The turning of the priest toward the people has turned the community into a self-enclosed circle. In its outward form, it no longer opens out on what lies ahead and above, but is closed in on itself. The common turning toward the east was not a “celebration toward the wall”; it did not mean that the priest “had his back to the people”: the priest himself was not regarded as so important. For just as the congregation in the synagogue looked together toward Jerusalem, so in the Christian liturgy the congregation looked together “toward the Lord.”

--Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Spirit of the Liturgy

One of the myths that continue to haunt us is the notion that Vatican II required a totally new architecture to provide for the radically new liturgy. This belief in a break, rather than in continuity, with the past has caused great damage to many of our historic churches, as well as encouraged unbridled experimentation in new ones. For the man or woman in the pew, a traditional church often accommodates the novus ordo Mass more reverently than most churches designed since the novus ordo was promulgated. Conversely, the majority of modern churches reflect a hermeneutic of discontinuity with the past and make it very difficult to celebrate the Mass of Blessed John XXIII.

An important question for bishops, pastors, and architects today is how our new or renovated churches can support both the Mass of John XXIII and the Mass of Paul VI. Pope Benedict XVI’s motu proprio Summorum Pontificum makes clear that the laity or an individual priest have the right to attend or celebrate the traditional Mass. For those committed to the novus ordo, to the exclusion of the vetus ordo, it is important to point out that the architectural elements required by tradition neither prevent nor preclude the use of the church for the novus ordo (as can easily be seen by attending Mass at most of the great churches built by our forebears). In fact, these traditional artistic and architectural elements show the continuity between the two forms of the one Roman Rite.

In order to accommodate both the ordinary and extraordinary forms of the Mass, our churches should have a prominently located and worthy altar with a footpace allowing the priest to stand in front of it facing ad orientem or ad Deum. The altar should be rectangular, raised on steps, and be wide enough for movement from side to side (this length is also beneficial for a Mass with concelebration). Benedict XVI has written about the significance of priest and people facing the same direction during the Mass, as traditional in the Mass of John XXIII but also allowed in the Mass of Paul VI. The baldacchino, as in the basilicas of Rome, can underscore the sacredness of a free-standing altar employed for both forms of the Roman Rite.

The other element that is crucial to the celebration of the Mass of John XXIII is the altar rail, barbarically ripped out of many historic churches and banned by many liturgical experts. Churches that I have visited in Europe and America, where the faithful receive communion either standing or kneeling at the altar rail, allow the community to receive symbolically from the altar. This proximity, or at least the visual connection to the holy altar, expresses the symbolism of the altar rail as an extension of the altar and the centrality of the paschal sacrifice.

A third element that would generously provide for priests wishing to celebrate the extraordinary form of the Mass in private or with a small group is the provision of side altars. American churches have often been very efficient in their design, resulting in the side altar formula of Mary to the left and Joseph to the right of the sanctuary. However, there are many other solutions for both new and existing churches, such as an altar along a side aisle, or in the transept, or even a spatially separate side chapel, all of which can become places of devotion for the faithful and even serve as a daily Mass chapel.

As we build anew or renovate our churches to accommodate the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite, we will find that these three elements (along with others) will increase the sacredness of our church architecture and in turn support awe and reverence in the celebration of the ordinary form of the Mass. As many realize, the architectural patrimony of the Church is rich and varied, and it offers many lessons for the inspiration of modern man and the support of the most holy liturgy, both ordinary and extraordinary.

Duncan Stroik
August 2007
SACRED ARCHITECTURE

ISSUE 13  2007

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Journal of the Institute for Sacred Architecture

The Institute for Sacred Architecture is a non-profit organization made up of architects, clergy, educators and others interested in the discussion of significant issues related to contemporary Catholic architecture. Sacred Architecture is published biannually for $9.95.

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Sacred Architecture  Issue 13  2007
Workers digging under St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome have discovered amazing full size drawings of the dome of St. Peter’s Basilica. The drawings made by Giacomo della Porta of the arches and walls of the dome were laid out full-size to work out the details of the dome. The drawings are carved into one thousand seven hundred marble tiles that made up the floor of St. Paul’s until a disastrous fire in the nineteenth century, after which the tiles were covered up with a new floor. Archeologists who were digging to reach the tomb of St. Paul came across the remarkable drawings this past year.

The new Cathedral of Nuestra Señora del Pilar is taking shape near Madrid, Spain, built by the hands of one man, farmer and former monk, Justo Gallego Martinez. Neither the Catholic Church nor the local planning authorities has given their blessings to the project, but Don Justo continues to build. Over the past few years the edifice has slowly risen to the height of forty meters by the hard work of the eighty-one-year-old farmer and other volunteers. The church is built of recycled and donated materials using hard work and ingenuity, for instance using old barrels and tires for concrete forms or using bicycle wheels as pulleys to lift steel girders of the dome. A local architect says the structure could be sound, given the proper reinforcing. Don Justo has no training as an architect or a builder, but as a former Trappist monk (he left because of his health before taking his vows), he explains it is “an act of faith” to build the cathedral: “I have no gold or silver, what I have I give to the Lord.”

In an address to the Fabbrica di San Pietro, the engineers and workers who maintain the Basilica of St. Peter’s, Pope Benedict XVI praised the workers “first among others, you are the ‘living stones’ of the spiritual edifice which is the Church.” The Pontiff noted that “five hundred years have passed since the foundation stone of the second Vatican Basilica was laid: yet, it is still alive and young, it is not a museum, it is a spiritual organism and even the stones feel its vitality!” Benedict praised the workers who labor to “enable this ‘heart’ of the Church to continue to beat with perennial vitality, attracting men and women of the whole world and helping them to have a spiritual experience that marks their life.”

The University of Sacramento announced plans to construct a two-hundred-acre campus to house seven thousand students. The university’s thirty-year master plan is set to begin in 2010 and is expected to cost five hundred million dollars. The university has also launched a master’s degree in business focusing on ethics and leadership. Until the first buildings are completed on its campus, the university will remain in its downtown campus.

This March the Vatican displayed inspired religious art works by four Russian artists as part of Russian exhibitions accompanying President Vladimir Putin’s visit to Rome. The paintings depict scenes of Easter celebrations in Russia, monks, nuns, and priests worshipping in beautiful landscapes and churches. Paul Cardinal Poupard, the president of the Pontifical Council for Culture opened the exhibition by praising “the way of beauty” as an appropriate means of evangelization, echoing recent statements by the pope concerning the arts and the mission of the Church.

Mayor Walter Veltroni of Rome backed off plans to rename the city’s main train terminal after Pope John Paul II. The mayor, along with Cardinal Ruini, the papal vicar of Rome, last December had unveiled markers dedicating Termini Station to the late pontiff, but after pressure from politicians, the mayor backed down. Mayor Veltroni had proposed the name change to honor John Paul II for his extensive travels.
The Wren Chapel at the College of William and Mary in Virginia will again display an eighteen-inch-tall cross that had been the center of controversy. President Gene R. Nichol had the cross removed from the chapel last year “in order to make the Wren Chapel less of a faith-specific space.” The cross had been permanently on display on the chapel’s altar since the 1940s, but since its removal has been returned only during religious ceremonies. The college was originally founded as an Anglican school in 1693 by an English royal charter, but since 1906 it has been a state-run institution. Over seventeen thousand petitioners supported returning the cross to the altar, while a petition supporting its removal garnered only two thousand signatures.

An eighty-foot-tall Madonna image was on prominent display on the Cathedral of Milan—not an image of the Blessed Virgin, but of the pop star Madonna. The selfsame singer last year outraged Catholics with a performance where she was “crucified” on stage. Monsignor Luigi Manganini of the cathedral dismissed the objections to the advertisement, saying: “It’s just an ad, certainly not a canonization. When it was accepted, the poster seemed all correct and appropriate for its place, and it still is.” Last fall the pope’s spokesman Ersilio Cardinal Tonino called Madonna’s performance in Rome “a blasphemous challenge to the faith and a profanation of the cross. She should be excommunicated. To crucify herself during the concert in the city of popes and martyrs is an act of open hostility.”

Israeli students have unearthed the remains of a Byzantine-era church near the modern Trappist monastery at Latrun, Israel. Students at the Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam Jewish Arab school unearthed a mosaic floor decorated with maroon crosses and pottery shards nearby that identify the era of the church as Byzantine. The students and faculty of the school have also brought to the attention of the Israel Antiquities Authority several Byzantine tombs, an ancient road, a lime kiln, and olive and wine presses that indicate an entire undiscovered Byzantine village in the forests on the hill overlooking the Ayalon Valley.

A pair of lost paintings by the Renaissance master Fra Angelico has been discovered in England in the home of a woman who recently died at age seventy-seven. The two painted wooden panels, which will likely soon hang prominently in a museum, were found hanging in the spare bedroom of a modest middle-class home in Oxford. The panels were part of an altarpiece commissioned by Cosimo de Medici of Florence in the 1430s and removed by Napoleon when the French invaded Italy. The other six remaining panels had been found over the years, but the two panels remained missing for nearly two centuries. The two panels are expected to sell for a combined total of more than one million pounds at auction.

After a two-year two-million-pound restoration, St. Anne’s Cathedral in Leeds, England was reopened in a ceremony in November. Dignitaries attending the ceremonies included over thirty of England and Wales’s bishops as well as Archbishop Faustino Sainz Muñoz, the apostolic nuncio from Rome. Apart from restoring the cathedral to its original splendor, a new bishop’s cathedra and a new altar were installed, as well as a new floor paved in local York stone. Built by John Henry Eastwood in 1905 in a Gothic style, the cathedral cost what would be ten million pounds today. Pope Benedict XVI sent a special message stating that he “prays that the cathedral will serve as an ever clearer sign of the Lord’s presence.”

The Catholic Church has long been known for its patronage of the arts, a fact of which thieves are well aware in Mexico. Many rural churches have in the past few years fallen victim to thieves in search of precious works of art. The thefts are motivated by a growing taste for colonial religious art in the international art market. The wealth of colonial art that Mexico possesses, often in small, undefended rural parishes, is greater than any other former Spanish colony. According to the National Institute of Anthropology and History, over one thousand pieces of colonial religious art have been stolen since 1999 and over half of them are believed to end up outside Mexico.
Pope Benedict XVI has denied a request from the leader of the Greek Orthodox Church, Archbishop Chrisioudoulos, to return a fragment of the Parthenon to Greece. The pontiff was initially puzzled by the request, not aware that a small fragment of the temple resides in the Vatican Museum’s collection. A new museum has been built in Athens at the foot of the Acropolis, with hopes of reacquiring various fragments, including the marbles now at the British Museum.

Justin Cardinal Rigali of Philadelphia and Mayor John F. Street announced in September that Catholic schools in five troubled neighborhoods in the city would become “beacon schools.” The involvement of Catholic schools extends a program already operating in public schools to give children a haven from crime and violence. Located in neighborhoods with high rates of youth violence, child abuse, and drug use, each beacon school will stay open after regular school hours, offering recreational and educational activities.

The new church at Pinnacle Hills, a Rogers, AR, evangelical church will feature the largest electronically tinted window ever built. The 6,000-square-foot window separates the 170,000-square-foot church from an outdoor baptistry and lake. The window will allow the 2,400 congregants to view the lake or be electronically tinted to focus on the view of the stage. The San Diego firm Tucker Sadler Architects designed the church.

Scotland’s leading classical composer recently criticized modern church music as “embarrassing, maudlin, and sentimental dirges.” Composer James MacMillan, a devout Catholic who wrote the fanfare for the opening of Scottish Parliament in 1999, unleashed his distaste for contemporary music performed by “incompetently strummed guitars and cringe-making, smiley, cheesy folk groups.” MacMillan called contemporary music a sign of the “triumph of bad taste and banality and an apparent vacating of the sacred spaces of any palpable sense of the presence of God.” The composer blames a “destructive iconoclasm” brought into the church in the 1960s and 1970s, which wilfully brought to an end any remnant of its massive choral tradition and its skilful application to liturgical use.

One of the largest Catholic cathedrals ever planned can be seen in Liverpool, Great Britain, but only as a model. The gigantic model of the proposed Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral is on display in the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, and it is nearly as impressive as the cathedral it represents. Designed by the talented Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1931, the Roman Catholic cathedral in Liverpool was intended to be taller and larger than St. Paul’s in London but was never built due to financial difficulties of the Depression and World War II. The model had languished in a basement for decades where it suffered neglect and vandalism, but a thirteen-year restoration effort has returned the ten-foot-tall, fifteen-foot-long model to its original majesty.
The Freemasons are opening doors and spilling secrets once closely guarded, in order to combat dwindling numbers. The secret society, long known for closely guarding its secrets, is opening its lodges for public tours, even of the inner sanctum where Masonic rituals take place surrounding elaborate centrally placed altars. The Masons’ numbers have drastically declined in recent years, and in an effort to increase membership the organization is launching a public relations campaign. The Masons opened up their Grand Lodge Headquarters in New York, where the public can see an ornate gilded ceiling, marble walls, and thrones for Grand Master Masons. The visitors can peer at Masonic symbols for geometry and the liberal arts and the four cardinal virtues whilst on tour, as well as at the altar where rituals of the group are performed. While the lodge may be open, what goes on there still remains a secret known only to members.

A growing number of evangelical denominations are turning to a novel way to shelter their growing denominations: renovating vacant Wal-Marts. Many churches choose to use converted warehouse stores as economical alternatives to building afresh, but many opt for big-boxes because they do not resemble traditional churches. Pastors prefer to have churches communicate that they are not the standard sort of church, “to reach out to the unchurched,” though others have added faux steeples and pedimented porches to give the appearance of traditional Protestant churches. Space is also concern for growing mega-churches. With large weekly attendances of sometimes over two thousand people, a lot of space, and parking, is needed. For one congregation, a big-box seventy-thousand-square-feet former store was big enough to fit a large worship space, classrooms, and even basketball courts, plus over four hundred parking spaces.

Construction of the Islamic Society of Boston’s new mosque in Roxbury, MA, has stirred up a hornet’s nest of lawsuits. The controversy around New England’s largest mosque began in 2003, when the society purchased land from the Boston Redevelopment Authority, in a transaction that one lawsuit claimed was illegal. While that lawsuit was recently dismissed, others remain, including a lawsuit filed by the ISB that accuses the local Boston media of libelous reports written in order to scuttle the project. However, despite these legal difficulties, construction of the mosque continues. According to the society, twelve million dollars have been spent so far, and they expect to raise an additional two million to complete the project.

The new Catholic church of St. William in Round Rock, TX, was recently dedicated in a ceremony presided over by Bishop Gregory Aymond of the Diocese of Austin. Bishop Aymond anointed the altar and deposited a relic of St. John Neumann under the altar. Then the bishop and Fr. McNeil blessed the walls of the church with sacred chrism. The new church, which seats fifteen hundred, with plans for future expansion for another thousand, features a traditional design with a reproduction of Raphael’s masterpiece The Disputation over the Blessed Sacrament behind the altar. The church replaces a 1982 church, which seated only six hundred, and also incorporates a barrel-vaulted ceiling and eight stained-glass windows made in Germany in 1905. The $12 million project was designed by Davis & Rexrode Architects of San Antonio, TX.

Another small orthodox Catholic college in Michigan is planned to open this fall to replace Ave Maria College, which moved this past year to Florida. The college is the brainchild of a group of professors, priests, and businesspeople, who plan to raise ten million dollars to found the College of SS. Peter and Paul somewhere in Michigan. The college would be based on the tradition of the liberal arts and would have faculty pulled from former Ave Maria professors. The group hopes to find a broad group of benefactors to fund the school, and while a site has not been chosen, they hope to begin classes in the fall of 2008.

Churches capitalize on vacated box stores.
Churches, particularly traditional churches, are some of America’s favorite buildings. In a poll conducted by the American Institute of Architects, Americans were asked to name their 150 favorite buildings in America. In third place, the Anglican National Cathedral in Washington, DC, scored the highest mark for a church, while St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York was the second-ranked church in eleventh place. The other traditional churches chosen were St. John Divine in New York (23) and Trinity Church of Boston (25). The only “modernist” churches to make the list were Thorncrow Chapel (60) in Arkansas, built by E. Fay Jones, disciple of Frank Lloyd Wright, and Philip Johnson’s Crystal Cathedral (65) in Garden Grove, CA. Of the 250 buildings nominated for the Top 150, several modernist churches failed to make the cut, including the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles, one of eight churches on the rejection list. Also excluded were Wright’s Unity Temple, Louis Kahn’s First Unitarian Church in Rochester, NY, and the award-winning Chapel of St. Ignatius at Seattle University by Steven Holl.

The Archdiocese of New York announced in January the closing of ten parishes and the merging of eleven other parishes. However, the diocese will be establishing five new parishes and announced plans for nine new churches to be constructed. The trends point not simply to a decline in Catholic population, but rather to a longstanding shift of population from urban to suburban areas.

The foundations of the oldest church in California in continuous use are being undermined by the growth of nearby redwood trees. The growing roots of four redwood trees planted in the 1950s are rapidly undermining the Cathedral of San Carlos Borromeo de Monterey, built in 1794. The trees also cast broad shadows across the church, preventing the sun from drying out the church in the damp coastal air. The smallest is acclaimed as the oldest cathedral in California, as well as the smallest cathedral in the continental US. The cathedral had requested a permit to cut down all four trees, but local residents opposed the move.

Pope Benedict XVI called the Vatican Museums an “extraordinary opportunity for evangelization,” during a speech commemorating the museums’ five hundredth anniversary. The pope, who has spoken extensively about art in the past year, said, “the Church has always supported and promoted the world of art,” which he called “a privileged vehicle of human and spiritual progress.” The pope added that the museums reach out to all people of the world, as they are no longer “reserved for artists, specialists and men of culture alone[,] in our days [they are] increasingly everyone’s home, thus responding to a widespread formative need of society.” Benedict stressed how the Vatican Museums are able to further the mission of the Church to sow peace, as they are “able to spread the culture of peace if, [and] while retaining their nature of temples of the historical memory, they are also places of dialogue and friendship among all.”

Since 1960, Mass has been offered at the Northshore Mall in Peabody, MA. A recent Boston Globe article detailed the life of Fr. Herbert Jones and his ministry of the Mass to the masses of shoppers at the mall. St. Thérèse Carmelite Chapel has offered three daily Masses and four on Saturday, faithfully served by Fr. Jones, since Boston’s Cardinal Cushing sent him there when the mall was built. Only confessions and Masses are offered in the 350-seat chapel; no weddings or funerals, as visitors to the mall would probably be disturbed by a casket passing by as they shopped.

Italy has barely half the priests it had a century ago. The number of priests in Italy was 69,000 in 1900, but today there are only 31,474. The average age of Italian priests is sixty, while almost 13 percent are over eighty. Good news though is found in the cloisters, where nuns have increased in number to 6,600, 300 more than a year before.

This past November the St. John’s Newman Center at the University of Illinois-Urbana broke ground on an ambitious expansion plan. Already the largest Newman Center in the United States, St. John’s plans to nearly double its residential capacity, from 300 to 560 students, add a new 300-seat cafeteria, new student lounge, meeting rooms, game room, laundry, and fitness center. The center will also be renovating its existing facilities, converting the existing cafeteria to an auditorium, consolidating offices, and expanding its library. The new wing comprises 127,000 square feet and is expected to be completed in June 2008 at a cost of forty million dollars for the entire project.

At the University of Illinois-Urbana ground has been broken on an expansion project to double the capacity of the nation’s largest Newman Center.

A study in Wired reports that baroque churches have the best acoustics for listening to sacred music such as Mozart and Gregorian chant. Using dummies to record the music played in several different churches, researchers then played the recordings to volunteers in a lab. The volunteers were asked to rate which version of the recorded songs sounded best. According to the report, Baroque churches fared the best, while Gothic cathedrals had the worst sound.
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**Two mischievous young priests at St. Bernard’s parish in Keene, NH, recently uncovered a century-old mural of the Crucifixion.** Late one night, the priests, guessing where the 1892 mural had been painted in the sanctuary from an old photograph, chipped away paint to reveal the painting, which had been covered for decades. The “vandals” were not disappointed when the pastor of the parish hired two local artists to restore the mural to its original glory. Response to the project was overwhelming, as parishioners gave generously to the project and also supported the construction of a new altar and tabernacle.

**For the first time the remote Siberian city of Petropavlovsk in Irkutsk will have a Roman Catholic parish.** Construction began this spring on the church that will serve the nearly eight thousand Catholics in the city of a quarter million inhabitants. Previously a small wooden house had served as the parish’s chapel, but now the new church devoted to St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus will minister to descendants of the many Poles, Lithuanians, and Ukrainians deported here during and after World War II.

**In Italy about twenty-one thousand companies are named after a saint, according to a survey published last November.** Most businesses are named for either the neighborhoods or streets where the businesses are located.

**A church in Detroit may have closed its doors, but the hope is that they will reopen to its parishioners as a pilgrimage site, in Poland.** The predominantly Polish members of Our Lady Help of Christians Roman Catholic church helped pack their pews, altar, statues, and even sacred vessels to send them to a new pilgrimage church in Poland. The Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Wloclawek, Poland, is being built on the spot of the martyrdom of Rev. Jerzy Popieluszko, who was killed in 1984 by Communist agents in persecutions against the Solidarity movement. The empty church that remains in Detroit is slated to become a mosque serving Asian Muslim immigrants.

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**Plans are moving forward to build a new cathedral dedicated to Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta.** Bishop Dode Gjergji of the Diocese of Prizren announced that the government of Kosovo has approved plans for the cathedral to be built dedicated to the nun whose name is a byword for charity and goodness. Mother Teresa was born in Skopje, Macedonia, which is now a part of the Diocese of Prizren in Kosovo.

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**The restored mural of the Crucifixion at St. Bernard’s Church had been completely covered with layers of paint and wallpaper.**

**At 102 years of age, Amedeo Scaramouche does something few people of his age do: he walks to Mass every day.** Scaramouche walks to the New Derry, PA, parish that he has been a member of for ninety-six years, since he joined with his family at the age of six. He recently celebrated his birthday in St. Martin parish by singing with the parish choir.

**A replica of the rose window of the Cathedral of Siena now resides where the original once hung.** The original window will now be displayed by Siena’s Opera Metropolitana museum. The window, designed by Duccio di Buoninsegna in 1287, had been removed in 1996 for restoration.

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**The recently replaced rose window at the Cathedral of Siena, Italy.**
Two conferences on sacred architecture and music will be held this fall at Yale University. The Yale Divinity School and the Institute of Sacred Music will host a conference on liturgical architecture and sacred space from October 25-26. Immediately following this conference, the Yale School of Architecture will host a conference on sacred space in world religions and contemporary society. The October 26-27 conference will include noted architects, ecclesiastical leaders, and scholars. For more information, visit www.yale.edu/ism.

According to a study, church attendance drops in cities that allow retailers to stay open on Sunday. The researchers from the University of Notre Dame and MIT studied the so-called “mall effect” to see what happened when states and municipalities recall blue laws restricting Sunday business. The researchers also found that while church attendance declined, drinking and drug use increased significantly among youth. The decline in attendance was higher among regular churchgoers than among those not regularly attending services.

The Vatican Museums recently opened to the public an ancient pagan cemetery found within the walls of the Vatican City. The cemetery, or Necropolis, was found during excavations for a new parking lot in the Vatican City. Unlike the catacombs, famous for being the resting grounds for Rome’s first Christians, the 250 graves are the tombs of Rome’s last pagans. The Necropolis on the former Via Triumphalis is home to both richly appointed mausoleums adorned with mosaics, as well as simple stone slabs with the names of the dead etched into them.

The New York Public Library has launched an ambitious online collection of art and literature. The website is a vast collection of over three hundred thousand digital images of original materials. The collection includes rare prints, manuscripts, vintage maps, and other artifacts from the New York Public Library. For more information, see digitalgallery.nypl.org.

An architect could soon be named a Roman Catholic saint. Phoenix bishop Thomas J. Olmsted recently began the cause for sainthood of architect Paul Murphy, who died at the age of thirty-six in 1976. After graduating from the University of Notre Dame in 1962, Murphy lived a pious life, while active as a practicing architect. He was active in the lay Catholic Cursillo movement and designed the Cursillo Center of Phoenix. For the last ten years of his life he lived under vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience as a member of Miles Jesu, a Catholic lay order. Murphy joins fellow architect Antoni Gaudi, whose cause for sainthood is also being investigated.

Pope Benedict XVI described pictures of the damage done to hundreds of Christian churches and monasteries on the island of Cyprus as “incredible.” During a November 2006 closed-door meeting in the Vatican, the president of Cyprus, Tassos Papadopoulos, presented the pope with a photo album containing dozens of color photographs of Christian churches, monasteries, and other sacred sites that had been destroyed or desecrated after the Turkish military occupied northern Cyprus in 1974.

Bishop Juan Asenjo Pelegrina has rejected the request of Muslims to use the Cathedral of Cordoba for worship. The Mezquita Cathedral was built in 785 as a mosque, atop the ruins of an even earlier Christian basilica. The Cathedral has been in use by the Catholic church since 1236.

On March 4 Justin Cardinal Rigali of Philadelphia dedicated a new tabernacle installed in the sanctuary altar of the Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul. The brass and gold domed tabernacle is located in a new reredos built behind the main altar of the cathedral during its recent restoration. The tabernacle is part of the cardinal’s efforts to increase belief in the True Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In a 2004 letter he exhorted his diocese to make Eucharistic Adoration the center of their spiritual life and urged pastors to place the tabernacle in the center of each church behind the main altar. During the Mass blessing the tabernacle, Rigali said, “we honor the presence of Christ truly and substantially in the Eucharist, which we have enthroned in this beautiful new tabernacle that expresses our holy Catholic faith.”

Planning authorities in Córdoba, Spain, have yet again refused plans forwarded by Saudi Muslims to build a new mosque in the city. The city, famous for its historic Mezquita mosque (now the Catholic Cathedral), has refused plans to build the second largest mosque in the world, which was conceived as a sort of “European Mecca,” home of the world’s largest mosque. Seville, however, has approved planning permission for a new mosque in that city, though residents have halted the project in court.
LETTERS

Video in Church

Dear Editor,

Thank you for the editorial “Imago Dei, Imago Video.” As I was reading it I recalled a visit to Kansas City last year on Palm Sunday. Our host invited us to join her in worshipping at her Methodist Church. It was the Palm Sunday from hell. A huge screen was mounted at the front of the Gospel side of the nave on which we were subjected to texts of everything, from hymns to scripture lessons, even though we had hymnals and the lessons were read. There were even some announcements, which were I surmise for those whose minds were found wandering. To make matters worse, we sat a couple of rows behind the video operator and were annoyed throughout the interminably long experience by every thing this individual did to cue up the next thing on the screen. I went away thinking that everyone simply came together for worship as entertainment.

I could not agree with you more in your analysis of this disturbing trend; it has even reared its ugly head in the Episcopal Church (along with a number of other distressing things).

Thank you also for your interview with Quinlan Terry. I found it quite enjoyable.

Fr. Bob Woodbury
Whitefish Bay, WI

Kids can see a good church

Dear Editor,

I want to tell you this story about one of my grandsons—8-year old Neil who lives in a wealthy suburb of Kansas City, KS. The family belongs to Nativ-ity Parish, also jokingly referred to as “Our Lady of Mercedes Benz”. It is a fairly new church—semi-circle style—open beam, mostly beige color with very little artwork. This area of Kansas City has a number of new modern style churches and Neil’s family has been to them all at some occasion.

About a year ago the family bought 130 acres of grass and wooded land about 50 miles out in the Flint Hills—ranching, farming area for a weekend getaway and recreation. When out there they go to Mass in one of several little towns with old style churches. These churches are served by one priest due to fewer priests, fewer families, and larger farms and ranches. These churches have not been “desecrated” or modernized for the most part because of lack of money and older semi-retired and tired priests who have no interest in remodeling.

Recently Neil asked his mother, “Why do all these poor farmers have such beautiful churches and in Kansas City where we live with so many rich people we have all the ugly churches? I just don’t understand this.”

I thought this remarkable for an 8-year old boy with no education whatever in architecture or church art. The only explanation I can think of: he is not brain-dead, and he is sensory!!

Arlen E. Freund
Goddard, KS

Advice on church building project

Dear Editor,

I am writing about a church building project here in Sioux Falls and the struggles in the process of contemporary vs. traditional architecture.

Overall, it’s been good and the church is actually going pretty well. The design is fairly traditional and the steering committee is leaning toward a natural stone look for the exterior. However there is still a desire for the fashion of the day, while tradition and church teachings are sometimes only an afterthought and are often sources of contention.

One concern I have is that some on the committee have a preference for a wooden floor for the elevated sanctuary and a wooden altar. My gut is telling me to stay with the stone look for the floor as well as a stone altar. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal shows preference for a natural stone altar but appears to say wood is a good second option. I’m concerned with the aspect of permanence in the sanctuary. There’s also a good chance of getting a fantastic reclaimed stone altar from another church.

Committee members want the floor and altar both of wood so they “match and look good together” and that “wood looks permanent enough”. Another concern is that dulling the sound in a wooden platform may also be a big expense but stamped concrete would be cheaper since the nave floor will already be of tinted concrete.

Is permanence an issue that should push us to use stone for the altar and sanctuary? Should a wooden altar match the wood floor in a sanctuary? Is wood a permanent or non-permanent material? Can a stone altar be placed on a wooden floor?

Many thanks,
Darwin Wolf
Sioux Falls, SD

CORRECTION

In SAJ Issue 12 the source of the news article pertaining to “Church Air Rights” was not credited properly. Both the article and photo were provided by Religion News Service and SAJ regrets the mistake.
DON’T BLAME VATICAN II
MODERNISM AND MODERN CATHOLIC CHURCH ARCHITECTURE

Randall Smith

Many people seem to think that contemporary Catholic church architecture is so ugly because of misunderstandings that arose from the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council. This thesis is especially attractive to those of a more “intellectual” bent, such as theologians and liturgists, because it suggests that the problem is one of ideas. Correct the ideas—enforce a proper theology of the liturgy (the job of, guess who, theologians and liturgists)—and voilà, we will get better-looking churches.

As attractive as that thesis is, its one big drawback is that it is largely untrue. Bad church architecture is not primarily the result of bad ideas about the liturgy—however much those abound. No, bad church architecture in America is the result, quite simply, of America having bad ideas about architecture. Our problems began some decades before the Second Vatican Council convened: they began with the embrace of modernist architectural principles by contemporary architects and, more disastrously, by the liturgical “experts” who have insisted on laying down the rules and regulations for all new Catholic churches built in America.

An Illustration of the Problem: Speaking of Liturgical Architecture

A good example can be found in a small, but particularly illustrative little booklet published in 1952 by the Liturgy Program at the University of Notre Dame called Speaking of Liturgical Architecture.¹ The author, one Fr. H. A. Reinhold, is described in the preface of the book as someone who “needs no introduction to American Catholic readers” because “he has become a household term [sic] in things liturgical.”² And although the correct expression should probably be “he has become a household name in things liturgical,” the point is clear: he was a well-known and highly respected liturgist who can be said to represent the heading in Fr. Reinhold’s text instructs us to find a principle for our procedure in the liturgy itself.” The title of the book, after all, is not Speaking of Church Architecture, but rather Speaking of Liturgical Architecture. What may at first seem like an innocent, even appropriate, principle of church architecture—design the church with the liturgy in mind—will become in the hands of Fr. Reinhold and his successors a means of forcing all churches to conform themselves to a fundamental principle of modernist design.

So it is that the first major, bold-faced heading in Fr. Reinhold’s text instructs the prospective liturgical “expert” (and
church designer) that the most basic principle to be followed in building churches is not “respect the liturgy,” but “form follows function.” Indeed, Fr. Reinhold starts out his book with a chapter entitled “Functional Characteristics” and develops his entire conception of church architecture from this starting-point. The principles of “form follows function” and “functionalism” were, of course, two of the most basic principles of modernist architecture. And although Fr. Reinhold denies repeatedly throughout his book that he is favoring any particular “style” of architecture over any other, it is telling that he bases his entire discussion of church architecture on these fundamental modernist principles.

So what does “functionalism” entail? If one thought that “functionalism” meant that a building’s form (or structure) should facilitate a certain function (or practical activity), such as worshipping or doing business or drinking coffee, then one would be mistaken. Modernist buildings are not especially “functional” in that sense—as when Mies van der Rohe designed windows that made the occupants of his skyscrapers feel as though they were going to fall fifty stories down to the street and then forbade them to put anything in front of the windows to cushion the effect of the vertigo; or when Frank Lloyd Wright forbade the residents of his houses to move the furniture or even to put new pictures on any of the walls.

So too modernist churches tend not to be “functional” in terms of the practical requirements of the liturgy; there may be, for example, no way for the priest to process in, no freedom to have statuary in the nave, and often no prominent crucifix at the front. Thus, contrary to what Fr. Reinhold says, it is not exactly the requirements of the liturgy that are governing the design of churches.

By the same token, if one thought that “form follows function” meant that a building’s function should be recognizable from its form, one would also be sadly mistaken. Indeed, one of the most characteristic features of modernist architecture is that it obliterated the differences among building “types.” Whereas we used to recognize a building from what it “looked like,” and we gave it a name because of its form—we called a certain building a “church” because it had the recognizable form of a church, another a “bank” because it had the form of a bank—now if we take the “bank” sign off the bank and put the “church” sign on it, then it becomes a church. In fact, often, if not for the sign, it would be hard to tell the difference.

**Building from the Inside Out: Functionalism and the Principle of “Expressed Structure”**

So if “functionalism” does not mean “the two most important sacraments” in the Church: “the prominence of these two sacraments must determine the architecture of a church, inside and out.” “A parish church,” he declares, “is above all a Eucharist ... and Baptism ... church. Its inside should express this. If its inside organs are thus disposed and visibly emphasized,” he says, “honest architecture (functionalism in its true sense) should manifest these two foci on the outside—in the right place.”

Now one could certainly quibble with this particular hierarchical view of the sacraments (and every person to whom I have explained Fr. Reinhold’s position has, and usually with some vehemence). Even if we granted—just for the sake of argument—that Baptism and the Eucharist were the two most important sacraments, it would not necessarily follow that this factor should determine the structure of the church building, both inside and out. It is not a principle one finds in the works of any of the great church architects of the past. So why has this become the absolutely essential principle of church architecture for Fr. Reinhold?

The answer, quite simply, is that it was an essential principle of architecture for architectural modernists. It is what they meant by “functionalism.” So, for example, *The Columbia Encyclopedia* describes “functionalism” as follows:

> Functionalist architects and artists design utilitarian structures in which the interior program dictates the outward form, without regard to such traditional devices as axial symmetry and classical proportions ...

Functionalism was subsequently absorbed into the International style as one of its guiding principles.

Indeed, it was the famous Swiss modernist architect Le Corbusier who instructed his disciples in his landmark book *Towards a New Architecture* that “The Plan is what determines everything” and that “The Plan proceeds from within to without; the exterior is the result of the interior.” This notion that “the interior program should dictate the outward...
form” is also known as “the principle of expressed structure.” In his best-selling book on modernist architecture, From Bauhaus to Our House, author Tom Wolfe explains:

Then there was [among the Modernists] the principle of “expressed structure.” ... Henceforth walls would be thin skins of glass or stucco ... Since walls were no longer used to support a building—steel and concrete or wooden skeletons now did that—it was “dishonest” to make walls look as chunky as a castle’s. The inner structure, the machine-made parts, the mechanical rectangles, the modern soul of the building, must be expressed on the outside, completely free of applied decoration.8

This is why Fr. Reinhold believes that, if the inside organs are visibly emphasized on the outside, this is “honest architecture (functionalism in its true sense).” The unexamined question, however, is whether all buildings must be built this way. The “principle of expressed structure” is merely presumed to be true. It has become by Fr. Reinhold’s time—at least in the circles he runs in—an unexamined, self-evident truth.

Using the Principle of “Expressed Structure” to Judge All Church Architecture of the Past

Indeed, this set of modernist principles and presuppositions seems to trump every other authority for Fr. Reinhold, even the authority of his own Church’s traditional heritage of architecture. Take, for example, his view of the Gothic. What Fr. Reinhold admires about the Gothic is not its simple yet elegant lines, the amazing feeling of lightness it conveys, the breathtaking way it draws the eye upward, or even the beautiful windows such construction made possible. No, what interests him about the Gothic is that it reveals the interior structure of the building externally. So, for example, he says of the Gothic use of the flying buttress: “The skeleton that was hidden in the Romanesque church has, [with the Gothic], grown out of its layers of skin and flesh, and man is turned inside out in his Gothic churches: he shows his interior ... This honesty in construction ... is something we begin again to love.”

And yet, while admiring the Gothic’s “honesty in construction,” still Fr. Reinhold finds it sadly lacking as suitable church architecture. For example, he writes of the magnificent Gothic cathedrals of Canterbury and York: “The beautiful ‘central’ towers of Canterbury and York are a magnificent architectural accent, but have no liturgical, intrinsic function whatsoever.” “The spires of so many cathedrals,” he continues, “though these churches ‘the accent question was not answered very well.’ Notice how the “liturgical focus” (line C) does not line up with the structural foci (lines A and B). This just cannot be allowed. Though lovely creations, these buildings just do not have the right “idea.”

An “Ideogram” of the Ideal Church

What would be the right idea? In answer, Fr. Reinhold offers his reader a diagram—something he calls an “ideogram” of the ideal church. Notice below that the entryway is in the middle between the baptismal font and the main altar. That is Fr. Reinhold’s ideologically preferred place. Following this plan—this “ideogram”—will finally give us (after centuries of misguided attempts) “suitable” liturgical architecture.

Now Fr. Reinhold is quick to assure his readers that this “ideogram” is not meant to be an actual “architectural design.” And yet, by the same token, even if an “ideogram” is not a full-fledged “architectural design,” it is still specific enough to stipulate that the architect must always put the entryway in the middle of the building, between the altar and the baptismal font. That is not only bizarre; it is what most architects would consider a very distinctive “design feature.”

Be that as it may, Fr. Reinhold insists that his “ideogram” could be built in “Gothic, Renaissance, or Modern Style, if there were good reasons to decide to do so.” How one builds a Gothic or a Romanesque church without a major entryway at the western end—a fundamental characteristic of nearly all churches up until, oh, about the mid-1950s or so—is hard to fathom. And what is more, nowhere in his book does Fr. Reinhold offer us any “good reasons” to build churches in either the Gothic or the Renaissance styles. Indeed, in the conclusion of his book, he positively discourages it. He says of these older styles that they were “children of their own day” and that our architects “must find as good an expression in our language of form, as our fathers did in theirs.”

Church Architecture and the “Spirit of the Age”

But this comment merely shows how distinctively modernist Fr. Reinhold’s mind-set is. For it was Mies van der Rohe who famously described architecture as “the will of the age conceived in spatial terms,” and it was Le Corbusier before...
him who declared: “Our own epoch is determining, day by day, its own style.”

It would have been completely foreign to a medieval or Renaissance church architect to talk this way. Not only because most of them believed they were expressing their Christian faith by means of their craft, but also because they saw themselves as part of an artistic tradition—one whose standards they had to live up to. Far from looking back on the past with scorn and disdain as something passé (“architecture,” insisted Le Corbusier, “is stifled by custom”), medieval and Renaissance architects looked upon the tradition of which they were a part with a sense of both pride and humility as something to be emulated and imitated.

And what if the “spirit of the age” is somehow at odds with the “spirit of Christianity”? That thought does not seem to have occurred to Fr. Reinhold. But it certainly occurred to modernists like Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, for whom the “spirit of the age” was clearly meant to effect a “revision of values” that would help people see themselves as part of an artistic tradition, that had come before him. Author Tom Wolfe has written about those who studied in Germany’s Bauhaus, for example, that:

The young architects and artists who came to the Bauhaus to live and study and learn from the Silver Prince [the Bauhaus’s founder, Walter Gropius] talked about “starting from zero.” One heard the phrase all the time: “starting from zero...” [H]ow pure, how clean, how glorious it was to be... starting from zero! ... So simple! So beautiful... It was as if light had been let into one’s dim brain for the first time. My God!—starting from zero! ... If you were young, it was wonderful stuff. Starting from zero referred to nothing less than re-creating the world.

Just as after Descartes there no longer seemed to be any point in reading the likes of Plato or Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas, so too after Le Corbusier and Gropius, there no longer seemed to be any point in studying Vitruvius or Palladio or any of the work of the classical architects and designers. They were, quite literally, banned from the curriculum in favor of “starting from zero.”

Indeed, modernists would often deny that “functionalism” was part of a “style” at all. For them, “starting from zero” meant getting behind the “mask” of all styles and getting at the essence of what a building is, without any additions of style. This helps to explain the draconian minimalism of most modernist buildings: you strip away all the supposedly superfluous external additions, and what you are left with is just the essence of the building—without “style.” This also helps to explain why, although Fr. Reinhold denies repeatedly throughout his book that the Church should favor any one “style” over any other, he is more than willing to base his entire discussion on one of the central tenets of modernism.

**The Church as a Shelter or Skin for Liturgical Action and the Loss of a Recognizable Language of Form**

“Starting from zero.” A draconian minimalism. A style which seeks to get behind the “mask” of all style, and a principle of design that says a building should be designed from the inside out. All of these characteristics of modernism go a long way toward explaining why contemporary churches often look so odd: multiple roofs jutting out at perilous angles; impossible-to-find doorways; oblong, narrow, or triangular windows that one never seems to be able to see out of; a bevy of bizarre angles in the nave; little or no symmetry anywhere. Why so strange? Well, one problem is that when you design a building from the inside out, the exterior is often the last thing on your mind. An architecture that designs buildings from the inside out tends to see the exterior of a building primarily as a “covering” or “skin” around a particular interior space or action. For example, the caption of this next photograph, taken from the highly influential little book Environment and Art in Catholic Worship, claims: “The building or cover enclosing the architectural space is a shelter or ‘skin’ for liturgical action.”

Le Corbusier famously said that a house is a “machine for living in.” This view of architecture, I suppose we would have to call a church a “machine for worshipping in.” The difficulty with this view, however, is that, in most cases we do not care very much what the outside of a machine looks like. Yes, sometimes we smooth over the rough edges a bit: we put the sewing machine mechanism in a nice, smooth beige-colored container, just as we put the hardware of a computer in a nice beige-colored box. But the

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**Fr. Reinhold’s “ideogram” of the ideal church... the entryway is in the middle between the baptismal font and the main altar. This “ideogram” will finally give us “suitable” liturgical architecture.**
automobile engine does not have the shape of a sewing machine, and the sewing machine does not have the shape of a laptop computer. In each case, the shape is largely determined by the nature of the mechanism; the outside is a skin that simply covers the mechanism. Such seems to be the mentality that goes into much contemporary church design.

Things were not always thus. Traditionally, architects conceived of the inside and outside of a building as serving two very different purposes and functions. Unlike the private, interior space of a building, the exterior form was generally thought to have a distinctively public, civic function. Indeed, in different places and within various cultures, there generally arose over the years a common and characteristic “language of form” that local building designers could call upon—a language that local citizens could generally recognize and understand.

With modernist “functionalism,” however, we are often left with church buildings that make few, if any, references to the iconic heritage or architectural traditions of the Catholic Church. How exactly, then, are the common, working people of the parish supposed to recognize and understand their own building when it is not speaking their own language of form?

And for those elite few who do understand the “meaning” of the building, what can they say to the pious, hardworking churchgoers whose tithes have gone to pay for the building? That it was the goal of modernists to sweep away all the traditions of the past in order to make way for an architecture that would not only “represent,” but in fact help to create, the new industrial, technological man of the future? It was Le Corbusier who wrote that: Architecture has for its first duty, in the period of renewal, that of bringing about a revision of values .... We must create the mass-production spirit. The spirit of constructing mass-production houses. The spirit of living in mass-production houses. The spirit of conceiving mass-production houses.16

How would the non-elite, working-class Catholics for whom most of these churches are built reconcile all this—the elitism, the rejection of tradition and authority, the revision of values—with their faith in a Church based on centuries of tradition and authority? Was the new “technological man” of the modernist

Albers, Moholy—Nagy, Bayer, and Mies van der Rohe ... Here they came, uprooted, exhausted, penniless, men without a country, battered by fate ...

As a refugee from a blighted land, [Gropius] would have been content with a friendly welcome, a place to lay his head, two or three meals a day until he could get on his own feet, a smile every once in a while, and a chance to work, if anybody needed him. And instead ...

Well, Gropius was made head of the school of architecture at Harvard, and Breuer joined him there. Moholy-Nagy opened the New Bauhaus, which evolved into the Chicago Institute of Design ... [And] Mies was installed as dean of architecture at the Armour Institute of Chicago ...

It was embarrassing, perhaps ... but it was the kind of thing one could learn to live with ... Within three years the course of American architecture had changed, utterly ... Everyone started from zero.17

So it was that when liturgists such as Fr. Reinhold turned their minds to church architecture, they breathed in, as it were, “the spirit of the age”: the modernist currents that were blowing like a tornado through all the American schools of architecture. And it is this modernist approach that still dominates many contemporary discussions about church architecture today—and in ways that most churchgoers would recognize instantly.

The Ideal Interior of the Modern Church: Church-in-the-Round

But this obvious contradiction between the goals of modernism and the principles of the Catholic Church merely begs another question. How did H. A. Reinhold, an American Catholic priest, end up imbibing so much of the spirit and forms of modernism? This has a lot to do with the fate of American architecture schools in the years prior to the Second World War. Tom Wolfe has described the somewhat unexpected character of this prewar European “invasion” of America as follows:

All at once, in 1937, the Silver Prince himself was here, in America. Walter Gropius; in person; in the flesh; and here to stay ... Other stars of the fabled Bauhaus arrived at about the same time: Breuer,
for proper functionalist design from his own a priori conception of the “ideal setting.”

And what is the “ideal setting for full participation”? You can see the basic, a priori “idea” if you look again at the figure on page 13; the “ideal” arrangement is diagramed under that large, bold-faced heading that says “form follows function.” Looking again to his text you will find the actual seating configurations Fr. Reinhold proposes for new churches. The “ideal setting” for a church, according to this pre-Vatican II liturgist, is the fan-shaped congregation, or what is sometimes called “church-in-the-round.” If you are a Catholic, you see it all the time. In fact, you can hardly manage to escape it. Indeed, liturgical “experts” have even taken regular straight churches and turned the congregation sideways to accomplish this “ideal” setting.

Ever wonder why it seems impossible anymore to build a church with straight aisles? Well, now you know. This configuration was not specified anywhere by the Second Vatican Council. What the Council did was merely to exhort the faithful to “full and active participation” at the Mass. When American liturgical “experts” heard those words in 1965, however, they had already long been conditioned to connect “full and active participation” with “fan-shaped” congregations. To “go back” to straight aisles in a church would be tantamount, in their eyes, to rejecting the Council’s call for “full and active participation.” And thus what used to be an “ideal” is now an absolute requirement.

I found a remarkable example of this recently in a magazine called The Classicist, where I found a church that had recently been built for a Catholic congregation in Texas. It is a traditional structure, which the architects had taken pains to ensure would fit in with the character of the town. But then they ran into a problem. The Classicist put it this way:

The congregation, wishing to replace its building as soon as possible [after a fire], found that the liturgy had changed significantly since the Civil War. Contemporary liturgy often renders the “ideal setting” for a church, according to this pre-Vatican II liturgist, is the fan-shaped congregation, or what is sometimes called “church-in-the-round.”

Church architecture in the round [sic], a condition which presented a seemingly irreconcilable difference between religious requirements and the client’s desires ...

The result is a balance of the client’s wish for a pre-Vatican II church and the new requirements in Catholic religious architecture.

My first reaction upon reading this description was: When did the fan shape become a “requirement” in the Catholic Church? In a church of this size—with no more than twelve rows of pews—it is unclear why anyone should have thought that “full and active participation” required fan-shaped seating.

No, what takes precedence is the “idea” to which all buildings must conform. This is fundamental. We must begin with an a priori “idea,” not with the living reality of what has actually been shown to work in practice. Then we enforce that form on the worshipping community, whether they like it or not. The result, as often as not, is a “functionalism” that is not all that functional.

The Great White Wash

The blank, white back wall of our little Texas church reveals another of those architectural innovations that people have mistakenly associated with the postconciliar period. In Fr. Reinhold’s 1947 book, he mentions a wonderful new innovation he has discovered: “Rudolf Schwarz proposes a white-washed wall behind the altar,”19 “There is great beauty in this original approach,” says Fr. Reinhold, “but are we ready to carry it out?”

The answer to that question would have to be an emphatic “yes.” But now
As I have indicated several times above, it may well be—indeed, it seems likely—that Fr. Reinhold was not a conscious modernist. It seems likely he had just taken in bits and pieces of what passed for the reigning wisdom in the architectural schools of his day. That’s not a crime. But it may be a problem if you take it upon yourself to dictate to architects how they must build a church. Sadly, Fr. Reinhold was merely the first in a long line of liturgists who have had the presumption to think that they can substitute for an actual architect. Nothing is more common in contemporary church building projects—especially the bad ones—than for the architect to have to work under the tutelage of a “liturgical consultant.” The liturgical consultant is not there merely to teach the architect about the liturgy, but to “help” the architect in matters of design. Most architects find this intrusion to be extremely frustrating. The liturgical consultant is a person who knows little about architecture telling the architect simply cannot build a church building without the guidance of the liturgist. Oddly, the liturgist does not seem to think he cannot plan a liturgy for the architect to have to work under the tutelage of a “liturgical consultant.”

The question is: Can we ever get liturgical experts to stop? Must every new church in Christendom have a blank, white-washed wall behind the altar? Worse yet, how many beautiful high altars were torn out of old churches to make way for the miracle of the ubiquitous blank, white-washed wall behind the altar? Unfortunately, when American liturgists heard the Second Vatican Council’s call for a “noble simplicity” in church decoration, they could think of nothing other than the radical, abstract minimalism of the modernist style.

De-constructing Modern Church Architecture

But that’s enough about Fr. Reinhold and his ideology of church architecture. My point is simply this: Here in this 1947 treatise, we find a popular course of lectures delivered to scores of prospective liturgists proposing all sorts of architectural “reforms” that most people associate with the Second Vatican Council, none of which are actually called for by the Council. When the Council documents finally did reach America in the mid-1960s, however, they were delivered into a social and cultural context that was already well imbued with the modernist architectural ethos. And thus when American liturgists read and interpreted those conciliar documents, they did so through the interpretive lens of the modernist architecture handed down to them by “experts” like Fr. Reinhold. In other words, we were well on our way to the kind of churches pictured in Environment and Art in Catholic Worship long before the Council fathers ever wrote a word of Sacrosanctum Concilium.

Footnotes
2. Ibid., see the “Foreword” by Fr. Michael Mathis, C.S.C.
3. All of Fr. Reinhold’s notable books involved the pre-Vatican II liturgy, e.g., The American Parish and the Roman Liturgy (1958), Bringing the Mass to the People (1960), and The Dynamics of the Liturgy (1963).
4. See the book’s first footnote: Speaking of Liturgical Architecture, 1 n.1.
5. The story is recounted in Tom Wolfe, From Bauhaus to Our House (Toronto: Farrar Straw Giroux, 1985), 36.
11. Ibid.
12. Le Corbusier, 12. See the quotation below, n. 14.
14. Environment and Art in Catholic Worship (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1978), illustration 25. It would be hard to overstate the extent of the influence of this simple, little book. Though it was never ratified by the Bishop’s conference, it became the de facto Bible for all church design in America. Indeed, its influence would probably be worthy of its own historical study, or tragic novel.
15. Le Corbusier, 10.
16. Le Corbusier, 12.
17. Wolfe, 45 f.
19. Ibid.
20. Sacrosanctum Concilium, section 34, states that “in encouraging and favoring truly sacred art, the church designers should seek for noble beauty rather than sumptuous display.” The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, section 279, also affirms that “church decor should aim at simplicity rather than ostentatious magnificence.” Oddly enough, there is no footnote in either document to white walls. In truth, the term “noble simplicity” arose originally in the mid-eighteenth century and was used to describe the beauty characteristic of ancient Greek works of art. See, for example, the work of art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst (Stuttgart, 1755), 26, 29, who described Greek art as having a “noble simplicity and quiet grandeur” [edle Einfalt und stille Grösse]. Thus, if the Council were implying anything in particular by the use of the term “noble simplicity,” it would be that churches should have the classical beauty of ancient Greek works of art. Be that as it may, there is no historical or conceptual relationship between the term “noble simplicity” and modernist functionalist minimalism.
Honesty compels me to admit the peculiarity of someone like me writing on sacred architecture. It’s like Helen Keller giving a tour of the Louvre. It’s like Ray Charles painting your portrait. It’s like the deaf Beethoven teaching my son’s aural skills class. I protest to my friends that although I lack an aesthetic capacity, I have learned to live with it, the way an adult who can’t read has learned to survive in society. The reader should therefore not look here for architectural detail, but rather for something that lies deeper. I should like to think about the theological underpinnings of liturgical architecture. I should like to look at the why, not the how. So I will take the reader on a short tour through anthropology and Christology and cosmic liturgy, and after you have indulged me in that, then I will bring myself back down to earth to make eight concrete statements about consequences for architecture.

If we’re going to talk about fundamental principles, then I feel obliged to include, sort of like bookends, both the beginning and the end—protology and eschatology. Only within such a vast scope does theology fully understand the place of anthropos in the cosmos. (I’ve taken to using the Greek word anthropos in order to refer to man as one person composed of many individually existing men and women.) The reason for starting with these parenthetical markers is not due to an idle curiosity about beginnings and endings, but rather to establish our proper trajectory. Fr. Alexander Schmemann describes man’s unique role by calling anthropos homo adorans—men and women are beings that are capable of giving adoration:

“All rational, spiritual and other qualities of man, distinguishing him from other creatures, have their focus and ultimate fulfillment in this capacity to bless God, to know, so to speak, the meaning of the thirst and hunger that constitutes his life. “Homo sapiens,” “homo faber” ... yes, but, first of all, “homo adorans.” The first, the basic definition of man is that he is the priest. He stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God. ... The world was created as the “matter,” the material of one all-embracing eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament.2

Anthropos is a hybrid composed of both matter and spirit, body and soul, and therefore able to participate in both realms. Angels can know the world, and animals can experience it, but only anthropos is an embodied spirit who can know by experiencing the material world. By reason of this conjunction of matter-spirit, anthropos was placed at the top of creation in order to mediate to the world the invisible graces of God from above and to mediate to God the praise of visible creation from below. This is how Fr. Louis Bouyer describes Agape and of the created eucharistia.3

Anthropos should have unified creation in his role of cosmic priest, mediating agape to creation and eucharistia to God. We are seeking anthropos’s place in the cosmos, and it turns out to be a liturgical place. Protologically (in light of his origins), anthropos is the voice of mute creation, able to put creation’s praise into words because he is made after the image of the Logos, who is the divine Word. They can see the logos in creation—traces of the Logos left strewn through creation. Men and women have reason, speech, cleverness of mind, and cleverness of hand. They can express by word and artif actual the glory of creation, thus adding material creation’s voice to the cosmic hymn of praise being sung to God. Other creatures praise God by their sheer being and obedience, but it is anthropos who is their priest and

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speaks on their behalf in liturgical song. The liturgical role of man and woman depends upon the twin capacities of sense and intellect, body and soul. They do a liturgy that neither angel nor animal can do.

Alas, the story takes a sorrowful turn from here. Anthropos is only too easily seduced by the Tempter and led into his rebellion. Anthropos neglects to bless God for the world, and at that moment, man and woman no longer see the material world as sacramental sign of agape and as raw material for eucharist. Instead, they see the material world as an end in itself, and as something for their own manipulation and pleasure. When we forget to bless God, the world is wronged.

M a x i m u s t h e Confessor (died 662) speaks of five divisions of being in creation that anthropos should hold united. When anthropos fails this vocation of coherence, then instead of holding in union what would be divided, he adds to the alienation that creation experiences. First, the created is divided from the Uncreated (we no longer find our end in God); second, what is perceived by the mind is divided from what is perceived by the senses (we look without seeing); third, heaven is divided from earth (the angelic and earthly creations go their separate ways); fourth, paradise is divided from the inhabited lands (Eden, our original home, is far from our current place of toil); fifth, the division of man and woman appears (the need for reproducing the species through sexual union is a sign of death’s reign over every generation).4

Anthropos should hold these extremes of being together in himself. This was the reason why “the human person was introduced last among beings,” says Fr. Andrew Louth, in summary of Maximus. Anthropos is “a kind of natural bond mediating between the universal poles.”5 But preserving this unity is precisely what anthropos has failed to do. The fall is the forfeiture of our liturgical career. In sin, we no longer stand aright as homo adorans. And for this reason the Son of God took on flesh to do as the second Adam what the first Adam was supposed to do, but did not. Christ is now the unity of cosmic creation. The divisions that the first Adam aggravated by his fall are redeemed by the second Adam’s incarnation and ascent to the Father. Maximus says, “Christ fulfills the great purpose of God the Father, to recapitulate everything both in heaven and on earth in himself.”6 Creation is repeated but this time correctly; capitus means “head” and the body of anthropos receives a new head; creation is headed up and united at last in anthropos; even of material things, was to remain a favorite theme for the Fathers of the Church. ... Athanasius in particular is so penetrated with this thought that he expresses it often. He loves to repeat that Christ is the leaven of the world; pasa kisis, ta panta, the whole universe is the mass that He leavens and the body to which He gives life.7

Or, in the words of my teacher, Fr. Aidan Kavanagh, “liturgy is doing the world the way the world was meant to be done.”

With this protological and eschatological foundation in place, I can make the following eight propositions about Church architecture.

1. Because of the Incarnation, therefore all matter and space and time is available for liturgical use.

The Word became flesh and consacred all matter, and now all created things are available to the Church’s liturgical use: Sundays and seasons, icon paint and scripture ink, altars and vestments, priests baptized and ordained, candles and incense, water and oil, bread and wine. Paul Evdokimov can say about the world’s end that everything is destined for a liturgical fulfillment. ... The final destiny of water is to participate in the mystery of the Epiphany; of wood, to become a cross; of the earth, to receive the body of the Lord during his rest on the Sabbath ... Olive oil and water attain their fullness as conductor elements for grace on regenerated man. Wheat and wine achieve their ultimate raison d’être in the eucharistic chalice. ... A piece of being becomes a hierophany, an epiphany of the sacred.8

Christ was a new thing, and it is this new thing that liturgy celebrates. Liturgy is a new humanity anticipating a new heavens and a new earth. Therefore, all space, time, and matter are available for liturgical use.

2. Everything has to pass through the hypostatic union before it is of any use

“A Church assembly is a sacramental sign of Christ’s whole Mystical Body. As there is one sacrifice at many altars, there is one Church at many assemblies.”

[Image: Gerald Augustinus]
to us, including church architecture.

Everything in Christianity derives from the Incarnate Christ. Mersch does not hesitate to say that “the hypostatic union does not affect our Lord alone, but that it is somehow prolonged in us, the members; that we are the prolongation of the Head, and that the hypostatic union renders us divine by reason of our continuity with the Man-God.”9 Everything in Christianity is a participation in Christ, and reflects Christ, and is Christ’s mystical presence in our midst, and comes from Christ’s humanity, which is divinized by its union to a divine nature and shared with us as grace. Everything in Christianity flows from Christ’s hypostatic union, including sacraments and priests and the people of God and Scripture proclaimed and hierarchical structures and magisterial offices—and architecture flows from the hypostatic union, too.

This means we cannot use any other religious building, sacrifice, or ritual as prototype for our Christian temple, altar, or liturgy. On this point we should give credit where credit is due. This was a cause championed by the liturgical movement. Josef Jungmann, writing in 1939, identifies three subjects who do liturgy in the totus Christus: “The first of these is Christ Himself. The second is the body of the faithful as a whole. ... The third is the bearer of the official priesthood who stands at the altar.”10 Pope Pius XII makes the same point when in Mediator Dei he defines liturgy as “the worship rendered by the Mystical Body of Christ in the entirety of its Head and members” (para. 20). The point here is that the Incarnate one remains active in his Mystical Body. Jungmann therefore concludes that the architecture that houses the Mystical Body is different from a religious temple:

The Christian place of worship differs essentially in plan from the temples of the ancient pagan religions. The Roman and Greek temples, as also those of the Oriental races, were open edifices erected in honor of their gods. They were externally ornamented. ... The interior of the temple was but a narrow dark cell in which the image of the deity was set up. Priests only were allowed to enter it, at the time when they had to perform their functions. No provision at all was made for the people; here the people were not bearers or repositories of divine worship.11 That we have slighted the ordained priesthood, or slighted the baptismal priesthood, or reduced the scale of the cosmic liturgy to the group in attendance, or weakened the sense that Christ is the premier liturgist, does not alter the fact that the liturgical renewal once had it right. Whatever problematics have arisen in execution, we must acknowledge the liturgical renewal’s role in recalling the Church as an arena for a corporate activity.

3. This corporate activity of the Church is not the Jesus Club getting together in its club house.

To think of Christian liturgy as a community religious event fails its cosmic and eschatological dimensions (protology and eschatology). In his study The Angels and the Liturgy, Erik Peterson writes that “The worship of the Church is not the liturgy of a human religious society, connected with a particular temple, but worship which pervades the whole universe and in which sun, moon, and all the stars take part ... [T]he Church is no purely human religious society. The angels and saints in heaven belong to her as well. Seen in this light, the Church’s worship is no merely human occasion. The angels and the entire universe take part in it.”12 If this is so, then Christian sacred architecture will look neither like other temple architecture nor like other secular meeting halls. Columba Marmion wrote, “The Church ... has a part too in the religion of Christ towards His Father in order to continue upon earth the homage of praise that Christ in His Sacred Humanity offered to His Father.”13 I conclude from this that there is no altar in the Church as the pagans knew it, but there is the hagia trapezia (holy table), which presents Christ, who is the altar of God. There is no sacrifice as cults knew it, but there is the Eucharist, which is the body of Christ, in which sacrifice the Church sacramentally participates. Likewise, there is no temple as religious impulse builds for the deity, but the assembly becomes the living body of Christ and the building that houses Christ’s nuptial embrace of his bride is a sacred place.

4. The Church is liturgy symbol-izing the Kingdom.

The Church does not exist in our minds, any more than Jesus exists as an idea. The Church is an ekklestia—which means a people called out. A Church assembly is a sacramental sign of Christ’s whole Mystical Body. As there is one sacrifice at many altars, there is one Church at many assemblies. The particular assembly is not its own end, then, but rather the symbolization of a reality larger than itself. We could express this by saying the liturgy symbol-izes the heavenly liturgy. Adding the suffix -ize turns a noun or adjective into a verb, in the sense of “causing it to be or become.” To verbal-ize is to express verbally, to sanita-ize is to make sanitary, to jeopardize is to put into jeopardy. The liturgy symbol-izes the Kingdom of God: it makes God’s reign into a symbol for our participation. The Mystery passes...
over into the mysteries. Each liturgy symbol-izes an assembly of angels and archangels and saints and martyrs and the righteous.

5. The Church’s building visual-izes this liturgy.

I do not mean that Christians close their eyes and form mental images of angels with wings. I mean that iconographers take up their brushes, sculptors take up their chisels, architects roll out their blueprints. Symbols are real, visible, material, actual things, therefore to call liturgy a sacramental symbol of the Kingdom is to say that the liturgy real-izes, actual-izes, and material-izes the very eschatological redemption that Christ is accomplishing in the world. And this requires the assistance of artists and architects. “Holy Mother Church has therefore always been the friend of the fine arts,” says Sacrosanctum Concilium, “and has ever sought their noble help, with the special aim that all things set apart for use in divine worship should be truly worthy, becoming, and beautiful, signs and symbols of the supernatural world” (para. 122). What the liturgy symbol-izes, the architect visual-izes. There is a synergistic, synthetic, living relationship between liturgy and architecture. Liturgy is to architecture not like a hermit crab is to the tin can it crawled into, but rather like a snail is to the shell it has grown. This leads Kavanagh to write:

Raw space becomes liturgical place through the change [Christ’s] presence by grace, faith, and sacrament causes. ... As it meets for worship of the Source and Redeemer of all, the assembly is the fundamental sacrament of God’s pleasure in Christ on earth. ... Christian instinct has been to house this assembly as elegantly as possible, avoiding tents, bedrooms, and school basements. The assembly uses its place to do something in. ... It is a vigorous arena for conducting public business in which petitions are heard, contracts entered into, relationships witnessed, orations declaimed, initiations consummated, vows taken, authority exercised, laws promulgated, images venerated, values affirmed, banquets attended, votes cast, the dead waked, the Word deliberated, and parades cheered.14

If we don’t like how Church architecture should look, we must ask ourselves whether we know what we’re supposed to be doing in it.

6. What the Church does includes visual-izing the potency of the world.

Olivier Clement says, “in its deepest understanding, the Church is nothing other than the world in the course of transfiguration.”15 This transfiguration from the Uncreated? How will you show that because Christ has ascended with his sacred humanity into heaven, the division between the intelligible and the sensible is overcome and now we can see all matter in a spiritual light? How will you show that because heaven and earth were reunited by Christ’s ascension, we join the angels in praising God? How will you show that the distance between our current site of toil and the paradise that was our original home has been overcome in the baptismary that is a New Eden? And how will you show that the mortality at work in the cycle of generations has been conquered by eternal life? A tall order for architects.

7. Churches are decorative, not cosmetic.

Chesterton wrote that “Decoration is not given to hide horrible things: but to decorate things already adorable. A mother does not give her child a blue bow because he is so ugly without it. A lover does not give a girl a necklace to hide her neck.”17 Churches do not exist for a cosmetic purpose, i.e., to disguise the ugliness of the world. They exist for a decorative purpose, i.e., to display the loveliness that the world was intended to have.

When Christians bejewel the landscape with light from stained-glass windows, and appoint the calendar with holy days, and spiritualize matter into sacrament, and canonize saints who walk among us, and build edifices of splendor and glory, they do so in order to proclaim to the world the beauty that it has from the hand of the Creator, but that sin has failed to actualize. They do so in order to display before the world the potential with which it was created, and which is being secretly worked by Christ’s recapitulation. The gift of the Church to the time in which it lives is the holy day; and the gift of the Church to the place in which it dwells is a beautiful church. But this requires extravagance and luxury, as does all decoration. People seem to have difficulty understanding that wastefulness in decoration is precisely its whole reason for being.

8. Church architecture must be true, and truth will be beautiful.

The word “truth” applies not only to propositions but also to reality. A person...
can be true or false, but succeeding (or failing) to become the idea God had of him when he was made. Something is beautiful when it becomes what it is supposed to be and shines forth (splendor) its essence. We use the word beauty in close connection to truth when we see an act of generosity or humility or kindness and say, “That was a beautiful thing to do.” It was a true thing. The person is beautiful for acting fully, with integrity, proportionate to his being, acting as a full human being. The saints grow more beautiful. In fact, the reason to become a saint is to become beautiful at last: the relationship between “beautiful” and “beatific.”

I will stop with eight propositions. I am talking about living in the Eighth Day, so it seems fitting. This liturgical cosmology depends upon several things. (I mean by “depend” what the word literally means, namely, “to hang.”) Liturgy as heaven-on-earth hangs upon several theological pegs. It depends first upon a protology that believes all being is good; second, an eschatology that believes everything is destined for glory; third, an anthropology that believes the image of God can, by grace, attain the likeness of God (which is deification); fourth, a Christology that believes the Reign of God has begun; and fifth, an ecclesiology that believes the Church visualizes the potency of the world and its final end. The Church-in-motion, the Divine Liturgy, makes visible the transfiguration worked upon the world by supernatural grace. The marching orders given to architects is to visual-ize that transfiguration.

The Christian is an icon of Jesus’ splendor repeated in each glorified face, and the church building must also be an icon of Jesus’ divinized humanity.

“The Christian is an icon of Jesus’ splendor repeated in each glorified face, and the church building must also be an icon of Jesus’ divinized humanity.”
Neglect, deterioration, and abandonment are not terms that are often associated with a house of God. However, the terms are beginning to become common as more and more parishes across the United States close the doors of their churches to the communities that they once served. The phenomenon is not exclusive to the Catholic Church, as every religion in the United States is seeing their older structures close for a myriad of reasons. In some religious communities older churches are being abandoned for newer, larger ones that provide worship space for a growing community. Other reasons for closings are not as hopeful. Declining parishioners, deferred maintenance, consolidation, and even a shortage of priests have been to blame. Whatever the reasons for the closures the outcome is often the same: a structure built as a monument to stand the test of time is left empty and without purpose. What becomes of these structures when they are no longer used for worship?

Across the United States and throughout the World there are countless examples of how these beautiful structures are being reborn for new uses in their communities. One can argue that the reuse of a house of worship for any reason other than the adoration of God is sacrilegious. However, preservation-minded individuals see the value of these buildings not just for what they represent spiritually but what they represent to the built environment. Many older churches were built by skilled craftsmen whose trade was handed down to them over the generations. These buildings are built with techniques and methods that are no longer common practice in today’s economy-driven construction industry. These buildings represent the heart of their neighborhoods and communities. They act as beacons, landmarks, and community centers. To abandon them functionally is sometimes a necessity, but to lose them architecturally is simply wrong.

Churches became the center of their communities quite logically. America was established to allow religious freedom to those colonists looking to escape the tyranny of the European nations from which they had emigrated. In cities like New York, Boston, and Chicago, where immigrants settled in communities of their own nationality, parishes became “national parishes,” offering services in their native languages, such as German, Italian, and Polish. These national parishes established identities for the districts they served, and many neighborhoods in Boston are still best known by their parish names. These buildings are more than symbols of faith, they are reminders of the history and the people who gave the funds and provided the labor to build these monuments to their culture, heritage, and religious freedom.

Houses of worship are built to serve a specific purpose. Architecturally they are termed white elephants. They are well-known landmarks that occupy a significant location in the community. The health of such buildings is closely linked to the well being of their neighborhoods. They are often large voluminous spaces that are hard to maintain and frequently even harder to adapt for new use without losing the character that makes them unique.

Deferred maintenance is often the culprit for abandonment, and structural uncertainty is often the reason these buildings are not reused. One does not know what damage or unforeseen conditions exist behind plaster and other decorative elements until they are removed. For this reason developers are often hesitant to look at abandoned religious structures for reuse possibilities. There are, however, some brave souls who see the potential for the spaces and take the risks as well as the rewards of such an endeavor.

Adaptive reuse is defined as “a use of a building that is different from its original or previous use, often involving conversion work.” Religious structures can be adapted into a variety of different uses. The preferred use is to find another
religious organization in need of space. This is more easily accomplished in urban areas when the buildings have fewer maintenance issues. When an ideal tenant cannot be found, the most likely reuse is to find a function that continues to serve the community in a public way. Many reuse projects are suited to such vast spaces, like community centers, theaters, schools, and libraries. Other uses include concert halls, restaurants, museums, offices, retail, and most commonly housing.

The most successful reuse projects occur when there is community support for the building, its intended use, and its developers. This can sometimes prove challenging. The U.S. Constitution has been interpreted to mean separation of church and state. This separation has saved religious structures over the years from zoning and mandatory building code upgrades. However, when a former religious building is purchased for some other use it becomes eligible for zoning constraints and code enforcement. Often the new zoning will not allow for the type of development that might be best for the neighborhood, and the building and lot size will not allow for the necessary code changes. A good part of a renovation budget will be spent retrofitting a building to make it handicapped accessible, fire safe, and structurally secure.

Listed below are just a few examples of successful adaptive reuse projects that have continued to serve their communities and encourage the rebirth of neighborhoods.

The Cohoes Public Library just outside of Albany, NY, found a new home in the former St. John’s Episcopal Church in the early 1970s after moving repeatedly over the preceding twenty years. The church building itself, constructed in 1895, had been vacant for several years after its congregation moved to a newer facility. In 1986 major renovations were made to the facility to upgrade the utility systems and allow greater accessibility for the library’s patrons.

Another example is the church that was formerly known as the Asbury Delaware United Methodist Church in Buffalo, NY. In 1996 heavy pieces of Medina sandstone began falling from the main steeple of this local landmark into the street below. This was the catalyst for closing a main city thoroughfare and sparking a ten-year legal battle for ownership of the property. When the dust settled, local musician and national recording artist Ani DiFranco and her company Righteous Babe Records purchased the property for $175,000 and began a $10 million restoration of the Gothic revival church.

Years of deterioration and neglect needed to be corrected in order to make the space habitable and useable. Ms. DiFranco’s vision was to adapt the space into a community asset. The completed structure now houses Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, a large flexible performance space, and the Righteous Babe executive offices. The church is also handicapped accessible and boasts thirty geothermal wells to provide natural energy for heating and cooling. The flexible performance space that is housed in the former sanctuary will be used in the future for concerts, weddings, and social gatherings.

The former St. Vibiana’s Cathedral in Los Angeles was literally saved from the wrecking ball by the Los Angeles Conservancy. After the 1994 Northridge earthquake, the structure was deemed unsafe for use and Cardinal Roger Mahoney campaigned to have it demolished so that a new cathedral could be built in its place. After intense legal battles the new cathedral, Our Lady of the Angels, was built several blocks away and St. Vibiana’s was available for purchase and redevelopment.

Developers Tom Gilmore and Richard Weintraub, backed by the Conservancy, have invested money into the structural retrofitting of the building so that it can be utilized as an events and performance space. Work is ongoing to stabilize the bell tower with hopes that the missing cupola can be returned after twelve years. The total expected cost of redeveloping the church and rectory, including a new hotel and residential complex, is around $77 million.

Vibiana Place, as it is now called, has seen new development in the surrounding area since renovations began. To the rear of the structure is the new branch of the Little Tokyo Public Library, across the street is the new Los Angeles Department of Transportation, and under construction kitty-corner to the site is a new police headquarters. This redevelopment joins additional efforts by Gilmore to provide housing, dining, and retail to an area that was once a crime-ridden and neglected. He envisions Vibiana Place as a future cultural destination.
St. Paul’s Parish, circa 1900, is located in the Pendleton neighborhood of Cincinnati, OH. Its construction supported continuous growth in that area at a time when Cincinnati was the fifth largest city in the United States. Time changed the landscape of the neighborhood, and as it changed from residential to commercial and industrial the need for the parish diminished. The parish held its last services in 1975, the same year in which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The property was purchased by investors shortly after it closed, but it sat vacant and derelict until 1981 when four additional outbuildings were purchased and restored by the Verdin Bell Company. At the time of the renovations, the sanctuary housed St. Paul’s Church Mart, a marketplace for ecclesiastical supplies. Today the meticulously restored sanctuary is used for banquets, weddings, and receptions, while the balcony space holds offices. The entire renovated complex is considered to be one of the few of its size to be in continuous use in the United States. The auxiliary buildings house corporate offices, the Verdin Bell Museum, showrooms, and design studios. The continued success of this complex has encouraged more and more private development of the surrounding neighborhood.

Not every adaptive reuse is thought successful. Take for example the conversion of the former Church of the Holy Communion in New York to the Limelight nightclub in the 1980s. The nature of the activity in and around the property prompted the New York City Police Department to shut down the operation. It has since changed ownership and continues to operate as a nightclub and bar. Another is a retail conversion of a former church in Cincinnati, OH, into an Urban Outfitters store. Although the only exterior sign that the building is no longer a house of worship is banners that advertise the store, interior changes have cost the interior its character. However, for every unsuccessful adaptive reuse there are quite a few projects that have been tastefully executed and have met with much success financially and in revitalizing the community around them.

It is impossible to know the true number of historic houses of worship that are available for sale. One can assume the number is staggering given the information coming out of major U.S. cities. In 2004 the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston announced the closing of sixty-five to eighty parishes throughout the community it serves over the coming years. The announcement has been met with opposition, as parishioners protest the closings, bringing the issue a great deal of national media attention. In March the Archdiocese of Detroit announced a plan to close up to sixty-three parishes by 2015. These are the first closings since 1989, when thirty inner-city parishes were closed or consolidated. St. Louis, MO, saw nineteen churches offered up for sale in 2005, bringing the total of closed churches to fifty-five since 1990. From Maine to California former sacred places sit awaiting a new owner, someone who is willing to invest the time, effort, financing, passion, and energy in transforming these buildings of brick and stone into thriving community assets once again.

As more is learned about this unique adaptive reuse subject, the United States could learn from the Church of England in how they deal with vacant churches that they deem “redundant.” The Church of England passed a Pastoral Measure in 1983, enforced by an Act of Parliament, that has set forth procedures for the reuse of redundant churches and emphasizes suitable reuse rather than abandonment or demolition. Each British diocese has a Uses Committee who becomes active in finding reuse for a church as soon as it is deemed redundant. A group called the “Commissioners,” who are appointed to answer to both church and parliament, is required to publish a draft scheme for reuse within three years of the date of redundancy. However, for now the reuse of churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples in the United States is left to individual efforts by developers and community groups.

Many would argue again that the use of a sacred space for any purpose other than the worship of God is sacrilegious. These churches, these spaces are attached to our memories. You might look at a church and say “That is where I grew up,” “That is where I was married,” or “That is where my children were baptized.” How do you want that memory to live on, should that parish be marked for closure in the future? As a vacant lot? As a derelict structure? Or as a place that has found a new use for the community that is alive and full of activity?

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Founded in 1870, St. Ignatius College Prep is a coeducational high school southwest of Chicago’s downtown. Until recently it was surrounded by public housing. When I became president of the school in 1981, it was bankrupt: it owed $1,750,000 to the banks, and its net worth was then only $1,100,000. The banks would not pull the loans, however, because the buildings were so old and in such bad shape, and their proximity to the projects meant that their sale was unlikely to be profitable. Moreover, it is likely that closing the oldest Catholic school in the city would have caused more problems for the banks than it was worth.

In 1981 the school was in its original buildings, which dated from 1869 and 1872, and what was called the “New Wing,” which was built in 1895. The school had deferred maintenance because of giving so much of its funds away each year as financial aid. St. Ignatius has always had a mix of students from blue-collar families, youngsters whose parents were on welfare, as well as the children of police, firemen, teachers, white-collar workers, and some executives and professionals. Financial aid was therefore always needed, so that families of various backgrounds would feel welcomed.

The school did not appeal to others to shoulder all that financial aid, and instead it just “went without.” As a result, the buildings had changed little over time, with the exception of makeshift modifications. For instance, the electrical wiring, installed by a Jesuit seminarian in 1902, ran in wooden troughs along the top of the walls, with a hole drilled through the wall to bring it into the classrooms. This setup was clearly far from ideal: wooden conduit with wiring like extension cords wrapped in a threadlike sheathing in wood-structured buildings!

The buildings had survived the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, which had burned to within a block of the school. The infamous Mrs. O’Leary was a member of the parish of the neighboring church, Holy Family, where her children were baptized. But by 1981, in addition to the school’s financial problems, the systems in the building were giving out, kept running thanks only to the skill of a wonder-working maintenance man. If we wanted to keep the school open for its 1,250 students, we had to raise “big money.” At that time, the annual fund-raising amounted to about $50,000.

The first issue was to assess the physical stability of the structures. This did not constitute a problem. The foundations were seven feet thick; the walls were thirty-eight inches thick. The school’s French-Canadian architect/builder had not been too sure how strong a one hundred and twenty-four foot building needed to be. When in doubt, he made it thicker. The floors were supported by four by fourteen inch beams set every twelve inches.

The big decision was whether we should restore the building, that is, ask benefactors to donate money to return it to its original condition (which would take a good bit of figuring out) or whether we should merely repair it in the cheapest possible way. In the winter, snow would come through the original windows, which ranged from twelve to thirty-two feet in height. Some suggested that we buy Sears double-glazed home windows and fill in around them with bricks. Others thought we could save money by running new electrical conduit on top of the plaster instead of burying it.

St. Ignatius is one of the five public pre-Great Fire buildings extant in Chicago. Its style is a Chicago frontier-town version of Second Empire, which was popular in 1870. Fr. Damen, the Belgian immigrant Jesuit priest who founded the parish and school and had both buildings built, wanted them to look like buildings he knew at home. This historical background influenced our commitment to preserve the integrity of the original buildings.

Regardless of albeit first-class curriculums—the teaching of Shakespeare and the classics or up-to-date science—most schools are today housed in structures that lack outstanding aesthetic appeal. Newer ones tend to be boxes of cement block with vinyl tiling running in a seemingly endless procession through their halls and classrooms. By contrast, we had a distinguished building. I therefore represented to the trustees that we take the time to restore it authentically to its original designs and ask our donors to do something really fine for our students and for the city of Chicago.

We contracted experts to wire brush through layers of paint on the ceilings of the various rooms in which we suspected there had once been old stencils. We copied the designs of the remaining wooden doors in the school; fire doors...
were clad so that the building would be safe and yet retain its architectural authenticity. Our nearly five hundred original windows were reproduced exactly.

We were able to consult with some enormously knowledgeable people about the detailing. The architectural firm of Solomon Cordwell Buenz had never done a restoration of this kind before. I drew sketches and showed them pictures of what 1870s detailing looked like, and we worked through the building with them step by step. The process was mutually rewarding, and as a result the firm became conversant in a nineteenth-century architectural vocabulary that they had hitherto never had occasion to use.

While there was doubt in the beginning that we could raise the money, perseverance and a good cause helped enormously. People were far more attracted to helping to restore something beautiful than to helping us to build a two-story cement-block replacement, as some had recommended. We found old photos of the gas fixtures and had them remade and electrified. We found old bits of carpet in the attic and had it made as carpet in the main areas. In order to get it “right,” wherever we needed designs, we sought help from restoration experts like Robert Furhoff and Tim Samuelson in Chicago. This rigorous approach to the restoration cost more than the alternatives might have, but it left a legacy for the future and avoided the destruction of a building deemed fine enough to be on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1993 we received the National Achievement Award for our efforts from the National Trust. By 1995, the school’s one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary and twelve years after we had begun the restoration, no mortar, no window, no bit of slate roofing, no plaster, no plumbing or wiring, no flooring or bit of paint and no furniture remained as it had been ten years before.

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While parents take their seventh and eighth graders to see a variety of high schools, they go home to memories of buildings that all look sort of the same—with the exception of St. Ignatius Prep. The former gymnasium has been converted into the grand library for the school. “It looks like a palace,” they say. The building has become a sign and symbol of the quality of the education the school offers, as its students are among the top-scoring students in Illinois.

St. Ignatius is a welcoming place to various economic groups and racial minorities, and its buildings provide a visible sign that students are really going to a special school that will launch them into life as people of faith and responsible adults. Signs and symbols, crosses and statues, are everywhere in the school, and these, in synthesis with the school’s religious and pastoral programs, offer a counterpoint to the secular world in which these boys and girls are growing up.

The three old buildings, about one hundred and forty thousand square feet of space, cost about twenty million dollars to restore. It took us about ten years to raise that much money. Phasing the construction worked out well because we used the whole building for classes forty-two weeks of the year—and then raced to get work done in the ten weeks of summer. Having completed the restoration, we erected two new buildings, about eighty thousand square feet, costing about another twenty million dollars, adjacent to the historic buildings, so that we could have more room and better facilities.

Some had suggested that our new buildings should reflect a contemporary style. However, given the relatively small scale of the campus (twenty acres, much of it playing fields and parking), it seemed better to be responsive to the context of the older buildings and to have newly designed buildings in similar shapes and textures.

The school had been surrounded by parking lots, but we were able to buy three acres a block away, following the closure of a local truck-repair company. That allowed us to move the parking there and to surround the school with a small botanic garden, as well as paths and benches for students, the whole surrounded by handsome wrought-iron fencing for security.

Raising this much money, plus building an endowment from $24,000 to $15,000,000, giving out great amounts of financial aid so that the school could always be welcoming to students of all backgrounds was a lot of work. During my presidency (1981–1998), we raised $70,000,000. But it proved easier raising money to put up something beautiful with which the donor would be proud to be associated than to try to eke out money for a concrete-block structure. Donor plaques adorn just about everything, including each and every window, visible demonstrations of how the restored St. Ignatius is our ongoing gift to the students of the school and, more broadly, to the city of Chicago.

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In a recent papal address delivered at the Vatican Museums, Pope Benedict XVI offered these thoughts on Christian art and architecture. “In every age,” the pope noted, “Christians have sought to give expression to faith’s vision of the beauty and order of God’s creation, the nobility of our vocation as men and women made in his image and likeness, and the promise of a cosmos redeemed and transfigured by the grace of Christ.” The pope then spoke of the permanent value of Christian art and architecture when he pointed to the fact that “the artistic treasures which surround us are not simply impressive monuments of a distant past. Rather … they stand as a perennial witness to the Church’s unchanging faith in the Triune God who, in the memorable phrase of Saint Augustine, is Himself ‘Beauty ever ancient, ever new.’”

If the treasures of Christian art and architecture are, indeed, “perennial witnesses to the Church’s unchanging faith,” then one might ask whether the faithful are equipped to better appreciate the genuine Christian meaning of such artistic witnesses to faith. Or to put it another way, do the faithful receive adequate catechetical preparation to discern interpretations of Christian works of art and architecture that subtly or overtly contradict the Church’s unchanging faith?

A Case in Point

A recent and obvious case in point is the sensational claims made by the novelist Dan Brown in The Da Vinci Code. All Brown’s assertions converge on his interpretation of what is undoubtedly Leonardo da Vinci’s greatest masterpiece, The Last Supper. And it is interesting to note that in order to support his claims, Brown needs an image, not history, not biblical theology or doctrine, and certainly not faith. Only one image that, in the author’s mind, seems to explain it all.

While Christians endlessly debate the fine points of historical and doctrinal errors contained in the novel, there is no getting away from the fact that many of the faithful were catechetically challenged in their efforts to interpret a Christian masterpiece like Leonardo’s Last Supper. Even in casual conversations many faithful found themselves simply unable to interpret a Christian work of art in ways that would deepen, not undermine, their faith. Consequently many were confused by the novel’s claims, based on religious art and architecture, about Christianity, even though those claims clearly challenged basic Christian doctrines. And a fresh pastoral challenge took shape in the process. For it is one thing to have works of Christian art and architecture routinely misinterpreted by novelists. It is quite another when the faithful find themselves unable to discern the genuinely Christian meaning of such treasures of art. With this cultural example and trend in mind, helping the faithful to reclaim a Christian interpretation of art and architecture takes on greater urgency.

The Christian Meaning of Love

In Deus Caritas Est (henceforth DCE), Pope Benedict XVI speaks of three kinds of love: eros, philia, and agape. Eros, according to the Greeks, is the love of man and woman, while philia refers to the love of friendship. Agape points to the new and distinct Christian view of love grounded in faith; ultimately it is the love of God manifest in the
A Case of Mistaken Loves

Art historians see marked similarities in Leonardo’s depiction of John’s flowing long hair and gentle features with his other paintings of the apostle. Yet there is still another way in which Brown’s claim that Mary Magdalene is the figure next to Jesus in Leonardo’s Last Supper is simply off the mark. In fact, from a Christian standpoint, of all Brown’s claims this is where he could not be more mistaken.

The mistaken identity of Mary Magdalene as the figure seated next to Jesus in Leonardo’s Last Supper can only thrive on a case of mistaken love, a confusing of philia and agape for eros, a substituting of one love for another. For sure Mary Magdalene loved the Lord as a disciple and follower. But her love was not a “warped and destructive form of it, a counterfeit divinization of eros that actually strips it of its dignity and dehumanizes it” (DCE 4). Furthermore, as the encyclical notes, “as for the term philia, the love of friendship, it is used with added depth of meaning in Saint John’s Gospel in order to express the relationship between Jesus and his disciples” (DCE 3). In that regard, the biblical accounts of the Last Supper, that must have guided Leonardo’s artistic inspiration, point to the meal Jesus shares with his disciples as a sublime expression of philia, the love of friendship, not eros.

Finally there is the New Testament notion of agape. Here we come face to face with “love in its most radical form.” Jesus’ death on the Cross is “the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him” (DCE 12).

Leonardo’s painting gives visual expression to the love of agape: as Jesus gives “this act of oblation an enduring presence through his institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper,” he anticipates his sufferings, death on the Cross and his resurrection by giving his disciples, in bread and wine, his very self, his own Body and Blood. As the pope writes, “the Eucharist draws us into Jesus’ act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate Logos, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving” (DCE 13). This is why perhaps even the earliest Christian depictions of the Last Supper in Roman catacombs are often cast as an agape meal.

What we see in Leonardo’s painting then is not the eros of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, but a visual representation of Christian love—of philia and of agape, the Eucharist as the “source and summit of the Christian life.” This is where “our definition of love must begin. In this contemplation the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move” (DCE 12).
Christian Art: A “Visual Gospel”

From Leonardo’s Last Supper the novelist Brown is inclined to draw out his “facts”: Christ was married, the Holy Grail is Mary Magdalene who sits beside him at the Last Supper, and the Church over the centuries has through various instruments suppressed the “truth” about a bloodline from Christ that secretly endured through history.

What are Christians to make of this and other mixtures of fact or fiction that dominate the popular imagination through printed and cinematic forms? Are such claims to be simply ignored as ludicrous, or should they be exposed as nothing more than, in the words of one French commentator, “une bonne farce,” a good hoax?

Moreover, how are the faithful to respond when a Christian image, such as Leonardo’s Last Supper, is given interpretations so contrary to Christian belief? What should we expect will follow in the popular imagination? Will Rembrandt’s The Return of the Prodigal Son be used to claim that belief in a God who forgives sin is ludicrous? Will Caravaggio’s Supper at Emmaus be interpreted to uncover hidden references to long censored pagan rituals? Will Michelangelo’s Pietà, for instance, be revealed as another attempt by the Church to suppress women? Or Giotto’s dramatic fresco in the Arena Chapel of Padua entitled the Kiss of Judas be exposed as nothing more than the repressed sexuality of the first Christian disciples?

Seeing with the Eyes of Faith

Christian faith is not something we have on Sundays or do whenever we engage in spiritual activities. Faith is an all-encompassing worldview. Faith colors the way Christians see the world, it inspires them to experience and interpret the world, often in radically countercultural ways.

Dan Brown looks at an artistic masterpiece of da Vinci and sees in it hidden codes, conspiracy, intrigue, subversion of ancient secrets, and the like. Following his example one can only imagine the anti-Christian claims that will emerge from fevered imaginations of future writers and film directors.

A Christian, on the other hand, looks at the artistic genius of Leonardo, and other masterpieces of religious and sacred art and architecture, and sees in them God’s revelation of love translated into paint, fresco, marble, stained glass and sacred music. Seeing with the “eyes of faith” we can discover in Christian art and architecture “witnesses to unchanging faith,” the “invisible made visible,” tangible representations of the core Christian belief that “God is love.”

Dan Brown and like-minded purveyors of pop spirituality may score on bestseller lists and at the box office. But Christians through their participation in and love for the Eucharist score even higher. For in every Eucharist we are transformed to see the world around us with the “eyes of faith.” And in every Eucharist we partake of the poverty of incarnate crucified love, a divine love that can never be mistaken for any other.

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Making Space for Sacred Space

Recovering the Sense of the Sacred

Jaap Dawson

The play’s the thing.” Shakespeare was dead right. And he was right not only with regard to the theater; the same applies to church too. When we worship, we play. And when we play right, we worship. The truth is so obvious that we might lose sight of it. But if we bring it back into view, the truth may indeed set us free.

The Sandbox and the Church

“The child is father of the man.” And a wise father he is, Wordsworth might well have added. The child we were is the child we are: the child who knows how to dream, the child who knows how to build a real world in a sandbox, the child who knows how to share this real world with other children. The other children need no complex rules, no creeds, no rites of initiation to play along. They simply need to grasp the essence of the play—and its boundaries. And then, wondrously enough, all the children in the sandbox share the very real world they have allowed to come into being.

During the play, the sandbox is as sacred for the small child we were as the church is sacred for the large child we become. The sandbox has clear boundaries that separate it from the world outside it. It is set apart from that world, marked off from it. True, you can dream outside the sandbox; but inside the sandbox you make space for the dream, the play, that you share with all the other players. Inside the sandbox you lay the building blocks that allow a deeper world to come alive. And that deeper world is the real world—so real that you can carry it with you even when you leave the sandbox.

The church is sacred because we learned how to play well in our sandbox.
We knew we needed to set the church apart from a world quite removed from real play and real worship. We knew we needed to establish boundaries between our church and the world that played to a different drum: without those boundaries we could not allow the deeper world to come into being. We knew too that we needed a place we could return to, at all times and in all places, in order to rekindle our awareness of the world that gives us life, and life in abundance.

The wisdom we acquired through our experience as children serves us well when we come to build a church. We know we need clear boundaries between hundreds of worlds that might vie for our attention and the world in which we can meet the living God. We know we need to move through our church as in a dance: if we only sit, and sit alone, we are not able to play actively with the other players to build a setting that allows the real world to be born. We know we need lots of sand—solid building materials—that we can feel and enjoy and form. We know we need enough space to play in. And we need to play together at the same game.

This we know. This any church architect must know. And this any parish council or bishop must surely know before choosing an architect worthy of the task of building a proper church. The play’s the thing. But play has serious rules, and the rules mock all ideology, all seriousness not in the service of the play. And the service of the play of worship is a dance of praise to the living God.

How, then, might the church architect best proceed?

By keeping his experience of the sandbox alive. By recognizing it in churches already built. By noticing it in the sketches that appear on his paper. By listening to fellow worshippers: Where do they feel most at home, most opened, most quickened? By focusing on the presence of the living God.

San Paolo Maggiore

San Paolo Maggiore in Bologna strikes me as a living example of a church that got it right. Though it has been around for quite some time, I only discovered it earlier this year. I had gone to Bologna and Ravenna to feast on the buildings and spaces and colors that, in a more loving world, we would build everywhere. And on the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, it felt utterly right to join the celebration in Paul’s own church. And what a feast it was!

What, exactly, made the feast such a feast? Was it a surprisingly full church in the middle of the week? Yes, but not only that. Was it the concelebration, the strength of a group of priests gathered together in one accord around the altar? Yes, but there was more. Was it the sung celebration? Of course, but that still does not explain it fully. Was it the space, then, the building itself? The familiar baroque recipe fairly incarnates the Body of Christ in the fabric of the building: the ample nave as the trunk, the lateral walls of the side chapels as ribs, the apse as the head, the transepts as the arms, the crossing as the heart. Yes, the spaces and their boundaries set the stage for the feast, but alone they fail to account for the church’s power.

The Body of Christ, then? Now we’re getting closer. It was made present at the Consecration. It was present in the worshipers. It was present in the homily: Christ really can change your life! It was present in the spatial configuration of the building. It was even present in the saturated, luminous colors that made the building materials at once earthy and heavenly.

But the real, palpable, and enduring presence of the Body of Christ lies in the tabernacle. And the tabernacle forms the center, the heart, the focus of the church. The tabernacle in San Paolo Maggiore rises up in the literal center of the crossing. It is unlike any other tabernacle I have seen. It is a building in itself, built in exaggerated perspective. It focuses your attention. It draws your attention further to a space beyond its own boundaries, beyond the walls of the church, beyond the confines of the world. It is truly a window on the soul.

And behind the tabernacle looms—at a huge if not hugely inappropriate scale—Alessandro Algardi’s sculpture of St. Paul about to be beheaded. You have hardly recovered from the force of the Presence in the tabernacle before you are shaken out of your reverie. You are reminded that heeding God’s voice means sacrifice. You are reminded too that the sacrificed victim is innocent—and that he is God.

The Goal of Sacred Space

The architect, the artists, the people who made the choices: they clearly took their experiences of the sandbox with them. They established unmistakable boundaries. They created spaces that give worshippers space. They knew how to establish a focus, how to help us focus on what really matters, what really counts. They placed the tabernacle at the center of the church and therefore at the center of the church’s life. And they built a tabernacle that does more than focus and contain and preserve: it points beyond itself. Immanence is transcendence is immanence.

The play’s the thing. The church architect who is adequate to the task has an inkling, an experience of Whom the play serves. The church architect who is liberated from fleeting styles and apparent functional requirements lives with the memories of the just-right sandbox. The child is father of the man, who must become as a child—not only in order to enter the Kingdom, but in order to build an image of the Kingdom: a church alive and quickening.

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Respect for the liturgical books and the richness of signs

39. Emphasizing the importance of the ars celebrandi also leads to an appreciation of the value of the liturgical norms. The ars celebrandi should foster a sense of the sacred and the use of outward signs which help to cultivate this sense, such as, for example, the harmony of the rite, the liturgical vestments, the furnishings and the sacred space. The eucharistic celebration is enhanced when priests and liturgical leaders are committed to making known the current liturgical texts and norms, making available the great riches found in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and the Order of Readings for Mass. Perhaps we take it for granted that our ecclesial communities already know and appreciate these resources, but this is not always the case. These texts contain riches which have preserved and expressed the faith and experience of the People of God over its two-thousand-year history. Equally important for a correct ars celebrandi is an attentiveness to the various kinds of language that the liturgy employs: words and music, gestures and silence, movement, the liturgical colours of the vestments. By its very nature the liturgy operates on different levels of communication which enable it to engage the whole human person. The simplicity of its gestures and the sobriety of its orderly sequence of signs communicate and inspire more than any contrived and inappropriate additions. Attentiveness and fidelity to the specific structure of the rite express both a recognition of the nature of Eucharist as a gift and, on the part of the minister, a docile openness to receiving this ineffable gift.

Art at the service of the liturgy

40. The profound connection between beauty and the liturgy should make us attentive to every work of art placed at the service of the celebration. Certainly an important element of sacred art is church architecture, which should

**Ars celebrandi**

38. In the course of the Synod, there was frequent insistence on the need to avoid any antithesis between the ars celebrandi, the art of proper celebration, and the full, active and fruitful participation of all the faithful. The primary way to foster the participation of the People of God in the sacred rite is the proper celebration of the rite itself. The ars celebrandi is the best way to ensure their actua participatio. The ars celebrandi is the fruit of faithful adherence to the liturgical norms in all their richness; indeed, for two thousand years this way of celebrating has sustained the faith life of all believers, called to take part in the celebration as the People of God, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (cf. 1 Pet 2:4-5, 9).

**The Bishop, celebrant par excellence**

39. While it is true that the whole People of God participates in the eucharistic liturgy, a correct ars celebrandi necessarily entails a specific responsibility on the part of those who have received the sacrament of Holy Orders. Bishops, priests, and deacons, each according to his proper rank, must consider the celebration of the liturgy as their principal duty. Above all, this is true of the Diocesan Bishop: as "the chief steward of the mysteries of God in the particular Church entrusted to his care, he is the moderator, promoter, and guardian of the whole of its liturgical life". This is essential for the life of the particular Church, not only because communion with the Bishop is required for the lawfulness of every celebration within his territory, but also because he himself is the celebrant par excellence within his Diocese. It is his responsibility to ensure unity and harmony in the celebrations taking place in his territory. Consequently the Bishop must be "determined that the priests, the deacons, and the lay Christian faithful grasp ever more deeply the genuine meaning of the rites and liturgical texts, and thereby be led to an active and fruitful celebration of the Eucharist". I would ask that every effort be made to ensure that the liturgies which the Bishop celebrates in his Cathedral are carried out with complete respect for the ars celebrandi, so that they can be considered an example for the entire Diocese.
highlight the unity of the furnishings of the sanctuary, such as the altar, the crucifix, the tabernacle, the ambo and the celebrant’s chair. Here it is important to remember that the purpose of sacred architecture is to offer the Church a fitting space for the celebration of the mysteries of faith, especially the Eucharist. The very nature of a Christian church is defined by the liturgy, which is an assembly of the faithful (ecclesia) who are the living stones of the Church (cf. 1 Pet 2:5).

This same principle holds true for sacred art in general, especially painting and sculpture, where religious iconography should be directed to sacramental mystagogy. A solid knowledge of the history of sacred art can be advantageous for those responsible for commissioning artists and architects to create works of art for the liturgy. Consequently it is essential that the education of seminarians and priests include the study of art history, with special reference to sacred buildings and the corresponding liturgical norms. Everything related to the Eucharist should be marked by beauty. Special respect and care must also be given to the vestments, the furnishings and the sacred vessels, so that by their harmonious and orderly arrangement they will foster awe for the mystery of God, manifest the unity of the faith and strengthen devotion.

Liturgical song

42. In the *ars celebrandi*, liturgical song has a pre-eminent place. Saint Augustine rightly says in a famous sermon that “the new man sings a new song. Singing is an expression of joy and, if we consider the matter, an expression of love”. The People of God assembled for the liturgy sings the praises of God. In the course of her two-thousand-year history, the Church has created, and still creates, music and songs which represent a rich patrimony of faith and love. This heritage must not be lost. Certainly as far as the liturgy is concerned, we cannot say that one song is as good as another. Generic improvisation or the introduction of musical genres which fail to respect the meaning of the liturgy should be avoided. As an element of the liturgy, song should be well integrated into the overall celebration. Consequently everything – texts, music, execution – ought to correspond to the meaning of the mystery being celebrated, the structure of the rite and the liturgical seasons. Finally, while respecting various styles and different and highly praiseworthy traditions, I desire, in accordance with the request advanced by the Synod Fathers, that

intrinsic relationship between eucharistic celebration and eucharistic adoration. A growing appreciation of this significant aspect of the Church’s faith has been an important part of our experience in the years following the liturgical renewal desired by the Second Vatican Council. During the early phases of the reform, the inherent relationship between Mass and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was not always perceived with sufficient clarity. For example, an objection that was widespread at the time argued that the eucharistic bread was given to us not to be looked at, but to be eaten. In the light of the Church’s experience of prayer, however, this was seen to be a false dichotomy. As Saint Augustine put it: "nemo autem illam carnem manducat, nisi prius adoraverit; peccemus non adorando – no one eats that flesh without first adoring it; we should sin were we not to adore it."

In the Eucharist, the Son of God comes to meet us and desires to become one with us; eucharistic adoration is simply the natural consequence of the eucharistic celebration, which is itself the Church’s supreme act of adoration. Receiving the Eucharist means adoring him whom we receive. Only in this way do we become one with him, and are given, as it were, a foretaste of the beauty of the heavenly liturgy. The act of adoration outside Mass prolongs and intensifies all that takes place during the liturgical celebration itself. Indeed, "only in adoration can a profound and genuine reception mature. And it is precisely this personal encounter with the Lord that then strengthens the social mission contained in the Eucharist, which seeks to break down not only the walls that separate the Lord and ourselves, but also and especially the walls that separate us from one another."

**Adoration and Eucharistic devotion**

The intrinsic relationship between celebration and adoration

66. One of the most moving moments of the Synod came when we gathered in Saint Peter’s Basilica, together with a great number of the faithful, for eucharistic adoration. In this act of prayer, and not just in words, the assembly of Bishops wanted to point out the

**The practice of eucharistic adoration**

67. With the Synod Assembly, therefore, I heartily recommend to the Church’s pastors and to the People of God the practice of eucharistic adoration, both individually and in community. Great benefit would ensue from a suitable catechesis explaining
the importance of this act of worship, which enables the faithful to experience the liturgical celebration more fully and more fruitfully. Wherever possible, it would be appropriate, especially in densely populated areas, to set aside specific churches or oratories for perpetual adoration. I also recommend that, in their catechetical training, and especially in their preparation for First Holy Communion, children be taught the meaning and the beauty of spending time with Jesus, and helped to cultivate a sense of awe before his presence in the Eucharist.

Here I would like to express appreciation and support for all those Institutes of Consecrated Life whose members dedicate a significant amount of time to eucharistic adoration. In this way they give us an example of lives shaped by the Lord's real presence. I would also like to encourage those associations of the faithful and confraternities specifically devoted to eucharistic adoration; they serve as a leaven of contemplation for the whole Church and a summons to individuals and communities to place Christ at the centre of their lives.

Forms of eucharistic devotion
68. The personal relationship which the individual believer establishes with Jesus present in the Eucharist constantly points beyond itself to the whole communion of the Church and nourishes a fuller sense of membership in the Body of Christ. For this reason, besides encouraging individual believers to make time for personal prayer before the Sacrament of the Altar, I feel obliged to urge parishes and other church groups to set aside times for collective adoration. Naturally, already existing forms of eucharistic piety retain their full value. I am thinking, for example, of processions with the Blessed Sacrament, especially the traditional procession on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, the Forty Hours devotion, local, national and international Eucharistic Congresses, and other similar initiatives. If suitably updated and adapted to local circumstances, these forms of devotion are still worthy of being practised today.

The location of the tabernacle
69. In considering the importance of eucharistic reservation and adoration, and reverence for the sacrament of Christ's sacrifice, the Synod of Bishops also discussed the question of the proper placement of the tabernacle in our churches. The correct positioning of the tabernacle contributes to the recognition of Christ's real presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Therefore, the place where the eucharistic species are reserved, marked by a sanctuary lamp, should be readily visible to everyone entering the church. It is therefore necessary to take into account the building's architecture: in churches which do not have a Blessed Sacrament chapel, and where the high altar with its tabernacle is still in place, it is appropriate to continue to use this structure for the reservation and adoration of the Eucharist, taking care not to place the celebrant's chair in front of it. In new churches, it is good to position the Blessed Sacrament chapel close to the sanctuary; where this is not possible, it is preferable to locate the tabernacle in the sanctuary, in a sufficiently elevated place, at the centre of the apse area, or in another place where it will be equally conspicuous. Attention to these considerations will lend dignity to the tabernacle, which must always be cared for, also from an artistic standpoint. Obviously it is necessary to follow the provisions of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal in this regard. In any event, final judgment on these matters belongs to the Diocesan Bishop.

Sacramentum Caritatis was released in March 2007 following the Synod of Bishops in October 2005.

“In the ars celebrandi, liturgical song has a pre-eminent place...‘the new man sings a new song. Singing is an expression of joy and an expression of love.’”

“The purpose of sacred architecture is to offer the Church a fitting space for the celebration of the mysteries of faith, especially the Eucharist.”

From the ceiling of the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome; Photo: Anthony Grumbine

From the ceiling of the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome; Photo: Anthony Grumbine
BOOK REVIEW

THE PRO-GOTHIC GOSPEL

TEMPLES WORTHY OF HIS PRESENCE


Reviewed by Shawn Tribe

It seems only too seldom that people of high ideals make much of an impact on the general populace, let alone realize those ideals. This was not the case with regard to Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin and the Cambridge Camden Society. These names are of course synonymous with the nineteenth-century Gothic Revival Movement. Of that movement, the Camdenians are amongst the most significant and arguably affected the Gothic Revival and the English Christian landscape more than any other of their colleagues. The Camdenians had a keen awareness of the iconographic importance of architecture and ornament, and they presented this vision passionately to their contemporaries.

It might be said that Pugin’s rather intemperate style was met by a more guarded style on the part of the Cambridge Camden Society, a group originally formed by Anglican undergraduate students. The Camden Society nevertheless got across the pro-Gothic gospel and did not fear to criticize the order and modifications of many Anglican churches of their day. So successful were they in spreading their message that, as J. M. Crook said in The Dilemma of Style, they “had succeeded in transforming the appearance of every Anglican church in the world.” They did so by producing inexpensive pamphlets that were strategically targeted to particular audiences in subject and in style. Eight of the first of these pamphlets have been republished for the first time by Spire Books and the Ecclesiological Society (the modern successors of the Camden Society) in ‘Temples ... worthy of His presence.’

Christopher Webster, the book’s editor, has done an excellent job in giving a critical analysis at the beginning of each pamphlet.

Particularly edifying and informative is his general introduction in which he gives a good synopsis of the climate of the Church of England during the time in which the Camdenians operated; a climate characterized by tensions between Protestant “low church” theology and worship and the more Catholic liturgical praxis and theology being advanced by the “high church” Tractarians of the Oxford Movement. Webster neatly summarizes the basic beliefs and aims of the Cambridge Camden Society, which ultimately (if indirectly) found itself working in sync with the principles of the Catholicizing movement within the Anglican church. Supplementing the original pamphlets, Webster includes many drawings, photographs, and even editorial cartoons from Victorian times that bring to life precisely the state of affairs in English churches and worship in the period against which the Camdenians were fighting.

The pamphlets themselves give many details that highlight precisely the poor state to which English church buildings had fallen into by the time of the nineteenth century, often being treated in a desacralizing manner and with little regard for their ancient historical elements. Modern ears will hear an only too familiar problem when the Camdenians criticize the churches of their day. The society’s aim was to bring people, both educated and uneducated, back to the Gothic style, which they understood to be part of the inheritance of Anglicanism. They sought to do this both by restoring those Gothic edifices that had been altered by later generations and by laying down principles for the arrangement and design of new church buildings according to the Gothic style.

The Camden Society pamphlets are primarily oriented toward more purely architectural considerations, whether it be in the care and restoration, or in the building and study, of churches, though it does not take much to see the implicit message and motivation that lay behind their ideas. Some of the pamphlets are heavily laden with architectural terminology, making it slightly more difficult for the layman to read. Despite this, the flowery presentation of the details and historical development of medieval Gothic churches makes for edifying reading. Moreover, in the description of how to study ancient churches, many interesting details come up that paint a picture of the way in which the Reformation, and particularly the Puritan movement, modified the Catholic arrangement of English churches, giving us a sense of how theology serves to influence and shape sacred architecture.

While all of these works are now more than one hundred and fifty years old, what is encouraging is that the debates we see raging today in Christian circles about appropriate Christian architecture were present then as well. This is encouraging in the sense that, like many problems that have faced the Church, this is nothing new under the sun; and if it is not new, perhaps we can trust that the phoenix will rise yet again from the ashes of architectural indiscretions. To that end, these works provide not only a basis for the first principles of Christian architecture—particularly if we dismiss Pugin’s absolutism of that which is not absolute—but should also provide an antidote to a time suffocated by iconoclasm, disregard for the past, and sterile modernism.

Shawn Tribe writes from London, Canada, has a degree specialized in classical and mediaeval philosophy and is founder and editor of the liturgical weblog, The New Liturgical Movement.

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Artists, like pedigree dogs, go in and out of fashion. The borzoi hound was popular with the film crowd in the 1920s and the beagle, on account of the comic strip “Peanuts,” became a favorite in the 1960s. The golden retriever was the dog of choice throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Likewise, artists themselves are subject to vogue. Erte was popular around the time as the borzoi. Then he had a comeback in the 1970s only to fall out of favor recently. Andy Warhol’s stock dipped in the 1970s but rose to great heights in the new millennium. And in this new millennium, certain artists of the Renaissance are beginning to be re-evaluated. One is Paolo Veronese, the sixteenth-century Venetian painter whose work is meticulously charted in a new and expensive monograph written by a scholar in East Anglia named Richard Cocke.

Billed as “the leading expert on Veronese in the English speaking world,” Professor Cocke’s book provides the reader with a virtual checklist of the artist’s most important paintings in a dazzling career that spanned over forty years. Dozens of illustrations (mostly in black and white) accompany the succinct text, and the author divides the chapters up with subheadings that make the reading easy and pleasurable.

While Titian was Veronese’s master and Tintoretto was his colleague and competitor, the full flower of artistic talent in Venice is presented against a backdrop of religious strife and the threat of foreign invasion. The Protestant Reformation had caused a cataclysm in northern Europe. The Council of Trent attempted to stem the revolt and artists were encouraged to paint pictures that preached a renewed faith. Venice remained firmly in the Roman Catholic camp, but the advancing Muslim navy threatened the eastern regions of the Mediterranean. Cyprus had fallen and the Christian governor there had been flayed alive. A tiny Christian fleet was formed to meet the challenge. A miracle was needed, and in the Battle of Lepanto in 1571 that miracle was granted. The superior Muslim force was routed, and the pope attributed the victory to the intervention of the Blessed Virgin and the Rosary. But the victory was short-lived as Venice turned a deaf ear to the pontiff’s plea for a new crusade and made accommodations with the enemy. Sensitive to claims that it had become an appeaser and a collaborationist, Venice tried to flaunt its orthodoxy in a flood of elegant religious paintings.

In 1573 Veronese was commissioned to paint a scene of the Last Supper for the Dominican refectory at SS. Giovanni e Paolo, and the work was to become one of the most controversial in the history of art. Pictured in a grand architectural setting with three great arches, Christ was shown seated in the center with the Apostles broken up into three separate groupings. Forfeiting the usual solemnity of the scene, the painting shows a flurry of activity taking place around them. Veronese had gained a reputation for his depiction of festal gatherings, and it seems that the artist (or his unknown and unorthodox patron, as Professor Cocke suggests) desired to stretch his talent by introducing into the hallowed scene a number of “novelties.” These included the addition of German soldiers, a servant with a bloody nose, an exotic falconer with his hooded lanner falcon, a midget jester, waiters, a dog and cat, and an assortment of odd guests. Needless to say, this came to the attention of certain members of the Inquisition, causing the artist to appear before them on July 18, 1573.

The transcripts of that meeting survive.
Veronese acknowledged that changes were needed, yet his defense seemed to rest on a lack of communication between the artist and his clients. Veronese claimed that he did not even know the name of the Dominican prior in whose refectory the painting was to hang. He argued that he had been attempting to incorporate features found in other renditions of Christ feasting and that since the architectural setting was so large he was compelled to fill it with interesting figures based on his own judgment. Regarding that judgment, Veronese declared: “we painters use the license employed by poets and madmen.” In short, freedom of expression was being used as an excuse for tampering with the sensitivities connected to the depiction of things dogmatic.

Was the shock of the new a good thing? Seemingly not, according to the Inquisition. Why? Because the added elements denigrated the reverence and soberness that ought to have accompanied this particular scriptural event. The Dominican theologians who would have to eat under it every day could very well have deemed the artist’s whimsical treatment inappropriate. Yet Veronese was supposedly painting not to please them, but to please instead his secular patron. Besides, if inventiveness is a hallmark of Western art, doesn’t the artist’s concept bear equal weight with the opinion of viewers? These and so many other modern questions of a philosophical and theological nature intersect with this event. Thus it is surprising, and a little disappointing, that Professor Cocke devotes only two pages to it. In other accounts the Inquisition is usually pictured as the big bad bogeyman trying to squelch an artist’s creative freedom. Yet how far had Western artists by this time in history strayed from the conforming regulations that still guided sacred art in the Eastern churches?

A compromise was reached by renaming the completed painting. The new title was The Feast in the House of Levi, thus removing any irreverence that could possibly be associated with a depiction of the event that led to the institution of the Holy Eucharist. After all, titles are always important. Andres Serrano would prove that point many centuries later when he created a photograph of a crucifix floating in a wondrous ethereal yellow liquid and titled it “Piss Christ.”

Despite his lack of digression on the religious and aesthetic ramifications of Veronese’s ill-fated Last Supper, Professor Cocke’s attention to the overall work of the artist provides the reader with a well-organized and useful volume. Replete with illustrations, the slim volume is indeed worth its weight in gold!

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Pew Americana


Reviewed by Duncan Stroik

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his series of essays, edited by Louis Nelson, examines how people have interpreted the idea of the sacred in American history. Gretchen Buggeln’s fascinating contribution on New England Congregational churches looks at an evolution in architecture and the way it is described by pastors and others. She argues that the idea of the meeting house as an ordinary multipurpose space gives way to an understanding of the church as a sacred place, set apart only for worship, only after the Revolutionary war. There are also essays on the subtle religious component of the design of Central Park and the boundaries created in New York City by Jews called the eruv. The essay on Catholic architecture by Paula Kane is disappointingly weak and relies in part on the unstudied belief that Vatican II mandated modern structures. She looks at the closing of ethnic churches in Pittsburgh, a banal suburban church in Northern Virginia and the Los Angeles cathedral for which she indicates that the figurative tapestries on the walls of saints and baptism compromise the otherwise signature design. She can find nothing positive to say about the “creeping traditionalism” in art and architecture desired by the laity and younger clergy who surprisingly take their cues from the Vatican. The essay by Louis Nelson on Anglican churches in South Carolina has interesting insights on the importance of regularity and the beauty of holiness. Jeanne Halgren Kilde’s essay on megachurches makes the point that the “seeker church” model, its commercial feel, the entertainment model, and anonymity is nothing new but was promoted by Protestants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
The beauty of the liturgy is part of this mystery; it is a sublime expression of God’s glory and, in a certain sense, a glimpse of heaven on earth.

~Pope Benedict XVI, Sacramentum Caritatis

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Marian Window, West

Mystical Supper Window, North

Sacred Heart Window, East

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Resurrection Window, South
20 x 30 ft.