here, the bleak and arid (pre-baptismal) "Waste Land":

> . . . where the sun beats,
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,

And the dry stone no sound of water … (Eliot 1969b, p. 61)

> Here is no water but only rock
> Rock and no water and the sandy road […]
> If there were water we should stop and drink […]
> If there were the sound of water only. (Eliot 1969b, p. 72)

Never, surely, was a mortal's thirst for baptism more transparently, more desperately, rendered, and never its quenching more sweetly delighted in. As the fountain springs up from the earth and the bird sings down from the sky, the distance between the two is poetically spanned, the fourfold springfully gathered.

3.5. The Cup (Exterior)

I walked all around the font. Its octagonal drum[38] was still—not still as if made of static stone, but still as if caught mid-spin[39] in a film still (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Font at Vänge, Gotland, described in a poem by Tomas Tranströmer (see note 39).

It seemed to me that the drawing away of the last row of benches, of the piers of the arcade and the walls of the church were evidence of a centrifugal force exerted on the west part of the nave. If centrifugal, however, the force was equally centripetal, in the way that all things were invariably pulled into its orbit, in reference and relation, remoteness and nearness thus simultaneously gained.

I plimsolled softly nearer, across the variegated, rose-coloured tiles. The eight panels of the font were well preserved, as Simon Jenkins and others have noted. Its state of preservation brings other, less fortunate seven-sacraments fonts, such as the one at South Creake, to mind (Figure 11).

The damage and defacement of the one shows the preservation of the other in its proper light, while the better-preserved aids in the guessed interpretation of the damaged and defaced. While some other Norfolk fonts retain some of their medieval paint, or have, like at Hemblington, been recoloured by restorers, no paint remains on the Salle font, revealing the stone itself in all its biscuity glory (Figure 12).

Figure 11. Font at St Mary's South Creake.

Figure 12. Coloured figures on the stem of the font at All Saints Hemblington.

The eight panels around the cup of the font feature the seven primary sacraments of the Catholic Church—baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, holy order, matrimony—and a crucifixion scene. (Figures 13–20) Although Simon Knott finds

the panels "simply done" and "not particularly characterful," (Knott n.d.). I find there is much to delight in visually entering their circumscribed spaces. Each panel is set back from the face of the stone, thereby creating a sensation of three-dimensional space. Each little diorama is peopled with the swaying, S-shaped figures typical of Gothic sculpture and painting, the folds and draperies of their gowns adding a sense of flowing movement. The pleats and tucks of the priest's garment is particularly fine in the baptismal scene, which also features a font, clearly octagonal, but with no sign of its featuring the seven sacraments. The eucharistic panel features a mischievously hovering altar with a lovely, tasselled altar frontal. The staining on the wall behind the priest elevating the host and his two censing attendants look like shadows cast. While all the panels give a sense of the action taking place in a room, the confession is particularly fetchingly set in a vaulted and canopied space. In the matrimonial tableau, the bride and groom appear to be in the process of exiting their panel in a Gothic pre-figuring of the Baroque.

Figure 13. Baptism. Source: Bob Mitchell.
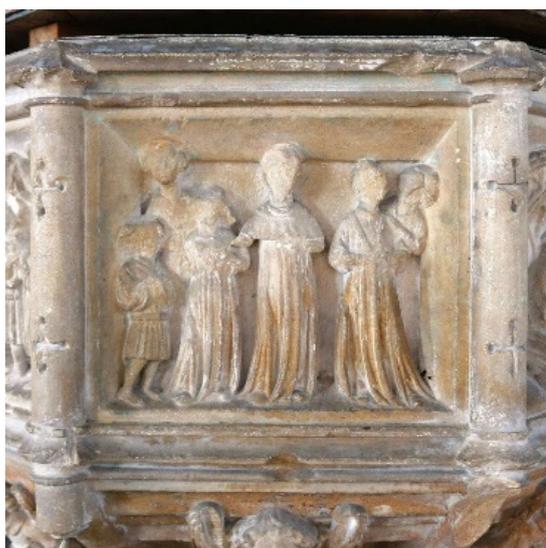
**Figure 14.** Confirmation. Source: Bob Mitchell.
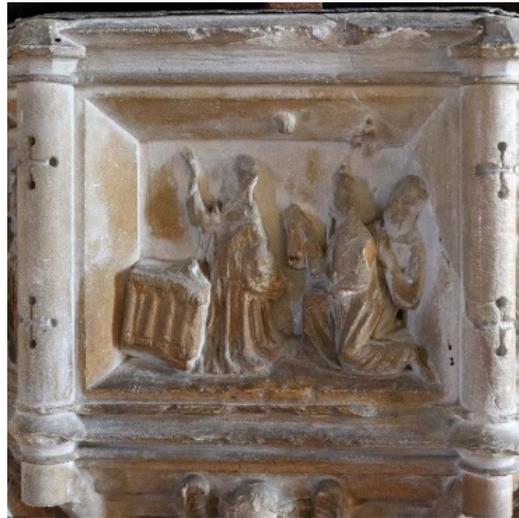
Figure 15. Eucharist. Source: Bob Mitchell.

Figure 16. Penance. Source: Bob Mitchell.

Figure 17. Matrimony. Source: Bob Mitchell.
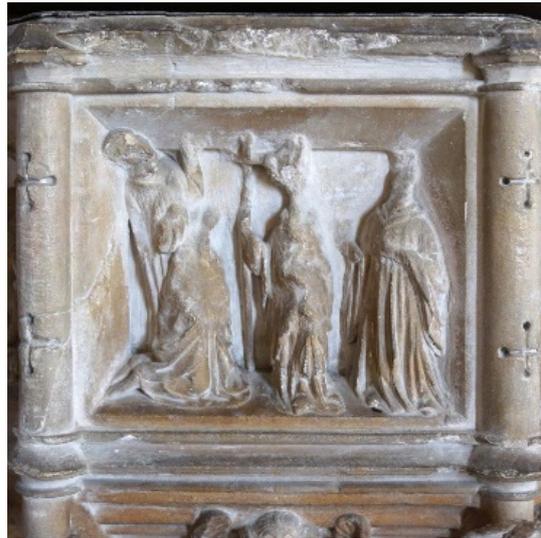
Figure 18. Ordination. Source: Bob Mitchell.

Figure 19. Extreme Unction. Source: Bob Mitchell.

Figure 20. Crucifixion. Source: Bob Mitchell.

There was a didactic aspect to the sacramental scheme, as the 12th-century Church felt it incumbent to clarify to a still illiterate and perhaps increasingly superstitious flock what constituted the sacraments and, especially, the relationship between baptism and the Eucharist (Sonne de Torrens 2013, p. 70; Gray 2013, pp. 112–13). As baptism is the first and foundational sacrament, it would have seemed natural to depict all the sacraments on the font, and the octagonal shape already, as we know, being popular with fonts would of course have lent itself to this. In continental Europe, the seven-sacraments fonts became popular in the 14th century and in England, especially East Anglia, around the middle of the 15th.[40]

In spite of the didactic intent, the proper order of the sacraments was rarely adhered to. In Norfolk, not only was the proper order not followed in a single instance, but no two seven-sacraments fonts have the same arrangement (Byrne 2020, p. 32). It is also clear that there was no strict rule governing either the orientation or the motif of the eighth panel. Five of Norfolk's seven-sacraments fonts, (including Salle) (Knott n.d.) have their eighth panel facing west, the most preferred direction, and a further three face east. As for the motif, that too varies, but convention gradually came to suggest the Crucifixion as a good candidate (as in the case of the Salle font), as symbolic of all the sacraments deriving their efficacy from the blood and sacrifice of Christ (Husenbeth 1858, p. 51.)

Below all eight panels are angels. Underneath the Crucifixion, the angel is in an attitude of adoration or orans (Husenbeth 1858, p. 55). Below the sacramental panels, the angels are depicted holding emblems of the sacraments. The emblem for baptism is a casket with holy oils; the emblem for confirmation is a mitre; that for the Eucharist is an altar stone; that for penance, a rod; that for extreme unction, a little figure (representing the soul) rising up from a corpse cloth; that for holy orders, a chalice; and that for matrimony—rather gladsomely—a guitar.

In their attempt to act as a guide for Christian life, these figures clearly implicate and address us mortals; in their insistent hinting at a realm beyond to which we should aspire, they draw down the hinting messengers of the gods, and thus the gods themselves. In the earthly stoniness of their carvings made visible to us in the lights and shadows of the September afternoon, the fourfold is spinningly gathered.

3.6. The Bowl (Interior)

The font cover has been lowered onto the rim of the font; I don't need to peer through its slatted cage to know that I will not find the bowl filled with water. I know it to be empty, but I also know that its gently rounded hollow cradles an emptiness that is far from a nothing. Just as the void in Heidegger's jug is altogether its own, so is the font bowl's void very much its own (Heidegger 2013c, p. 169). Whether filled with water or not, it is either in a way peculiar to a font. A font is not unfilled in the same way that a water glass or dam can be. Far less is it devoid of water in the way that objects not made to hold water, such as bells, books, and candles, are devoid of water. The resonance of water, blessed and purposed for baptism, fills the unfilled void with a plangency peculiar to itself.

Baptismal waters and fonts have, as we have seen, many-layered interpretations. Linked as they are both to birth and to death, they have been compared, on the one hand, to the womb of the Virgin Mary (allegorically referred to as the *fontes vitae*) and Mater Ecclesia, out of which God's children spring (Ben-Aryeh Debby 2013, p. 15) and, on the other, to the empty tomb. Whether womb or tomb, the hollowed, hallowed concavity is where Godhood is seeded, where God becomes God.

3.7. The Water

Spiritual aquatic symbolism[41] is universal (Eliade 1987, p. 135). In all religions in which water figures, either literally or metaphorically, it plays a purifying, restorative role (Eliade 1987, p. 131). As waters are believed to have existed before the earth,[42] "immersion in water signifies regression to the pre-formal, reincorporation into the undifferentiated mode of pre-existence" (Eliade 1987, p. 130) while emersion signifies re-formation. Water

represents 'states of being' as well as the process of transformation from one state of being to another (Drewer 1981, p. 546).

　　In a Christian context, that originary, pre-formal, pre-existent state of being is thought of as a state of sin, and the water symbolising it referred to as the 'bitter sea of sin' or the 'evil waters of this world.' This is the sense in which the metaphor of the fishpond, with Jesus or the apostles as the fishers and human souls as the fish, is most commonly understood. The souls must escape the water, be taken out of it, in order to be saved (Drewer 1981, p. 534). The notion of a fishpond has, however, also been used as a more positive symbol, for instance by Tertullian, who wrote, "we little fish . . . are born in the water, nor otherwise than swimming in the water are we safe."[43]

　　Water can, in the Christian lexicon, however, also symbolise the state of grace, in which case it may be referred to as the 'living waters of grace,'[44] the Fountain of Life,[45] or the Four Rivers of Paradise (Drewer 1981, pp. 535, 545). Paradoxically, then, the escape from water takes place by means of (other) water. The water that grants the means of conversion or transformation is baptismal: it is affusion, aspersion or immersion in baptismal water that affords an escape from the state of original sin. Baptismal water is manifest as the actual consecrated water in the baptismal font, but also symbolically interpreted as the Word of God or the Gospels, in which mankind must immerse itself in order to be revivified (Drewer 1981, p. 536). It can also, as we have touched on before, be symbolically associated with the womb of the Virgin Mary. The Marian allegory emphasises the fact that it is not the water itself—not the amniotic fluid, if you will—that causes man to be (re)born in/as God, but the fact that the waters have been impregnated by the Holy Spirit (Underwood 1950, p. 71). Hers is not a prosaically biological womb, but a womb of grace (Underwood 1950, p. 75), and it is by the *grace* of baptism that the process of transformation is achieved, not by a magical immersion into a merely material substance.[46] The meanings and interpretations relating to water are, in baptismal contexts, hence manifold and complex, but they should be read as complementary rather than contradictory (Drewer 1981, p. 546).

　　One of the most compelling apparent contradictions related to baptismal water is the fact that it symbolises both death and (re)birth. We are (as mortals) born into or unto death, and the Christian narrative insists, in a pleasingly symmetrical counterpoint, that we also die into life (eternal). Already in St Paul's day, the sacrament of baptism became particularly associated with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. As he wrote in his Letter to the Romans: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore, we are buried with him, by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." (Romans 6:3–5). St Augustine of Hippo also wrote, "We have begun to be under grace [and] we are already dead together with Christ, and buried with him, by baptism, into death." (Underwood 1950, p. 86). And St John Chrysostom said the same thus: "When we plunge our heads into the water as into a sepulchre, the old man is immersed, buried wholly; when we come out of the water, the new man appears." (Underwood 1950, p. 133). St Paul, St Augustine and St John, all three living in an age of primarily adult baptism, all appear to have interpreted the immersion into the waters of baptism not merely as the death and burial of our original sin, but as the death and/or entombment of our entire self, and the rising from the waters of baptism consequently as a rising from the sepulchre. When the practice of infant baptism, performed in chronological proximity with biological birth, began to take over from the baptism of adults, a small shift in the interpretation of baptism took place, where the understanding was not that we are 'baptised into his death' as St Paul would have it, or 'buried with him, by baptism' as St Augustine worded it, or 'buried, wholly,' as St John Chrysostom phrased it, but rather that we have already, by being born biologically, been born into or unto death and that we are, hence, rather to be 'baptised (only) into life everlasting' (or the prospect thereof), having entombed only our original sin in the font.

Baptism's imagery of stony sepulchres and watery springs marry to create a sense of its being subterraneally anchored. However, the springs are likewise fed by the rain, falling from the sky, and rise to the surface of the earth, there to glint and trill in sun-dappled becks and brooks; there to be consecrated in the presence—and name—of the absent God; and there to quench the unquenchable spiritual thirst of mortals. In this feeding, falling, rising, glinting, trilling, hallowing and quenching—the fourfold gathers.

3.8. The Cover

From the 13th century onward, the font was always kept covered.[47] Sometimes, the consecrated water was even kept under lock and key. This was to avoid the consecrated water being either profaned by evil spirits[48] (Kuuliala 2013, pp. 182–83) or stolen by human water thieves whose belief in the water's spiritually transformative properties bled into a belief into its also having magical and miraculous properties, including the ability to cure and heal physical illnesses and deformities.[49]

The earliest font covers were flat, wooden lids, and some, such as the ones at Sedgeford and Ranworth, remain flat to this day (Figure 21).

Figure 21. Font with flat lid at St Mary's Sedgeford.

The association between fonts and sources or springs is a strong one, and these well-lid-like covers are particularly effective at reforging the link between fonts and wells.

As time went on, covers became first domed, then ogee-shaped. Even as the shape kept changing, becoming ever taller and more elaborate as the Middle Ages wore on, the notional echo of the well-lid—and its silently implied wellhead beneath—lived on. The 15th century saw covers, such as the ones at Salle and Cawston, soar towards nigh impossible heights, much like the head-dresses of fashionable ladies in the second half of the 15th century. Just as the height of church spires tends to stand in direct relation to the flatness of the surrounding land—the flatter the land, the higher the spire (Cox 1976, p. 22)—so has the lofty font spire at Salle taken to gesturing indicatively towards the vast field of tile all around it.

In connecting the Evangelists at the foot of the font with the bell tower above, the ground-anchored font with the vast Norfolk sky above, the font cover breaks through "from plane to plane." (Eliade 1987, p. 36). Sometimes there is a bird, that creature of

both sky and earth, carved onto the apex of a font cover's spire, as if to symbolise this connection and breakthrough (Figure 22).

Figure 22. Bird on font cover of St Agnes of Cawston.

There is one at neighbouring St Agnes at Cawston, and on entering St Peter and St Paul, I had looked to see whether "the bird sang down" (Eliot 1969a, p. 95) also at Salle. On not seeing it, I felt instantly chastened for having checked, as of course it sings down here, as at Cawston, even though its little effigy does not perch on the steeple. It simply must sing down, as it represents the communication with the sky without which human existence—dwelling—is impossible.[50]

As we prepared to leave the church, I turned around, taking one last look at the sunlight lying in great rhomboid sheets across the pews and pamments, like bleaching linen in the fields of Haarlem; taking up its candlelike residence in the font cover, now made less of wood than light; turning font to sconce to light a world at whose centre it stands (Figure 23).

Figure 23. Nave, south aisle and chancel at St Peter and St Paul at Salle.

4. Exegesis

The descriptions with which this essay began, tacitly suggest that the seven-sacraments font and its sky-scraping cover are important primarily because they feature an inscription that records the donor, because there are traces of original paint on the crane, and because the sacramental panels are in an unusually good state of preservation. I have, in what followed, attempted to subvert this notion. It has not been my intention to cast aspersions on the guidebooks without which I would myself be lost, but to present a complementary write-up of the font at Salle that rescues it from the threats of objectification and eventual commodification and sets it up as a thinging thing, proper unto itself, once more. I believe it to be of critical importance, as things stand today, to carefully consider what and how we write about historic ecclesiastical artefacts and works of art. Our writings will, after all, bear at least partial responsibility for how historic churches and their furniture, fixtures and fittings are perceived and treated in times to come.

When we objectify works of art and artefactual objects, when we imagine them to exist solely for our leisured experience and consumption, they cease to be things. In the case of historical works, this takes the form of their immediately becoming objects of 'heritage' and, as such, subject to the cultural heritage schema. Even were they never claimed for a collection, they would nevertheless be part of the 'standing reserve' of cultural heritage. The annihilation of the thing as thing is located in the forgetting of its essence, a forgetting of what Heidegger saw as the truth of things (Mitchell 2015, p. 57). As he wrote, "Devastation is no mere turning to sand; Devastation is the high-speed expulsion of Mnemosyne" (Mitchell 2015, p. 70). It is more important now than ever before to make the effort to remember the thinghood (relationality) of *things*—to re-member them, if you will.

Some might wonder whether the essence of a specifically Christian historical artefact like a medieval font can be thusly re-membered in a largely post-Christian age. While it is still there to be seen, has not the world that it set up departed (Boetzkes and Vinegar 2014, p. 17)? Or does the opening to the sacred that it provided remain open also for today's post- or non-Christian visitors? I would suggest that that rather depends on whether we let it. Whatever the age or origin story of an artefact, it must gain and regain its significance in a constant coming to be, its meaning perpetually recreated and reflected back to itself from the way in which it opens up the world to us (Tonner 2014, p. 123).

The font at St Peter and St Paul at Salle need not point to a specific praxis like Christian baptism. Although, if our understanding and interpretation of the Christian message is continually broadened, as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both recognised it must be in order to remain salient, Christianity may well be able to continue to blossom within the flint walls of Norfolk's medieval churches, in the place of some more generic sense of holiness.[51] Perhaps, if we attend to these spaces as we should, we may perceive an 'afterglow' of which proper contemplation could yet yield a spark of its original worlding.[52] Or, perhaps it is rather precisely in the withdrawal and decay of the theology and liturgy that once inspired the making of the font, that they are still present in it[53] (Boetzkes and Vinegar 2014, p. 17). Just as our own sense of deprivation and destitution may itself, one day, cause a sense of the holy to be rekindled—if only in a form in which the *logos* appears as open-endedly disappeared or as shrouded in our ongoingly unfolding deprivation (Schalow 2001, pp. 138, 141).

Whether or not a *Heimkehr* to a new or old, broadened, or deepened Christianity is realised, Heidegger's mythic-poetic concept of the gathering of the fourfold continues to allow for an imaginative retrieval—through the finite things of this world—of the Sacred, to grant a possibility for mystery to prevail beyond all religious dogmas, decrees, and denominations. As such, it continues to make it possible to recognise the seven-sacraments font at St Peter and St Paula at Salle as a sacred thing. To anyone who comes within the orbit of it, it must be clear that it performs a mystic ablution by simply standing there, gathering around itself, as it does, birth and death, endurance and decline.[54] It is in and through this gathering that it comes to salience in the world (Malpas 2006, p. 246).

The undimmed importance of this can best be understood against the dark backdrop of my love for Norfolk's churches: namely, a concern for their future preservation as what they are.[55] The threats against them are legion, from the rising sea levels that result from climate change to the roof lead thefts and other heritage crimes that result, at least in part, from the ever increasing social and economic inequalities in Britain and the world at large; from a lack of the funding necessary to make repairs to the fabric to funding from the types of bodies that tie moneys for repairs to commitments made to partial transformations into so-called multi-use spaces.

By choosing to engage with the font, and the church in which it stands, as things rather than objects, we spare them from being commodified, from becoming units in the standing reserve of cultural heritage. In doing so, we, too, are freed from our false identities as units of production and agents of consumption. The gathering acts as a covenant, a betrothal. When we apprehend the font as what it is, fully, we are also seen as what *we* are, fully.

The medieval fonts and churches of Norfolk are not valuable as a result of their putative antiquarian qualities. They are *in*valuable as a result of their conferring upon us a sense of belonging—of feeling at home with ourselves and at peace with the world.[56] They are invaluable because they extend to us a possibility of our dwelling—as mortals—on the earth—under the sky—before the divinities.

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Notes

[1] And, more than that, that it is specifically by isolating and dividing something into its smallest component parts that we can learn most about it, including its purpose and meaning. Cf. Descartes' infamous vivisections as attempts to understand the vascular system or, even more preposterously, life itself.

[2] Heidegger's term for encountered things was "ready-to-hand-equipment.".

[3] Heidegger was himself criticized on this very score by Meyer Shapiro who claimed that while Heidegger thought Van Gogh's painting of a pair of peasant shoes told an intersubjectively and non-reflectively perceptible "truth about the world" (299) he was in fact himself simply projecting his own thoughts and feelings onto the painting. Shapiro feels that Heidegger has deceived himself in supposing that the truth of this painting is something given here once and for all, especially without taking the artist's own motivation and presence in the work into account. "The Still Life as a Personal Object: A Note on Heidegger and Van Gogh" (Shapiro 1968, pp. 296–300).

[4] Although one could argue that the question isn't really one of simple accuracy or inaccuracy—this way of considering things is in itself part of a reductionist and unnecessarily dichotomous way of perceiving things. It is rather that poetic, ekphrastic saying, the way Heidegger conceives of it, has access to a *deeper* reality and fuller truth (Šišovski 2013, p. 3).

[5] In phenomenological texts, the writer does not so much attempt to capture 'absolute truth' or 'objective reality' (shibboleths both) as aspire to capture a sense of meaning, the meaning—ultimately—of human existence (Van Manen 2017, p. 7).

[6] Any original German words, phrases and passages included can be traced to (Heidegger 2000).

[7] –but which can trace its ancestry all the way back to ancient Greece–

[8] In the post-modern world, consumption increasingly takes the form of experiences. Historic churches are often advertised as good destinations for a 'day out' and parts of them either objectively evaluated as 'worth seeing' or removed and offered as a consumer experience elsewhere, such as in museums. Increasingly, parts are also reproduced, such as the replica brasses that members of the general public can now pay to rub at the St Peter Hungate Museum and Brass Rubbing Centre in Norwich. These are all examples of how objectification and positionality collude to position the human as the 'greedy consumer of objectified experience.' (Mitchell 2015, p. 32).

[9] We shall return to this later in outlining the elements of the fourfold.

[10] Nader El-Bizri has rightly pointed out that many adaptive assimilations of Heidegger's thinking around the fourfold to architectural concerns must be deemed "facile or dilettante" in not having attended with due thoughtfulness to the intricacies of his philosophical pathways (El-Bizri 2011, p. 48).

[11] However, while things need the ground to be grounded, the ground likewise needs things to ground in order to be grounding—and, also, to itself *be* grounded (Mitchell 2015, p. 76).

[12] Heidegger didn't define himself as a phenomenologist after what he referred to as the 'turning,' which took place after the publication of *Being and Time*, but phenomenology did nevertheless continue to reverberate in his thoughts and work all his life long. In his penetrating and productive parsing of the fourfold, Andrew Mitchell makes a persuasive case for the ways in which a close reading of Heidegger's writing about the fourfold rewards one with a definite conviction of the schema being wholly phenomenological.

[13] So does Heidegger's unknown and by-default absent God, for example, appear as unknown and absent precisely through the sky's manifestness of that absence (Mitchell 2015, pp. 124–25).

[14] While Heidegger does not use the terms *chronos* (from which we get chronological) and *kairos* in the texts from which I am working, it seems obvious that his drifting clouds and his inclemencies of weather do not mean to suggest temporality as measured by clock time, but rather a kairotic time that brings to fruition each thing in its own time.

[15] An ontological, existential conflation that Heidegger also famously made regarding the icons of gods, writing "The sculpture of the god . . . is not a portrait whose purpose is to make it easier to realise how the god looks; rather, it is a work that lets god himself be present and thus *is* the god himself." (Heidegger 2013b, p. 42).

[16] While the prayer "In the midst of life there is death" is often recited at funerals, in which context it is simply understood as meaning that at any given moment one person may die while another remains alive, a more profound everyday reading of it would highlight the fact that we are all always and continuously dying, or living-towards-death.

[17] In English translation the passage reads: " . . . and indeed continually, as long as [we] remain upon the earth, under the sky, before the divinities." "Building Dwelling Thinking" (Heidegger 2013a, p. 148).

[18] In (Heidegger 1973), Heidegger wrote, "[t]hings themselves are places and do not merely belong to a place." Jeff Malpass has similarly commented that place is something other than mere location (Heidegger 1973, p. 255).

[19] Heidegger was scathing of tourists who visited but did not see, who appeared unable to perceive the traces of being (Sharr 2008, p. 13).

[20] This figures prominently in the Christian belief in humankind's life on earth being a life lived in exile.

[21] While scientific measuring measures the unknown against the known, Heidegger's poetic measuring measures the known against the unknown.

[22] It has been observed that the loftiest churches and most soaring of church spires tend to be found where, as Cox would have it, "the neighbourhood is monotonously flat or destitute of striking features (Cox 1976, pp. 20–23). While in hillier and more mountainous terrain, as Wordsworth reflected in 1798: the "steep and lofty cliffs [. . .] connect/The landscape with the quiet of the sky." ("Tintern Abbey, Lines Composed Above", Wordsworth 1926), that task is left to man on "duller levels" (Cox, again).

[23] Jesus is quoted as having said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (KJV, John 3:5)

[24] We know, of course, that Christian iconography owes a great deal to Rome, and it is fascinating to ponder the inherited subliminal memory that pictures, such as Classical motifs, retain when appropriated into a new context, Christian as here. Just how and when this particular elision or translation of motifs took place is not known.

[25] Setting foot under a hammerbeam angel roof was to come under the guardianship of its angels (Stanford 2019, p. 187).

[26] So-called because it was devised by angelologists in the 12th century as an explanation of the relationship between heaven and earth, God and humanity (or, if you like, between earth and sky, mortals and gods, to use Heidegger's terminology) by means of angels (Stanford 2019, pp. 8, 27, 149).

[27] On stepping into a church, a sacred space, the threshold does not merely separate (and join) exterior and interior, two sides of a material wall, but two modes of being, two qualitatively different spaces. Crossing into a sacred space, the threshold does not open merely inwards, but also upwards, making angels particularly apposite threshold companions (Eliade 1987, pp. 25, 26).

[28] Looking from the darkness underneath the bell ringers' gallery towards the light of the nave and the sun-infused chancel beyond visually replicates the meanings of the various parts of the church, where the west is associated with the realm of darkness, grief, and death; the middle, i.e., the nave, represents earthly life; and the sanctuary in th easternmost part represents Paradise, traditionally thought to have been in the east (Eliade 1987, p. 61).

[29] Eliade defines unconsecrated space as an amorphous wasteland, an "extent into which no orientation has yet been projected, and hence in which no structure has yet arisen" (Eliade 1987, pp. 36, 64).

[30] Just as the central placing of the font acts as a visual spatial reminder directly upon entry into a church, of one's own baptism and thereby of one's inclusion in community both earthly and divine, so do the year-round ecclesiastical celebrations act as a chronological anchor for the memory of baptism (Ben-Aryeh Debby 2013, p. 19; Schlegel 2013, p. 130).

31 The enhanced location of the baptismal font, including its repositioning in the middle axis of the nave (a placement that can be traced back to the 9th-c. plan of the Abbey of St Gall, Switzerland) and its elevation on to a platform with steps, happened around the year 1200 and corresponded with a revival of the symbolism of baptism (Schlegel 2013, pp. 131, 146).

32 (BBC 1974), archived on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkqY-MBPTR8 (accessed on 15 June 2021)

33 Saint Ambrose called the fountain in Eden *fons vitae aeternae*, identifying it not only with Christ but with *sapientia* (wisdom) (Underwood 1950, vol. 5, p. 47).

34 Oddly, most of the Reformational or Puritanical violence appears to have been directed at these figures. The rest of the font had perhaps been successfully plastered over in time, whereas no one had imagined that the innocuous figures of the Evangelists—hardly divisive figures in the battle between Catholics and Protestants—would have occasioned so much zealous (or purely random?) rage.

35 Another enduring tradition associates the four Evangelists with angels (Stanford 2019, p. 113). Whether this equation arose as a result of their emblems all being winged, or the wings of the emblems rather came about as a result of the pre-existing equation, I must leave unsaid. Suffice to say that the connection to baptism is twice made by means of the Evangelists—by their association with the Four Rivers of Paradise that have their source in the Fountain of Eden and by their correlation with angels who, as we have already seen, have a special role to play in the rite of baptism.

36 The association of the font with the fountain of Eden/Life places it—places *every* font—at the centre of the world, a place that can only ever be found in sacred and never in purely geometrical space (Eliade 1987, p. 37).

37 While the font cover at Salle does not feature a little bird at its apex, many other font covers do, including the almost equally lofty one at Salle.

38 Round or polygonal (most often octagonal) baptisteries are the rule from the fourth century onward. Well-known octagonal baptisteries include the Baptistery of St John in Florence and the Lateran Baptistery (Ben-Aryeh Debby 2013, p. 14). They are possibly modelled on Roman bath buildings, which were always round, square or octagonal, the interior being centred on a basin for the performance of the cleansing ritual (Homan 2006, p. 26; Underwood 1950, p. 43). While there are only a few octagonal fonts of late Norman date in England, almost all English fonts were made octagonal from the 13th century on.

39 For the mental image of a wildly revolving font, I am indebted to the Nobel Prize-winning Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer (2011). In "Österjöar III" (2011: 230), he writes about the extraordinary 12th-century font in the small Gotland village of Vänge: Bilderna starkare i minnet än när man ser dem direkt, starkast/när funten snurrar i en långsam mullrande karusell i minnet." [The images are stronger in the mind's eye than when seen directly/strongest when the font spins in a slow rumbling carousel in the mind.]

40 According to Cox, there are 32 in total in England, whereof 19 are to be found in Norfolk (Cox 1923, p. 97), whereas Matthew Byrne has it that there are 40 in total, whereof 24 in Norfolk (Byrne 2020, p. 32). It would therefore seem that another eight were unearthed between 1923 and 2020, including five in Norfolk.

41 While there is no water in the font during my visit to Salle, the search for the *essence* of the font requires me to use the ekphrastic technique of describing things as seen also with the mind's eye, evoking that which is absent as vividly as that which is present.

42 " ... and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." (Genesis, 1:2). "And God said, Let the waters under the heave be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear. And it was so." (Genesis 1:9).

43 From Tertullian's *De Baptismo*, cited in Drewer, "Fisherman and Fish Pond": 534. Of course, this can be interpreted to mean that were we not swimming in the pond to begin with, we wouldn't be there to be fished to our rescue.

44 By some, including Leo the Great, deduced to have taken its course from the pierced side of Christ: "from his side there flowed forth the blood of redemption *and the water of baptism* (taken from his letters before AD 440 and cited in (Underwood 1950, p. 57)).

45 "*fons et origo*" (fountain/spring and origin), a reservoir of all the possibilities of existence. Tertullian also wrote, in *De Baptismo*, that "Water was the first to produce that which had life, that it might be no wonder in baptism if waters knew how to give life ... "

46 Heidegger understood grace both as an 'unwarranted bestowal' (*die Gunst*) and as a 'sparing mercy' (*die Gnade*), both of which he took to define the (authentically poetical) dimension of mortal existence, comprised and defined by the relationship between beings and Being (Mitchell 2010, pp. 309, 319).

47 According to a provincial English Synod in 1236, the font was always to have a locked cover, to prevent the water from being sullied or being put to any superstitious use (Cox 1923, p. 98).

48 I am not sure why or how locks would necessarily be effective against spirits, however.

49 Amy Bloch mentions the instance of Constantine's allegedly having been cured, by means of baptismal immersion, of the leprosy that he had been suffering as a punishment from God for his having persecuted Christians ("The Two Fonts of the Florentine Baptistery": 93).

50 In order for a place, any place, to be sacred, it must offer a break in the homogeneity of space, link heaven and earth and put us in communication with the sky/transcendent (Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*: 33–34, 37, 58).

51 The large number of culturally Christian agnostics in England and the rest of the West are, privately and—in some cases—collectively, ongoingly searching for a for them viable and meaningful Christianity, inspired by a diverse set of influences from forms of *Ur*-Christianity to other world religions and philosophies as well as from the various European paganisms that once co-existed with early Christianity (Schalow 2001, pp. 137, 143).

52　Referred to as such by Heidegger in *Sojourns*, the journal recounting his philosophical pilgrimage to Greece, traces of whose history he found in its land, art and architecture (Tonner 2014, p. 130).

53　Heidegger was himself fond of the idea of negation as confirmation.

54　As the temple does its work simply by standing in place (Heidegger 2013b, p. 41).

55　Phenomenological accounts invariably have an, albeit sometimes unspoken, ethical dimension and mine is no different (Halling 2020).

56　The word 'dwelling' comes, as Heidegger elucidated, form the Old (Anglo-)Saxon word *wunian*, meaning 'to be brought to peace' (Roy 2017, p. 32).

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