One of the recommendations of Vatican II was that priests be formed in the arts: “During their philosophical and theological studies, clerics are to be taught about the history and development of sacred art, and about the sound principles governing the production of its works. In consequence they will be able to appreciate and preserve the Church’s venerable monuments, and be in a position to aid, by good advice, artists who are engaged in producing works of art.” This is not a bad idea, considering that priests are the caretakers of the Church’s artistic patrimony. Each pastor is ostensibly the curator of a small art gallery as well as the overseer of a physical plant which needs constant maintenance, repair, and additions. Then there are the lucky few, or perhaps not, who have the opportunity to build anew. Building a church is a grand undertaking which includes thousands of decisions from hiring the right architect to raising millions of dollars to critiquing the statue of the Blessed Virgin to deciding whether the door hardware should be bronze or polished brass. And it all has to be done in addition to the full time job of running the parish.

Given that many pastors have to be shepherd, curator, head of the physical plant, chairman of the music and education programs, and chief development officer, does it make sense that priests are the caretakers of the Church’s artistic patrimony.

What do future priests need to know? To understand the distinctiveness of different periods and styles while at the same time studying their development and continuity with the past. We see this in the development from early Christian architecture to the Romanesque and then to the Gothic. The Renaissance church plan and bay module develops ideas begun with the Gothic. To be familiar with some of the great patrons and their architects including Constantine, Bishop Sugger, the Medicis, and Pope Julius II up through Archbishops Carroll, Hughes, and Ireland in the United States. These men set the standard for us today, and their buildings continue to inspire. To inculcate in future priests a love of the great tradition of sacred architecture. This means valuing not just the churches they grew up with but also the early Christian basilica, the Byzantine dome, the Gothic cathedral, and the exuberance of the Baroque. There is not one Catholic style nor is there one formula for creating a beautiful church. Rather there are timeless principles of sacred architecture such as verticality, procession, the body analogy, symbolism, and durable construction which can be found across all centuries and styles.

In terms of design, it would be helpful to offer background on the role and benefits of hiring a professional architect, how to hire an architect, and the different services they can provide. As someone who “professes,” the architect’s role is to assist the pastor in designing a work of art which is durable, serves the liturgy, and can be constructed for a budget. A successful project requires the involvement of the priest as patron, leader of his parish committee, with reasonable expectations of his architect, engineer, and contractor.

Finally, future priests would benefit from an introduction to the fundraising and construction process. Just as in the design process, there is no replacement for the pastor being involved. He is the agent of the bishop, and a shepherd who looks out for the faithful’s needs. Alternatively, a do-it-yourself approach has many potential pitfalls; it is no less crucial to hire professional fundraisers and competent general contractors than a competent dentist to pull out your teeth. Many have learned the hard way that if you go cheap you often get what you pay for. Either way, building or renovating a church, like many things in life, is not easy, and there is of necessity a lot of hard work.

Can all of this be done in a seminary education? A course that covers it all would be most beneficial, though it could only be an introduction to these topics. At the minimum, I believe a course on the history of sacred art and architecture would be a wonderful foundation for a lifetime of learning, curating, and beautifying. The design process and construction process could be taught as part of a class on running a parish. Alternatively, these topics could also be covered in a couple of daylong or weekend seminars. In this way we could help our future pastors and bishops in their work of appreciating, preserving, and adding to the Church’s rich patrimony of sacred art and architecture.
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Two new bronze statues were installed in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Wichita, KS. The larger than life-size “Mary and Joseph” and “The Crucifixion” face each other from the east and west transepts of the cruciform church. Sculptor Rip Caswell of Troutdale, OR, commented, “Churches still want commissioned works to be of the highest quality and to remain true to doctrine, but they want them to reflect a more genuine portrayal of life and of the things with which we can all relate.”

The new church of Saint Martin de Porres in Lake Charles, LA, was dedicated in a ceremony on February 13 presided by Bishop Glen John Provost of the Diocese of Lake Charles. The Spanish Baroque church was designed by Jackson & Ryan Architects of Houston, TX, at a cost of $8 million. Architectural features of the new building serving the 1,200 family parish include stone details quarried from Jerusalem and a stained-glass dome in the apse with eight panels depicting Old and New Testament figures.

The Pope gave a personal donation for the restoration of Saint Augustine in Algeria.

The Basilica of Saint Augustine in the Algerian town of Annaba is currently undergoing restoration work with funds that included a personal donation from Pope Benedict XVI. The Basilica was constructed in the early twentieth century in an eclectic mixture of Arab, Moorish, Romanesque, and Byzantine styles in a conscious effort to represent the coexistence of Muslims and Christians. It stands on a hill overlooking the ruins of the Roman city of Hippo, where St. Augustine was bishop in the fifth century.

The National Shrine of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini reopened in Chicago on September 30, 2012 after a restoration by the firm of Sullivan, Goulette & Wilson. The shrine is located on the site where Mother Cabrini, the patroness of immigrants and first American citizen to be canonized, died in 1917. The Shrine was constructed in 1955 as an addition to Columbus Hospital and closed in 2002 after the hospital closed. It is in the care of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, the order founded by Mother Cabrini.

Saint Wenceslaus Church in Chicago hosted a series of lectures regarding its art deco architecture and its status as an ethnically Polish parish. Lecturers included Jacob Kaplan of the organization Forgotten Chicago, Professor Dominic Pacyga of Columbia College, and preservation consultant Victoria Granacki. The church was designed by the firm of McCarthy, Smith, and Eppig, and dedicated in 1942.

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A series of storms and tornadoes destroyed the church of Saint Joseph in Ridgeway, IL, along with hundreds of other buildings. The Gothic high altar was all that remained intact after the February 29 storms. Although no one was harmed in the destruction of the church, the storms took the lives of at least six victims elsewhere. The diocese of Belleville, IL, prayed for the victims of the storms and pledged its support to the affected communities.

The Basilica of Santa Maria in Montesanto on Rome’s Piazza del Popolo was the site of a February 18 event titled “In Dialogue: Faith and Figurative Art.” The event celebrated the works of the fifteenth century Dominican painter Fra Angelico, described by Pope John Paul II as “an example to all artists.” The meeting took place as part of a larger project by the Office of Social Communication of the Vicariate of Rome, “A Door to the Infinite: Man and the Absolute in Art.” The goal of the project, organized in collaboration with the Pontifical Council for Culture, is to help artists nourish the relationship between faith and art.

The Catholic Artists Society hosted a Lenten Evening of Recollection at Saint Vincent de Paul Church in New York City on March 1. The event included an Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and Adoration.

Thirteen parishes in the Diocese of Cleveland were reopened after the Vatican overruled Bishop Richard Lennon’s church closures on March 7. The closures were reversed for not properly following church laws and procedures. Previously the thirteen parishes had appealed to the Vatican’s Congregation for the Clergy under the premise of being self-sustaining parishes that should not be closed. Many consider this ruling a monumental shift in the Vatican’s stance on the hundreds of U.S. parish closures that have occurred in the last decade. Bishop Lennon chose not to appeal the Vatican’s decree, calling for “peace and unity” in his diocese.

The 1857 structure of Saint Patrick in Colebrook, Tasmania, was posthumously built from the designs of A. W. N. Pugin.

The historic church of Saint Patrick in Colebrook, Tasmania, is undergoing a restoration by architects Brian and Jude Adams. The church was originally designed in 1843 by the Gothic Revival architect A. W. N. Pugin. The US$707,000 renovation includes a new bell tower with a peal of three bells, new plaster and paint in the intended scheme of Pugin, a restoration of the original rood screen, and a new organ to be built by Hans Meijer of Launceston, Tasmania.

Saint Louis Catholic Church in Memphis, TN, underwent a sanctuary renovation in late 2011 that included a new artificially lit stained glass window and a classical baldacchino. Victor Buchholz of the firm Looney Ricks Kiss was the principal architect.

The interior of Saint James Church in Lakewood, OH; one of 13 parishes to be reopened in the Diocese of Cleveland. More photography of the reopened parishes can be found at clevelandparishrenewal.webs.com.
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**News**

**Saint Emma Monastery in Greensburg, PA** is the site of a new sculpture titled “The Last Supper” by artist Timothy Schmalz. The sculpture consists of a life-sized statue of Jesus seated at a table with twelve empty seats. Schmalz has created religiously inspired sculptures for twenty-two years and describes his “Last Supper” as a tool for meditation in which people have the opportunity to “sit next to Jesus.” The Sisters of St. Benedict commissioned the piece in October 2011 with the funding of donors, memorials, and ongoing contributions.

**Mary Queen Parish in Friendswood, TX**, dedicated a new church on April 21, presided by Archbishop Daniel Cardinal DiNardo of Galveston-Houston. HLB Architects of Houston designed the two-towered Romanesque-inspired building with construction beginning in the fall of 2010. The completed structure cost a total of $10.6 million and has a seating capacity of 1,600 plus an additional 200 seats in an adjacent chapel. A massive mural behind the altar depicts Jesus feeding the loaves and fish to the masses. Artist Andrew Halterman used volunteers from the parish as models for this composition.

**Architecture students at the Catholic University of America** began building their collaborative design for a modern day hermitage on March 29. The purpose of the hermitage is to provide a place for quiet prayer and contemplation amidst a busy area of Washington, D.C., emphasizing “the relationship of the sacred with the profane,” according to director William Jelen. The 350-square-foot structure allows a single person to reside for either a short or long period of time. The design won the 2010 Unbuilt Award from the American Institute of Architects in Washington, D.C.

**The church of Saint Augustine in Ramsgate, England**, was formally established as a shrine to “the Apostle of the English” by Archbishop Peter Smith of Southwark. Notable Gothic Revival architect A. W. N. Pugin designed the church in the mid-nineteenth century within close proximity to the original site where Saint Augustine of Canterbury landed by ship in A.D. 597. The March 1 dedication of the Shrine coincided with the birthday of Pugin. The church is also Pugin’s burial place.

**The world-renowned Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig** performed for the pope on April 20 at the Vatican’s Paul VI Hall. The concert celebrated the eighty-fifth birthday of the pope earlier in the week. The orchestra performed Felix Mendelssohn’s second symphony, “Hymn of Praise.” After thanking the orchestra, the pope commented on the composer Mendelssohn: “Music as praise of God, the supreme Beauty is the basis of Mendelssohn’s approach to composition, not only of his liturgical or sacred music as such but of the whole of his opus.”

**The new high altar at Charlotte Cathedral.**

**Artist Timothy Schmalz touching up his new sculpture for Saint Emma Monastery in Pennsylvania.**

**The church of Saint Augustine in Ramsgate, UK.**

**The interior of the newly completed Mary Queen Church in Friendswood, TX.**

**The Lady Chapel of A. W. N. Pugin’s Saint Augustine Shrine in Ramsgate, UK.**
A new monastery was dedicated May 24 at the site where Jesus miraculously multiplied loaves and fish near the Israeli town of Tabgha. Six Benedictine monks of the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem will inhabit the new monastery, designed by Peitz-Hoffman-Hillinger of Germany. The monastery replaces a 1950s structure built without foundations and in danger of collapse. The organization “Aid to the Church in Need” donated $63,850 for the construction of the small air-conditioned oratory within the cloister for monks to escape the summer heat. At the dedication ceremony, the former Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Monsignor Michel Sabbah, referred to the monastery as “a new witness of the presence of God in the life of this land.”

The 5.8 magnitude earthquake that hit northern Italy on May 29 caused the roof collapse of the Cathedral of Mirandola, a town in the Emilia-Romagna region. The Italian Gothic structure dates from the late fifteenth century. The earthquake took the lives of at least sixteen people, one of whom was a parish priest in the town of Rovereto di Novi. The priest was killed by a falling beam in his church while attempting to save a Madonna statue.

In March 2012, the Archdiocese of Port-au-Prince, Haiti announced an international competition for the design of a new national cathedral. The previous cathedral of Port-au-Prince was heavily damaged in the earthquake of January 12, 2010, after the roof and two towers collapsed. The purpose of the competition is to identify winning entries that can be used to inform the reconstruction of the cathedral, with the possibility of implementation of one of the designs. The deadline for submitting projects is November 15, 2012, and the winner will be awarded $12,000. Information on the competition can be found at http://competition.ndapap.org/index.php.

The Anglican Diocese of Christchurch, New Zealand, began construction of a new temporary cathedral built primarily out of cardboard last April after the extensive damage of the old cathedral in earthquakes last year. At a cost of $4.1 million, the new cathedral was designed by Shigeru Ban of Tokyo and will be built of 104 cardboard tubes structurally reinforced with concrete and wood. When completed, the cathedral will be 82 feet tall and seat 700 people. The structure is expected to be completed by the end of 2012 and will have a lifespan of about ten years.
In June, the Italian organization Frate Sole announced the winners of its International Award of Sacred Architecture, conferred every four years. The grand prize was awarded to Chilean architect Cristian Undurraga for his design of the Auco Retreat Chapel in Auco, Chile. The second and third prizes went to the Portuguese architect João Luís Carrilho da Graça and the Italian firm X2 Architettura respectively. The Frate Sole Foundation was created with the purpose of “stimulating awareness of the need for excellent churches.” Previous winners of the award include Tadao Ando, Álvaro Siza, Richard Meier, and John Pawson.

Interior restoration of the world famous Chartres Cathedral in France is well underway and staged to be finished by 2015. The interior changes include full restoration and cleaning of the 175 stained glass windows and the restoration of the original polychromy on the walls and vaults. Chartres is unique among the Gothic cathedrals of France in that 80 percent of the original polychromy survives beneath a build-up of dirt and successive layers of paint. The walls and vaulting are returning to the original pale ochre hue with white faux stone joints. The keystones in the vaulting are being repainted to their gleaming red, green, black, and gold colors based on fragments of the medieval color that have survived. 

Cost of the restoration totals just under 14 million euros, and funding has been provided by both public and private donations. The dramatic effect of the restoration has garnered the criticism of some historians, and Giles Fresson, the historian overseeing the work, has commented, “You could say that we are taking a risk by transforming something which is admired and loved by so many people.”

On June 9, the Diocese of Orange, CA, announced the new name of the recently purchased Crystal Cathedral: Christ Cathedral. The name was chosen from over 4,000 suggestions submitted from all over the world. $50 million from next year’s diocesan capital campaign will fund the renovation of the cathedral and 34 acre campus. Rob Neal, interim chief operating officer of the Christ Catholic Cathedral Corporation estimated that the seven existing buildings on the campus would cost $300 million to construct, if built today.

The new Saint Raphael church includes the facade of the former Saint John of God church in Chicago.
Ongoing studies by University of Notre Dame Sociologist Christian Smith show that Catholics are not as generous with their tithing relative to other denominations. Smith first published these results in his 2008 book *Passing the Plate* and has a several hypotheses regarding this statistic, including one that regards Catholic church buildings. In contrast to Protestant churches, which are owned directly by the congregation, Catholic churches are technically owned by the bishop. Smith hypothesizes that “Catholics belong to a church, but they don’t feel they financially ‘own’ as Protestants do.”

An exhibition of original documents of the Second Vatican Council began at the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls on January 25. The exhibition coincides with the 50th anniversary of the Vatican II Council, celebrated this year. The exhibition includes such documents as the handwritten texts of Pope John XXIII’s address to announce the council as well as his opening speech for the council, given on October 11, 1962.

An electrical fire that was sparked during last year’s Christmas Vigil Mass severely damaged Saint Mary Church in Brussels, IL. All that remained after the fire was suppressed were the four main walls and a few pews in the rear of the structure. Firefighters and parishioners were able to salvage items such as vestments, chalices, and statues. The parish and diocese are currently planning to use the existing walls for reconstruction. Chiodini Associates of St. Louis, MO is the architect.

Saint Gianna parish in Wentzville, MO, dedicated a new church on April 29. The $2.7 million church seats 450 and features stained glass windows from a shuttered parish in Saint Louis.

On November 10, 2011, authorities in the Vatican declared the church of Saint Stanislaus Kostka in Winona, MN a minor basilica. The petition for this title included such reasons as the architectural quality and significant Polish heritage of the 1895 building.

A new session of the series “Courtyard of the Gentiles” opened May 21 at Barcelona’s National Museum of Art. The series is part of a new initiative by the Pontifical Council for Culture with the intention of considering art as a way of transcendence and communication with God. The event included several lecturers, including Cardinal Giancarlo Ravasi, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, who called for those in attendance to “fight against superficiality in art.”

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The parishioners of the Dominican-run church of Saint Dominic on the south side of Youngstown, OH broke ground for a new parish center on April 25. The project is part of Prior Father Gregory Maturi’s initiative “Operation Redemption.” The initiative began in 2010 in response to the homicides of two elderly parishioners on the parish premises. The 4,000-square-foot facility will cost $1.3 million and is seen by the parish as “an investment in growth and restoration for the whole neighborhood.”

The Episcopal Diocese of Boston unveiled plans for the presently blank pediment of the Cathedral of Saint Paul. The proposal includes a sculpture by artist Donald Lipski depicting a cross-section of a chambered nautilus placed against a blue field. Installation of the sculpture will be completed in 2012 in conjunction with the 100th anniversary of the dedication of Saint Paul as a diocesan cathedral. The budget for the sculpture is $200,000, and the symbolic nautilus is meant to represent a spiritual journey as well as “the holy mystery and creativity of the Divine.”

Last December, the State of New York’s highest court affirmed the right of the Archdiocese of New York City to demolish the shuttered church of Our Lady of Vilnius. The church was built at the turn of the twentieth century to serve Manhattan’s Lithuanian Catholic community. When the archdiocese filed for a demolition permit after the church’s 2007 closure, second and third-generation parishioners sued with the argument that the archdiocese should first consult the congregation. The church presently stands, awaiting demolition.

July saw the dedication of the new Chapel of Our Lady of the Assumption in Johnson Bayou, LA. The previous 1965 structure was damaged by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and then completely destroyed by a storm surge of Hurricane Ike in 2008. The new $1 million chapel, designed by architect Steven D. Shows of Sulphur, LA, is raised seventeen feet above sea level with stairs and an elevator, and the siding of the wood-framed structure is concrete based to protect from insect infestation and rot.

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For the purpose of trying to discern major shifts in the theory and practice of the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, the history of the tabernacle can be divided into four sections: the patristic period until Carolingian times, the Carolingian period until the Council of Trent, the Council of Trent to Vatican II, and Vatican II to the present.

**The Patristic Period until Carolingian Times**

The evidence from this early period deals with two kinds of reservation of the Blessed Sacrament: 1) the private reservation of the Eucharist in the homes of the faithful, and 2) the reservation of the Eucharist in the church for the sake of giving Communion to the sick or the dying. In the first category, the homes of the faithful, there is very little information about how or where the Eucharist was reserved, although some sources indicate that it was reverently wrapped in a piece of white linen, or placed in a special chest or container. In the case of the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament in churches, the Apostolic Constitutions, c.VIII, no.13 indicate that the deacons should bring what was left over of the Eucharistic species consecrated during the Mass to a special room called the *Pastoforio*. In the Oriental churches, this was situated on the south side of the altar. In the West, it had the name *secretarium* or *sacrarium*. The deacon had the keys since the administration of the Eucharist was his special charge. In this room there was a special wardrobe or chest called a *conditorium*. An example of this can be seen in the fifth-century mosaics of the Galla Placidia mausoleum in Ravenna. In pre-Carolingian times, however, there is no evidence for the use of the altar as a place for the reservation of the Eucharist.

From the ninth century onward, the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament in the church becomes the norm, while the practice of keeping the Eucharist in the homes of the faithful disappears. This is a one of those fundamental shifts which merits greater attention. Giambattista Rapisarda offers three reasons for such a significant change in Eucharistic practice: 1) the rise of major Eucharistic controversies about the nature of Christ’s presence, starting with Paschasius Radbertus (+859) and Ratramnus (+868); 2) the spread of a different spirituality reflected in the new genre of apologetic prayers which manifested enormous respect for the Eucharist and a sense of profound unworthiness before so great a mystery, and 3) the conversion of barbarian peoples en masse with the danger of profanation of the Eucharist on the one hand and superstition on the other.

**The Carolingian Period until the Council of Trent**

The six or seven centuries we are dealing with in this second period contain notable developments in Eucharistic theology and practice. Mention must be made of Berengarius (+1088) and the Eucharistic controversy that raged around him; the development of a new Eucharistic piety manifested in the desire to see the Host, with the resultant introduction of the elevation first of the Host, then of the Chalice at the Consecration of the Mass; the scholastic precisons about transubstantiation; the diffusion of the feast of Corpus Christi; the decline in the reception of Communion, and so on. Some of these factors contribute to new ways of reserving the Eucharist (the Sacrament-towers, for example). At other times, the force of custom results in the retention of more traditional forms. Righetti distinguishes five basic ways of reserving the Blessed Sacrament during this period:

1) *Propitiatorium*: a container or small chest which was placed on the altar; hence a kind of portable tabernacle. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215-1216) prescribed that it should be locked and kept secure. This system was rather widespread in Italy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

2) Sacristy: In many places, the Eucharist was kept in the sacristy, in some kind of special chest or cupboard. In many places, this practice continued until the Council of Trent.

3) Eucharistic dove: around the...
eleventh century: a metal dove (symbolizing the Holy Spirit), hollow, of modest proportions, was suspended over the altar from the ciborium (if there was one), or placed on a small table next to the altar. This system was frequently used in France and England, but rarely in Italy.

4) Wall tabernacles: From the thirteenth century onward this was the system most commonly used, especially in Italy and Germany, because it was more practical and more secure. On the Gospel side of the altar, a tabernacle was built into the wall. A fine example of such a tabernacle can be seen in San Clemente in Rome (thirteenth century). From the seventeenth century onward, with the development of the tabernacle on the altar, these wall tabernacles were then used to reserve the sacred oils.

5) Sakramentshäuschen or Sacrament-towers: This was a specialty of northern Europe (Germany, Low Countries, and northern France) from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. It was usually in the shape of a tower, built close to the altar, the consecrated host kept in a glass container protected by a metal grate of some kind. This responded to the popular piety developing at the time: the desire to see the host. These “towers” were actually a kind of monstrance, with a kind of permanent exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. One notes a great deal of variety according to time and place. At this time there is no standard practice for the universal Church.

The Council of Trent to Vatican II

What changed Catholic practice radically in this third period was the Protestant denial of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the response of the Counter-Reformation to this challenge. While the Council of Trent affirms against the Reformers that the Blessed Sacrament should be reserved, the canon in question is not very specific, mentioning the place of reservation in passing as the sacrarium. Popular piety and two bishops will play an important role in establishing a new form of Eucharistic reservation. In the sixteenth century, even before the Council of Trent, Bishop Gian Matteo Giberti of Verona (+1543) ordered that the Eucharist should be reserved in a tabernacle on the main altar: “The tabernacle should be placed on the main altar, and should be installed permanently (bene et firmiter) in such a way that it can by no means be carried off by sacrilegious hands.” This eventually caught on in the neighboring diocese of Milan, such that in 1565, at the First Provincial Synod of Milan, it was decreed that: “The bishop should diligently see to it that in the cathedral, in collegiate churches, in parishes and all other kind of churches, where the most holy Eucharist is usually reserved or where it should be reserved, it be placed on the main altar, unless it seems to him otherwise, on account of some necessary
In 1576, another synod of Milan prohibited wall tabernacles, and ordered their destruction. Saint Charles Borromeo lent this new custom the full weight of his moral and spiritual authority. In the duomo of Milan, he transferred the Blessed Sacrament from the sacristy, where it had been kept up until then, to the main altar of the church. In 1577 Cardinal Borromeo’s book *Instructionum Fabricae et Supellectilis Ecclesiasticae Libri II* was published, a work which was to have enormous influence in shaping church architecture and design in the centuries to come. Concerning the tabernacle he simply argues from authority, without providing any other justification. Since the provincial synod of Milan in 1565 decreed that the tabernacle should be on the main altar, if possible, Saint Charles assumes that this practice will be followed, and gives instructions concerning the materials to be used, style, decorative motifs, measurements, etc. Because the *Rituale Romanum* of 1614 incorporated this practice into its “praenotanda” in the section of the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist (Titulus IV, c.1, par.6), the custom of reserving the Blessed Sacrament in a tabernacle on the altar became known as “the Roman custom.” The placement on the main altar was not absolute, however, since it was foreseen that another altar might be more worthy or more suitable. Because the *Rituale* was not obligatory, the “Roman custom” of placing the tabernacle on the main altar spread only gradually, while other European countries maintained their local customs, sometimes for centuries. But the section on the tabernacle of Charles Borromeo’s *Instructions* had more influence than perhaps any other section of that work, and by the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries, the altar tabernacle that is found almost everywhere is the tabernacle of Saint Charles Borromeo.

The extremely important shift that took place after the Council of Trent can be explained by a number of factors: 1) the Protestant denial of the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament and the Church’s affirmation of her doctrine in the clearest possible way by placing the tabernacle in the center of the high altar; 2) the resultant increase in Eucharistic devotions such as adoration and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament; 3) the flourishing of Baroque architecture, especially in Rome, manifesting a larger-than-life enthusiasm and pride in the Catholic faith in the Eucharistic Presence; 4) the standardization of liturgical books (in this case the Roman Ritual) and the gradual standardization of liturgical practice as a result.

**Vatican II to the Present**

The fifty years that have elapsed since the Second Vatican Council have been characterized by enormous changes in liturgical theology and practice. The placement of the tabernacle in relation to the altar has been a topic of heated debate. What was normative in the post-Tridentine period has been largely rejected in the post-Vatican II period. While there has been general consensus about where the tabernacle should not be (on the main altar), there has been little consensus about where...
it should be. Theological disagreement about these issues has led to a rather confusing and sometimes contradictory pastoral practice. These changes will be traced in detail in a subsequent article on Liturgical Norms. (to be published in Sacred Architecture 23 Spring 2013)

There were two main reasons for the enormous shift that has taken place. The theological motivation was to restore emphasis on the altar and the Eucharistic action of the Mass, as opposed to the adoration and worship of the reserved Sacrament (a kind of dichotomy between the Eucharist seen as sacrifice and the Eucharist seen as sacrament). The result in practice has been a decline in Eucharistic devotion. The pastoral motivation was to promote active participation by placing the altar versus populum. In older churches a common solution has been to place a new altar in front of the old altar, thus creating a certain cognitive dissonance in the worshipper, at least at the subconscious level. The dilemma of where to put the reserved Blessed Sacrament has been frequently resolved by creating a side chapel. While that has been the practice for centuries in great basilicas and cathedrals and is eminently suitable under those conditions, many modern renovations have been less than felicitous, and small and crowded Blessed Sacrament chapels can seem inadequate and even irreverent. The revised General Instructions of the 2002 Roman Missal attempts to resolve some of these dilemmas by proposing a new model.

Born in 1955 in Massachusetts, The Very Rev. Cassian Folsom, O.S.B. has been a monk since 1979 and a priest since 1984. He served as the pro-President of the Pontificio Istituto Liturgico at the Athenaeum of Sant’Anselmo from 1997 to 2000, and is the founding prior of the Monastery of San Benedetto, located in Norcia, Italy, the birthplace of St. Benedict. Father Cassian is also a member of the Society for Catholic Liturgy, and is the author of numerous studies on Roman Catholic liturgy. In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI named Father Cassian as a consultor to the Congregation on Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. The second part of Very Rev. Folsom’s article, Liturgical Norms, will be printed in the Spring 2013 issue of Sacred Architecture.

Articles

Born in 1955 in Massachusetts, The Very Rev. Cassian Folsom, O.S.B. has been a monk since 1979 and a priest since 1984. He served as the pro-President of the Pontificio Istituto Liturgico at the Athenaeum of Sant’Anselmo from 1997 to 2000, and is the founding prior of the Monastery of San Benedetto, located in Norcia, Italy, the birthplace of St. Benedict. Father Cassian is also a member of the Society for Catholic Liturgy, and is the author of numerous studies on Roman Catholic liturgy. In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI named Father Cassian as a consultor to the Congregation on Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. The second part of Very Rev. Folsom’s article, Liturgical Norms, will be printed in the Spring 2013 issue of Sacred Architecture.
There’s a scene that unfolds at weekend liturgies in the place where I worship with stunning predictability. At a point somewhere in the midst of the Communion Rite worshipers begin migrating toward the exit doors, lured, one assumes, by the promise of more exciting Sabbath hours spent elsewhere. Imperceptible, at first, the trickle from the Mass of a person or two steadily builds to a great flood of defectors that leaves whole sections of the church looking as if they’d never been occupied at all. The effects of this on the parish’s ritual life are dramatic, as our celebrations never really end as much as disintegrate at the edges in a way that reduces any recessional hymn-singing to the most anemic sort of “exit music.”

The picture I describe is in no way new, nor is it unique to my parish. Sadly, a half-century after having been invited by Vatican II to become full shareholders in the Church’s rites—a role, one assumes, that necessitates them seeing every liturgical celebration through to its proper conclusion—many lay Catholics in the United States exhibit a public piety that is half-hearted. More restless than ever, the products of a national culture besieged by stimuli and ever in motion, they regard the rites of their own church as too slow-paced to be engaging. Should they comply, say, with requests from the pulpit to silence their cell phones at the outset of the Mass, they still face the challenge of quieting themselves—difficult for people unaccustomed to silence. It is precisely while worshiping, in fact, that Roman Catholics in this country act least Roman. Romanità, the native manner of the Eternal City that makes its dining tables no less than its altars the sites of unhurried elegance, doesn’t transfer well to the parish communities of Middle America, where liturgy is less often savored for its beauty than “gotten through” with greatest expediency.

Driving to Mass: Catholics, Automobiles, and the Dematerialization of the World

Among those rightly troubled by these circumstances are admirers of sacred architecture, who sense that various cultural and technological forces have conspired to rob American Catholics of their sensitivity to place along with their underlying “sense of the sacred.”\(^1\) Though this may seem a recent development stemming from the crush of electronica and other distractions with which the faithful now contend, I would argue that their appreciation for the physical dimension of worship actually began to be challenged a century ago, with the advent of the automobile. It is certainly by car that the majority of Catholic Americans continues to arrive at the Mass today and later depart for the far-flung residential developments that comprise the amorphous mega-parish.\(^2\) Apart from their homes, the first inorganic environments which believers occupy on a Sunday morning are their vehicles, mechanical preludes to the act of worship that dictate everything from the choreography of their approach to a familiar church building, to the likeliness of their entering the latter by way of its ceremonial doorways or some lesser portal, to where they eventually take their seats.\(^3\) Should automobiles have no other impact on believers’ weekly encounters with sacred architecture, their presence on a parish campus virtually guarantees that even the loveliest of churches will be surrounded by an expanse of asphalt bearing little connection to its outward form or interior purpose. As the car is a feature of Catholic liturgical experience today, so, one might say, is the tar (Fig. 1).

Anecdotal evidence abounds for the impact that auto-culture has had on both the place and pace of ritual activity among American Catholics. It is virtually impossible, for example, to find a parish whose weekend Mass schedule is not partly determined by the simple logistics of filling and emptying its parking lot.\(^4\) Equally rare is the pastor who lacks at least one story of
ritual-gone-bad over a mishap involving a hearse, limousine, motorcycle, or other form of ceremonial transportation. Those eager merely to weatherproof the motorized flow of worshipers to and from the thresholds of their churches by erecting elaborate entrance canopies are surprised to discover that at fourteen or fifteen feet—the height now required to accommodate the inflated vertical dimension of emergency vehicles and parishioners’ trucks, minivans, and SUVs—such structures prove largely useless against the elements they are intended to repel (Fig. 2). Likewise, the parish administrator hoping to control the circulation of on-site traffic by means of speed bumps, pylons, flags, and assorted pavement markings soon discovers how quickly their campus comes to resemble a Department of Motor Vehicles testing facility or go-cart track. Compounding the effect are the large, marquee-style signs bearing flashy, LED graphics that have cropped up on parish campuses in recent years (Fig. 3). The latter nearly always compromise the appearance of nearby buildings but are popular with pastors precisely for their ability to convey information to passing vehicular traffic.

A National Mythology Transformed into an Ecclesial One

So closely is the automobile connected to the developing egos of American Catholic adolescents, apparently, that many parishes now treat their newly-licensed teen drivers to something resembling a Confirmation ceremony. During these “Rites of Ignition,” as they might be called, the teens are presented to a congregation during the Mass and handed sets of shiny, new car keys, the way Catholic youths in a previous time might have been awarded scapulars, rosaries, and other sacramentals for maturing in the faith. Indeed, the objects are sacramentals of a sort—not diminutive “Keys to the Kingdom” exactly, but potent enough in their own way to offer their holders a taste of the vastly expanded geography of American adulthood. A website maintained by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry suggests that recipients of the typical “Blessing of Teen Drivers” be sprinkled with holy water, a gesture rich enough in baptismal symbolism to rebirth them into their new roles as operators of the family sedan. Whether it is proper to celebrate such rites within the context of the Eucharist is a question not likely to bother the average Catholic sixteen-year-old, who takes from the Church’s own actions only that attainment of a driver’s license is an achievement worthy of public adulation.

The initiation of Catholic teens into the intermingled cultures of road and roof actually begins much earlier in life, when the adult believers around them demonstrate how handily the mechanical wonders of the age can assume ecclesiastical roles. Consciously or not, their senior role-models signal the Church’s complicity in granting elevated status to the automobile with every wedding plan that specifies inclusion of a “stretch-limo,” trolley or similarly oversized vehicle. Likewise, their gambling on a chance at owning the cars and trucks many parishes offer as part of fundraising raffles (Fig. 4) legitimizes the updated version of the medieval “Cult of the Carts” that prevails today, as does the presence in many rectory garages still of luxury vehicles belonging to the resident clergy. (If the Church’s supreme pontiff enjoys as fine a motorized sedia gestatoria as the world-famous “Popemobile,” teens are led to reason, why begrudge the local pastor his lowly Lexus?)

Living and Worshiping Where our Cars are Happiest

It is by their decision to live and worship today primarily as suburbanites, however, that adult Catholics in the United States introduce their children most directly to a lifestyle inseparable from the automobile, if only by consigning them to the hours of commuter travel that life beyond the fringes of any city today requires. For even the most ascetical believer, cars have come to provide both the literal and the symbolic means of mobility within a whole network of public relationships beyond the realm of religion. The faithful rely on them not only to move bodily through space, but also sociologically through the cultural-economic strata that distinguish one class of God’s children from another. Not surprisingly, then, the flight of American Catholics from the working-class “parish-neighborhoods” of their past to the roomier expanses of exurbia has been accompanied by an increase in both the number and size of the vehicles they own. A modest, single-bay garage adjoining an equally modest, three-bedroom bungalow proves inadequate to the needs of...
today’s Suburban Catholics, whose vehicles have grown heftier even as their families have shrunk in size. On a subtler but no less important level, pastors rightly worry about the cacophony of messages that rises from the paved expanses surrounding their churches, some related to the very size and form of parishioners’ vehicles and others to the manner in which they are decorated. During weekends especially, the grounds of Catholic churches come to be draped in great suits of chain mail[10] emblazoned with images and words that can be wholly antithetical to Catholic moral teaching. What is a pastor to do, for instance, at first sighting of a “Hummer” (Fig. 5), popular, commercial version of the U.S. Military’s Human Transport Vehicle, or “Humvee?” What is he to say to the owner of a car with bumper stickers, decals, or similar marks of personal expression that are in any way off-color? Does a “Hooters” sticker or the campaign emblem of a pro-choice or pro-death penalty politician constitute merely a “near occasion of sin” or does its proximity to a Catholic place of worship promote such scandal as to be a matter for the confessional? What about anti-immigration slogans, or mud flaps decorated with the silhouettes of naked women, or Confederate flags embroidered with the slogan, “It’s heritage, not hate!” — actual examples all?

Guidance from the Episcopate

Surprisingly little guidance concerning automobiles has been offered pastors by members of the American episcopate. No mention of cars is made, for example, in the liturgical directives published by Roger Cardinal Mahoney,[12] who, as then-shepherd to over three million Catholics in the sprawling, auto-dependent Archdiocese of Los Angeles, must be particularly aware of the role they play in the lives of his flock. While the cardinal’s statement challenges the faithful to resist “the hurried pace” and “tyranny of the clock”[13] that pervade their culture, it never points to the specific tools of technology that indeed have come to enslave North Americans and contribute to the kind of free-floating, commuter worship that so commonly afflicts them.

Even when the automobile is identified by name, as is the case in a similar set of directives[14] issued by Donald Trautman, Bishop Emeritus of Erie, PA, and twice chairman of the Bishops’ Committee on Liturgy, it is treated as a minor component of parishioners’ preparation for worship, as innocuous a part of the Sunday experience as “… getting everyone into the bath [and] into their clothes.”[15] Little more is made of the issue in instructions on church design from the Diocese of Wilmington, DE, which offer the somewhat counter-intuitive stipulation that parking lots be located “in areas apart from the main entrance,”[16] or from the Diocese of San Diego, CA, which attacks the problem of parking obliquely by requiring sufficient spaces for the faithful “… within and outside the church building.”[17] All that is said of automobiles in Built of Living Stones, the instruction on sacred architecture promulgated in 2000 by the USCCB, is that they should not be allowed to dominate the site of a church. Parking lots and passenger drop-offs, the instruction suggests, need to be “conven
tient yet unobtrusive” and able to offer their users some degree of transition “from everyday life to the celebration of the mysteries of the faith.”[18]

As a half-century of urban analysis and design research reveal, unfortunately, automobiles are inherently obtrusive things, capable of devouring some 200 square feet of space within the confines of a single, painted parking bay. Together, one hundred of them can easily consume an acre of land surrounding a parish’s place of worship. If not planned for with care, their bulky frames can quickly spoil the appearance of the most beautiful of natural or architectural settings, as much by standing idle as by passing through a community’s most sacred setting.

The Dissolution of Parochial Boundaries

Among the more obvious effects of the automobile on the liturgical lives of American Catholics is their ability to travel greater distances in less time to worship at any parish of their choosing. The pastoral implications of this are great: today the parish priest is less the spiritual leader of a community of souls linked to a specific, geographical location than an accommodator of nomads in search of just the sort of ecclesial experience that meets their fancy. Lay Catholics now think nothing of claiming official membership in one parish while selectively worshipping in others for reasons including what might be called the “alumni factor,” their sentimental attachment to the sights and sounds of the churches of their childhood. The last phenomenon is particularly intriguing as it often affects individuals who have consciously fled older, more densely-populated, urban settings for suburban ones only to find themselves returning by car each weekend to the very parish-neighborhoods where their religion was formed.[19] All of this roaming around has prompted at least one bishop to issue a statement reminding his flock of the fundamental territoriality that underlies the canonical definition of a parish. Writing in The Observer, official newspaper for Diocese of Rockford, IL, while he was still vicar general there, David D. Kagan, now bishop of the Diocese of Bismarck, cited article 518 of Canon Law to explain that parishes should ordinarily have “… real, physical boundaries so that all the Catholics living within them can identify with the Church and with the pastor, and the pastor and the Church can know and minister to the Catholics entrusted to their care.” Parishes, Kagan adds, are comprised of communities of believers that are “stable and identifiable” and that live in “a certain area.”[20]

The notion that one parochial community might be distinguishable from another by means of geographical markers, demography, or even an entirely different architectural vocabulary strikes Catholics today as rather foreign, given the general diminishment of older ethnic allegiances and their ability to travel more freely from one parish to another, no matter how great the distance between them. While it remains true that believers generally...
build their view of the Church on experiences shared at the parochial level, they are now freer than ever to choose the particular version of parish life from which this view follows.

Mass Transit—Privatization of the Sacred Journey

Along with contributing to the demise of their parochial affiliation, the automobile also privatizes an aspect of the Sabbath day experience that unfolds from the driveways of believers’ homes to the paved aprons of their churches. Rather than participating, as they once did, in great parades of solidarity that wound through parish-neighborhoods as prefigurations of the solemn entrance procession at the Mass, Catholics now rendezvous at a place of worship as autonomous souls, each enclosed in private bubbles of conditioned air and stereophonic sound. That the “walk to Mass” should be supplanted long ago by the “drive to Mass” is no minor matter. The former encouraged worshippers to depart early from their homes, as they had only their legs to transport them to church. Conversely, the latter, based as it is on trust in the speed and power of our vehicles, encourages worshippers to leave their homes later, so as to arrive just minutes before the Entrance Rite begins. This partly accounts for the fact that the parking lots of most churches grow fullest just minutes before the outset of a service.

It is likewise no small matter that the very device Catholics use for traveling to the Mass is a privately-owned commodity containing a defined volume of space that is perceived as “belonging” to its owner in a way that a public sidewalk never could. When Catholics once walked to church en masse, they were required to share sidewalks with fellow parishioners and others and thus observe a certain public etiquette. The walk to Mass was a fairly quiet affair, even for families that made the trek together. If conversation occurred at all, it was in subdued tones not likely to call attention to itself or break the quiet of a neighborhood’s Sunday morning. Seeing others like oneself making such a sacrifice had a way of making believers feel part of something solemn and important, even before reaching the doors of their churches, where rubbing shoulders on a sidewalk gave way to rubbing shoulders in pews.

Wrapped in their private, metal skins and lost in vehicular traffic that might be going anywhere on a Sunday morning, believers arrive today at the Mass with little to offer fellow worshipers in the way of bodily testimony. Their trips to church unfold with an anonymity that can easily carry over into a liturgical attitude. The autowhere on a Sunday morning, believers arrive today at the Mass with little to offer fellow worshipers in the way of bodily testimony. Their trips to church unfold with an anonymity that can easily carry over into a liturgical attitude. The autosenstive layouts of many church buildings themselves often allow worshippers arriving by car to slip into a comfortable seat without the least bit of interaction with other members of the assembly. This is especially true in locations that suffer seasonally from snow, rain, or other inclement weather, where the intent of parishioners bundled up against the elements is to move from the warmth of their cars to the warmth of their seats as quickly as possible.

The larger pathways that Catholics follow on their way to the Mass have become more circuitous than when they were members of a pedestrian church. While believers of a previous era may have visited a number of venues after the Mass, today, because of the speed of their cars and the availability of anticipatory liturgies on Saturday evenings, they can easily add trips to the bank, liquor store, dry cleaners, beauty salon, or any number of locations in busy weekend schedules and treat the Mass as just one of many “tasks” to be completed. The beauty of liturgy and its sacred setting are no longer the high points of modest journeys beyond the confines of their homes, but mere equivalents to the many other experiences that comprise weekends no longer given to rest and reflection.

Conclusions

It is certainly naïve to hope that American Catholics might somehow forego the use of their cars on weekends so as to regain the lost art of walking to church and with it a manner of worship not measured in horsepower or speed. Automobility is a fact of life for followers of Christ in the twenty-first century, and mimicking the behavior of believers from an age given more freedom to traveling on foot will not, in itself, produce the sort of engaged liturgists the bishops of Vatican II hoped to make of all believers. Neither will the Catholic Church’s adoption of the drive-in and drive-thru models of church design with which Protestantism has experimented so extensively. The unapologetically locus-bound nature of Catholic worship demands the fixity of its participants and a collaboration between priest and people wholly different from the “transactions” of the closed-circuit banking kiosk or fast-food service window. Likewise, its radically incarnational character obliges Catholic liturgy to be beautiful in a way that escapes the sacred site doubling as a “park-n-ride.”

If, in fact, there’s reason to believe that automobiles might contribute positively to the setting of sacred worship, it comes from the Church’s own history of subsuming into its ritual practice the mechanical advances of every age. There was a time, after all, when pipe organs were as new to Catholic church as electrified lamps and amplified sound, chair lifts, and elevators—even the sanitary plumbing required for public restrooms—all of which are now standard features of the place of Catholic prayer. Recent examples of the Church’s “appropriation of the world” can be found at the great, station churches of Rome itself, including Saint Peter’s Basilica, whose ancient naves and piazza spaces now feature Mega-
tron screens and other large-scale telecommunication devices for the viewing benefit of large assemblies (Fig. 6). At the same time, the vehicle-free Saint Peter’s Square reminds us that automobiles need not dominate a sacred site and that its visitors will gladly traverse considerable distances on foot if they deem the journey worthwhile. Daily, of course, people of all ages and physical abilities meander through Bernini’s vast, uncovered forecourt as part of an uphill trek to the Basilica, their spirits lightened by having escaped the debilitating frenzy of Rome’s own streets.

The more modest grounds of American churches, too, can be oasis-like places marked by the tranquility and order modern Catholics secretly desire even while enduring the very freneticism their automobiles make possible. To the extent that architects and pastors alike prevent sacred sites from resembling the mean, paved expanses of commercial parking lots, they minister wisely to the faithful (Figs. 7A and B). Like the church squares of Europe, the grounds of even the humblest American parish can be venues for collecting and serving people, not just their vehicles, and places where the juncture of road and rood points to the life-long journey of the spirit to which every Christian is called.

Michael E. DeSanctis, Ph.D. is Professor of Fine Arts and Director of the Honors Program at Gannon University in Erie, PA. He writes widely on Catholic architecture and serves as a liturgical designer and consultant. He can be reached at desanct001@gannon.edu.

(Endnotes)

1 At a talk I offered recently to a regional chapter of the American Institute of Architects, for example, serious questions arose from younger practitioners about the future of the building arts in a technoculture whose electronically simulated environments make traditional places unnecessary. Any parent who has watched a child slide into the electronic simulacr of an Xbox game, for example, knows how oblivious one can become to the general buzz that surrounds them in “real” space and time.

2 The latter, like the suburban setting in which it is typically found, is a direct product of the automobile, which allows Catholics living at considerable distance from each other to maintain some semblance of parochial “community.”

3 Experience gained from my work as a design consultant suggests that the symbolic component of a church’s building’s main, or “processional,” entrance is of little consequence to modern Catholics and that they typically assume seats within the building closest to where their cars are parked outside.

4 The so-called “Seven-Minute Homily” has become the standard shared by American pastors, who know that by preaching beyond this modest limit and thereby lengthening the Mass they risk fouling up completely the strict cycle of vehicular traffic that must flow unencumbered through their campuses. Even the Word of God, apparently, is expected to defer to the automated ebb and tide of worshippers that is a parish’s lifeblood. Once attended an Easter Vigil service in a parish that had succumbed to the tyranny of the parking lot. So many components had been lopped off of this most solemn of rites to facilitate parishioners’ departure from the premises that I was able to begin my journey home barely an hour after arriving for worship.


6 In some parishes, of course, an annual “Blessing of Motor Vehicles” ceremony is maintained, during which members of the pastoral staff may pray blessing 66(6) C from the Church’s official Book of Blessings, which invokes God to help drivers make Christ “ . . . the companion of their journey” whose travels be for business or leisure.” See International Commission on English in the Liturgy, Book of Blessings (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1989), 378.

7 Though no scholarly figures exist on the popularity of luxury cars among American clergy, anecdotal evidence abounds that priests own and drive nicer vehicles than their parishioners. Members of the clergy themselves seem aware of at least the perception that they enjoy access to high-prices cars, as is clear from a confession by Capuchin Father Martin Pable’s book A Religious Vocation: Is It For Me? (Our Sunday Visitor, 1994) excerpted on a website maintained by the Office of Vocations of the Diocese of Reno. Pable admits that a popular image of priests is that “[t]hey live in nice comfortable homes, they dress in the latest fashions, they drive luxury cars.” See http://www.usccb.org/issues-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/global-climate-change-a-plea-for-dialogue-prudence-and-the-common-good.cfm http://vocationsreno.com/discernment/isisform.shtml.

8 An estimated 75 percent of American Catholics now live in suburbs. See Our Sunday Visitor’s Catholic Almanac 2009, Matthew Bunion (ed.) (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor), 362.

9 A survey of some 26,000 households conducted jointly in 2001 by federal Department of Transportation’s Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) and Highway Administration (FHWA) suggests that there are nearly two (1.9) vehicles available to every licensed American driver. Data also suggest that vehicles used as a means of transport to religious services carry an average of only 1.7 occupants and that over 15 percent fewer trips are made weekly to “church/church” than to “social/entertainment” events. See “National Household Survey (Washington: U.S. Department of Transportation, 2001), 2, 10-11.


11 The high ratio of parking spaces to church occupants required by the municipal building codes of many communities do nothing to encourage Catholics to share vehicles on days of worship. The 3:1-7 configuration maintained in Collier County, FL, site of such tourist/retirement communities as Naples and San Marco, for example, presumes that on average only two Catholics occupy a church-going vehicle, though it might be much more beneficial for the elderly couples to double-up for their trips to the Mass.

12 The vehicle’s pedigree, not to mention the sheer gigantism of its form and cost, its poor fuel economy, and emissions record, together mock the Church’s stance on peacemaking and responsible stewardship of the planet.


16 Liturgical Policy and Guidelines for Building and Renovation (Office of Worship, Diocese of Wilmington, 1999), art. 303-18.1


19 Another wrinkle in this trend involves Catholics who claim “membership” in a Newman Center or other campus ministry-affiliated community, which fills their sacramental needs while exempting them from real or financial commitment to a parish.

20 “Reflections: Parish Membership and Boundaries,” The Observer (Diocese of Rockford, IL, February 2, 2001), 5.

Figure 7: Serpentine parking arrangements with extensive landscaping distinguishing the ecclesiastical site from the commercial one. At left: Marmion Abbey, Aurora, IL. 1998. At right: Saint Bede Church, Williamsburg, VA. 2005.
A n American physician and native New York Catholic by the name of James Joseph Walsh once published a wonderful little book entitled Thirteenth, Greatest of Centuries, in which he extolled the virtues of that bygone era. There were indeed many such virtues, but as the great French philosopher and medievalist Etienne Gilson is reported to have once said about the Middle Ages: “I love studying them, but I’m glad I didn’t have to live in them.” There is also, of course, Edward Arlington Robinson’s famous character from the poem “Miniver Cheevy.” Two stanzas from that poem are especially fun:

Miniver loved the days of old
When swords were bright and steeds were prancing;
The vision of a warrior bold
Would set him dancing.

Miniver cursed the commonplace
And eyed a khaki suit with loathing;
He missed the mediæval grace
Of iron clothing.

Then there is my favorite stanza of all:

Miniver loved the Medici,
Albeit he had never seen one;
He would have sinned incessantly
Could he have been one.

The Medici aren’t exactly “medieval,” but there are plenty who overromanticize the Renaissance in much the same way people sometimes overromanticize the Middle Ages.

Don’t get me wrong. Like Gilson, I love the Middle Ages. I never tire of studying them, especially those geniuses like Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Saint Thomas and Saint Bonaventure, who were among the finest intellects who ever lived. And yet, by the same token, to be honest, I’m glad I didn’t live then. It’s not merely that I prefer flushing toilets, streets unclogged with mounds of horse and human fecal material, clean water, antibiotics, air-conditioning, the ability to buy dozens and dozens of printed books at will, including all the collected works of both Plato and Aristotle, safety in travel, political stability, the freedom to vote and move about as I wish, and many other creature comforts it would take too long to mention, none of which were available to even the wealthiest medieval king. We think we have problems (and we do), but they’re really just pin-pricks compared to the near-constant onslaught of troubles medieval men and women of the Church had to endure.

Let’s begin with just the political intrigues. I’m always amused when I hear contemporary people say that things “move so much faster” now than they did back in “the olden days.” You get this picture of rustic people, working in their fields patiently, year after year, waiting for something, anything interesting to happen. Everybody moves in slow motion; nothing major changes. Of course nothing could be further from the truth. The political intrigues were constant and borders shifted repeatedly. The map of Europe has been relatively stable for decades. You wouldn’t have found anything like that sort of stability during most of the Middle Ages. If you were a “lord,” you could simultaneously be a vassal of another king with regard to certain of your lands, and he could be your vassal with regard to other lands. People’s loyalties were always in question and shifted constantly. And then, of course, there was that very confusing time in the fourteenth century when there were three claimants to be the true pope, none of whom was particularly worthy of the job—and yet the Holy Spirit brought us through in spite of all that.

We sometimes look upon the great instances of medieval sacred architecture and say: “Behold one of the glories of human achievement.” And so they are—in a way. But not entirely. What I suggest we realize is the degree to which the Holy Spirit was able to guide the Church even through the most confusing and troubled times to produce edifices of lasting beauty and importance, churches that have lent dignity and nobility to the towns in which they stand, and which have been a blessing to their citizens for centuries.

Allow me to give just one example of what I mean. Certainly one of the most beautiful and artistically rich of the Gothic churches in Europe is the cathedral dedicated to Our Lady in Chartres, France, roughly seventy miles outside of Paris. On the contemporary scene, one sometimes comes upon rooms filled with odd sculptures and lighted tubes and painted walls that have been given the very serious-sounding name of “an artistic installation.” Whether or not it’s “artistic” is often open to question, but that it has been “installed,” usually in such a manner that it gets in the way of where you want to go, cannot be denied. The point of such “installations,” I am told, is to combine all the various arts in one concentrated space: painting, sculpture, light, music, words. Such installations are meant to bathe your senses. Usually they just offend your sensibilities, but we’ll leave that aside for the moment. What these modern “installations” are attempting to do and usually do very badly, the cathedral church at Chartres does as brilliantly as any piece of art ever created. It is a work of art that combines all the arts into one concentrated space. There is the beauty of the music and the spoken word. There is the beauty of the stained glass, the quality of the changing light throughout the day, the sculptures that adorn the columns and capitals. Every part of the cathedral speaks and teaches; it tells the story of salvation history cul-
The beautiful cathedral of Chartres. The circumstances surrounding its construction were not so edifying.

minating in the coming of the Savior Jesus Christ. You could study the building literally for decades and still not have plumbed the depths of its theological and artistic richness.

That’s all fine and good. But now let’s take a look at some of the circumstances surrounding its construction. As one commentator has written: “The cathedral itself was a house divided.” It’s a nice line, but a “house divided against itself cannot stand,” or so the Scriptures (and Abraham Lincoln) tell us. What’s amazing is that with all the division, Chartres continued to rise and still stands today. The basic source of the divisions at Chartres came from conflicts between three distinct sources of authority whose interests often came into conflict: first, the Count of Blois, within whose territory the city of Chartres was located; second, the local bishop of Chartres, whose seat was at the Cathedral, but whose duties would often take him throughout a wide-ranging archdiocese; and finally, third, what is called “the cathedral chapter.”

The term “chapter” originally was used for a congregation of monks, but it was extended to include any number of ecclesiastical bodies, including the sort of monks (often called “canons”) who gathered to pray in and lived near most major medieval cathedrals. (Who do you suppose it was who used those “choir” stalls and did the chanting? Not the sort of paid choirs one finds today in “high” Anglican churches.) The Catholic Encyclopedia helpfully explains that:

The chapter can be considered as forming one body with the bishop, in as far as it constitutes his senate and aids him in the government of his diocese; or as forming a body distinct from the bishop, having its own regulations and interests. Viewed under the first aspect the cathedral chapter has the bishop for its head; under the last, it has its own proper superior. Taking the chapter in the strict sense, however, canonists generally declare that the bishop must always be distinguished from it; nor can he be called a member of the chapter. Anciently, the principal dignitary of the chapter was the archdeacon, but from the eleventh century the dean, who was also archpriest, had the internal government of the chapter.

In the case of Chartres, the cathedral chapter was distinct from the bishop and had its own dean. Those of us in the United States are accustomed to stories about conflicts between “church” and “state,” and sometimes even between “lords” and “bishops.” What we are not so accustomed to is hearing stories about conflicts between a bishop and the canons of his cathedral chapter. In the case of Chartres, however, we have conflicts among all three.

One of the sources of friction came from competing jurisdictions. The count (or when he was away, the countess) had authority to collect taxes and enforce his laws in the town of Chartres, but not in the areas directly surrounding the cathedral, where the cathedral chapter had jurisdiction. Not only did the cathedral chapter increasingly draw laborers into their jurisdiction, thereby making them exempt from the count’s taxation, they also had sole authority over the cathedral fairs, a great source of revenue, which were also exempt from the count’s taxation. An additional wrinkle arose from the fact that the count would divide many of these towns taxes equally with the bishop. Thus to deny revenue to the count was in part to deny it to the bishop and to the diocese at large. As serfs who had previously been working on the count’s lands and in his fields increasingly moved into the cathedral precincts to work on the building, tensions mounted. A contemporaneous ecclesiastical writer recounts what transpired next:

It happened in the city of Chartres, in October 1210, on a Sunday afternoon, that a great crowd dared to violently attack the home of Guillaume, the dean, and his household because a certain serf of the dean’s had berated and verbally abused one of the town rustics of the countess. When the countess’s marshal and the provost had been summoned by the chapter, even by the king, so that they might repel the furious crowd … instead they attempted to incite the people. Indeed, a crier was dispatched throughout the city who cried out in the street and by-ways to the mob that they all rush upon the dean’s home with their arms to demolish it…. The dean, as soon as he saw the increasing rage of the mad mob grow, fled to the church…. Many of the sacrilegious crowd were wounded, and some of them succumbed to a merited death…. Looting continued at night with light from burning candles.  

Violence erupted regularly in the years after, until in 1249, the provost, or chief administrator of the countess within the town, took as prisoner and subsequently hanged one of the chapter’s serfs. The dean of the chapter demanded that the countess and her provost pay 150 livres in recompense—a “livre,” like a British “pound sterling,” being the equivalent of one pound of silver. The chapter demanded in addition that the provost should be marched naked through the streets of the town to the church, there to be subjected to a public whipping by the canons of the cathedral before the altar of the Virgin Mary. Those who know the story of King Henry II of England’s troubles with Saint Thomas à Becket will remember that, after Becket’s murder at the hands of several of Henry’s knights, Henry was similarly forced to strip naked and endure whipping at the hands of the canons at the cathedral of Canterbury. In Chartres, however, two of the countess’s men responded by kidnapping one of the canons and holding him hostage. In
response, the dean of the chapter increased the fine from 150 livres to 400 and demanded that the provost undergo three penitential processions and whippings.

The hostilities continued with both parties jockeying for the upper hand, until in 1253—when the count’s men killed two of the chapter’s serfs, and the cathedral’s cantor, Renaud d’Épine was appointed to arbitrate the dispute—Renaud was murdered on the cathedral steps while on his way to matins. At which point, both the bishop and the members of the chapter became so frightened for their safety that they fled Chartres and stayed away for five years, residing first at Mantes, roughly fifty miles north of Chartres, and later in Étampes, some thirty-eight miles to the east.

Only after the chapter’s appeals to the king caused him to take twenty town burghers hostage and force two hundred members of all the trades, the agents of the count, and the people of the town to swear they would do no further harm to the chapter, along with gaining permission from Pope Innocent IV to hold matins at five in the morning because of the insecure condition of the cloister at night, did the chapter and bishop return in 1258. The chapter also gained permission from the king to seal off the area near the cathedral with a fence and lock the gates each night. It was not, shall we say, an entirely edifying or inspiring affair. Not exactly the sort of thing we hope for in our churches and monasteries.

And all this culminated in 1258! Both Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure were teaching in that year as Masters of Theology at Paris, a period often described as “the high Middle Ages”. All this horror and confusion at Chartres was taking place virtually in their backyard; although in that regard, it’s worthwhile remembering that neither Saint Thomas nor Saint Bonaventure would have been allowed to become Masters at the University of Paris at all if it hadn’t been for the intervention of the pope. The lives and careers of the “two great lights” (as they are often called) of the Middle Ages were not at all peaceful or easy ones.

When we think of the accomplishments of the Middle Ages, we can allow ourselves to imagine: “What a blessed age! What a thing it would have been to live then!” While yes, it was a “blessed age,” those who had to survive during those hard and often confusing times might be forgiven for not having always thought so at the time. Perhaps then we could say of the thirteenth century what Dickens says at the beginning of A Tale of Two Cities:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.


This is undoubtedly an important lesson for us to remember at times such as ours which can often seem far from “blessed” and when the Church seems so often in such sad shape. What monuments will we bequeath to the future? Certainly, there are the writings and reforms of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict. People in the future will certainly look back at us and say: “What an amazing time it must have been to live with such popes.” And so it is. Not many ages have been as blessed in this regard as we.

We also enjoy the fruits of the Thomistic revival begun by Pope Leo XIII near the end of the nineteenth century, as well as the recovery of the works of the patristic fathers and doctors of the Church, spurred on by the great ressourcement movement, in
which the current pope played an important role. There is also the incomparable achievement of the Second Vatican Council, for those who understand it correctly.

What it seems we won’t leave behind, however, are very many beautiful churches, both because nearly all of our churches are ugly as sin and because they’re not built to last—the latter undoubtedly a blessing considering the former. Although even in this area, there are signs of hope and renewal. One finds them here and there, many of them usefully catalogued in this journal (along with some of the continuing horrors). The existence of this journal, along with the good work it catalogues, shows that there is increasing interest in good churches and that things may be turning around—finally.

I am recently back from a trip to England where I spent some time exploring the medieval churches in Norfolk. They are amazing, and I can’t recommend such a road-trip enough. There is one problem, though. There are simply too many of them. Indeed, often one will find a beautiful stone church on one rise or hillock, only to look across the way and see another, just as lovely, on the next rise, no more than four miles away. Most of these churches were built during the early Middle Ages, when the political circumstances in England were decidedly confused, constantly shifting, and life was often enough, to quote a much later statement by Thomas Hobbes: “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” And yet, they left us to this very day these wonderful churches, any one of which, if you had the chance to worship in it, given the usual alternatives in the U.S., would make you think you’d died and gone to heaven. Granted, they’re all Anglican, but I will say this for our Anglican brethren: they’ve kept the church buildings intact without screwing them up, as has happened so often with the Catholics, who have torn out altars and altar rails, turned their churches sideways, put in orange carpeting, replaced crucifixes with indistinguishable (and ugly) modern art installations, just to mention a few of the many horrors visited upon the great church buildings of the past. You won’t find any of that nonsense in these great eleventh and twelfth-century churches. And for that, I must say to my Anglican brethren, as a Catholic, I am profoundly grateful.

The result of a well-built, beautiful church building is a gift-that-keeps-on-giving to future generations. I am perfectly aware of the state of the faith in Europe. It’s not good. And yet, anyone who studies Church history can tell you, we’ve seen troubled times before, and until Christ’s second coming again at the end of the world, we’ll continue to see troubled times in the future. Indeed, each age has its own troubles and confusions: the age of Thomas and Bonaventure had theirs, we have ours. Once the current madness passes, however, those great church buildings will still stand as a monument to the faith and sacrifice of our forebears, and as such can serve as a foundation upon which the next generation can build its renewed faith. The towns and villages that surrounded those churches have long since passed away, but the churches still remain. So too all the disputes and controversies and fads of today will soon enough pass away, but the Church will still remain. Whatever we’ll need then is a place to worship. We might do well to remember that when the Lord said to Saint Francis from the cross: “Francis, rebuild my church,” his first response was to start rebuilding the church in which he was praying: the little, crumbling church of San Damiano. In our day, as in Francis’s, the church is in need of some “rebuilding.” We might similarly do well to begin, as he did, by rebuilding our church buildings.

If we can learn from the age that created the great Gothic cathedrals, however, here are some of the elements we will need to bring about better and more beautiful churches in the future. First, we will need a healthy guild of skilled architects and workmen who can continue to work at a high level of excellence even when confusion and quarreling prevails among the officials in the local church community. Second, we will need generous and wise patrons who are willing to pay for excellent building and who refuse to pay a dime for the sort of trash we so often see today. Third, we need a critical mass of faithful parishioners who believe that beautiful churches are still possible and who insist that such buildings be built. As with patrons, it is essential that the faithful not allow their piety to be abused into paying for ugly churches. Finally, and most importantly, we need the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit. Nothing will be more important in such ventures than prayer. If we are to succeed, it will be by the work of the Holy Spirit, or we will not succeed at all.

Randall B. Smith is an Associate Professor of Theology at the University of Saint Thomas in Houston, Texas. He was the 2011-12 Myser Fellow at the Notre Dame Center for Ethics and Culture. He writes regularly for The Catholic Thing and Crisis and has a forthcoming article in the journal Nova et Vetera on “How to Read a Sermon by Thomas Aquinas.”
Concern for the Spirit: A History of Modern Church Architecture

Karla Cavarra Britton

“People will again go up to the religious community building, whose architectural prominence will command respect, and which can only be approached along a triumphal axis.

Its great internal space will inspire us again, not because of a sacredly mystic devotion that makes us long for a transcendental world, but because of a devotion characterized by a reborn Dionysian joy.

Yet it will be essentially different from the small classical temple space, which was only intended to be used by the deity. For this new space will have to contain thousands of people who will approach the earthly god in a totally different way, and the god will be present again in this space, but only in a spiritual form...”

–Hendrik Petrus Berlage, “Art and Society” (1909)

What are the recent important accounts of the history of twentieth-century church architecture? One or two come to mind: Wolfgang Stock’s two-volume History of European Religious Architecture, or Edwin Heathcote’s extensive introduction to Contemporary Church Architecture, as well as some studies of the history of modern churches in individual countries. Yet overall the history of modern religious architecture in the twentieth century is a relatively unexplored field. Hence this essay, which sets out to call attention to this area of study by sketching three identifiable historical narratives in the history of modern church architecture. Avoiding a strictly chronological definition, this essay focuses on mapping these interlocking narratives through an emphasis on prominent features of representative work. Less emphasis is placed here on the subjective experience of individual buildings, their interiority, and how they manifest important influences of the liturgical movement, than on a consideration of how these larger narratives represented by the modern church have been received within the history of early twentieth-century architecture. In this sense the wider reception of methods and ideas presented through the design of new church buildings often helped to redefine the professional identities of prominent architects, far beyond the circle of the faith traditions that their church buildings were intended to serve.

Innovation within a Cultural Continuity

Augustus Welby Pugin, in his Contrasts of 1841, dramatically conveys his vision of the moralizing force of church architecture by aligning it with the ethical and aesthetic composition of society. Pugin’s famous comparison of an idealized fifteenth-century English town with its numerous Gothic steeples, is contrasted with the industrial city of his day where the steeples have been replaced by factory chimneys. Whereas in Pugin’s vision the fabric of the fifteenth-century town is fully integrated and comprehensible through
The church of Notre Dame du Raincy by Auguste Perret, 1923

its relationship to the church buildings themselves, the industrial town is depicted as disjointed and devoid of a directional and moral presence. Pugin’s point is that the cohesion of the medieval city around its religious edifices—manifested in the architecture of the Christian Gothic—has been undone by the technological advances of the Industrial Revolution.

Such a starting point for a discussion of the early modern church building forms an ironic counterpoint to what many modern architects themselves did with religious buildings, namely, using them as loci for experimentation with the intent of giving expression to the new urban realities, materials, and technologies. For many of the founders of modern architecture, the church building was not so much a distinctive form as an opportunity to innovate building traditions back to the ancients.

The Church of Notre Dame du Raincy may thus be seen symbolically to set in motion a number of ideals that run through the successive evolution of the history of the church building in the early twentieth century: a continued concern for the hierarchical relation of architectural space to the urban fabric; the construction of the church building with an attention to new materials and technology; and a determination to continue to evolve a new language of monumentality within the constraints of a particular religious tradition. The innovations evident in the church of Le Raincy thus served as a fountainhead for a whole tradition of church construction in the first half of the twentieth century. Ferdinand Pfamatter in his 1948 study, Betonkirche, calls the church an “astonishing phenomenon” (überraschende Erscheinung), emphasizing its structural clarity as a model for the renewal of religious architecture through a reworking of the typology of the church. As examples of its influence, he points to such churches as Jean Combaz’s Sainte Suzanne in Brussels (1928); Saint-Pierre à Roye, Somme (1931) by Duval & Gonse; and the University Chapel, Fribourg (1941) by Dumas & Honegger. Others have noted Perret’s influence in such works as Cecil Burns’ Christian Science Church, Turnbridge Wells (1933). Yet it was Karl Moser’s Saint Antonius in Basel (1927) that extended the concern for materiality and structure into what Peter Hammond called “the full accomplishment of the technical revolution that was begun at Le Raincy.”

Derivation and the Spirit

If some architects used church buildings as an opportunity to innovate within a cultural tradition, for others contemplation of the human spirit in the face of modernization played a stronger role as a derivative source for thinking about architecture. It has been persuasively argued, for example, that the origin of Mies van der Rohe’s concern for “the building art” as a spatial expression of spiritual decisions was informed by the Catholic Reform Movement in Germany during the Weimar Republic. This movement was given inspiration by the priest, philosopher, and theologian Romano Guardini, as well as the church architect, theorist, and urban planner Rudolph
Schwarz. Thus, aside from Mies’ contribution to the building methods that became characteristic of his work and was often duplicated by others, he held a strong philosophical concern for the spiritual foundations of architecture in an age of technology, arguing that building could not be viewed as merely a matter of function and technology.

Schwarz’ 1938 book, *Vom Bau der Kirche* (On the Building of Churches), exerted a profound influence on Mies’ sense of the spiritual dimension of all architecture. Intended by Schwarz to be “a primer for church building—no more but also no less,” the book was translated into English in 1958 with the suggestive title *The Church Incarnate*. At the most obvious level, Schwarz’s book is a re-thinking of the typological organization of the Christian church. The book’s underlying structure is based upon his system of seven “plans” or diagrams, outlining various patterns for the arrangement of sacred space and the symbolic and metaphysical manifestations that lie behind this spatial ordering. Given the book’s theological focus, it is striking that the English translation included a foreword presenting a surprisingly strong endorsement from Mies—an endorsement that was largely responsible for bringing the book to the attention of English-speaking audiences: “It is not only a great book on architecture, indeed, it is one of the truly great books—one of those which have the power to transform our thinking.”

What Mies shared in particular with the reform-minded Schwarz and Guardini was a deep metaphysical and even religious concern for the problem of the spirit, especially in regard to harnessing the drive of technology and science in the modern era. For him, the key question was one of value, through which one could fix ultimate goals in order to establish effective standards. As the historian Fritz Neumeyer observes, what Mies, Schwarz, and Guardini shared in common was a search for the means of “building” as a reality that could come to terms with the salient technical phenomena of the modern epoch, with all its consequences. In this respect, the spatial effect created through the primary features of Mies’ Barcelona Pavilion of 1929—the building’s steel skeleton placed on a grid, the experience of the body progressing through the configuration of interlocking planes and free-standing screens—has been read as a synthesis in material form of a new understanding of the body and space. In light of Mies’ own written statements on the reevaluation of space, building, and its connections to the spirit, the pavilion may be seen as a symbolic expression of the possibility for material to give shape to a deep understanding of human existence. As Mies himself expressed this ultimate concern in spiritual terms: “For the meaning and justification of each epoch, even the new one, lies only in providing conditions under which the spirit can exist.”

Against the highly refined Miesian vision, one may set as a contrast the trans-national influences on the exploration of the spirit in architecture as evidenced by the 1932 “League of Religions” project, carried out by an obscure but telling figure, the young Chilean Surrealist Robert Matta. As his thesis project at the School of Architecture and Urbanism at the Catholic University of Chile, this project was not directly focused on the church building type, but is indicative in its intellectual guises of a similar concern for the spirit as Mies, yet in this case through a concern for the organic rather than technological. Because of its interfaith approach, Matta’s League of Religions project suggests a search on his part for a means of expressing a universal spirituality. In making this exploration, Matta appeals to the use of natural, biomorphic forms rather than traditional historical precedent as an inspiration for spiritual design. This turn to the organic and away from the prevailing rationalism of European modernism reflects skepticism toward traditional religious beliefs as Matta had encountered them through his rigorous classical Jesuit training. One might observe, therefore, that between the two architectural trends toward “the rational and the geometrical, [and] the irrational and the organic” (to borrow Giedion’s dichotomy), the League of Religions project is self-consciously situated toward the organic end of the spectrum. Moreover, this early experimentation with biomorphic form seems to anticipate Matta’s embrace of the Surrealist impulse that he encountered in Paris later in the 1930s.

One might situate these concerns with the spirituality of architecture within an intellectual matrix (following from an observation suggested by Kenneth Frampton) that is rooted in two seemingly interrelated factors in European architectural culture prior to the Second World War. The first turns on how the work of a number of architects may be read in the vein of the “avatars” of an emergent modernity who felt the need throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century to develop a new anthropocentric, universal religion in order to compensate for the loss of traditional faith. The second factor then concerns the ways in which the loss of traditional faith was accompanied not so incidentally by the dissolution of the rationalist form most commonly associated with Modernism, towards more organic expressions.

In the first instance—the move toward a more anthropocentric, universal spirituality—one could cite such phenomena as Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophical movement, which resulted in the construction of the “Goethea-
num” in Dornach, Switzerland dating from 1908, with a second larger building begun in 1924. Intended as a Gesamtkunstwerk, the Goetheanum is a strong statement of German expressionism, relying on spiritually expressive forms even while experimenting with modern concrete construction. A related strain within the culture of the German architectural avant-garde between the turbulent years of 1914-19 is evidenced by the more familiar Bauhaus Proclamation of 1919, given behind the woodcut image of Lionel Feiniger’s Cathedral of the Future, which was also identified at the time as the Cathedral of Socialism. This proclamation called for the creation of a utopian craft guild that would make a unified creative expression of the plastic arts, with an emphasis on “creative artists as the spiritual counterparts to the practical technicians.” In both cases, the search for a universal, secular spirituality is the dominant motif.

In the second instance—the dissolution of rationalist form in favor of organic expressions—one could contrast the overt rationalism of such pioneering projects as Perret’s Notre Dame du Raincy with the organism of the Catalan architect Antoni Gaudi’s La Sagrada Familia in Barcelona (begun in 1882). In contrast to the rationalism and structural logic of Le Raincy, as discussed above, Gaudi’s La Sagrada Familia embraces a formal exaggeration and natural form related to the Art Nouveau movement, that also evokes the later Surrealism of Salvador Dalí, Marcel Duchamp, and André Breton (with whom Matta was to become familiar). It was Breton who noted that the architecture of the Art Nouveau movement was the first among all the arts to move towards surrealism by excluding the external world and turning toward the inner consciousness of expressing the internal world visually. In La Sagrada Familia, Gaudi draws upon influences ranging from Gothic to Moorish, creating what might be characterized as evoking “another” Modernism lying outside the traditional constructional logic of modern architecture—a prime expression of the strain of a derivative use of religious ideas which contributed to shaping any number of architectural works that share the concern for developing a new more universal spirituality of building.

Aesthetic Summation

A third trajectory within modern religious architecture is the summational aspect which some buildings had within the corpus of certain architects who were eminent teachers and representatives of new architectural languages: this would include, for example, among others, Theodore Fischer and Dominikus Bohm and the Catholic reform architecture in Germany, Otto Wagner in Austria, Hendrik Petrus Berlage in the Netherlands, and Karl Moser in Switzerland. These figures often turned to the religious building as a culmination of their
inventiveness with new structures, or as an expression of a complete vocabulary drawn from numerous architectural languages: classical, modernist, and vernacular. In such cases, the church building had the effect of freeing the imagination of the architect from all stylistic conventions, and allowed for a freer association with forms.

By way of example, Wagner’s Saint Leopold am Steinhof in Vienna of 1907 provides a fresh reading of materials, ornamentation, and their relationship to structure. Above all, the church presented a new interpretation of ornament in relation to metalwork, the radial ribwork, the thin sheets of Sterzig marble, and the gold and copperwork which stress the salient features of the building’s structure. In turn, Wagner’s church had a notable impact on the work of his prize student, Joze Plecnik, who himself was raised in a deeply religious family. This formation, combined with his early tutelage by Wagner and the influence of the texts of Gottfried Semper, shaped Plecnik’s belief in material as the basis of architectural form. Plecnik’s Church of the Most Sacred Heart in Prague (1928-31) openly demonstrates how he adapted elements derived from numerous architectural traditions—from the trabeated forms of Classicism, to vernacular construction methods and regional building traditions.

In the United States, Frank Lloyd Wright’s Unity Temple in Oak Park (1907) might in one sense be said to be analogous to Perret’s Notre Dame du Raincy in terms of its innovation with concrete construction, the strength of the influence of its forms, and the ways in which the building helped to provide an essential foundation for a “new architecture” with wider implications for the field extending well beyond the programmatic need for providing space for religious worship. Yet the building also summarizes Wright’s own utilitarian and transcendentalist background by giving full expression to his aesthetic and philosophical stance. Wright’s intention for Unity Temple to be “a modern meeting house” underscores the importance of the seated congregation within the three sides of a square room and its galleries with the focus on the central pulpit at the front. Here the building is understood in relation to Wright’s concept of architecture as a place of gathering rather than architecture as a sanctuary. Wright’s radical approach to the temple—so unlike traditional church architecture at the time—was set out in a lecture he gave at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1931, in which he said of the Unity Temple that it represented:

> An entirely new sense of architecture, a higher conception of architecture: architecture not alone as form following function, but conceived as space enclosed. The enclosed space itself might now be seen as the reality of the building. The sense of the “within” or of the room itself, or the rooms themselves, I now saw as the great thing to be expressed as architecture.

Similarly, Bernard Maybeck’s First Church of Christ, Scientist in Berkeley, California (1910-12) is in many ways as expressive of a particular tradition as Wright’s Unity Temple. Maybeck’s building does not appear in a traditional church form on the exterior; its scale combined with its wooden trellises and wisteria vines and concrete tracery create a space that is more intimate than imposing. Of Maybeck’s work Paul Goldberger has written:

> Maybeck was interested in the way buildings made people feel; he cared about the auras his buildings possessed, about the emotions they inspired, about the thoughts they brought forth. [. . . ] He knew that there is no such thing as the completely new; he also knew that no work of art worth anything can be made entirely from things that have come before. He felt no conflict, and his work was proof that total originality need not demand total rejection of what is familiar and comfortable. In the end, he takes his place not only among the greatest of California architects, but also among the select group of architects throughout history who, like Hawksmoor, Soane, and Lutyens, pushed and pulled traditional languages in ways that others could not imagine, and in so doing made poetry.

**Conclusion**

Recognizing that the critical assessment of the religious building in modern and contemporary architecture is an often ignored subject within most schools of architecture, the Yale School of Architecture organized an interdisciplinary symposium on the topic “Constructing the Ineffable” in 2007 with architects, theologians, phi-
losophers, and historians. Since many new contemporary religious buildings built over the last two decades have received substantial attention within the popular press, it seemed like an opportune moment to explore the subject, especially as many prominent working architects on the current scene have in fact engaged it in their own work. The symposium set out to examine this large corpus of contemporary sacred architecture and the cultural attitudes that give it shape. In this sense, the speakers at the conference in effect addressed two foundational questions posed by Vincent Scully in his keynote address: What do we consider sacred today? And how is that expressed in built form?

What emerged from this dialogue was a confirmation that a broad audience is eager to address the ideas that have shaped attitudes to sacred space within the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Many participants came to this discussion with a belief that the topic of the religious building, especially in the historiography of twentieth century architecture, has been unfairly ignored. Indeed, some leading architect-scholars asserted that in comparison with the past, the twentieth century lacked a compelling religious building tradition (with the exception of a few outstanding examples such as Le Corbusier’s chapel at Ronchamp) — presumably thereby accounting for why modern religious architecture has not caught on within professional schools as a topic for in-depth historical and critical inquiry.

From the symposium, there emerged a sense of the need for a more nuanced historical perspective that could reassess contemporary religious architecture’s modernist roots. Contrary to assumptions, the relation between modern architecture and religion is emerging as a more complex and often contradictory relationship than previously assumed. The significance of the pursuit of the “rational” for modern architects — in relation to the lucidity of construction, structural logic, and economy — is not in doubt. On the other hand, one could argue that there has been relatively less emphasis placed by modern architects on a search for the relationship of the built environment to patterns of myth, ritual, and the archetypal aspirations of the human spirit. Yet as this essay has reasserted, the place of spirit in leading innovative approaches, sustaining derivative appropriations, and offering summational exemplars of modern architecture cannot be overlooked.

Most of the great modernist architects in fact displayed a real interest in, and sensitivity towards building religious work. Although the religious building has perhaps been the most problematic architectural type of the twentieth century, it has never ceased to challenge the architect. In a century when building types were expanding to keep up with meeting the requirements of a modernist mass society — including such varied forms as the shopping center, the factory, the airport, and hydro-electric dams — the religious building type persisted as an indication of human presence, symbolic myths, and archetypal bonds in the midst of radical and absolute change. If we follow this thread, there emerges a more nuanced picture of the narrative of modern architecture that brings forward the very serious ideas on the relationship between the spirit and the formation of new materials and technologies. These achievements suggest that there is a stronger narrative of concern for the spirit to be traced within the history of modern architecture than many critics have observed.

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Karla Cavarra Britton, who received her M.A. from Columbia University and Ph.D. from Harvard University, teaches at the Yale School of Architecture. She has written a monograph on Auguste Perret (2001) and edited the book Constructing the Ineffable: Contemporary Sacred Architecture (2010) and is currently writing Middle Ground/Middle East: Religious Sites in Urban Contexts.

(Endnotes)

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The Language of Babylon and Expression of the Sacred

Uwe Michael Lang

Art and the Crisis of Beauty

At a recent occasion, Pope Benedict XVI called artists “custodians of beauty,” as his predecessors Paul VI and Blessed John Paul II had done before him. This title is significant, not least because in the Catholic tradition beauty is understood as a philosophical and ultimately theological category. It was the Franciscan theologian Saint Bonaventure who first numbered beauty among the so-called transcendentals: beauty is considered a property of being itself, along with truth and goodness. This refers in the first place to God, who is being itself, and hence truth, goodness, and beauty itself.

Art, therefore, as the expression of the beautiful, is capable of revealing reality to us; sacred art in particular has the ability of manifesting to us the beauty of God. There is a remarkable passage in the Catechism of the Catholic Church that sums up this theological concept of beauty (nos. 2500-2503). Here I would like to refer to the very concise version found in the Compendium of the Catechism published in 2005.

In the section on the eighth commandment, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,” question no. 526 reads: “What relationship exists between Truth, Beauty and Sacred Art?” The response is: “The truth is beautiful carrying in itself the splendor of spiritual beauty. In addition to the expression of the truth in words there are other complementary expressions of truth, most specifically in the beauty of artistic works. These are the fruits both of talents given by God, and of human effort.” In this passage, the intrinsic relationship between truth and beauty is affirmed and particular attention is given to works of art, which are born from the divine gift of human creativity.

Modernity has contested precisely the transcendent dimension of beauty as expressing or revealing truth and goodness. Beauty has been detached from the order of being and, in a radical turn to subjectivity, has been reduced to an aesthetic experience or indeed to a matter of feeling. This has been part of an intellectual revolution, the consequences of which are not limited to the art world. The Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar saw this very clearly. He dedicated several volumes to what he termed “theological aesthetics,” recalling the idea the Catholic tradition has taken up from classical Greek philosophy, especially from Plato, that truth and goodness attract us because they are beautiful. Thus, what is good, in other words, what ought to be done, becomes self-evident. However, Balthasar notes, when beauty is disconnected from this intrinsic link with truth and goodness, when it becomes totally autonomous, then the good loses its force of attraction and becomes simply a matter of choice, one possibility among others. We are not concerned here with the moral result of this intellectual revolution, but rather with its effect on art. One result of this isolation of beauty from being, or truth, has been a phenomenon described by the Italian philosopher Remo Bodei as the “apotheosis of the ugly.”

By this is meant an aesthetic theory and practice that rejects anything that appears to be beautiful as a deception and holds that only the representation of what is crude, vulgar, and low is capable of expressing the truth. No doubt, the ugly is present in the classical tradition as well, but it serves as a contrast, a backdrop to the beautiful. We may think of images of the Last Judgment, where the devil and his angels are painted often in the most grotesque and monstrous way, to highlight the contrast with the beautiful reality of heaven. However, what Bodei means by the apotheosis of the ugly goes much further. Beauty itself is suspected as being deceptive. And the consequence is that beauty is no longer sought. Such an analysis of the state of the arts in the modern world is shared by some critics of renown, such as Jean Clair, who made an outstanding contribution to the “Court of the Gentiles” of Paris on March 25, 2011. This initiative promoted by the Pontifical Council of Culture in the name of the Holy Father evokes the Temple in Jerusalem, which had a court for the gentiles who were at some distance from the sanctuary, but still related to it. They were not quite ready to cross the threshold, but they were not completely removed from it either. This idea of the Court of the Gentiles includes a re-launch of the dialogue between the Church and the arts. At this occasion, Clair published a very remarkable analysis of the state of the arts in the contemporary world.
especially with regard to the sacred and does not spare his criticism for certain forms of artistic expression that have been admitted into churches. A similar scrutiny is presented by the American critic Roger Kimball in an essay published in *First Things* in 2008, with suggestive title, “The End of Art.” There is a crisis of culture, at least in the West, and at its core there is a rejection of the very concept of the fine arts that is ultimately grounded in a transcendent vision of beauty.

Ever since the turn to the subjective which results from Enlightenment philosophy, especially Immanuel Kant, and the Romantic movement, it has been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to restate the metaphysical foundations of beauty. I consider a recent and very fine book by the philosopher Roger Scruton on beauty an excellent example of this aporia. Scruton is also aware of the need to recover these metaphysical foundations that were eroded in the eighteenth century, when “aesthetics” became a separate philosophical discipline, but in the end, cannot do so and must limit himself to the judgment of taste.6 Certainly, an education of aesthetic taste would go a long way, but, in the end, *de gustibus non est disputandum*. In other words, taste cannot provide foundations that would be stable enough to rebuild the metaphysical grounding of the arts today.

**A Theological Response**

I am not competent to provide a philosophical response to this burning question. Instead, I should try to present some elements of a theological response drawing on the Catholic tradition. There is a general tendency in Western thought, going back to Plato, that alternates between exaltation and deep suspicion of art. As Kimball observes, “if beauty can use art to express truth, art can also use beauty to create charming fabrications. … Instead of directing our attention beyond sensible beauty toward its supersensible source, art can fascinate us with beauty’s apparently self-sufficient presence; it can counterfeit being in lieu of revealing it.”7 The Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky in his novel *The Brothers Karamazov* of 1880 has his protagonist Dmitri Karamazov say, “Beauty is the battlefield where God and the devil war for the soul of man.” On the other hand, the same Dostoevsky, in an often quoted passage of his earlier work *The Idiot* of 1869, puts into the mouth of his Christian-like hero, the Prince Mishkin, the famous words: “I believe the world will be saved by beauty.” Not any beauty is meant here, but the redemptive beauty of Jesus Christ.

As a cardinal, Benedict XVI published an essay on this subject, beginning with a meditation on Psalm 45(44), which is a praise of the king at the occasion of his wedding, and a lyric exultation of his bride. In the exegetical tradition of the Church, this psalm has been read as a representation of Christ’s spousal relationship with the Church, and in fact has recognized Christ as the fairest of men and where the psalm says grace is poured upon his lips, it points to the beauty of Christ’s words, the glory of his proclamation. Seen in the light of God’s revelation in the New Testament, it is not merely the external beauty of the Redeemer’s appearance that is praised here, but rather the beauty of truth that appears in him. This beauty captures us with the wound of love and makes us to go forward, as the psalm describes the procession of the Mystical Bride of Christ, which is the Church, to meet the Bridegroom. It is the same Christ, however, to which are applied the words from Isaiah, “he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2). The beauty of Christ is a paradoxical one, which embraces suffering and even death, and is revealed in the disfigured image of him crucified, when he shows his love to the end for his heavenly Father and for humanity. This redemptive beauty of Christ, crucified and glorified, which shines forth with the splendor of the saints, is also reflected in works of art that the Christian faith has generated; works of art that have the power to lift our hearts to higher things and to lead us beyond ourselves to this encounter with God who is beauty itself.

The present pope has more than once expressed his profound conviction that the predicaments of today’s world call for a “widening of the horizon of reason.” Ever since the Enlightenment, and to some extent already before, reason has been narrowed to mere scientific and technical rationality: its sphere is only that which can be counted or measured. Benedict XVI is confident that religion can make an essential contribution to opening up this limited conception of reason, and the arts have an important part to play in this. He even sees in the beauty that the Faith has brought forth the true apology of Christianity. Rational argument remains important and indispensable, but the encounter with the beauty of God, especially through the arts, can today speak with much greater immediacy and effectiveness.
In other words, there is a tremendous treasure in the Catholic tradition, which can help the search for beauty that has become disoriented ever since its metaphysical foundations were eroded.

Beauty and the Sacred

When it comes to beauty and the sacred, I should like to begin with the Second Vatican’s Council Constitution on the Liturgy, which dedicates its seventh chapter to “Sacred Art and Sacred Furnishings.” The opening paragraph of this chapter contains a concise description of the Church’s understanding of sacred art (Sacrosanctum Concilium, no. 122), and it introduces a subtle, but important distinction between religious art and sacred art. Religious art is characterized by the artist’s personal approach to a religious theme, and precisely because of its strongly subjective form of expression, a work of religious art may not be accessible to everyone. Sacred art, on the other hand, is born from the artist’s engagement with and reflection upon a positive or historical truth of a given religion. In addition to the subjective element, which will always be present in the artist’s creative work, sacred art has an objective quality that transcends the individual’s form of expression, and for this reason can be appreciated by anyone who is familiar with its religious theme. In other words, sacred art aims at a visible translation of a reality that goes beyond the limits of human individuality: the narration of a scene from Holy Scripture, or from the lives of the saints, or the meditation on a mystery of the faith.

The above-mentioned passage from the Compendium of the Catechism (no. 526) continues to say: “Sacred art by being true and beautiful should evoke and glorify the mystery of God made visible in Christ, and lead to the adoration and love of God, the Creator and Saviour, who is the surpassing, invisible Beauty of Truth and Love.” Sacred art is always oriented towards the liturgy because it is explicitly destined for the sacram, the sacred, which in the Christian sense is not to be understood in some vague or generic sense, but as referring to worship of God. This carries implications for its forms of expression, as Benedict XVI observes in his book The Spirit of the Liturgy: “No sacred art can come from an isolated subjectivity.” Catholic sacred art, then, requires the readiness to think and feel with the Church (sentire cum Ecclesia), the universal communion of the faithful, which is the true subject of faith. “Without faith there is no art commensurate with the liturgy,” the present Holy Father concludes this reflection.10

The Church has been a great patron of the arts, especially of sacred art, and the many, much-visited historic monuments all over the world speak eloquently of this fact. However, the crisis of beauty, of which I have spoken in the first part of this talk, has deeply affected sacred art as well. Pope Paul VI, in his homily to artists in the Sistine Chapel on May 19, 1964, already lamented the rift between the Church and the arts, which he thought had adopted “the language of Babylon” and were no longer capable of expressing the sacred.

Incarnation and the Image

The crisis of sacred art is, I believe, above all a crisis of the sacred image. At its root the present pope identifies a materialism that comes out of the domination of the material world that has never been achieved before. This unprecedented mastery over matter we enjoy today, however, has also led to blindness to the questions of life that transcend this material realm; Joseph Ratzinger even speaks of “a blindness of the spirit.” On the one hand, we live in a culture of images, which have become far more influential and powerful than words, but on the other hand these images remain on the surface of appearance, that is, they do not go beyond that which can be immediately perceived by the senses, whereas the transcendent dimension, which is so important for the sacred image, is no longer understood.11 In this cultural predicament, where are sources for a renewal of sacred art to be found?

One obstacle in the search for such a renewal is the often-heard objection that proposing criteria for art, architecture, or music that are drawn from the Church’s tradition would place limitations on the artist’s creativity. As already mentioned, in the sphere of sacred art, such limits are legitimate, and they are necessary. They even help artistic creativity to widen its horizons. Artists who used to have important commissions from bishops or popes, such as Michelangelo Buonarotti in Rome, entered into relationships with their patrons, which could at times become difficult. However, such tensions proved to be immensely creative, and opened up depths of artistic expression that otherwise may not have been reached. In other words, the Church has always nurtured artists and has brought out greatness in them, which may not have manifested itself otherwise. Today, the Church has become very timid in this field, for reasons that have something to do with her more recent history. Many ecclesiastical patrons seem to have lost the confidence to nurture, to build up, and occasionally to correct artists when they enter into the sacred. And yet, proper patronage is also required for a true renewal of sacred art.

The Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, much in the same way as Pope Pius XII’s encyclical Mediator Dei (November 20, 1947), affirms that contemporary art “shall be given free scope in the Church” and that it should be allowed to flourish in order to express the sacred. At the same time, both documents use a telling metaphor: contemporary forms are meant to join the “wonderful chorus of praise in honor of the Catholic faith” which is the Church’s patrimony (Sacrosanctum Concilium, no. 123). This metaphor presupposes an existing harmony into which new voices should be inserted, as well as the possibility that certain voices will be cacophonous and therefore not apt to become part of this chorus of praise. If you approach sacred art, you insert yourself into a tradition, be it iconographic, architectural, musical, or likewise.
In his chapter on the question of images from *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, the present pope proposes principles of an art ordered to divine worship. These principles cannot be discussed here in any systematic way, and so I shall limit myself to the first one, which seems absolutely essential: “The complete absence of images is incompatible with faith in the incarnation of God. God has acted in history and entered into our sensible world, so that it may become transparent to him. Images of beauty, in which the mystery of the invisible God becomes visible, are an essential part of Christian worship. ... Iconoclasm is not a Christian option.” The Word has become flesh; God has become visible in Jesus of Nazareth, the Incarnate Son of God. Christianity is an incarnational religion, and the image is indispensable for its religious expression. Hence sacred art in the Christian context is, or at any rate should be, essentially figurative. There is also place for non-figurative art, for instance in stained glass, but primarily it should be figurative art, which make perceptible the mysteries of the faith and narrates the history of salvation. It follows from this principle that the presence of abstract art in so many Catholic churches built more recently needs to be questioned.

**New Hope**

While the crisis of sacred art today is a reality that needs to be addressed as such, there are also very promising developments. The gestures of protest and provocation, which opened the modernist movement in art and architecture, are not innovative or ground-breaking anymore. Kimball notes that such gestures are mere repetitions of what Marcel Duchamp and the Dadaists did a century ago. On the other hand, there is a reappraisal of certain artists of the twentieth century that have been passed over in the standard manuals, and there is also a return to figurative painting and sculpture. These phenomena are by no means limited to sacred art, and in fact it sometimes appears that patronage in the ecclesiastical world seems to be lagging behind in appreciating them because of the fear to appear out of touch with modernity. However, a renewal of sacred art needs artists who follow their calling outside the commercial centers as much as enlightened and courageous patrons. While teaching in Rome, I was delighted to meet a group of young artists from the Anglophone world, who had studied at small private academies in Florence how to paint and sculpt figuratively. One of them, the sculptor Cody Swanson, has recently contributed to the outstanding project of the resacralisation of Sioux Falls Cathedral.

As the present pope observes in *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, echoing the voice of the French author Marcel Proust: “The great cultural tradition of the faith is home to a presence of immense power. What in museums is only a monument from the past, an occasion for mere nostalgic admiration, is constantly made present in the liturgy in all its freshness." When the Church’s liturgical tradition is experienced in its authentic beauty, it will also lead to new inspiration for sacred art. I am convinced that Benedict XVI’s decisive steps to renew divine worship will bear fruit in this field as well.

**Father Uwe Michael Lang, a native of Germany and priest of the Congregation of the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri in London, is the Coordinator of the Master’s program in “Architecture, Sacred Art and Liturgy” at the Università Europea di Roma/Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum and a Consultant to the Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff. He has published in the fields of Patristics and liturgical studies.**

(Endnotes) This article is the abbreviated version of a talk given to the Catholic Artists’ Society in New York City on October 31, 2011. The character of the spoken word is largely kept and bibliographical references are limited to a minimum. For a fuller documentation, see U. M. Lang, “The Crisis of Sacred Art and the Sources for its Renewal in the Thought of Pope Benedict XVI,” in N. J. Roy and J. E. Rutherford (eds.), *Benedict XVI and the Sacred Liturgy: Proceedings of the First Fota International Liturgy Conference 2008, Fota Liturgy Series* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), 98-115.


His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI gave the following homily at the Ordinary Public Consistory for the Creation of New Cardinals and for the Vote on Several Causes of Canonization, 19 February 2012:

Dear Cardinals, Brother Bishops and Priests, Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On this solemnity of the Chair of Saint Peter, we have the joy of gathering around the altar of the Lord together with the new Cardinals whom yesterday I incorporated into the College of Cardinals. It is to them, first of all, that I offer my cordial greetings and I thank Cardinal Fernando Filoni for the gracious words he has addressed to me in the name of all. I extend my greetings to the other Cardinals and all the Bishops present, as well as to the distinguished authorities, ambassadors, priests, religious and all the faithful who have come from different parts of the world for this happy occasion, which is marked by a particular character of universality.

In the second reading that we have just heard, Saint Peter exhorts the “elders” of the Church to be zealous pastors, attentive to the flock of Christ (cf. 1 Pet 5:1-2). These words are addressed in the first instance to you, my dear venerable brothers, who have already shown great merit among the people of God through your wise and generous pastoral ministry in demanding dioceses, or through presiding over the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, or in your service to the Church through study and teaching. The new dignity that has been conferred upon you is intended to show appreciation for the faithful labour you have carried out in the Lord’s vineyard, to honour the communities and nations from which you come and which you represent so worthily in the Church, to invest you with new and more important ecclesial responsibilities and finally to ask of you an additional readiness to be of service to Christ and to the entire Christian community. This readiness to serve the Gospel is firmly founded upon the certitude of faith. We know that God is faithful to his promises and we await in hope the fulfilment of these words of Saint Peter: “And when the chief shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory” (1 Pet 5:4).

Today’s Gospel passage presents Peter, under divine inspiration, expressing his own firm faith in Jesus as the Son of God and the promised Messiah. In response to this transparent profession of faith, which Peter makes in the name of the other Apostles as well, Christ reveals to him the mission he intends to entrust to him, namely that of being the “rock”, the visible foundation on which the entire spiritual edifice of the Church is built (cf. Mt 16:16-19). This new name of “rock” is not a reference to Peter’s personal character, but can be understood only on the basis of a deeper aspect, a mystery: through the office that Jesus confers upon him, Simon Peter will become something that, in terms of “flesh and blood”, he is not. The exegete Joachim Jeremias has shown that in the background, the symbolic language of “holy rock” is present. In this regard, it is helpful to consider a rabbinic text which states: “The Lord said, ‘How can I create the world, when these godless men will rise up in revolt against me?’ But when God saw that Abraham was to be born, he said, ‘Look, I have found a rock on which I can build and establish the world.’ Therefore he called Abraham a rock.” The prophet Isaiah makes reference to this when he calls upon the people to “look to the rock from which you were hewn ... look to Abraham your father” (51:1-2). On account of his faith, Abraham, the father of believers, is seen as the rock that supports creation. Simon, the first to profess faith in Jesus as the Christ and the first witness of the resurrection, now, on the basis of his renewed faith, becomes the rock that is to prevail against the destructive forces of evil.

Dear brothers and sisters, this Gospel episode that has been proclaimed to us finds a further and more important ecclesial significance in the Church’s life today. Saint Peter is a model par excellence of faithfulness to the Lord. For this reason, it seems fitting here to show appreciation for what you have accomplished in the past and what you will do in the present and in the future. May the Lord, who has called you to the high office of serving the Church, give you the strength and wisdom to discharge your duties with competence and zeal.

Photo: Daniel Garcia Neto

The 9th Century chair is enclosed in a gilt bronze casing by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1647. The four statues are Saint Ambrose, Saint Athanasius, Saint John Chrysostom, and Saint Augustine.
eloquent explanation in one of the most famous artistic treasures of this Vatican Basilica: the altar of the Chair. After passing through the magnificent central nave, and continuing past the transepts, the pilgrim arrives in the apse and sees before him an enormous bronze throne that seems to hover in mid-air, but in reality is supported by the four statues of great Fathers of the Church from East and West. And above the throne, surrounded by triumphant angels suspended in the air, the glory of the Holy Spirit shines through the oval window. What does this sculptural composition say to us, this product of Bernini’s genius? It represents a vision of the essence of the Church and the place within the Church of the Petrine Magisterium.

The window of the apse opens the Church towards the outside, towards the whole of creation, while the image of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove shows God as the source of light. But there is also another aspect to point out: the Church herself is like a window, the place where God draws near to us, where he comes towards our world. The Church does not exist for her own sake, she is not the point of arrival, but she has to point upwards, beyond herself, to the realms above. The Church is truly herself to the extent that she allows the Other, with a capital “O”, to shine through her – the One from whom she comes and to whom she leads. The Church is the place where God “reaches” us and where we “set off” towards him: she has the task of opening up, beyond itself, a world which tends to become enclosed within itself, the task of bringing to the world the light that comes from above, without which it would be uninhabitable.

The great bronze throne encloses a wooden chair from the ninth century, which was long thought to be Saint Peter’s own chair and was placed above this monumental altar because of its great symbolic value. It expresses the permanent presence of the Apostle in the Magisterium of his successors. Saint Peter’s chair, we could say, is the throne of truth which takes its origin from Christ’s commission after the confession at Caesarea Philippi. The magisterial chair also reminds us of the words spoken to Peter by the Lord during the Last Supper: “I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strength-

en your brethren” (Lk 22:32).

The chair of Peter evokes another memory: the famous expression from Saint Ignatius of Antioch’s letter to the Romans, where he says of the Church of Rome that she “presides in charity” (Salutation, PG 5, 801). In truth, presiding in faith is inseparably linked to presiding in love. Faith without love would no longer be an authentic Christian faith. But the words of Saint Ignatius have another much more concrete implication: the word “charity”, in fact, was also used by the early Church to indicate the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the Sacramentum caritatis Christi, through which Christ continues to draw us all to himself, as he did when raised up on the Cross (cf. Jn 12:32). Therefore, to “preside in charity” is to draw men and women into a eucharistic embrace—the embrace of Christ—which surpasses every barrier and every division, creating communion from all manner of differences. The Petrine ministry is therefore a primacy of love in the eucharistic sense, that is to say solicitude for the universal communion of the Church in Christ. And the Eucharist is the shape and the measure of this communion, a guarantee that it will remain faithful to the criterion of the tradition of the faith.

The great Chair is supported by the Fathers of the Church. The two Eastern masters, Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Athanasius, together with the Latins, Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine, represent the whole of the tradition, and hence the richness of expression of the true faith of the holy and one Church. This aspect of the altar teaches us that love rests upon faith. Love collapses if man no longer trusts in God and disobeys him. Everything in the Church rests upon faith: the sacraments, the liturgy, evangelization, charity. Likewise the law and the Church’s authority rest upon faith. The Church is not self-regulating, she does not determine her own structure but receives it from the word of God, to which she listens in faith as she seeks to understand it and to live it. Within the ecclesial community, the Fathers of the Church fulfill the function of guaranteeing fidelity to sacred Scripture. They ensure that the Church receives reliable and solid exegesis, capable of forming with the Chair of Peter a stable and consistent whole. The sacred Scriptures, authoritatively interpreted by the Magisterium in the light of the Fathers, shed light upon the Church’s journey through time, providing her with a stable foundation amid the vicissitudes of history.

After considering the various elements of the altar of the Chair, let us take a look at it in its entirety. We see that it is characterized by a twofold movement: ascending and descending. This is the reciprocity between faith and love. The Chair is placed in a prominent position in this place, because this is where Saint Peter’s tomb is located, but this too tends towards the love of God. Indeed, faith is oriented towards love. A selfish faith would be an unreal faith. Whoever believes in Jesus Christ and enters into the dynamic of love that finds its source in the Eucharist, discovers true joy and becomes capable in turn of living according to the logic this gift. True faith is illuminated by love and leads towards love, leads on high, just as the altar of the Chair points upwards towards the luminous window, the glory of the Holy Spirit, which constitutes the true focus for the pilgrim’s gaze as he crosses the threshold of the Vatican Basilica. That window is given great prominence by the triumphant angels and the great golden rays, with a sense of overflowing fullness that expresses the richness of communion with God. God is not isolation, but glorious and joyful love, spreading outwards and radiant with light.

Dear brothers and sisters, the gift of this love has been entrusted to us, to every Christian. It is a gift to be passed on to others, through the witness of our lives. This is your task in particular, dear brother Cardinals: to bear witness to the joy of Christ’s love. We now entrust your ecclesial service to the Virgin Mary, who was present among the apostolic community as they gathered in prayer, waiting for the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:14). May she, Mother of the Incarnate Word, protect the Church’s path, support the work of the pastors by her intercession and take under her mantle the entire College of Cardinals. Amen!
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CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN LATE ANTIQUITY


Reviewed by Thomas F.X. Noble

The period from 300 to 700 was for a long time—for centuries—interpreted as the time of Rome’s, of Classical Antiquity’s, senescence. Everything declined and fell. Standards eroded. In the 1960s a new interpretation emerged that is today regnant in the academy although perhaps not in the broader culture. This was a time when, apart from economic, social, and institutional dislocation, a buoyant, triumphant Christian culture put its stamp decisively on virtually every aspect of life. This was “Late Antiquity.”

Transition was originally inspired by Demetrios Konstantios, the late director of the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens. The volume is a catalogue from a 2011 exhibition at the Onassis Cultural Center in New York. Typical for the genre, the volume opens with various laudations followed by expert and illustrated essays covering aspects of the overall theme and then by beautiful reproductions of 144 objects. The idea behind the exhibition was to situate Greece—understood rather generously—in the world of late antiquity. That is, the objects included were (with only a few exceptions) either made in Greece, or found in Greece, or today conserved in Greek collections.

Readers—and viewers!—of Transition are treated to an intellectual and visual feast. The volume opens with a sparkling essay by Peter Brown, one of the founding fathers of the late antique paradigm. Subsequent essays treat broad cultural themes, geographical settings, coins, personal adornments, death and burial, places of worship, art generally and icons in particular, and aesthetics. Each essay is up to date and accessible. All have material that will inspire the expert and the non-expert alike.

If the book may be said to have a thesis it is this: Once Constantine granted toleration to Christianity in 313, the arts of pagan antiquity were adapted to Christian uses. Styles and production values largely persisted but subject matter changed dramatically, albeit gradually. Objects essential to daily life, say lamps, dishes, and small chests, acquired Christian symbols and decorations, crosses most often but also lambs, chi-rho monograms, ships, fish, and even images of saints. Personal adornments such as ear- and finger-rings, bracelets and armlets, necklaces, and clothing acquired similar symbols and images. Floor mosaics, large and small inscriptions, column capitals, statues, and sarcophagi acquired Christian symbols or illustrated Christian themes. Ecclesiastical architecture, of both the basilican and centrally-planned varieties, developed slowly but gained confidence, style, magnitude, and prominence. The walls and apses of churches were decorated with magnificent mosaics that were loud proclamations of triumph and not merely decorations. A beautiful piece of jewelry bearing a cross continued to signal the wealth and status of its owner but also announced her adherence to the new faith. Jas Elsner speaks of “a melting pot of styles, visual allusions, and religious references” (31). He, like the book as a whole, stresses continuities amid dynamic, creative changes.

Slobodan Curcic’s fine essay on aesthetics makes three intriguing points. First, increasing abstraction represented a rejection of naturalism with its dependence on a range of symbols related to the natural world. Older artistic conventions were replaced by theological principles. Second, de-materialization had the paradoxical effect of denying materiality to material forms. He illustrates this point with examples of lace-work carving on column capitals. Third, the proliferation of two-dimensionality suggested new ways of capturing reality and simultaneously curtailed the role of sculpture. Curcic’s essay helps the reader work through the catalogue as a guide to why so much looked the same while at the same time looking so very different. Katherine Marsengill’s essay sums up scholarly thinking on the rise of the icon. These potent images had many sources, of course, but a key one was Egyptian mummy portraits. One might thoughtfully compare the en-caustic icon of Saint Peter from Saint Catherine’s in Sinai with the stunning portraits included in the catalogue (nos. 139-141). Immediately striking are the haunting, all-seeing eyes. But the mummy portraits commemorated the dead for the living whereas in icons the oversized eyes abandon naturalism to insist that the holy dead are still alive, that they “see” us, that they remain involved in our world. This is a wonderful illustration of Curcic’s point about older conventions yielding place to theological principles. And it reveals Elsner’s “melting pot.” And, finally, it reminds the student of late antiquity to take continuity and change in tandem and not in opposition.

Thomas F.X. Noble, Ph.D., is a professor of medieval history at the University of Notre Dame. He won the 2011 Otto Gründler Book Prize for his book Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. He currently serves as the President of the American Catholic Historical Association.
Book Review

Embrace of Classicism


Reviewed by John W. Stamper

This formidable book is both beautifully illustrated and exhaustively researched, and for what it lacks in historical synthesis, it makes up for in sheer quantity of detail. It covers a period that began with the completion of Sir Christopher Wren’s Saint Paul’s Cathedral, representing the eighteenth-century Baroque tradition, and it ends at a time when church design was largely inspired by Neoclassicism based on an archaeological revival of the antique past.

The book is a lengthy 617 pages, with 739 illustrations, a great number of which are in full color. Friedman is an architectural historian and art curator who has dedicated his career to a detailed study of archival material, both drawings and written documents that explain the conditions and methods of English church building. He has divided the book into four parts, each with a distinct theme: churchgoing, church building, the medieval traditions, and the classical traditions. These topics aptly suggest that the book is not just about architecture, but about the whole social and economic context of religious architecture.

This is especially evident in Part I, which includes topics such as accommodating the congregation, the vicar’s life, fund-raising, and the range of activities connected with church-going—from cradle to grave—worship, musical concerts, weddings, baptisms, catechisms, and funerals. The distinctions between British churches and those on the continent are also explained. Since most churches of the seventeenth century had been built for Anglican congregations, they were therefore characterized by a repudiation of the doctrine of the Catholic Church, notably transubstantiation and devotion to the Virgin and saints. Most notably they allowed for involvement in the communion service, requiring, for instance, the removal of pre-Reformation chancel screens and bringing the pulpit and reading desks into the nave. The emphasis was now on preaching and receiving the Word rather than the reception of the sacraments.

By 1800 London had 315 churches, 103 parish churches and over 100 chapels. There were also country house chapels, which were either within a main house or an independent building within estate grounds. During the course of the eighteenth century there appeared a number of new religious building types, including nonconformist chapels, characterized by architectural modesty and an absence of steeples, marking a strong contrast to the Baroque tradition. They were practical and carried the expediency of anonymity, built mostly by Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, or Quakers.

Part IV of the book would be of most interest to those concerned with Classical architecture. During the period 1700 to 1730, most churches were designed in the Classical style, though as the author points out, there was anything but stylistic hegemony as traditionally portrayed in architectural histories. Instead they ranged from full-blown Continental Baroque and English modifications of the Baroque as practiced by Wren, James Gibbs, Thomas Archer, and Nicholas Hawksmoor, to essays in Early Christian architecture and a resurrection of antique temple forms. By the 1730s, Palladian patterns were embraced, influenced by the publication of several English editions of I quattro libri dell’architettura, plus a renewed interest in the work of Inigo Jones. Even during this time there was a core group of architects who practiced in the Medieval and Gothic Revival traditions.

At the end of the century there was a change from an emphasis on the Baroque or Palladian to a reinvention of the antique in a succession of radical experiments. Friedman suggests that the Church of Sainte-Genevieve (the Pantheon) in Paris, with its exclusive use of colossal Corinthian columns, was the most important influence on British architecture in the second half of the eighteenth century. Neoclassicism differed from the preceding Palladian Classicism in terms of grandeur and the more prominent use of columns. This shift in attitude to embrace classical antiquity was further supported by the founding of the Society of Dillettanti, which sponsored the Greek excursions of James Stuart and Nicholas Revett in the 1750s and produced the first detailed drawings of Greek antiquities. Others followed in their study of classical architecture, including George Dance, Robert Adam, William Chambers, and James Paine, all of whom made significant contributions to British church architecture.

The author relies heavily on extensive quotes from diaries, books, journals, articles, and correspondence, some of which could be edited out or paraphrased to make the book more readable. It is, however, an encyclopedic work that immeasurably enriches our understanding of eighteenth-century British architecture.

John W. Stamper is Associate Dean and Professor of the School of Architecture at the University of Notre Dame. He is an architect and historian and the author of several books including The Architecture of Roman Temples: The Republic to the Middle Empire and Chicago’s North Michigan Avenue: Planning and Development 1900-1930. Stamper.1@nd.edu.

Reviewed by Thomas Gordon Smith

Three years ago, Kerry Downes published a compilation of at least thirty years of organization, analysis, and interpretation: Borromini’s Book. The first merit of Professor Downes’s book is his English translation of Borromini’s Opus Architectonicum, subtitled in English, The Oratory and Roman House of the Congregation of the Oratory of S. Philip Neri. The candid account by Francesco Borromini and Virgilio Spada of vissitude and success is essential reading for paradigmatic architects and readers interested in Catholic churches. Downes’s clear translation greatly extends access to this fascinating account of Borromini’s twelve-year involvement in design and building for the Oratorians from 1637 to 1649.

The thirty-eight year old Francesco Borromini was asked to devise a holistic monastic complex in Rome to the west of San Filippo Neri’s Santa Maria in Vallicella, a church completed in 1606. The Oratorian priest, Virgilio Spada, was unaware of Borromini initially, but soon became an invaluable patron. Spada’s politically and socially astute sophistication about architecture helped Borromini achieve a rich and complex structure, despite incremental construction. Spada’s diplomacy within his religious community also kept the temperamental architect working—due to his ability to explain the plans and pacify his brothers.

In 1647 Spada, ever modest and prudent, became an unacknowledged co-author for Borromini’s account of planning and construction. In the Opus, he also helped provide descriptive treatments of an architect’s job creating unity from a multitude of requirements. Although the autograph text and illustrations were not published until 1725, in the long run this proved beneficial. Despite the almost sixty-year delay after Borromini’s death, the type-set text and large-scale engravings illustrating the Oratorians’ house in great detail, rekindled enthusiasm for complexity and curvilinear form in ecclesiastical architecture. A generation of architects born in the 1680s in Rome, Piedmont, Germany, and Bohemia, reanimated the lively and meaningful ideas of Borromini and his contemporaries. The 1725 monograph provided an opulent and precise presentation of Borromini’s words and images that took advantage of new typographical developments. The Opus provides the most extensively detailed account and visual documentation of Borromini’s many buildings.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Oratorian complex was taken by the national government; only a few areas were retained by the Oratorians. Despite this takeover, the Oratorian structures remain essentially unaltered, thanks to the appreciation and decorum of generations of Italians. When in Rome, I suggest polite requests to see as much as possible via Borromini’s portal between the Church and Oratory façade, although many areas are closed to visitors.

Downes follows his translation with crisp reproductions of the 1725 publication. Images are arranged at different scales to help comprehension of its many components. Plates 61 through 64, for example, show plans, section/elevations, and perspective details of the relationship between the ground-level Refectory and the Recreation Room above it. These are followed by a sumptuous engraving of the beautiful marble fireplace in the Recreation Room. The mantel is surmounted by a fluted tent-like funnel that conveys the flue to the chimney. Of mid-seventeenth century Roman architects, only Borromini would have exercised such a provocative concept. Below a curvaceous horizontal cornice, his sculptors carved a hanging valence of alternating rectangles and squares, separated by voids for hanging ropes finished with knots and tassels. These are rectilinear versions of the bronze pelmets Borromini designed with Bernini for the baldachino at Saint Peter’s in 1630. The whole composition alludes to a type of campaign tent devised by the Ottomans and emulated by their European foes.

Two factors made this imaginative undertaking possible for the still-new confraternity who desired modesty and fiduciary responsibility. First, while the carving was expensive, the material was gratis. A huge hunk of white marble was discovered during excavations for foundations on the site. This block of stone had been transported but not used in ancient Roman times. Second, Borromini complains in the Opus about Oratorian restrictions on ornament in general, “And if in anything I exceeded a little bit the rule prescribed to me I heard grumbling for some time.” In the Ricreazione mantel, Borromini, perhaps with Spada’s di-

Fireplace at the Sala di Ricreazione
plomy, was allowed to leverage the fortuitous stone into a delightful caprice by carving in relief symbols dear to San Filippo on the square flaps: florid lilies, many-pointed stars, and flaming hearts. Hanging from a tent, these flaps would move with the winds, but in an architectural pun, the solid flaps mimic the canonical sequence of triglyphs on a Doric frieze, just as we see them on that paragon of stability, the Parthenon.

Borromini explains in the same section on ornament that, “among the rules prescribed to me by the Fathers was one that required frugality…relaxing the rein somewhat only in matters pertaining to divine worship…to the point that in dealing with the façade of their House they did not want it to be made with a facing of cut bricks…or bands of travertine…They aimed above all things at moderation.” In his penetrating study, Borromini and the Roman Oratory, Joseph Connors found wide latitude in congregational opinions on what constitutes moderation. Nevertheless, many secular areas are composed in remarkable Borrominian forms executed with simple materials. Because the Oratorians allowed the sacred functions to be visually-elevated, the south façade representing the Oratory is extremely sophisticated. The mass is appreciably smaller than the travertine church and it is built primarily of brick. Borromini extended the datum line of the Corinthian columns and entablature of the church westward. This device created basic unity between the buildings. His imaginative simplification of Corinthian details on the Oratory conveys the inferiority of the Oratory-to-Church hierarchy, however, only in theory. I would compare this architectural achievement to the stimulating infusion the Oratorians gave to European music by introducing sacred oratories, developed from San Filippo’s liturgical practices, into highly effective compositions. These new forms of melodious proselytizing were the functions that required superb acoustics for preaching and sung sacred dramas.

Kerry Downes’s massive work follows the pioneering publications on Borromini by Paolo Portoghesi, Christian Norberg-Schulz, and Joseph Connors. Downes’s book is 536 pages long and has a practical ingenuity. The English translation takes about forty pages; opposite each page is a page of footnotes proximate to the text. Many of these pages display vignette diagrams of related building parts and precedents.

The rest of the book illustrates Borromini’s known sources. These include, for example, the juxtaposition of hand-drawn Michelangelo and Borromini profiles on page 387 and an important set of photographs of Palazzo Mattei by Borromini’s mentor, Carlo Maderno, on pages 394-395. Many photographs in the color “Prequel” and the black-and-white “Sequel” to the translation of the Opus are blurred and discolored. Accepting this, one appreciates the devotion of a specialist of the eighteenth-century English Baroque who has been fascinated by Oratorian culture and charm since childhood. Since Borromini’s book and his buildings have had perennial impact on Catholic architecture and music, Professor Downes has bestowed a great gift.

I am delighted that a magnificent new book focuses on the works and text of an incomparable architect who has been a hero to me for decades and whose buildings I recommend as paradigms for students of classical architecture.

Thomas Gordon Smith, AIA, is principal of the firm Thomas Gordon Smith Architects and is a professor of architecture at the University of Notre Dame. His design work at a Benedictine monastery in Oklahoma, a seminary in Nebraska and other ecclesiastical and civic projects can be seen at www.tgsarchitects.com.

FROM THE PUBLISHING HOUSES

A SELECTION OF RECENT BOOKS


Presently one of the top tourist draws in the United Kingdom, Westminster Abbey has been the subject of countless writers and rulers throughout the centuries, including such writers as Shakespeare, Voltaire, Dickens, and Henry James. This book delves into the extensive art, architecture, and history of Westminster from its medieval origins to the present day.


A comprehensive study of over 120 of London’s parish churches from various eras, ranging for the Middle Ages to the dawn of the 21st century. The book gives a particular emphasis to the post reformation churches of Inigo Jones, Sir Christopher Wren, and Wren’s successors, as well as the Victorian and Revivalist era churches. The book is filled with over 200 color illustrations.


A practical guide for church communities to run environmentally friendly facilities and be good stewards of natural resources. Several practical examples of church building-and renovation projects are provided that demonstrate the author’s call to sustainable church facilities.


This book includes extensive research into the archaeological ruins of several early Byzantine churches in present-day Turkey, uncovering the materials, construction techniques, and vaulting systems of these structures. The nature of the vaults and domes of these churches was previously unknown due to the ruined state of the churches and the lack of written records. Many useful vaulting diagrams drawn by the author are included in the book.
“A flowering of traditional church architecture has occurred far beyond even the optimistic hopes expressed in the year 2001...a perusal of the last thirteen years of Sacred Architecture, diligently produced by the Institute for Sacred Architecture, surveys well the achievements of the last decade and more.” - Dr. Denis R. McNamara, The Liturgical Institute
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