Unemployment is at a high level, and the economy is in recession. In order to give thousands of people jobs, the state embarks on some major infrastructure projects designed by an award winning architect. A parable for how the U.S. government can get the economy back on track? No, the story of how Pope Alexander VII and Gianlorenzo Bernini built Piazza San Pietro, the greatest public piazza in the world.

Behind every great building and its architect there is a visionary patron. Someone who thinks big, takes risks, raises funds, and above all recognizes the significance of architecture. Patrons may be pastors or popes, businessmen or college presidents. What they all have in common is a desire to create a masterpiece and the discernment to find the right people to help them do it.

Every patron is unique, and so their buildings appropriately bear their stamp. I have been fortunate to work with many brilliant and visionary patrons and believe that a building cannot be successful without a patron’s leadership. I had the fortune to work with one such patron for nine years and was edified by his passion for architecture, in service of the Church. When I met him, he already had some experience with building and was saving the best for last. We traveled to Italy together to study the great examples of sacred architecture as a research and development tour. From that point on wherever his travels took him, he availed himself of the opportunity to visit and study great buildings. It might be to experience the proportions of the interior, the size of a cornice, or to look at marble patterns. Like most patrons he was an incredibly busy man, but he found time to do the things that mattered, such as visiting artists’ workshops and traveling to Europe to pick out marble. He was deeply engaged in the design and construction process and thought of the church like it was his own, like a book that people would read for centuries to come. Involvement in every aesthetic detail came naturally to him because he believed that the domus Dei needed to be worthy of the Creator. This drive for excellence meant that he wanted to be convinced through words, drawings and precedent that every design decision was correct.

Early on he asked me to tell him whenever there was something I disagreed with, because he wanted me to be happy with the design. This was a bold and gutsy request that I tried to comply with. Then there were many aspects of the design that he would ask me to change. In the spirit of coauthors we would study the issue and look at alternate solutions, I with my pencil and he with his eyes. Sometimes this led to a better design, other times it convinced us to stay with the original idea. Because he was constantly looking at and thinking about great architecture, he saw that our project would be measured against these exemplars. As T. S. Eliot wrote, “In a peculiar sense I say judged, not amputated, by them; not judged to be as good as, or worse or better than, the dead; and certainly not judged by the canons of dead critics. It is a judgment, a comparison, in which two things are measured by each other.”

In this case, the comparisons inspired higher quality in design and materials—mahogany, marble, bronze, and limestone. Higher quality meant that he needed to convince others and raise more funds. This was true of the columns and pilasters of the nave that had been designed as painted plaster, were upgraded to limestone, then to travertine and eventually became single shafts of botticino classico marble. Their significant increase in cost was difficult to stomach, yet when the building was complete everyone saw how right he was to advocate for them. In addition, the length of the nave, the heavenly light from the clear windows and the simple color palette, all flowed from his vision for the church and his own character. It is a very cerebral chapel, most appropriate for a college campus and reflective of the president’s vocation as philosopher.

At the same time that he asked a lot from everyone, he continually told us how appreciative he was of our work. That appreciation made everyone work even harder and gave them a great sense of accomplishment at its consecration. The patron was ecstatic at the dedication mass. “It was better than I ever expected,” he remarked, and he spent hours in prayer and contemplation in the temple that he had brought to life. Nothing made him happier than to hear all the visitors, friends, and students thank him and tell him how magnificent it was. During Holy Week he was there in the front row, and at Easter he was beaming. He had dreamt of a beautiful chapel at the head of the campus dedicated to Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity. The task complete, his vocation fulfilled, one week later he was called home to the Father. Dr. Thomas E. Dillon, philosopher and patron, Requiescat in Pace.

Duncan Stroik
June 2009

On the cover: S. Maria Nascente, Duomo of Milan. Photo by ©iStockphoto.com/Alessandro Oliva.
EDITORIAL

Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam et Beatae Mariae Virginis

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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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Charitable donations surpassed $300 billion in 2007, crossing a philanthropic milestone. According to the Giving USA Foundation’s annual report, donations made in 2007 totaled $306.39 billion. While the total amount is notable, after adjusting for inflation, it is only a 1 percent increase over 2006 levels.

Ave Maria University in southwest Florida took delivery of eighty tons of Carrara marble—the pure white marble used by Michelangelo and still prized by Vatican sculptors—from quarries in Italy. Hungarian-born sculptor Marton Varo will use the nineteen blocks of marble to create a relief sculpture of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary to adorn a thirty-five-by-thirty-one-foot space on the facade of Ave Maria’s oratory. Varo will spend a year at the school to complete the $3 million project.

During his journey to Australia last July for World Youth Day, Pope Benedict XVI dedicated the new altar in Sydney’s Saint Mary’s Cathedral. In his homily, the Holy Father explained that the relief sculpture of Christ the Suffering Servant on the front of the altar is emblematic of how “every altar is a symbol of Jesus Christ, present in the midst of his Church as priest, altar, and victim.” The altar is a new addition to the Gothic Revival cathedral designed by the English-born architect William Wilkinson Wardell. Construction of the church began in 1868 and lasted for nearly sixty years.

Over its 2008–2009 winter break, Boston College concluded an eight-year project to increase the presence of symbols that emphasizes the university’s Roman Catholic heritage. Students and faculty returned from their break to find a crucifix or a Catholic icon adorning each of the school’s 151 classrooms along with newly installed statues and other works of art on campus and in university buildings, including mosaics of Dorothy Day and former superior general of the Society of Jesus Pedro Arrupe, as well as a large statue of the order’s founder, Saint Ignatius of Loyola.

This past fall, for the first time in 42 years, the Archdiocese of Chicago increased the number of Catholic schools in its territory. Christ the King Jesuit College Preparatory School is part of the Cristo Rey Network sponsored by the Society of Jesus. Although the school welcomed its first class this past fall, it is currently housed in temporary quarters while it awaits the completion of a new $27 million facility on the Chicago’s West Side slated to open in 2009. Cristo Rey Network schools operate on an alternative educational model in which students enroll in a college prep curriculum while working in a professional internship five days per month at a local corporate sponsor, thus enabling students to defray a significant portion of their tuition costs. Christ the King is the twentieth school in the nationwide Cristo Rey Network that began eleven years ago.

The Diocese of Madison, WI, demolished Saint Raphael’s Cathedral in June 2008, over three years after a March 2005 arson fire significantly damaged the edifice. The diocese announced in June 2007 that it would forego repairing the 1854 structure in favor of clearing the site in order to build a new, larger cathedral at a yet to be determined date. Prior to razing the historic cathedral, the diocese salvaged architectural and ornamental elements from the structure including mosaics, stained glass, and the ninety-foot-tall steeple and bells—which had been just been refurbished in 2004—in order to incorporate them into the future cathedral.

Last May, Bishop Jean-Michel di Falco of the Diocese of Gap announced the official recognition of the Church’s newest Marian Shrine at a Mass in the Basilica of Notre Dame in Laus, France. The apparitions of the Virgin Mary to a young French shepherdess, Benoîte Rencurel (1647–1718), at the sanctuary of Laus began in 1664 and continued throughout the woman’s life. In these visions, the Blessed Mother requested the building of a church and house for priests to bring people to greater conversion, especially through the Sacrament of Penance. Today, the site associated with Our Lady of Laus draws 120,000 people annually.
On June 8, 2008 the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter celebrated the opening Mass for its personal parish in the Diocese of Rome. In an Easter 2008 decree, Pope Benedict XVI granted the Church of Ss. Trinità dei Pellegrini to the fraternity as a personal parish. Construction on the church began in 1587 under Martino Longhi the Elder. Later in 1723, Francesco De Santis, designer of the Spanish Steps, completed his design for the façade of Ss. Trinità dei Pellegrini. This is the fraternity’s first personal parish in Europe and their tenth overall. Personal parishes serve the distinct needs of a particular population, be they linguistic, ethnic, or, as in this case, liturgical, and therefore are not defined by specific geographic boundaries like territorial parishes. With the establishment of their personal parish, the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter have a permanent venue in Rome in which to offer the Extraordinary Form of the Mass.

On November 9, 2008, Pope Benedict XVI used his weekly Angelus address to focus on the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, which happened to fall on that Sunday. He began by introducing the feast: “The liturgy today has us celebrate the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, called ‘mother and head of all the churches of the Urbe and Orbe.’” He then provided a brief history of it in which he mentioned that “this occasion initially only involved the city of Rome; then, from 1565 onwards, it extended to the entire Church of the Roman rite.” Reflecting on the Scripture readings of the day the pope said, “The Word of God during this Solemnity recalls an essential truth: the stone temple is the symbol of the living Church, the Christian community, that the Apostles Peter and Paul had, in their Letters, already understood as a ‘spiritual building’, constructed by God with the ‘living stones’ that are the Christians, upon the one foundation that is Jesus Christ, who is in turn compared to the ‘cornerstone.’” Benedict then spoke about church buildings, “The beauty and harmony of the churches, destined to render praise to God, invites us humans beings too, though limited and sinful, to convert ourselves to form a ‘cosmos,’ a well-ordered construction, in close communion with Jesus, who is the true Holy of Holies.” “Dear friends,” the pontiff concluded, “today’s feast celebrates an ever current mystery: that God desires to build himself a spiritual temple in the world, a community that adores him in spirit and truth. But this observance reminds us also of the importance of the concrete buildings in which the community gathers to celebrate God’s praises. Every community therefore has the duty to carefully guard their holy structures, which constitute a precious religious and historical patrimony.”
Sacred Architecture  Issue 15  2009

Bill V. Brown, AIA, a leading figure in church and liturgical design, died on June 11, 2008. He was fifty-eight years old. Mr. Brown received his architectural training at the University of Notre Dame, IN, graduating in 1973. During his nearly thirty-five years as a practicing architect he established his own firm, Bill Brown AIA Professional Corporation, in Colorado Springs, was a founding member of the Association of Consultants for Liturgical Space, and designed many new churches across the United States and renovations of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Fort Wayne, IN and the Cathedral of the Assumption, Covington, KY.

In December 2008, Antonio Cardinal Cañizares of Spain became Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, succeeding Francis Cardinal Arinze. Born in Valencia, Cañizares comes to the Vatican from his post as archbishop of Toledo, Spain’s oldest and primatial see. Prior to his 2002 appointment to Toledo, he was archbishop of Granada from 1996 to 2002 and bishop of Ávila from 1992 to 1996. He was created a cardinal in 2006 at age 60.

Outside Warsaw, Poland, construction continues on the Temple of Divine Providence. While the concept for the project and the first attempt at building a church to unite the population of the nation dates to 1791, the current campaign to fulfill that vision began in June 1999 when Pope John Paul II laid the cornerstone for the church now under construction. With an estimated cost of €30 million, the Temple is the largest construction project undertaken by the Roman Catholic Church in Poland since Prussia, Russia, and Austria partitioned the country in the 1700s. The church’s design features a Greek-cross plan with a base encompassing 275-by-275 (84m) foot area, a circular nave that is approximately 223 feet (68m) in diameter, and a dome soaring nearly 250 feet (75m) into the sky.

As part of its 750th anniversary celebration, Britain’s Salisbury Cathedral installed a new baptismal font designed by British sculptor William Pye. The cathedral’s first permanent font in over 150 years, the Greek-cruciform basin is made of patinated bronze and set on a Purbeck freestone plinth. Designed to accommodate full-immersion baptisms, the font is almost 10 feet (3m) wide and holds nearly 800 gallons (3000 liters) of water, making it the largest working font in a British cathedral. The Most Rev. Dr. Rowan Williams, archbishop of Canterbury, consecrated the new font and baptized two infants on September 28, 2008, during a service commemorating the cathedral’s anniversary.

After a seven-year, $41 million restoration to repair the destruction caused by a 2001 fire, the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City officially reopened with a rededication service on November 30, 2008. The fire gutted the church’s north transept and severely damaged the rest of the landmark edifice, the cornerstone of which was laid in 1892. The scaffolding and partition walls required for the subsequent repair work obstructed the 600-foot-long interior. His Eminence, Edward Cardinal Egan, archbishop of New York, attended the service as part of an ecumenical delegation and New York’s two U.S. Senators led the group of civil officials present at the service.
Sacred Architecture  Issue 15  2009


In order to revive the Catholic Church’s role as an important patron of the arts, the Pontifical Council for Culture recently created a committee to find and commission prominent contemporary artists to produce new religious and spiritual works. The pieces will be part of the Vatican’s exhibition at the 2009 Venice Biennale—the first Biennale in which the Vatican has participated. Monsignor Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, stated that the Church is seeking to encourage new religious art in order to bring about works that complement modern church architecture, such as Richard Meier’s Jubilee Church in Rome.

British architect Craig Hamilton has been garnering significant acclaim for his design of a private chapel in northern Britain. The project won the 2006 Georgian Group Award for the best new building in the classical tradition. More recently, the Stone Federation of Great Britain listed the chapel as Highly Commended in its 2008 Natural Stone Award’s Interiors category. In addition to his work on the interior and exterior, Hamilton designed many of chapel’s furnishings including its silver communion set, tabernacle, altar, pews, font, consecration candelabra, celebrant’s chair, and organ. Original works by sculptor Alexander Stoddart enhance the chapel, including a bust of the chapel’s patron saint, reredos bas-reliefs of the Annunciation and the Visitation, life-size sculptures of Saint Augustine of Hippo and Saint Nicholas of Tolentino, and a bronze tympanum depicting Saint Monica.

Winner of the Religion and Contemplation category at the 2008 World Architecture Festival in Barcelona, Spain, the Dornbusch Church near Frankfurt, Germany by Meixner Schlüter Wendt Architekten blends a partially demolished 1940s church with newly designed structures. The result is a smaller sanctuary housed in the preserved section of the original church with a new tower, churchyard, and community center. In their design for the new additions, the architects recalled features of the earlier edifice. The new exterior wall for example, evokes the original altar, entrance façade, and gallery and the new churchyard features outlines that indicate the location of the original church’s furnishings and plan.

St. Colman’s Society for Catholic Liturgy will hold its 2009 International Liturgical Conference from July 12–13, 2009 on Fota Island in County Cork, Ireland. Entitled Benedict XVI on Beauty: Issues in the Tradition of Christian Aesthetics, the conference will feature talks by scholars from around the world and a keynote address by George Cardinal Pell, Archbishop of Sydney.

On April 15, 2009, Dr. Thomas Dillon, President of Thomas Aquinas College in Santa Paula, California, died in a car accident while traveling in Ireland. He was 62 years old. Dr. Dillon joined the faculty of the college in 1972 and had served as its president since 1991. Considered a leader in Catholic higher education for his advocacy of the Catholic liberal arts tradition and commitment to the school’s Great Books curriculum, Dr. Dillon’s term as president was a era of significant growth for Thomas Aquinas College. Under his leadership, the student body reached its maximum size and a number of ambitious building campaigns brought most of the campus’ master plan to fruition, enabling the College to transition from temporary to permanent facilities. Dr. Dillon considered the Chapel of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity as the head and crown-jewel of the 131-acre campus. Poignantly, this apex of Dillon’s career as a patron and builder was dedicated on March 7, 2009, only a month before he died. Friends and colleagues recounted how he spent countless hours on the project. He travelled to raise funds and to personally study local and international precedents for its design, including the California Missions and the masterworks of Europe, and he attended to the smallest details during its construction.

The Diocease of London, ON, is putting three of its surplus churches up for sale for as little as $1 each. The diocese recently concluded that it could no longer maintain the structures and has offered the churches to local municipal governments and non-profits. Finding buyers will be challenging though, due to repair costs estimated in the millions and the number of other vacant buildings already present in the surrounding communities.
The Institute for Christ the King Sovereign Priest is in the midst of completing a major renovation of a 1920s neo-Renaissance Chicago church designed by Henry J. Schlacks. Established as the Shrine of Christ the King Sovereign Priest on June 23, 2006, by Francis Cardinal George, archbishop of Chicago, the institute has already completed the first phase of the project: the preservation and repair of the exterior, including replacing the roof, tuck-pointing, surface cleaning, and refurbishing the church’s tower. Two phases remain to complete the entire renovation of the shrine. One involves upgrading and installing new mechanical systems, and the final phase will be bringing the plans by architect William Heyer for an early Roman baroque interior to fruition. The focal point of the restored church will be a high altar housing a seventeenth-century Spanish statue of the Divine Infant King. The interior will also feature several altars and shrines: one dedicated to the patrons of the institute, Saints Benedict, Francis de Sales, and Thomas Aquinas; another to the historic patrons of the parish, Saints Clare and Gelasius; one to Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, as the church once served as her national shrine. In addition, the transept and chancel will house altars to Mary, the Immaculate Conception, and Saint Joseph along with life-sized paintings of the Nativity and Crucifixion. The Institute estimates the complete preservation and renovation project will cost over $7.3 million.

Completed in June 2008, Mar Thoma Sleeha Cathedral is the seat for the Saint Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Diocese of Chicago, the first Diocese for the Indian Catholic Rite outside India. Established by Pope John Paul II in 2001, the diocese serves more than 100,000 followers in North America and the cathedral parish is comprised of more than 800 families living in the Chicago area. The 42,600-square-foot Cathedral designed by Jaeger, Nickola & Associates, Ltd. features a 1,200-seat octagonal worship space, a sanctuary with a baldachino housing the tabernacle, a daily chapel, and a Eucharistic chapel. The cathedral’s exterior dome draws on Indian architectural traditions while the façade is inspired by baroque designs, especially the two-storey entrance portico, which is adorned with carved symbols of the Catholic faith and includes a statue of “Jesus, the Good Shepherd” in its central vaulted niche.

A researcher recently discovered that the gold paint used in medieval stained glass not only added beauty to sacred buildings, but also purified the air. According to Zhu Huai Yong, an associate professor at Queensland University of Technology in Australia, the gold particles in the paint react with the heat of the sunlight and creates an electromagnetic field that breaks apart air-borne pollutants, like volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Only small amounts of carbon dioxide have been detected as a by-product of this process.

In September 2008, Pope Benedict XVI dedicated the new altar in the Cathedral of Albano, Italy. In his homily, the Holy Father reflected on the altar’s significance saying: “But how much greater, dear brothers and sisters, must our joy be, knowing that every day on this altar, which we are preparing to consecrate, the sacrifice of Christ is offered; on this altar he will continue to immolate himself, in the sacrament of the Eucharist, for our salvation and that of the whole world. In the Eucharistic mystery, that is renewed on every altar, Jesus is really present.” Quoting the First Letter of Saint Peter, His Holiness stated, “Christ’s real presence makes each of us his ‘house,’ and we all together form his Church, the spiritual edifice of which Saint Peter speaks. ‘Come to him,’ the apostle writes, ‘a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.’” The pope then drew on Saint Augustine’s observation, “that through faith men are like wood and stone gathered from forests and mountains for building; through baptism, catechesis, and preaching they are cut, squared, and filed down; but they only become the Lord’s house when they are ordered by charity.”
At the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico work is underway on the construction of Plaza Mariana, a nearly 318,000-square-foot (29,534 square meters) extension of the Plaza of the Americas in order to provide more space for pilgrims. Designed by architect Javier Sordo Madaleno of Mexico City, the Plaza Mariana incorporates several additions to one of the most important shrines in the Americas. These additions include: the Center for Evangelization to aide in the proclamation and spreading of the faith by providing classrooms and a thousand-seat auditorium for educational presentations; a museum to inform visitors about the story of Guadalupe and its history through interactive exhibits; a columbarium with 100,000 niches; a marketplace; and a large green space. The Center for Evangelization is the only major architectural feature of the new plaza and is centered on the Chapel of the Rose, a monumental sculptural work incorporating symbols that represent both Blessed Mother and her Son, and the Guadalupe miracle of the image of the Virgin appearing on San Juan Diego’s cloak.

In addition to its devastating human toll, the April 6, 2009, earthquake in the Abruzzi region of Italy severely damaged several of the area’s major architectural treasures. In and around the town of L’Aquila, the disaster’s epicenter, officials from Italy’s culture ministry have begun to document the effects of the earthquake on area landmarks, including the cathedral, the baroque Church of the Anime Sante, the Renaissance-era San Bernardino, and the thirteenth-century Basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio, widely considered the finest artistic work of the city and region.

On the Feast of All Saints, 2008, San Albino in Mesilla, NM, was formally dedicated as the newest minor basilica in the United States. While the current structure dates to 1906, the parish began as a mission in 1851. The designation, received from the Vatican in late June, recognizes the church’s history, support of local culture and religion, and education efforts. The Basilica of San Albino is the second church so honored in New Mexico and the sixty-second minor basilica in the nation.

The Chapel of the Immaculate Conception at Seton Hall University in New Jersey reopened in early November after completing an extensive two-year renovation. Exterior work focused on repairing the brownstone masonry, installing a new slate roof, copper flashing and gutters along with the restoration of the early twentieth-century stained-glass windows. To complement and enhance the English Gothic character of the 1863 chapel’s interior, Granda Liturgical Arts of Madrid designed and installed new liturgical furnishings, including a carved wood reredos to house the tabernacle, a marble altar and ambo, carved wood shrines to Mary and Joseph, plus the rehabilitation of the decorative woodwork found throughout the chapel. EverGreene Architectural Arts of New York restored the chapel’s murals and painted ceiling.

Saint Brigid’s Church in New York City received an anonymous gift of $20 million in May 2008, saving it from demolition. Built by Irish immigrants, the 1849 Gothic Revival structure closed in 2001 due to structural problems. Once it is restored the parish hopes to reopen the church for regular services.

The Sisters of Saint Benedict in Saint Paul, MN, moved into a new fifty-thousand-square-foot monastery designed by Pope Associates of Saint Paul on February 10, 2009, the Feast of Saint Scholastica. The sisters built the new St. Paul’s Monastery on the property that has been their home for over three decades in order to better suit the community’s current and future needs. The monastery complex includes housing for thirty-five sisters, a retreat center with accommodations for sixteen guests, a chapel, community room, bell tower, dining area, health center, and administrative offices.

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The new Gothic reredos and tabernacle in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception at Seton Hall University.

The Basilica of San Albino in Mesilla, New Mexico is the U.S.’s newest minor basilica.
An Orthodox parish in the New Urbanist community of I’On near Charleston, SC, consecrated a new church on May 24, 2008. The design of Holy Ascension Orthodox Church blends Byzantine customs, such as its two onion domes, and traditional low-country building materials like heartpine floors. The 3,500 square foot facility cost $1.2 million to build, but the interior iconographic painting remains unfinished and may take several years to complete.

On the morning of February 4, 2009, a fire broke out in the attic of Chicago’s Holy Name Cathedral. It took firefighters over two hours to extinguish the blaze; declaring it out by 8:00 a.m. Although the fire affected only a portion of the building, the damage caused the cathedral to close its doors for the second time in a year. The church had just reopened in August 2008 following a six-month closure for structural repairs. Designed by Patrick Charles Keely of Brooklyn, NY, the cornerstone of Holy Name Cathedral was laid in 1874.

With more than five thousand houses of worship built in the United States annually, the construction, repair, and maintenance of religious buildings contributes $40 billion to the nation’s economy. As of mid-2008 the economic downturn was having mixed effects on this sector of the construction industry. Due to the economic climate reducing work in other types of construction, builders are eager to secure work and willing to negotiate lower rates, thus reducing construction costs for congregations that have cash on hand and are ready to build. However, the downturn makes it difficult to raise funds for future capital projects, as congregants cut back on donations in order to cope with increased costs of living or decreased income.

Thomas More College in Merrimack, NH, recently launched a new program to foster the next generation of Catholic artists and patrons. Led by the college’s first artist in residence, David Clayton, the Way of Beauty Art Program combines instruction in “practical art skills, the talent to apprehend beauty, and the ability to open up to inspiration from God.” Clayton comes to the college from Great Britain, where he worked as an iconographer and naturalist artist. In addition to teaching, he will mentor students and artists one-on-one in the College’s newly established art studio. Thomas More College hopes that the Way of Beauty Art Program will not only be a catalyst for the renewal of culture and sacred art, but also draw aspiring artists to its four-year undergraduate program in the Catholic liberal arts.

In September 2009, the new Chapel of Christ the Teacher at the College of Saint Thomas More in Fort Worth, TX will be dedicated by Bishop Kevin Vann. The chapel was designed by Joe Self of Firm 817 in Fort Worth, with College Chancellor Dr. James Patrick consulting on the design. The interior includes a rood beam with a crucifix from post-Revolution Mexico. The chapel will regularly seat 120 people and be able to accommodate up to 200 on important occasions.

The Cedars Worship Center in Waterloo, ON, houses the congregation of Westminster United Church and the Temple Shalom synagogue. Designed by Charles Simon and completed in the summer of 1996, the $1.4 million complex is the only one of its kind in North America and features a double-ended sanctuary to provide each community with its own distinct space. Each sanctuary is crowned with a skylight that provides natural light for the appropriate service: evening light for the synagogue’s Friday services and morning sun for the United Church’s services on Sundays.

Photo: The United Church Observer

The Cedars in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada houses a United Church congregation and the synagogue of Temple Shalom.

Photo: The United Church Observer

Baptism of Christ, by artist Henry Wingate, from a series of scenes from the life of Saint John the Baptist. The four eight-by-four-foot paintings will be installed in the sanctuary of Saint John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church in Front Royal, VA, which was dedicated in 1998.
The Lonely God

OAKLAND'S CATHEDRAL OF CHRIST THE LIGHT

Matthew Alderman

We live in an age of cathedral building. Whether it be “starchitect” bunkers like Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles or simpler liturgical refits from Sydney to Sacramento, the last decade has seen a surprising upsurge in high-profile ecclesiastical projects. The newest example was completed only last September, but it had started winning awards before construction ever began.1 This airy glass-and-concrete truncated cone, set in a handsome lakeside location, is the Cathedral of Christ the Light, the new seat of the bishop of Oakland. The building cost $190 million.2

The press’s reception has been a warm one, describing the finished structure as “ethereal,” “awe-inspiring,” and “a quiet retreat.”3 Many see it as a symbol of unity in an ethnically diverse diocese. Designed by architect Craig Hartman, a San Francisco–based member of the venerable modernist firm of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, the cathedral’s long list of inspirations includes both the stark contemporary work of artist Richard Serra and the delicate Gothic of Paris’s Sainte-Chapelle.4 Mr. Hartman, who is not a Catholic, has nonetheless called his participation in the project a humbling and deeply enriching experience for his spiritual life.

While much of the media coverage has praised the design as both contemporary and elegant, others, such as project patron Bishop Allen H. Vigneron, have stressed its traditional side, describing the design in luminously orthodox terms. It will be a Christological beacon on the city skyline, the bishop has said, an “icon of icons,” “an icon for icons,” rich with liturgical symbolism.5 Bishop Vigneron has long been deeply concerned with the reverent, rubrical celebration of the Church’s rites, often in the face of considerable opposition, and is widely known for his doctrinal orthodoxy and pastoral abilities. As this article was being written, he was named to succeed Adam Cardinal Cupich in the archbishopric of Detroit.

In spite of being a confirmed classicist, I was intrigued. Through the centuries, a multiplicity of styles have embellished the worship of the Church, while at the same time retaining a strong sense of liturgical and cultural continuity. Adapting modernist architecture, with its secular origins and conscious rejection of historic precedent, has proven more elusive. Many modernist ecclesiastical monuments, such as the metropolitan cathedrals of Liverpool and Brasilia, have relied on novel systems of liturgical organization and alien theological speculation, suggesting a philosophical divide running deeper than mere stylistic differences. Others, such as Perret’s Notre Dame du Raincy, applied modernist streamlining to a traditional plan, resulting in structures, that, while not uninteresting, may invite awkward comparisons with both their ancient predecessors and contemporary rivals. Yet here was a new synthesis that might preserve the best of the past without neglecting the present and future. Had contemporary Christendom put on a white garment of churches or a beige chasuble? Is it possible to produce a truly successful modernist church?

Set against the downtown backdrop, the plain glass walls of the cathedral appear indistinguishable from the monoculture of office towers that surround them. The interior, famously flooded with light, is dominated by a prominent altar, a central tabernacle, and a gigantic Gothic (or perhaps “Gothico-futuristic”) Christ Pantocrator. Celebratory books and prayer pamphlets, issued in advance of the dedication, gave witness to the rich spiritual meaning encoded in its geometry, the potent significance of its severe cathedral, altar, and font. A recent visitor, oblivious to the church’s iconography, came away with a different message. She thought the cathedral was about “being one, past religions, past race, […] just all about one humanity.”6

Herein lies the root of the problem: Though efforts toward multicultural and community unity may be laudable, a church cannot risk appearing to transcend a sense of its own religion for the sake of a superficially broader perspective. Even inadvertently.

Beginnings: The Old Cathedral, the Earthquake, and the Beatles

Formed in 1962, the Diocese of Oakland adopted the parish church of Saint Francis de Sales as its cathedral rather than opting for a new structure.
 Shortly thereafter, the new cathedral’s guidebook recalls, a forward-facing altar was installed, while “devotional elements [were] minimized to focus on the eucharistic liturgy.” A popular center for progressive liturgical tinkering—including the playing of Beatles music at Mass—the pro-cathedral continued in use until the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. It was razed in 1993. In late 1999, Bishop John S. Cummins, who had presided over the diocese since the late seventies, began gathering a consensus for a new cathedral as “a sign of unity among peoples.” The name Christ the Light, from Vatican II’s Lumen Gentium, “The Light of Nations,” was intended as a further nod to the community’s multiculturalism. Any more specific saint or Marian title might have risked the appearance of ethnic exceptionalism.

Much of the initial planning occurred during Bishop Cummins’s tenure, but ground was not broken until 2005 under Bishop Vigneron, who had succeeded the late Bishop Cummins more than a year earlier. From the beginning, the project was intended to be contemporary in style. (For contemporary in this instance, read, modernist.) A shortlist of three prominent architects—Hartman, Santiago Calatrava, and Ricardo Legorreta—had been invited to participate in a complex vetting process that had included the submission of their own schematic designs for the cathedral. The winner had been Santiago Calatrava. Mr. Hartman, the architect of San Francisco airport’s new international terminal, was later selected to replace Calatrava early during Bishop Vigneron’s tenure.

Mr. Hartman’s completed design was not substantially altered from his competition proposal. However, Bishop Vigneron’s dialogue with Mr. Hartman led to the adoption of a number of liturgically traditional elements, including the addition of a figural image of Christ behind the altar and an interior layout that was less centralized and more processionable than originally proposed.

Hearing Bishop Vigneron so rigorously emphasize the design’s scrupulous liturgical planning and considering Mr. Hartman’s enthusiasm for the end result gave rise to a glimmer of hope that modernism, with a firm resolution of amendment, might finally have been Christianized. Despite expectations of a dazzling, light-filled bit of architectural fusion cuisine, ever ancient and ever new, further study of the finished product extinguished that glimmer. Though designed with considerable verve and elegance, the church nonetheless disappoints.

A Walk Through the Cathedral

The cathedral is seated on a vast plaza, inspired by the church squares of Catholic Europe and Latin America, and potentially the location for similar traditional devotions. Bishop Vigneron sees it as “the site for an annual Diocesan Corpus Christi procession on the Plaza.” If not quite able to separate itself from its glassy surroundings, the church’s exterior is public in scale, with a certain degree of verticality, balance, and hierarchy. The front door, atop a monumental flight of steps, is mercifully easy to find. Still, it presents few clues to its identity beyond fragmentary abstractions: an anemic, diagrammatic cross, and the pseudo-Gothic pointed arch dominating the front. The bare, stained concrete base, the so-called “relic wall,” appears curiously unfinished.

The church’s tapering silhouette is a distinctive one. The walls slant upwards on curved foundations, abruptly truncating at the top in a row of spare upright spires—or perhaps spikes is the better word. The architect calls them “architectural exclamation points.” There is little to give a sense of scale, or, in spite of the “exclamation points,” any other transitional details to relieve the eye as it moves over the structure’s vast smooth flanks.

Continuing through a shallow narthex, the visitor moves into the bulging interior of the nave. Overhead, beneath the canted glass walls, a second wooden vault of curvilinear gluelaminated Douglas fir rafters and purlins runs from a low concrete dado up to an almond-shaped oculus dominating the ceiling. There is no real ornament, ostensibly to emphasize through the materials themselves a prymordial connection to the elements. To a traditionalist’s eye, the view is not so much primal as mass-produced: dull stone flooring, an enormous latticework of yellowish wood overhead, red oak pews below, some glass, and a touch of concrete around the edges. Even Rafael Moneo’s Los Angeles Cathedral melded modernist design with cool stone and alabaster windows.

Blonde Wood and Concrete in the Belly of the Fish

Architect Hartman’s work is predicated on his concern that traditional churches, with their great masses of ornamentation, merely get in the way of their own message. He hopes in the new cathedral congregants will come of their own message. He hopes in the new cathedral congregants will come
loaves and fish, the Pacific Ocean, and the Eucharist. Like the vesica itself, the interior tends toward the tastefully geometric—a circle of eternity here, a cross there, generic enough to do duty for both Eastern and Western cultures—but none are articulate enough to be specific to any culture. Unless they are carefully pointed out, they remain as obscure as the esoteric medieval encrustations so worrisome to Mr. Hartman. The few places where a more orthodox figural approach is taken seem a late addition, disconnected from the rest of the structure. The most obvious instance is the hulking, ectoplasmic Pantocrator pixilated into what has been termed the “Omega window” looming behind the altar. The gigantic image is fifty-eight feet high.

An impressively stark object, the baptismal font is placed at the west end of the nave, in the fashion currently popular. There is a case to be made for separate baptisteries, especially in cathedrals. That said, the location is not unprecedented, and is suitably processional. A single inscription from Genesis, telling of the Spirit moving on the waters, is set into the floor. This creation theme is not misplaced, for it relates to the abstract, creation-themed “Alpha window” over the narthex, yet it feels incomplete, missing the redemptive drama of the sacrament. The visitor is confronted with the deep reality of water, but there is very little to show the still deeper transformation this element has undergone through Christ’s sacrifice. There is nothing to hold the pilgrim, save the uncommunicative fact of the font’s existence.

The vast sweep of the nave is marked by a sense of processional movement and liturgical orientation. The Pantocrator’s “Omega window” and its abstract “Alpha” equivalent on the entry façade neatly terminate the ends of the inner wood vault. The line of the twelve-foot-high concrete “relic wall” lowers the horizon somewhat and creates a sense, not of striving upward, but of too much ceiling.

Throughout the nave, Mr. Hartman’s emphasis on light is evident. Here, the light itself becomes the symbolic ornamentation of the interior, at first glance an elegant notion. An official biography refers to a “life-altering” encounter Mr. Hartman had with Paris’s Sainte-Chapelle.13 Unfortunately, the vaguely shadowed light strained through the slats is a far cry from Sainte-Chapelle. Mr. Hartman quotes Louis Kahn in relation to the cathedral—“we are born of light … we only know the world as sacramental theology.15

The Naked Sanctuary

The sanctuary consists of a raised platform at the far end of the church. Its design, and that of the other liturgical implements in the cathedral, was overseen by the project’s liturgical planner and designer, Brother William Woeger, FSC. The altar is set atop a high-stepped circular predella enclosed by a lower curving platform with the ambo and cathedra. Four six-foot-high candlestands are at the corners of the altar. Its placement terminates the processional, directional hierarchy of the nave, an improvement over earlier, more strictly centralized designs.

The height and prominence of the altar steps is particularly successful, in contrast to most contemporary plans, where the altar usually sits at the floor level of the chancel. The lofty candlesticks also create a certain upward movement, if somewhat diffused. But the altar’s directional primacy is undercut by the choir seating and pews that almost completely encircle it. The altar appears nearly fully in the round and has no true overarching architectural element to celebrate or anchor it. These wooden furnishings merge visually with the low blonde wood screen that divides the sanctuary from the Eucharistic chapel placed at its back. The effect is somewhat amorphous. By way of contrast, the chancel and sanctuary of a traditional church are expressed as a specific, enclosed volume within the interior, much like the Holy of Holies within the Temple of Jerusalem. As a practical matter, the cathedral’s openness also increases the twists and turns that acolytes must take back and forth to the sacristy in the midst of a solemn mass. Such flustered coming and going in and out of the sacred precinct of the sanctuary turns liturgy from a holy tableau into a busy theater-in-the-round.

The chancel furnishings are all that it is evoked by light”—a pronouncement suggestive not of Christianity but a more nebulous modern spirituality. The light is beautiful, yet, without concrete figural symbolism to render it theologically articulate, it appears unlinked to Christ except in a vague, subjective manner.

Mr. Hartman has mentioned his debt to the mid-twentieth-century architect and theoretician Rudolf Schwarz, specifically the soi-disant “New Iconography” proposed in his Vom Bau der Kirche. The book was suggested to Mr. Hartman and his team by retired Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill partner Walter Netsch, the architect of the Air Force Academy chapel, another of Mr. Hartman’s influences. The parti of the interior, with its open nave, ring of seating, and quasi-centralized sanctuary, is strongly reminiscent of Schwarz’s schemas, even in spite of later, more orthodox edits. Although ostensibly derived from a suitably ancient source—Christ’s life itself—the “New Iconography” is an idiosyncratic, highly personal iconography self-consciously divorced from liturgy and


14 Mr. Hartman quotes Rudolf Schwarz in the introduction to his 1979 book, New Iconography.14

15 General Instruction of the Church, 1960.
Sacred Architecture

Roman Missal might demand, and no more. Present are a large, somewhat stubby stone altar, a discreet bishop’s throne inset into a small *synthronon*, or priests’ bench, a crucifix, and a large round ambo. Each of these elements only vaguely resembles its traditional antecedents. The ambo, the name of which is taken from the Greek word for “high place,” is a low, tub-like stone object with barely enough room for one reader, much less two candle-bearing acolytes and a thurifer. The large freestanding crucifix, placed off center above the ambo, is misplaced, its location here inspired by the preaching crosses seen so often behind baroque pulpits. The modern altar-cross mentioned in the General Instruction, while permitted to be placed elsewhere, is the direct descendant of the small crosses placed upon the altar for priestly devotion. A pulpit cross is of secondary importance and does not have the same effect as a cross on the altar, an arrangement that Benedict XVI has advocated.16

The cathedral’s liturgical planning is not without its meritorious aspects. There is a Eucharistic chapel, as is customary in cathedrals, separate from the sanctuary. The tabernacle is located on axis with the altar and, inset into the screen enclosing the rear of the sanctuary, is clearly visible from the nave. It may be approached from either side. In North America, where many cathedrals are effectively oversized parish churches, placing the tabernacle in the sanctuary has become the “traditional” norm, even if a separate Eucharistic chapel has been historically preferred for cathedrals. Cathedrals often become working models for local parishes, making tabernacle placement a ticklish issue. This arrangement preserves the traditional independence of a cathedral’s reservation chapel without relegating the Eucharist to some obscure annex.17

Christ, Alone on the JumboTron

Regrettably, the whole of the sanctuary—and the whole interior with it—is dwarfed by the “Omega window,” a vast expanse of translucent paneling jutting prow-like into the interior. It looks uncomfortably televisual. Neither the “Alpha window” nor the “Omega window” were meant to carry figural imagery. Bishop Vigneron nonetheless wanted a great icon of Christ over the altar to serve as the church’s liturgical nexus, a laudable addition in the abstract. It was decided to copy an image of Christ in judgment from the west portal of Chartres. This ancient sculpture would be made suitably contemporary by rendering it in a highly experimental medium. The Pantocrator is a pixilated mosaic of light strained through the 94,000 perforations of a vast expanse of aluminum panels. While a fascinating exercise in digital pyrotechnics, the result is a bit sterile.18

This icon of Christ, so intimately contextualized in the hieratic symbolism of the Last Judgment, is blown completely out of proportion, looking like a ghostly overscaled projection caught on a JumboTron. The hinge-like angle of the “Omega window” gives the figure an alarming bulge when approached from off-center. At the same time, the immense size of the image miniaturizes everything beneath it. By comparison, the tabernacle is a tiny gold spangle, the altar almost crushed. A baldachin, even one in a matching contemporary style, might have moderated this effect by creating a frame for the exposed altar and tabernacle.

The image of Christ is also, like much else in the interior, decontextualized and reduced to the most basic of components—a blessing hand, a book, a halo, a dominating mounre under His odd medieval mustache. Gone are the sheep and goats, the ministering angels, the *ite, maledicti, in ignem aeternum* that made such a statue at Chartres intelligible, a living presence within its time and place. In the Temple, before the Lord had a human face, Yahweh had His tasseled curtains, ministering cherubim, and palmettes. Here, Christ is a lonely postmodern fragment: Christ on display rather than *Christus regnat*. At first glance this might prove the architect’s concern about artistic distractions from the liturgy, yet the solution is not less, but more. Christ must be ensconced in the liturgical-symbolic exegesis that is the Church’s great artistic heritage. Without it, He is a lonely God indeed.

The few figural sculptures scattered around the remainder of the nave feel just as disconnected. Most are tucked away in little devotional pigeonholes along the raw concrete relic walls. All the humanizing niceties of Catholic piety are discreetly hidden away here—the flickering votive candles, the ethnic patrons, the antique art. There are some real treasures here—richly polychromed Mexican neo-baroque wood sculptures, an eighteenth-century Peruvian *Christ in the Temple*, and other surprises. There is even some old-fashioned stained glass in the mausoleum-lined crypt, probably the most appealing part of the church. These sequestered chapels, with their bare plaster walls, might come across as a museum of outdated religious practices to the undiscerning visitor, but as the years stretch on, the “circle of devotion,” as it is being called, may end up being the liveliest part of the cathedral.19

Empty Vessels

Can a truly successful modernist church be built? The first part of the twentieth century saw some intriguing experiments in early and high ecclesial modernism, though the best were so heavily classicized with austere half-Byzantine mosaics and rich marbles that they might merely be taken for an exoticly austere variety of Cistercian Romanesque. Most adhered to the orthodox basilican plan of the time and forsook modernist ideals of space planning, until the advent of the centralized sanctuary and the subsequent cultural crisis that consumed the late Liturgical Movement and much of the mainstream Church.

At Oakland, there are some points worth applauding. The eminent desire to secure the services of a top-notch, high-profile, locally minded architect...
in an age of penny-pinching ecclesiastics is heartening, although a traditionalist may respectfully disagree with the outlook of the successful candidate. Bishop Vigneron’s guidance has led to a far more liturgically orthodox interior, for all its flaws, than many other churches being built today, including Los Angeles’s Our Lady of the Angels. Coming into a project in progress, he may have done all that was possible to recast the interior.

The basic lineaments of the design are, if unconventional, not without elegance and wit. Further symbolic ornamentation and articulation, as well as richer and more colorful materials, could have transformed the exterior from a glass tower among glass towers to a dream of Victor Horta, the nacre into a polychrome Gaudi fantasy on the hull of the barque of Peter.

Mr. Hartman and his patrons have stressed their desire that the building they erected authentically reflect their time and place. A good architect, modernist or classicist, cannot confine himself to his own era. He must look into past and future at once. Mr. Hartman admits as much when he lists his own heterogeneous influences: the primal feel of the earth, the Midwestern sixties of his boyhood, scientific progress, the sea, the simple wood of farm outbuildings, Gothic, Richard Serra, Rudolf Schwarz. But even this is not enough to ensure a unified result. Although the architect worked carefully with the bishop, liturgical designer Brother William, and the various committees to create a seamless whole, the finished design turns their divergent interests into a running debate about the value of Christian symbolism.

The celebrated unity of the cathedral is achieved at the expense of real diversity. Compared to the largely Euro-American roots of Skidmore, Owing, and Merrill’s modernism, California’s indigenous family of Spanish revival styles is a veritable international rainbow—an organic and very Catholic mixture of Latin, Native American, Italianate, and Moorish, with, if we stretch our minds a bit, a touch of China by way of the Manila galleon. If that is not enough, why not toss a few more lumps into the melting pot and see what happens? Next to all this local and cosmopolitan color, the cathedral seems a grey void, sterilized of all except the lowest cultural common denominators, with everything agreeably bright, cheery, and ethnic hidden safely away in a side chapel. This strategy of multicultural compromise has not worked: parishioners are currently arguing about whether or not they can sing the Our Father in Tagalog at Mass.

If she is to present a truly counter-cultural witness, the Church must proudly display her own traditional culture in all its vibrant local variations as an alternative to the artificial and homogenous productions of contemporary civilization. Mere colorless light is not enough. We need pictures. The opulent blood-reds and cobalt blues of stained glass traditionally transformed light into a riot of saintly and Biblical typologies. Literacy has not supplanted the human need for story, image, and symbol, touchstones far more primordial than postmodern allusions to stone and wood. Without real allusions to doctrine, to sacred history, and the inner life of God, we will have very little on which to meditate under this unredeemed light. It may speak to the modern need for a Zen-like release from the workaday world, yet Christian mysticism desires self-emptying, not as an exercise in aromatherapy, but in order that God might fill up our empty vessels with Himself.

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2. It is claimed to be the most expensive cathedral in U.S. history. See Rebecca Rosen, “Most Costly U.S. Cathedral Rises to Oakland Skyline,” Oakland Tribune, June 4, 2007.
4. Most of the information about Mr. Hartman and his design process comes from a telephone interview the author conducted with the architect on September 23, 2008. Other helpful background came from another phone interview with traditional church architect and author Steven Schloeder on September 25, 2008.
8. Ibid., pp. 18–20, and Kuruvilla, “New Oakland Cathedral.”
10. One useful resource for allowing this desk-bound reviewer to experience the cathedral up close were the photographs taken and articles published by the California-based Dominie Forte at his weblog http://paronomasialpersues.blogspot.com/.
13. Durkin, The Cathedral of Christ the Light, p. 9. He had another while visiting Le Corbusier’s Ronchamp, perhaps underlining the architect’s varied influences.
17. The separate Eucharistic chapel in cathedrals is, historically speaking, related to the rubrics of a pontifical mass in the Extraordinary Form and other choral functions. (See J.B. O’Connell, Church Building and Furnishing: The Church’s Way [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1955], p. 173.)
As in the period that followed the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the Catholic Church has redefined herself following the Second Vatican Council. In both the sixteenth and twentieth centuries changes in church architecture accompanied reforms to the liturgy, and today we are still trying to come to terms with attempts to redefine our sacred space. One way to evaluate contemporary churches is to understand the model that so many of them react against, which had been developed after Trent. However historians still debate the significance of that historical architecture; indeed, they disagree about its very qualities. Some clarity may result from examining the buildings commissioned by Carlo Borromeo (1538–1584), the reforming archbishop of Milan. In addition to his colleges, seminaries, and clerical residences, he commissioned the new construction or renovation of hundreds of churches throughout his vast archdiocese. Borromeo defined sacred space for the Catholic Church by developing a model that he realized in built form and by communicating that model in written norms for churches and their furnishings. Many of his norms resulted from practical considerations, but Borromeo understood that architecture could contribute to worship. Surprisingly, the architecture of his churches ran the gamut from simple and functional to elaborate designs executed in the finest materials. This article will examine Borromeo’s thoughts on architecture to the extent that we can know them from his intellectual formation, his commissions, and his writings.

Borromeo was very much a child of the late Italian Renaissance. He was born into a cultural context in which the arts took inspiration from the achievements of ancient Rome, and patronage was a responsibility of the nobility. The comprehensive revival of ancient Roman art and learning in the fifteenth and earlier sixteenth centuries led architects to design “all’antica” architecture, or to utilize the classical principles and forms of republican and imperial Rome. Architecture looked different because of this cultural transformation, and it also meant something different: it became a vehicle for expressing the nature of the human condition. For religious buildings, the typologies, forms, and motifs of the ancient architecture could form Christian churches that communicated something about humanity’s relationship with God and the structure of His Church.

With the exception of a few outstanding yet unfinished medieval buildings, it was a foregone conclusion that important buildings would have designs inspired by antiquity. However, there were differing modes of that architectural language that were current in Borromeo’s day. For example, many of the villas of Andrea Palladio (1508–1580) were rather simple yet well proportioned, and they respected the principles of all’antica architecture. The publication of Giacomo Vignola (1505–1573), Le Regole delle Cinque Ordini (1562), precisely defined proportions and form for each architectural order, and thereby fostered a strict approach to design. Michelangelo Buonarotti (1475–1564), on the other hand, creatively misused the orders in the attempt to create something new; today such designs are often termed manneristic. Although these modes elicited strong reactions from sixteenth-century architects, they were options for both designers and patrons.

Born into a noble Lombard family and raised in Milan, Borromeo learned to view architectural patronage as one of his responsibilities. Northwestern Italy had been devastated by wars in the early sixteenth century, but Milan began to rebuild under the peace afforded by Habsburg victory and rule. Although his family commissioned little during this period, Borromeo witnessed the architectural transformation of the city and the construction of several noteworthy monuments. Some of the most creative designs came from the drafting table of Galeazzo Alessi (1512–1572), an architect who had achieved fame designing sumptuous villas for the Genoese nobility. In Milan, buildings like the church of Ss. Paolo e Barnaba and the Palazzo Marino demonstrated his skills in innovative planning and mannerist design. Alessi introduced a different mode of all’antica architecture into Milan, and Borromeo surely took note.

Borromeo studied at the University of Pavia, and immediately after his graduation he was called to Rome by his uncle, the recently elected Pope Pius IV (reigned 1559–1565). Although young and relatively inexperienced, Borromeo received important offices, high honors and enormous income from the new pontiff. Too young to be consecrated bishop (indeed, he had not yet been ordained a priest), Borromeo was named the administrator of the Archdiocese of Milan. He also assumed a role in the secular government of the Papal States that approximates a modern secretary of state. Under Pius’s careful tutelage, Borromeo developed administrative capabilities and successfully handled tremendous amounts of work. He took on added responsibility as Pius reconvened the Council of Trent in 1561 and

Shown at prayer, Borromeo is surrounded by views of buildings for institutions that he either founded or supported.
of perception. They considered it to be the most spiritual of all the senses, suggesting that it informed the soul. For its part, the soul instinctively appreciated beauty. Admiring a beautiful object would lead to the contemplation of higher things: beauty was “a divine hook that entices a human being to draw him or her from earth to heaven, from the physical senses to intellectual ideas, from temporal existence to eternity.” The viewer would contemplate not physical but spiritual beauty, and then the source of all beauty.

Beauty could also lead one to virtuous action: “who, seeing the beauty of an angel on earth, would not follow him? Who would not decide to serve him, rather than be the leader of all humanity?” This was an effect not restricted to God’s Creation: “consider painting, sculpture, architecture, the movement of the stars and of the heavens, and of human beings; the world has such variety, and it is all judged by the eyes.” Architecture, then, was capable of affecting the soul, leading the viewer to contemplate the divine and conduct him- or herself in an appropriate manner. This explained that fundamental concept that inspired all Renaissance architecture, a belief in its rhetorical capacity, or its ability to move the viewer to engage in virtuous actions. In reality, little in the orations of the Noctes Vaticanae was entirely new; most of the ideas and themes originated in ancient Greek or Roman philosophy, and had been reiterated by Renaissance scholars and artists. Nevertheless, through the meetings of the symposium Borromeo became familiar with the ideas that provided the theoretical underpinnings of Renaissance architecture.

Perhaps more important than the theory was the example of the Pope’s patronage. Pius enthusiastically promoted building projects, continuing work on the most important papal commissions, overseeing the urban expansion of the city, embellishing existing buildings, and endowing Rome with some of its most beautiful structures. He was known for selecting from among different designs for a project and personally scaling scaffolding on construction sites, giving evidence of his passion for architecture. Pius engaged the most renowned designers of his day, enjoying the prestige of employing great architects and commissioning great buildings. However, different architects designed in differing modes of all’antica architecture, and the pope willingly allowed such variation. For Pius, patronage meant establishing a strong program, commissioning the work from a great architect, participating in the design process, and allowing the designer’s creativity to achieve a noteworthy building.

Pius set an important example for Borromeo, and not surprisingly the young prelate followed a similar pattern of patronage in one of his earliest endeavors. As the administrator and future archbishop of Milan, Borromeo was technically in charge of the ongoing construction and furnishing of the cathedral. Construction was effectively directed by a multi-tiered com-

Façade of SS. Paolo e Barnaba. The layers of wall plane, and contrasting amount of decoration on different levels, typify Mannerist qualities in Alessi’s architecture.

Among the earliest parts of the building, the intricate tracery is characteristic of the florid Gothic architecture of the Milan Cathedral.
mission of cathedral canons and building professionals known as the fabbrica. The archbishop was not involved in all decisions, but the fabbrica sought Borromeo’s direction for selecting an artist to produce painted doors for the organ cabinets. Borromeo responded: “I would prefer ... that the only considerations be for the usefulness and greater embellishment of the cathedral. In the selection of artists, you should not have any other criteria than their skill and capability.”

Like architecture, contemporary painting had a variety of emphases and genres: Emilian sweetness or Venetian light and color, naturalistic or manneristic. Borromeo did not favor any one particular mode, but rather—like Pius—he selected the best artist.

When Borromeo undertook his first large architectural commission, Pius actively participated in the process. Borromeo founded the Collegio Borromeo, a new educational institution affiliated with the University of Pavia, in October 1561. Property was purchased, the building was designed (and then enlarged), and construction was underway all by the spring of 1565 (fig. 4). Borromeo had never commissioned a large project before, and not surprisingly his uncle, patron, and mentor provided guidance. The documentation on the building demonstrates that Pope Pius approved the initial design and then called for the building’s enlargement.

Recent scholarship has also revealed that Pius selected Pellegrino Tibaldi (1527–1596) as the architect of the Collegio. The son of a Lombard mason, Tibaldi trained as a painter and then perfected his craft in the mannerist workshops of Rome. He admired Michelangelo greatly, imitating his design process and promoting himself as a follower of that master. He pursued a painting career but soon began to undertake architectural and engineering projects. He designed and oversaw the construction of the Collegio from 1563 until the year following Borromeo’s death, when he left Milan to execute a fresco cycle in the library of the Escorial, outside Madrid. The finishing touches on the building were put in place before the end of 1589, by another architect.

The pope might have considered a whole range of things when choosing the architect of his nephew’s building, but foremost among them must have been Tibaldi’s credentials and accomplishments. Pius commissioned work from Michelangelo, and he may have wanted the self-styled follower of even greater things. It seems unlikely that Pius would select an architect in order to promote any particular mode of all’antica architecture. Rather, Pius trusted Tibaldi to produce noteworthy designs that would attract attention in Milan and garner esteem for both Borromeo and the institution housed in the building.

The Collegio Borromeo was unprecedented in scale for a college building, and an outstanding example of mannerist design. Borromeo obviously valued Tibaldi’s capabilities; indeed, he continued to request work from him for the rest of his life. He appointed Tibaldi to be the capomastro of the fabbrica for Milan’s cathedral and gave him responsibility for a number of projects in numerous churches and other buildings in the Archdiocese of Milan, including the renovation of the archepiscopal palace and the design and construction of the cathedral’s canony.

Tibaldi became renowned as an architect of churches: he designed the church of S. Fedele (fig. 5) for the Jesuits, and for the civic government he designed S. Sebastiano, a votive church offered in thanksgiving for the end of the plague. Tibaldi operated in a variety of architectural modes that were all based upon ancient Roman architecture. Some of his designs were classical in their expression (albeit with a light, airy structure of the architectural orders) and some were more manneristic in their creative misuse of the details. Yet Borromeo did not employ Tibaldi to propagate mannerism; neither Pius’s example, Borromeo’s stated criteria, nor the variety of Tibaldi’s design modes allow us to believe that Borromeo tied his patronage to an architectural language. Rather, he sought to honor the group or institution housed in the building, or its purpose, with an appropriate richness of material and quality of design.

Borromeo was never a lax Catholic or a libertine. However, he held some typical Renaissance views about the noble status of the ecclesiastical hierarchy: he lived as a prince of the Church and used his wealth and status to promote his family. Unfortunate events in his own life, consideration of the reforms discussed at Trent, and the influence of truly holy men led Borromeo to re-
evaluate his life. He arrived at a new understanding of his vocation and sought ordination and consecration as archbishop of Milan in 1563. He dedicated himself to reforming the Church and hoped to enact changes through pastoral roles. But he had become indispensable to the pope and had to continue in his administrative posts in Rome. Only after Pius’s death could Borromeo return and had to continue in his administrative posts in Rome. Only after Pius’s death could Borromeo return and had to continue in his administrative posts in Rome. Only after Pius’s death could Borromeo return and had to continue in his administrative posts in Rome. Only after Pius’s death could Borromeo return and had to continue in his administrative posts in Rome. Only after Pius’s death could Borromeo return and had to continue in his administrative posts in Rome. Only after Pius’s death could Borromeo return and had to continue in his administrative posts in Rome. 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and his administrators wrote the book to communicate the new standard for sacred space. It codified what Borromeo had come to understand through observation and practical experience. It communicated specific, detailed requirements for the building itself, as well as for a number of features such as baptismal fonts, pulpits and confessionals. Borromeo devoted great attention to the setting of the Mass, down to the niche that held the cruets and basin. It should be in the wall to one side of the altar, and, when possible, it should be lined in marble or some other durable stone. It should be two “cubits” above the pavement, with a width of sixteen “ounces” and a height of twenty-four “ounces”. Furthermore it should be divided in two, transversely, by a shelf of marble or stone. The lower part will serve for disposing of the water used for washing the hands of the priest who celebrates the Mass. That part, therefore, should have a small drain through which the water can flow into a small cistern created below. The upper part will serve for placing the cruets and the basin during the Mass.

Borromeo carefully defined features or aspects of the church interior, such as the steps distinguishing the chancel or side chapel from the nave, the minimum space required to either side of an altar, the location of windows, etc.

Borromeo’s text demonstrates an obvious attention to practical concerns, but he invented little to nothing in his specific demands for spaces, configurations or furnishings. He knew the traditional options from personal experience or investigation. He evaluated them, perfected the form of some furnishings, insisted upon decent spatial settings for each liturgical function, and established a standard set of components. Borromeo’s particular contribution was in organizing those selected elements into a new standard, producing extremely detailed norms for churches and their furnishings, utilizing the printing press to disseminate his achievements, and insisting consistently upon their realization.

The text suggests that architectural unity was a concern. When there was to be a distinct building for the baptistery, Borromeo demanded a building “of noteworthy structure and in a style coherent with that of the church itself.” Similarly, the belfry should be in a form that “follows the criteria of the construction of the church and the characteristics of the surroundings.” In terms of architectural language, Borromeo made many of the typical assumptions of his day. He noted the need for the services of a competent architect on a number of architectural matters, and such an architect would—in sixteenth-century Italy—have certainly designed in one of the classical modes. In addition, Borromeo looked back to the first centuries of the faith, drawing upon the writings of the Fathers of the Early Church as well as the example of ancient basilicas. Although they lacked the structural complexity or spatial magnificence of great imperial buildings of the second or third centuries, the ancient churches did have porticoes and nave colonnades constructed with the architectural orders. Developing upon those architectural models presumed that the new churches would also be built in an all’antica language.

However, Borromeo’s explicit promotion of classical architecture was rather weak: “It is not prohibited, however, for the greater stability of the building (if architectural criteria suggest it), [to include] some structure with the Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, or some other order.” Indeed, Borromeo intentionally avoided discussion of many architectural issues: “We wanted to avoid any discussion of the multiple forms of construction of church buildings ... that ... are rarely used or that necessarily require the judgment and counsel of people [who are] highly competent in architectural knowledge.” He allowed architects to make many decisions. After noting that the Instructionum would only treat the design of furnishings necessary for celebrating the sacraments and their settings, he stated that “the other topics are wisely explained in an exhaustive and useful manner by architectural theorists.” It appears that Borromeo had read a few treatises, and was obviously well schooled in architectural matters. While certainly a child of the Renaissance, he did not make a program of uniting architectural language to his reforming endeavors.

Implementing such clear goals might appear to be a straightforward process, but two important examples demonstrate just how complex it actually was. The cathedral in Milan was still under construction throughout Borromeo’s life, with the piers and vaulting of the nave continuing to be built in the Gothic idiom defined by the preexisting work. However, Borromeo had Tibaldi completely redefine the choir in the cathedral’s apse. The result was a complex configuration of a crypt and new, elevated choir in which was located the altar and tabernacle, all enclosed by choir stalls, organ lofts and paired pulpits (fig. 8). The architectural language for these furnishings—as for most of the non-structural interior work—was Tibaldi’s mannerism, which seems odd when one considers Borromeo’s call for stylistic unity in the Instructionum. Whatever the architectural language of the church building, a different language was obviously permissible for the furnishings. Borromeo may have appreciated the ability of mannerism to gather the attention of the viewer, impress him or her, and thereby achieve the goals of church architecture.

Like the cathedral, Borromeo’s first commission from Tibaldi—the Collegio Borromeo—was also under construction throughout his episcopacy. In the early 1570s, as demanded by the progress of construction, Tibaldi devised a detailed design for the chapel that included four freestanding columns in the nave. That would have been a lavish display of ornament, as appropriate for the space’s purpose. However, the design was altered slightly, and the columns were not erected in the space (figs. 9 and 10). Neither patron nor architect recorded the reason for their omission, but the freestanding columns...
would have impeded the visibility of the altar, which was a crucial criterion for the patron. For Borromeo, practical concerns could sometimes trump architectural considerations.\(^3\)

The variety among the examples and apparent contradictions between the Instructionum and the built works may make it difficult to see any consistency in Borromeo’s endeavors. However, there were a few goals that took precedence over all others. Borromeo desired church buildings that (i) had an adequate volume and distribution of space to house the sacred functions, (ii) presented an adequate offering to God, and (iii) engaged the viewer and inspired him or her to devotion and fidelity. The idea that a beautiful building with lavish furnishings was an offering that was pleasing to God, or that such was required to adequately house the sacred rites, had a long tradition. The degree of enrichment, or perhaps the understanding of what was appropriately lavish, had been challenged in the past, most notably by the early Cistercians who preferred an unadorned yet wonderfully designed and proportioned interior. The basic concepts behind the traditional notion came under attack during the sixteenth century, and Catholic apologists had to defend the practice against the criticism of Protestant reformers. Catholics insisted upon the antiquity of the tradition,\(^3\) as did Borromeo in passing references in his Instructionum. Borromeo also inherently agreed that architecture could be an offering to God. In the introduction, addressed to the clergy and laity in his ecclesiastical province, Borromeo assured them that by following the example of ancient patrons of beautiful churches (and by applying his norms), “you ... will receive from the Lord, who is generous and attentive to good people, a most pleasing and eternal reward.”\(^3\) The beauty of a church would stand out in the context, drawing attention to itself and its purpose. Since architectural beauty could function as a “divine hook,” leading the viewer to contemplate higher things, then the architecture of a church, in particular, could have a rhetorical purpose. It could bring the viewer to recognize the significance of the sacred rites housed in the structure and inspire him or her to greater piety. Likewise, the standard form that one would have encountered upon entering one of Borromeo’s churches—the visually open, well-ordered interior that focused attention upon the tabernacle—became recognizable as sacred space. The viewer would have been encouraged to think and act accordingly, leaving behind his or her daily concerns, acting with reverence for the Real Presence housed in the tabernacle, and fulfilling religious duties.\(^3\)

The Renaissance, in general, pursued development by returning to authoritative sources, and many theologians and reformers sought to improve the Church by drawing inspiration from the earliest days of the Christian era. Yet for all the renewed interest in the ancient sources, the New Testament and the first century of the Christian era offered little in the way of architectural models for churches. However, the churches dating from the fourth and fifth centuries—most notably the Roman basilicas—were known and studied, and they could justify traditional practices. Borromeo was a precocious proponent of studying the Early Church for contemporary solutions; for example, he drew inspiration from the seating in ancient basilicas for the design of Milan cathedral’s choir as early as 1564.\(^3\) Not surprisingly, in his Instructionum he looked back nostalgically to the “ancient piety and religion of the faithful” that manifested itself in the construction of beautiful churches.\(^4\) Those venerable basilicas could inspire a longitudinal plan in contemporary churches, with an atrium or a portico.\(^4\) And since those ancient churches were built using the architectural orders, it seems inevitable that Borromeo’s churches would be as well. However, Borromeo did not make a program of joining the design of churches to an architectural language. This is not to say that he was unaware of the expressive potential of all’antica architecture. However, he sought to address a pressing need, prioritizing the religious goals without strictly defining the architectural language.\(^4\)

Borromeo’s text responded to contemporary needs, and was in many ways a product of his times. Nevertheless, the underlying principles are timeless and therefore may continue to direct architectural design today. Borromeo knew that the architecture of churches should fulfill a practical purpose, create recognizable sacred space, and inspire people to devotion and fidelity. These principles present a challenge to architects in the twenty-first century. An interior that not only houses acts of worship but also serves as a setting for the Divine requires some shared understanding about what is sacred and the way that architectural features can serve as a metaphor for holy things. During the last forty years, efforts to emphasize the communal aspects of the Eucharist have often been achieved at the expense of recognition for the Divine Presence in the consecrated host. Priests and building committees sometimes lost sight of what created the community of believers in the first place—a shared but personal experience of epiphany. Their architects avoided the traditional definition of sacred space and provided assembly halls instead. Far too often church design reflected a twentieth-century iconoclasm that left older generations yearning for what was lost and younger generations searching for the sacred.

The very idea that visual perception can inspire is complicated today because we are over stimulated visually from the television, the internet, and movies. This condition can mitigate the awe instilled by any perception of beautiful architecture and decoration. Specifically for architecture, the lack of a unified cultural context renders communicating by means of forms or motifs difficult. An architect cannot assume that a language will be understandable to all viewers, much less bear the intended meaning, and that makes it more difficult to “reach” a broad audience. Furthermore, many of the modern and postmodern architectural options of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries can impress, bedazzle, or pique the curiosity, but can they inspire? With nihilistically inspired juxtapositions of curves, angles, and
jagged edges, one wonders about the efficacy of many contemporary modes of design to create spaces for Catholic worship.

These are certainly challenging times, requiring both great patrons and great architects. We need informed patrons who will—as Borromeo did centuries ago—evaluate the options and establish recognizable models for sacred space that take into consideration the eternal truths of the faith and contemporary objectives. Yet Borromeo left many decisions up to the informed judgment of the architect. We need capable architects to give form to those models in a way that will inspire people. It is the architect, working with the clear program of the patron, who must respond to the current challenges and give form to sacred space.


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23. Placing the tabernacle on the main altar was the norm in the diocese of Verona due to the episcopal legislation of Gian Matteo Giberti (1495–1543), but it was not a universal practice in the early years of Borromeo’s life. Christian Jobst, “Liturgia e culto dell’Eucaristia nel programma spaziale della chiesa. I tabernacoli eucaristici e la trasformazione dei presbiteri negli scritti ecclesiastici dell’epoca intorno al Concilio di Trento,” in Lo spazio e il culto: relazioni edifici sacri e uso liturgico dal XV al XVI secolo, ed. Jörg Stanzer (Bregenz, 1996), 27–26.

24. The best example that I know is the basilica of Santa Prassede in Rome. A scaled-down version of the fourth-century Constantinian basilica of Saint Peter, the mosaics on the arches of the transept depict the Heavenly Jerusalem and worship of the Lamb as recounted in the Book of Revelation. They indicate the building’s purpose and the parallel between the celebration of the Mass in the church and worship in heaven.


29. Borromeo advocated employing an architect for determining the proportions, structure and construction of churches, their planimetric form, the form of ceilings and roofs, and much about the size, shape, and location of doors and windows. Borromeo, Instructiunem, 12–25.


CROWN JEWEL IN THE HILLS
SAIN T H U G O S T O N E C H A P E L , B L O O M F I E L D H I L L S , M I C H I G A N
William Turner

I
f you are looking for someone to preserve and protect crown jewels, a visit and conversation with Monsignor Anthony M. Tocco may resolve any concerns as to how it may be done. As he led a 2001 project to restore this chapel “to its original glory,” as it is titled in the short history of the event, the emphasis was to prepare a defense against the ravages of time. Not only has that aging been addressed, but even more has been accomplished. In what the American Institute of Architects in 1937 called “one of the hundred representative and distinguished buildings in the United States,” this chapel stands as an example that what came before can be retained when the new is built. Here is found a visible testimony to the symbols and the Catholic identity held dear by parishioners in an over seventy-five-year history.

Saint Hugo parish, dedicated to the eleventh-century French Benedictine abbot, began to grow during the Great Depression amid what would become the exodus of communities. Bloomfield Hills is hidden in peaceful wooded areas eighteen miles from downtown. Strangely enough, the Saint Hugo property is often called the only parkland in the area. You would not suspect that as you look upon the thirty-eight acres of beautiful gardens and ponds on the grounds. Fed by the Rouge River system, the two tiny lakes of Saint Hugo with their gushing fountains have provided an idyllic scene for weddings, funerals, and the many parish events for over 3,700 families. It may be a well-kept secret, but it is undoubtedly one of the flagship parishes of the archdiocese.

The chapel itself was the parish church from 1936 until 1989, used along with the original Saint Walter’s chapel, a wood-framed building with an attached rectory. Literally pushed into a hill and built at a cost of more than $250,000, the new edifice expressed the faith of pioneer advertising executive Theodore McManus and his wife Alice, their respect for the abbey at Cluny, and their memorial to their sons Hugo and Hubert who had recently died. They carved out a portion of their Stonycroft Farm property for donation to the archdiocese. They chose Arthur des Rosier as their architect. Additional land would later be donated by William VanDyke, paving the way for the present church. Today the stone chapel is used for daily Mass, most of the parish weddings, Eucharistic devotions, funerals, and special liturgies that do not need more than the 250 seating capacity. In 1985 there were eleven weekend Masses on the property, two of which were still held in the stone chapel.

The stone crafting of the church occupied four Italian artisans, who each chose one of the cardinal compass points for their labor. Their unique style of brick work is evident in each of the areas they supervised. The style is Norman Gothic, with a monastic influence. The Wisconsin Lannan stone was hand cut on site. A pilgrim first notes the circular driveway that leads one to the front of the building. The entrance of the church was created to reflect the front of the Abbey at Cluny. Its outward arch directs the eye to the inner relief over the doors, which recall the abbey buildings with symbols in front picturing the achievements of mankind, appropriately including the motorized vehicle. A large statue of Saint Hugo sits on a pedestal above the arch. The “Saint Hugo Cross” is found forming the air vents on the back and sides of the building. The use of this cross has been carried over into the new building. Though not a universally recognized cruciform, it has become a symbol of the Saint Hugo community. The fifty-six-foot tower is an outgrowth of the nave and transept and assists in giving the building its Norman dignity.

Five stone steps lead visitors to the front door. Upon entering the vestibule, a stone spiral stairway may be noticed on the left that leads down to the unique crypt area. The McManus family petitioned Pope Pius XI to allow the burial of their sons in a crypt below the church they were building. Lay burial in a church was unheard of in the United States at the time, but nonetheless the request was granted by papal dispensation, no doubt in recognition of this family’s generosity and good works. The walls are of fieldstone taken directly from the McManus estate.

The wood ceiling is supported by stone pillars upon a stone floor. The north wall contains eighteen burial niches, seven of which are occupied. The chapel facing the burial area has an altar, statues of Saint Thérèse and Saint Joan of Arc, and a kneeling bench. The McManus family hoped Masses would be offered here for the deceased family members. The area is also used as a wedding ceremony preparation room. It is not a muted symbol as brides (including Lee Iacocca’s daughter) rise from the crypt to their wedding day!

A rope is noticed upon iron railings as you climb the stairs. This theme, ap-
proved by Mr. McManus, is continued in the church on railings in the choir loft with its Casavant organ, and in the sanctuary. The baptismal font in the narthex was designed by Fr. Thomas McGlynn, O.P., a noted sculptor. The space of the church seems larger than the seating capacity allows because of the 140-foot-long wide-flung nave. A center aisle is flanked by rows of red cypress pews. With expert crafting, a torch had removed the sap in the wood, and steel wool was used to scrub them before waxing and polishing. Butterfly tongue and grooving is another feature that is found here and then carried to the new church building. Rows of pews are also found facing forward in each side of the sixty-four-foot-wide transept, containing chapels with altars and altar rails. Other wood appointments include the black walnut Oberammergau crucifix carved by Anton Lang, who famously played Christus in three productions of the Oberammergau Passion play. It is found over the altar flanked by two lindenwood angels. A railing above the altar and on each side of the sanctuary provides a space where trumpeters sometimes enhance the liturgical celebrations. Upon the altar rests the forged-iron tabernacle with two guardian angels inset in gold mosaic. The altar table has been brought forward in the sanctuary to facilitate the Ordinary Form. The use of small marble pillars has been continued in the altar and in the communion rail, which is topped by red cypress. Iron gates have been retained. The story is told of the McManus family donating boxes of gold tiles to enhance these pillars, which Alice McManus felt were too plain. She had the artisans train her Japanese houseboy to do the work of decoration. Sadly, after completing his work he was deported to Japan at the beginning of World War II. Today in his seventies, he still lives there.

Other lindenwood statues in the transept include the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph over the side altars, and those of Saint Thérèse, Saint Anne, the Sacred Heart, Saint John Vianney, and Saint Francis. Two panels of Venetian Mosaic are found on the back wall. On the south side the mosaic depicts the head of the Lord, and on the north side, the head of Mary from Titian’s Assumption. The Stations of the Cross originally intended for this church were reported to be “lost at sea.” They have been replaced with wooden reliefs upon wooden pedestals in niches. These were handcrafted from a solid block of wood in the Austrian Tyrol. While not in complete keeping with the original design, they nonetheless blend with the wood accoutrements.

Light in the church is nobly presented in the upright torches on the walls of the nave and side chapels. They are reminiscent of the type of torches that peasants removed from their sockets for use in religious processions moving outside. Even though they are well out of reach, they are a fine, serviceable, and practical decoration recalling the history of such devotions. Other lighting has been added through the years to complement the hidden lights in the timbers and elsewhere. The lancet stained-glass windows were hand-blown in England. They add a jeweled effect, enhancing the walls, increasing the light, and nourishing the atmosphere. Unused parts of the windows were incorporated in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel of the new church.

The construction of the huge modern parish church in 1989 did not overshadow the obvious beauty and presence of the 1936 building. McManus’s church stands on its own as a gem on the parish grounds.

The 2001 restoration project respected the traditions and sensibilities of the Saint Hugo community, and this chapel still honors the intent of its founders. If Theodore and Alice McManus were alive today, they would be proud of the condition of the building and its symbols. They would delight in the weekly Eucharistic devotions. Entombed here they wait for the last days to rise here. In an age where often the older traditions do not seem to be respected and the Catholic identity of parishioners does not seem to be honored, this restoration rather than renovation has been true to the faith heritage and the Catholic identity of the people of Saint Hugo.

I asked Monsignor Tocco why he had not, like so many others, just demolished the chapel to make way for the new. He answered me with a simple, knowing smile. It was good to realize that here our crown jewels are safe, an example of how Catholic identity is increasingly regaining the respect it deserves.

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Over the past two centuries, Pittsburgh’s beautiful churches have made significant contributions to the city’s architectural character and quality of life. Great neighborhoods across the country, as in Pittsburgh, grew up around active churches. However, over the past few decades, many of our nation’s once thriving churches have declined or even been shuttered. While the question of church health is undoubtedly complicated, the story of two Pittsburgh churches may provide some clues as to the connection between neighborhood context and congregation vitality.

East Liberty Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh is a five-minute walk from Calvary Episcopal Church of Shadyside. The churches are remarkably similar: both are well-endowed, exemplary French Gothic-inspired structures designed by Ralph Adams Cram. Calvary Episcopal of Shadyside was completed in 1906 and East Liberty Presbyterian in 1935. In the early twentieth century, both churches thrived, boasting full congregations and vibrant surrounding neighborhoods. Today they are worlds apart; East Liberty Presbyterian Church’s membership has declined dramatically since the 1960s, while Calvary Episcopal of Shadyside continues to flourish.

East Liberty was once a busy center of Pittsburgh’s East End. East Liberty Presbyterian Church sits at the geographic center of its commercial district. At its completion the church was fully endowed, containing excellent amenities for a congregation that numbered over 1,500. In the 1960s, as the commercial district of East Liberty began to lose business to new suburban shopping malls, the center was transformed by a reckless urban renewal program. The program involved tearing down neighborhoods of historic, residential fabric and replacing them with parking lots. Further disconnecting the commercial center from remaining residential neighborhoods, tree-lined streets were removed, a four-lane, one-way ring road was constructed around the center of East Liberty, and three affordable housing towers, designed in a reckless manner, were built along the four-lane road. Since the 1960s, the once prosperous neighborhood has deteriorated, and East Liberty Presbyterian’s church membership has significantly declined.

Literally only a few blocks away, Calvary Episcopal Church of Shadyside is nestled in the beautiful neighborhood of Shadyside, the pride of Pittsburgh’s East End. Calvary was originally named “Calvary Episcopal of East Liberty,” but the congregation changed the name to associate itself with Shadyside. Shadyside has had its own periods of decline, but its overall urban infrastructure has always remained intact. Calvary Episcopal Church sits at the intersection of a number of different uses: Sacred Heart Parish church and school; a mixed-income, mid-rise residential tower; a successful town center of neighborhood services; and a beautiful neighborhood of Victorian houses. All of these uses are set on tree-lined streets of a congenial human scale and a notable local character that encourages walking. Although Calvary’s congregation has had its ups and downs over the decades, the church continues to thrive today.

Pittsburgh is just one of the many cities in which the condition of a church’s neighborhood, its context, is symmetrical with congregational participation. Is it sheer coincidence that thriving churches, such as Calvary Episcopal, are most often found in intact, successful urban neighborhoods, like Shadyside?

The Effect of Context

A healthy church congregation and a healthy neighborhood community are indeed interconnected. The shift towards new development, urban sprawl, and automobile efficiency over the last fifty years has resulted in residential places that lack walkable streets, mixed-use centers, connectivity to neighborhood services, and a distinct feeling of intimacy that was common in traditional communities. Where widespread placeless growth is on the rise, a steady decline in church membership consistently follows. When it comes to church health, urban context matters.

Many of our nation’s best neighborhoods are those developed prior to World War II and the automobile era. At that time, development patterns were balanced, providing residents with an infrastructure that supported walking, public transit, and the automobile. But what stands out most in successful, historic neighborhoods is the human scale and local character of the streets and the architectural form. In such places, resident activities and services are usually found within a comfortable geographical radius of a quarter mile (approximately a five-
the quality of existing neighborhoods. In many cases, fine-grained networks of city streets, which were not built to handle the suburban rush hour, were replaced with an infrastructure designed for heavy volumes of automobiles traveling in and out of the city, further damaging the character of our great urban communities.

New suburban churches, instead of nesting comfortably within pleasant neighborhoods, have become vehicular destinations with the dubious real-estate parity of shopping malls. The residential patterns designed to represent “freedom” have become patterns of entrapment; high-traffic congestion and automobile dependence are limiting the very liberation that automobiles were marketed to facilitate in the first place. Generic patterns of high-volume traffic arteries and a disconnected network of cul-de-sacs are neither walkable nor memorable. These patterns completely disregard the characteristics of traditional great places and serve neither our communities nor our churches.

Current Development Practice

Many professionals recognize the relationship between healthy churches and healthy neighborhoods. The Congress of the New Urbanism (CNU) is a consortium of architects, planners, and developers who consistently apply basic town-making principles and regional characteristic to new and existing communities across the nation. Some of the most high-profile communities and planning efforts along these lines have included churches as a critical component of urban design.

Seaside, a seminal New Urbanist town on the Gulf of Mexico in Florida’s panhandle, was one of the first new towns to exemplify traditional town-making principles and is often cited as a model town. In the design process, the developer, Robert Davis, and the designers, Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, set out to create a community with all the positive qualities of pre-war precedents. Seaside’s design prioritized walking and the pedestrian scale over automobile infrastructure. The town, which was started in 1980 and is still developing today, includes fine-grained residential fabric, a neighborhood center, offices, a school, and places for recreation. Seaside is widely respected for its unique sense of place and high-quality, regionally inspired architecture. In fact, it is so successful that local real estate values have swelled to uncomfortable highs.

Seaside’s original master plan included a prominent site for a town chapel. The main streets and passageways in the town are oriented toward the water, and in an effort to provide an inland focus for the community, a high profile, axial location adjacent to the town center was selected for the chapel site. The town is not large; it is approximately eighty-seven acres. Its residential fabric was built over about a decade and one-half is entirely complete. Shortly after completion of the first phase of residential construction, residents of the town organized and funded the design and construction of the Seaside chapel building. The success of the democratic group that raised private funds to build a community chapel is a testament to the will of the neighborhood to include worship within its boundaries. The design of the chapel, by Merrill, Pastor, and Colgan, is extraordinary. Although the architecture contains no specific denominational references, the chapel is clearly Gothic inspired, which gives the space a distinctive ecclesiastical feel. Like Seaside, the chapel exemplifies the plurality of today’s new towns, holding nondenominational services and community events. Today the stunning chapel, funded by its congregation, sits on its prominent location in the significant town of Seaside.

 Churches have been included in designs for larger new towns as well. Celebration, Florida, a town developed by the Walt Disney Company, is a well-regarded example of a large-scale New Urbanist community. The town was designed for an underutilized tract of the Walt Disney Company’s own land outside of the Florida theme park. Within the academic community, the town was often criticized as “disneification” of town making. However, Celebration has proved itself to be a successful town, illustrating that traditional town-making principles are a sound foundation upon which to build a year-round community much larger than Seaside. The plan for Celebration, over 4,900 acres, included sites for neighborhood churches. The sites were sold to church groups of many different denominations, and the church structures were built through fund-raising drives. Because community residents funded church construction, the

Deterioration of Neighborhoods and Communities

Once the automobile became ubiquitous, change was inevitable. The automobile offered unprecedented mobility and consequently the walkable quarter-mile radius lost its influence. Distance between neighborhood services that was once measured in feet is now measured in miles. New infrastructure based upon a culture of cars changed the landscape of the United States and the urban form for the worse.

Unfortunately, the automobile had great market and political support within cities. As people moved to the suburbs, city neighborhoods were destroyed by poor planning and transportation policy. City governments, eager to cash in on commercial revenue, replaced residential zoning with commercial zoning, deteriorating minutes walk). Churches are also an integral part of these neighborhoods. In fact, church communities often played an integral role in the creation and the continuation of these neighborhoods. The urban patterns, whether developed privately or publicly, were often designed around public buildings of civic pride, including churches. Congregations selected sites with distinguished hierarchy and character. These churches flourished.

Sixth Presbyterian Church considered closing its doors until, through an entrepreneurial effort to redevelop its own land with residential condominiums, the church’s membership and financial security increased.
town’s churches were some of the last buildings to be completed within each construction phase. Today the town of Celebration and its church congregations are thriving.

The Kennecott Land Company has made church sites a fundamental part of its master plan for Daybreak, a new town in South Jordan, Utah. The Church of Latter Day Saints (LDS) and the Kennecott development team worked together to design neighborhoods in which landmark sites were designated for churches and every residence was within a comfortable walk of a church. The Kennecott Land Company is also encouraging members of other denominations to build churches within Daybreak. An interfaith chapel, entirely funded by Kennecott Land Company, will house a Montessori school and provide space for various religious groups while the town grows. The goal is that as these groups grow along with Daybreak, they will establish more churches of their own. In Daybreak, churches have become an active partner in development efforts, resulting in obvious benefits for both the community and the church congregations.

Urban Infill around Dwindling Churches

Through active participation in local planning efforts, church communities across the nation can promote responsible, human scale development surrounding an individual parish. A parish can also develop its own excess land in partnership with private planners. Such development brings residents closer to the church itself, utilizes land efficiently, and makes sound financial sense. In Pittsburgh, Sixth Presbyterian Church did just that. The church revived its congregation, refilled its financial coffers, and, at the same time, assisted in the revitalization of the commercial intersection of one of the great neighborhoods of Pittsburgh.

Squirrel Hill, home of Sixth Presbyterian Church, has always been a neighborhood of diverse incomes, activities, and religions. Squirrel Hill is esteemed for its pedestrian-friendly streets and rich architecture. It is well served by public transit and its adjacency to Carnegie Mellon University. In the early 1990s Sixth Presbyterian’s roof and structure were in desperate need of repair and its congregation was dwindling. The church considered closing its doors. As a last resort, the church constructed a separate condominium building around back of the existing building. This model for development, although perhaps difficult to imagine, is particularly useful in today’s development context. The design of the two buildings provides the church with a new, improved congenial space, similar to great European piazzas. The new condominium building is home to members of the church, including a number of senior citizens. Interestingly, the church itself does not provide any parking—congregation members travel by bus, walk, or park on surrounding streets.

Following the construction of this condominium building, Sixth Presbyterian Church’s membership increased, and since that time, new construction and revitalization around the site has increased at great rates. Had the church shuttered, it would likely have set back the entire neighborhood. Although this example is “urban” by nature, many churches can benefit from this type of proactive strategy. Around the country, specifically in the suburbs, church parking lots are conspicuously oversized for that once-a-year Easter Sunday, holding excess land with an unrealistic goal of future growth. By utilizing this excess land in an aesthetically pleasing manner, a church can actually improve membership and the financial status of the parish itself.

The Future

Community development is a difficult and complicated business, requiring patience and strategic business acumen. However, the collaborative nature of Christianity and the process of community building is a natural fit. Proactive participation in neighborhood building, combined with a healthy, entrepreneurial spirit can benefit the long-term health of a parish. At a national scale, the Catholic Church and its membership would do well to lend support to responsible neighborhood development strategies, such as those advocated by the Congress for New Urbanism.

Today, our nation is at a critical juncture. Many of our cities are struggling to maintain core economies and the suburbs are increasingly stressed. A national research study by Reed Construction has determined that the United States will double its square footage by the year 2030. Even if that number is off by a factor of ten, it is still a remarkable prediction. Our nation’s cities are ripe for redevelopment and our suburbs will require reconstruction. It is critical that redevelopment is responsible and sustainable, and that it promotes the core values of great place making in order to support both healthy neighborhoods and healthy church communities.

Here lies an opportunity for leadership by the Catholic Church. As a society, we yearn for communities that connect us to our daily necessities and our neighbors, but we do not always follow a development path that will adequately meet these needs. Meeting community needs goes hand-in-hand with building healthy churches. Through secular and church leadership, we have an incredible opportunity to rebuild our nation’s communities and congregations at the same time. When it comes to church health, urban context matters.

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Sacred Art of Today

Is It Art and Is It Sacred?

Steen Heidemann

Born in Denmark in the 1950s, I came of age in 1960s society, surrounded by all the clichés of liberal atheism that resulted in my experience of a spiritual void. This void was not filled until I converted to the Catholic faith many years later at Westminster Cathedral in London. Being in the arts and having been deeply involved in the staging of a large exhibition on the Jesuits and the baroque, I came to realize the importance of the sacred image in proclaiming the faith, so vital today, especially given the prevailing absence of intellectual inquiry and reading among the young.

Turning from the seventeenth century to our own historical period, I perceived that we are now faced with so-called Catholic art that more often than not states what Christ is not, rather than what He is. It is an art form (if one can call it “art”) where often the tragic, the absurd, and the rejection of the true Christ become their own new and perverse trinity. This has become a pseudoreligion of its own, in which the atheist, humanitarian “artist” has been elevated to the role of dogmatic priest.

As a response to the recent crisis in vocations, I have started, with the support of various priests, to use my artistic knowledge to create a book, which will published in several languages, entitled The Catholic Priest: Image of Christ Seen through Twenty Centuries of Art. Through 550 works of art of all periods since the days of the Catacombs, this book seeks to explain the priesthood through the visual image with the hope of attracting vocations to this most important and beautiful ministry. Needless to say, the dilemma quickly arose as to which works of art should be included to represent our own times.

To understand why the great majority of Catholic art over the past half century has been a monumental failure, one has to understand not only how society has evolved, but also how this change has been reflected in what is termed “contemporary art.” Two recent books that address this issue are Christine Sourgin’s Les Mirages de l’Art contemporain (La Table ronde, Paris 2005) and Aude de Kerros’s L’Art caché (Eyrolles, Paris 2007). The latter provides a good description of how contemporary has emerged and developed:

The dominant movement today is conceptual art, which nominates itself as “contemporary.” It is not an art form in the traditional sense of the word, but a named ideology based on the statement by the artist himself that “this is art,” all confirmed and approved by the establishment. This has been baptized “contemporary art,” fruit of the arbitrary, and does not pretend to have an essential or truthful character. However, this infinite diversity does exclude one specific element: art. Contemporary art is strongly based on several forbidden key elements: the use of hands to modulate and transform materials with its positive metamorphic outcome; the articulation of the form and meaning in an organic unity; the beauty and its mysterious manifestation: “aura,” the glory of sensitivity. Most people still believe they are in the continuation of the “avant-gardes” of modern art and have not perceived the reality of the situation.

In France, but in various degrees also elsewhere, contemporary art has become the official and only acceptable form of expression. This is in the secular as well as in the Catholic sphere. This “art” is part of a commercial mechanism in which the often poorly informed and politically correct opinions of government bureaucrats determine the allocation of funds for the purchase of artworks esteemed by intellectual and fashionable art critics, ignorant nouveau riche investors, and trendy, predominantly Anglo-Saxon, mondlistic art galleries. It is a totalitarian system, where art has become another financial commodity with which to speculate. The concept of art serving nothing but itself has been born. There is no transmission of knowledge, no recognition of the past, and there is certainly nothing for the art student to learn, given the perceived risk that learning might “de-nature” his spontaneous talent. Contemporary art is a cultural vacuum, but anyone daring to speak up—like the little girl in the story of the emperor’s new clothes who realized that the emperor was naked—
will be either ignored or regarded as ignorant. It is a money racket that has little to do with art and has nothing to do with the transmission of Christ's message.

Contemporary art offers no reference to beauty, truth, or goodness; and thus can have no idea of a moral aesthetic. It can have no place in the Church, not just for aesthetic reasons, but because it was conceived with the intention of serving nothing other than the fallen ego. In fact, much like the corrupted angels, the motto of contemporary art could easily be “non serviam.” This tension was already visible in the nineteenth century, when some of the most skilled artists, especially in France, turned their talents away from sacred art. The secular took control and has not let go since. Impressionism gave way not only to a style of painting, but also to a philosophy of life.

Even within the Church, at a time when she is in particular need of artists able to convey Christ's message clearly, one senses a marked lack of a philosophy and theology of art. Without most people realizing it, two thousand years of Christian art have been quietly, but firmly, pushed aside. It is a silent apostasy that Christine Sourgins describes in terms of a pseudoreligion:

Priest, prophet, artist of contemporary art, he is also king. But his kingdom is that of passions, which is the distant, but direct, inheritance of the age of Enlightenment. For contemporary art the passions are the spiritual. The transgression that enables us to go above our ordinary perceptions of matters, is for contemporary art a true transcendence. One is, as a conclusion, confronted with an inverted religious, who still thinks as a religious.

For most contemporary art there is no resurrection and nowhere is the Redeemer to be found. Contemporary art results in a mental castration, or perhaps, quoting George Orwell in 1984, “the prevailing mental condition must be controlled insanity.” And what contemporary art ultimately constitutes is an attack on the Christian faith, which is the foundation of our society and its culture.

The current anti-aesthetic principles and the new orthodoxy of provocative iconoclasm in artistic circles have not only brought to museums and fashionable galleries such blasphemies against Christ's message of truth and beauty as Andres Serrano's crucifix in a vat of urine and the Austrian Hermann Nitsch's mockeries of the Catholic Mass (to take only a few examples), they have also created an ambience in which a lack of form and the expression of mental and spiritual twistedness have gained respectability. It is as if beauty and truth had been replaced by ugliness and perversion as the medium for depicting the sacred! Contemporary art is supposed to be “contextual.” It is the context that often crowns the “artwork,” and its revolutionary transgression becomes sacred or meaningful. A toilet shown in a fashionable London gallery becomes immediately an artwork, while seen in a place of public amenities it remains what it is. So-called “real” artists in the world of contemporary art may express themselves spiritually, but only if they show that they have second thoughts about religion, especially the Christian religion. Hence ambiguity and/or irony are much welcomed elements. The New Age icons of Alex Grey constitute an “ideal” reply. The smashing (some years ago) of Michelangelo's Pietà perhaps offers an emblem of a world bent on destroying the true, the good, and the beautiful and supplanting Christ with an agenda steeped in the culture of spiritual death. It is interesting to note that Salvador Dalí’s Last Supper and Crucifixion are the only two twentieth-century paintings of a religious subject that have won universal acclaim. They are still seen in all poster shops around the globe. No contemporary art painting of a Christian nature has even come near these in status.

A good Christian artist, especially one who expresses himself figuratively, is to the media a dead artist, an object at best of pity and fit to be placed in a museum as merely folklore. Two years before Andy Warhol died, he created a work entitled Repent and Sin No More! The question arises as to where we are to turn from here in order to express Christ's message artistically in a way that the ordinary faithful can comprehend. There are artists who have had the courage to stand out and create artworks where Christ's message is clearly and attractively represented without a ten-page “written supplement” to understand them! Their work is what Aude de Kerros terms “the hidden art.” The media simply ignores them, as if they did not exist, or rather as if they were mere decorators, and certainly not “artists.”

According to Aude de Kerros, there are indications that in America contemporary art has been largely accepted for what it is, a sort of merchandise, and what one would term real art retains its own place. However, as she concludes, one will have to wait until a semantic distinction is made separating contemporary art from real art. One could then...
start to evaluate non-conceptual art and each individual artist. This is important in general, but it is vital for the Church to clearly mark the boundaries.

Were this milestone to be achieved, what would it mean for Christian art? The first consideration would be to realize that art cannot be produced in the same way in which one orders a car or a piece of contemporary art. It is a kind of gift that cannot be had through materialism. It requires the gift of faith. Wherever that presents itself, Christ’s message as expressed in art finds its proper expression. It is beyond the scope of this article to enter into a detailed and profound discussion on Christian art, however, I should like make some suggestions, the first articulated well by Rodolfo Papa, artist and teacher at the Pontifical Academy for the Arts in Rome:

The Church does not have an artistic style of her own, because it is not important how to say something, but it is important what you want to say or communicate; it is easy to know what to do: “Rem tene, verba sequuntur” [Grasp the subject, the words will follow]. I think that only figurative art is able to speak about Christian mysteries. Catholic art has expressed itself in many various styles in the past, but all of these are figurative. Some will argue that the abstract can be used beneficially to depict aspects of the truth that are not specifically narrative. In fact the non-figurative can underline the mystery of the infinite and the mystical with an intensity that no other form can accomplish. The danger, however, is that, if totally abstract, the artwork can quickly lose its Trinitarian sense and quickly become an image that might just as well adhere to New Age concepts as to Christian realities. Painters, for example Giovanni Battista Gaulli (“il Baccicci”) have in the past tackled this subject with success, combining the flood of light with Christian figurative symbolism. Some recent examples are included here, namely, works by Philippe Lejeune and Agnès Hémery. One may have a preference for the sober monastic expressions of the Middle Ages, the exuberant baroque, or some of the more sentimental works of the nineteenth century, but a Catholic welcomes all these forms of expression as part of the same unity centered on Christ. The problem arises when contemplating recent works of contemporary art where the underlying spirit has been destroyed.

Christine Sourgins writes that “the visible becomes worthy of God for the reason that God made himself visible; this could be the basis of Christian art.” According to Sourgins, the figurative painter needs faith and knowledge of the truth to execute his or her art. At one of the largest exhibitions held in recent years to focus mainly on Christian topics (National Gallery of Victoria, Australia, 1998), a work was displayed that depicted a woman as a crucified Christ. Such blasphemous images cannot orient the faithful, as Sourgins suggests, toward prayer, devotion, or an authentic sense of Christianity in line with the teaching of the Church. Many an excellent artist in the past has been a great sinner, but their faith permitted their works to embody the divinity of the Trinity. An artist need not be the perfection of sanctity in order to be a good Christian artist, but faith does bring about a transformation. During the nineteenth century Christianity still represented something of a social foundation that, despite its shortcomings, did animate society in general and did have an underlying influence on many artists dealing with sacred themes. Though often not masterpieces in a spiritual sense, some paintings did retain a certain Christian “aura.”

However, one has to conclude that this is no longer the case. The best one can hope for in most artists in the twentieth century is a kind of cosmic mysticism. Many intellectuals dealing with this question have forgotten that the Christian artist can be the instrument of divine grace. Fra Angelico is reputed to have stated that “To paint Christ, one must live Christ,” or as the American artist James Langley sees it:

The ultimate point of reference for the Christian artist is neither contemporary culture nor one’s self, but rather the discovery of beauty in the encounter with Christ. Proceeding from the experience of the radiant God-man as clothed in the Divine Liturgy, the Catholic approach to the making of religious art is grounded in the common experience of a received tradition to which one’s own contribution is humbly added. To accept that tradition implies a study and appreciation of how other artists have seen the image of God. Art forms that hold originality and self-expression as paramount begin with a disordered understanding of the freedom of the children of the children of God. As such they risk producing art, as we have seen in recent decades, that distorts and is literally irrelevant to the Christian experience.

It can of course be argued that hope and faith can find expression even in contemporary art. The argument might follow that we now live in times when the direct Christian approach is
no longer viable and that the Christian message can only be perceived in the absurdity and the despair of contemporary art. And yet, while it is indeed challenging today to be a Christian, the last two thousand years have shown many other periods of direct or indirect persecutions; one must not lose courage to stand up and be counted. Contemporary art typifies an anti-Christian counterculture, in which one may contemplate the Crucified Christ but not His Resurrection. As Christ stated “He who is not with me is against me” (Lk 11:23). A compromise between Christianity and contemporary art will inevitably lead to paintings as in the aforementioned Australian exhibition, where the image of the Trinity is hidden by the absurd, the tragic, and nihilism.

Is it possible, then, to still look toward contemporary art as a possible place to find art forms that will serve Christ’s message? As Anthony Visco has written, “Would you look to devil worshippers for liturgical consultants on the rites and rituals of the Church? Would we look to atheists for prayer advice on the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius? Why then look towards contemporary art that has decidedly made itself not serve the Church and wonder how it might fit in?” Some Catholics deem themselves “courageous” when they commence a dialogue with contemporary art, but however well-intentioned they may be, their efforts can never bear real fruit, as the roots of the tree are rotten to the core. They argue further that contemporary art will encourage a new spiritual search and hence a deeper understanding of the truth. For them, people should be adventurous and try to understand the new and unconventional. Intellectuals may have a field day arguing this, but will their arguments make any sense to the ordinary faithful? Some Catholics will then continue the debate saying that many an artist such as Giotto was revolutionary in his day, and so why should contemporary art not be accepted in the Church? This is obviously a point that for all the reasons stated in this article does not require an answer.

The Catholic and universal Church longs for a renaissance, not to be confused with a simple renovation. Some will argue that to question contemporary art and to look for an alternative would lead to a triumphal type of neo-fascist propaganda. This is to take the easy and comfortable stance and not to confront the reality of Christ’s message of going out and converting the world. The Church has faced difficulties before, and she will find a new way forward where Christian art will again serve the word of Jesus in a pedagogical, intelligible, and effective fashion: a manifestation of hope and promise, as Pope Benedict XVI’s recent encyclical Spe salvi describes. One will have to distinguish between religious, sacred, and liturgical art, but overall one should not be afraid to recognize those art forms that best express Christ’s various messages as well as the devotional needs of the faithful in different cultures and parts of the world. A work of art in Spain will obviously not meet the criteria of a person in Armenia, but the underlying spirit should be the same. The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, in a letter of November 25, 2008, to Archbishop Gianfranco Ravasi, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Pontifical Commissions for the Cultural Heritage of the Church and for Sacred Archeology, expressed the necessity of relaunching a dialogue between aesthetics and ethics, between beauty, truth, and goodness. Indeed, a Vatican pavilion is being planned for the 2011 Venice Biennale, a major international festival of contemporary art.

At the heart is a need to return to the Eucharist as the wellspring of artistic expression. In the words of Anthony Visco, “The reality of the Eucharist must be reaffirmed in our world today. With Christ, the Eucharist is still ‘a scandal, something to get over.’ Without this, all art becomes mere decoration or ornament of the ego.” In order to be missionary, the Church needs to re-incarnate in art the mystery of Christ in a clear manner and expose it courageously to a world that has apostatized. Though sacred art can not effect salvation, nor contain the reality of the priesthood or the Mass, it can show the way. It should render service to the faith, to understanding of God, who has spoken to man through Holy Scripture. The semantic difference between “renaissance” and “renovation” urgently needs to be addressed. We are beginning to see a renaissance, as some bishops have comprehended the issue and have had the courage to commission architects and artists worthy of their name. Further encouragement might also be gleaned from the fact that this year’s famous New York autumn sale of contemporary art was a financial flop; this might prompt collectors to reassess what real art is all together and transfer the center of attention away from this American city, where over the last few decades money and current ideologies have been the only criteria. The work of some promising new artists has been illustrated here, to show that real art is beginning to rise out of the ashes. A true search has commenced.

A native of Denmark, Steen Heidemann was educated in England earning degrees in art and architecture at Oxford and an MSc in management from Reading. A convert, he later married a French woman. He currently organizes international art exhibitions.

1. The above-mentioned book on the Catholic priesthood has led to the beginning of a collaboration with the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church and the modern department of the Vatican Museums to try and evaluate the current situation and to aim at finding a new way out of the current desert in Catholic art. The latter initiative will lead to an exhibition. I am in contact with many Latin, mainly figurative, artists, but few American artists. Should anyone read this article and be interested in contributing, I encourage them to write sending samples of their work to Steen Heidemann, 41 rue de Bayeux, 14740 Bretteville-l’Orgueilleuse, France.
In recent years, historical research has paid considerable attention to the relationship between liturgy and architecture. Much of this scholarship has focused on Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, but there is also growing interest in the periods of the Renaissance and of the Catholic Reform both before and after the Council of Trent (1545–1563), as is evident from the proceedings of a conference held at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence in 2003. The editor of the volume, Jörg Stabenow, identifies two main developments that transformed the typical church interior in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. First, elements that divided the building into different sections were removed in order to create a unified space. By contrast, medieval churches were structured by a complex system of partitions, especially the rood screen separating the nave from the choir. Secondly, the tabernacle placed in a central position on the high altar was adopted as the common form of Eucharistic reservation and became the focal point of baroque church architecture.

The word tabernaculum was already used in the Middle Ages to indicate the receptacle for the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. William Durandus notes in his highly influential Rationale divinorum officiorum (1282) that, in imitation of the Ark of the Covenant and of the Tent of Meeting (Exodus 25–26, 33:7–11 and elsewhere), “in some churches an ark or tabernacle (archa seu tabernaculum) is placed, in which the Body of the Lord and relics are kept.” The biblical association is significant, since the Tent of Meeting was God’s presence among the people of Israel in the desert. Moreover, the prologue to the Gospel of John states that the Divine Word “was made flesh and dwelt [literally, “pitched his tent’] among us” (John 1:14). Finally, in the Apocalypse the heavenly Jerusalem is evoked with the words: “Behold the dwelling of God is with men,” which reads in the Latin Vulgate: “Ecce tabernaculum Dei cum hominibus” (Revelation 21:3).

The placing of a fixed Eucharistic tabernacle on the high altar is usually associated with the liturgical reforms that were implemented after the Council of Trent, especially by St. Charles Borromeo, whose efforts to renew religious life in his Archdiocese of Milan became exemplary for the Catholic Church as a whole. However, this practice had already been promoted by reforming bishops before Trent and can be traced back to fifteenth-century Tuscany. High-altar tabernacles were introduced in several churches of this Italian region, including the cathedrals of Volterra (1471) and Prato (1487); perhaps the best-known example is the transferral of the older tabernacle of Vecchietta to the high altar of Siena cathedral in 1506, where it replaced Duccio’s Maestà.

The new arrangement was vigorously promoted by Gian Matteo Giberti, bishop of Verona from 1524 to 1543. Giberti’s Constitutiones, which were issued in 1542 with the approval of Pope Paul III, aimed at a reform of ecclesiastical life in his diocese and in many ways anticipated post-Tridentine developments. Reserving the Blessed Sacrament on the high altar in the centre of the church, where it would be exposed for the veneration of both clergy and laity, formed an important part of Giberti’s pastoral programme. The bishop wrote in his Constitutiones, with reference to various psalm verses:

And as the eyes of a maid to the hands of her mistress (Ps 122[123]:2), so should be the eyes of those who stand around the table of the Lord (cf. Ps 127 [128]:3), always with fear and trembling toward the most high and most precious sacrament, which is there on the high altar; they should weep for joy about it, and rejoice devoutly in their weeping, and they should see how sweet is the Lord (cf. Ps 33[34]:9).

In a similar mould, Pier Francesco Zini in his biography of Giberti, published in Venice in 1555 with the title...
Boni pastoris exemplum ac specimen singularae, describes the position of the tabernacle on the high altar as being “like the heart in the breast (tamquam cor in pectore).” The tabernacle was intended to be the heart of the church both in a spatial and in a spiritual sense. Giberti applied this principle to his own cathedral in Verona and prescribed it for every parish church of his diocese.

The Council of Trent, which met from 1545 to 1563, did not give specific directives on church architecture and furnishing. However, by affirming traditional Eucharistic teaching, the conciliar decrees gave clear theological indications that were to shape the construction of the new churches and the restructuring of already existing ones. The canons of the Decree on the Eucharist, dating from the Council’s thirteenth session on 11 October 1551, confidently asserted the Catholic position in the face of Protestant criticism, especially that of Martin Luther, who had argued earlier that Christ was present in the sacrament of the Eucharist only during the actual liturgical celebration when it would be received in faith by the communicants. The canons of Trent restated the teaching of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 about the real and abiding presence of Christ under the form of bread and wine after their consecration by the priest. Hence there is the need for an appropriate and secure reservation of the consecrated hosts after Mass, which are also used for bringing Holy Communion to the sick. Canon seven speaks in apparently general terms about the reservation of the Holy Eucharist “in sacramento.” In medieval use, the word sacramento could indicate any place for Eucharistic reservation, including the sacristy. However, in the context of Trent, it would be safe to assume that many Council Fathers would have understood sacramento to mean the altar tabernacle. This idea had already obtained some currency, as is evident from the synod convoked by Cardinal Reginald Pole, legate of the Holy See in England, and held in Westminster in December 1555 and January 1556. The legatine synod decreed that the Holy Eucharist should be reserved “either in the middle of the altar or at its end.”

The Council of Trent also emphasized the role of bishops in implementing ecclesiastical reforms and mandated the edition of revised liturgical books, a work that was carried out by the popes in the years to follow. These factors resulted in a standardization of liturgical life, which made the new way of Eucharistic reservation on the high altar spread throughout the Catholic world. Historians have often concentrated on the contribution made by Saint Charles Borromeo (1538–1584) to the development of church architecture and furnishing after Trent. Borromeo has been presented as a model reforming bishop, who implemented the Tridentine decrees in the Archdiocese of Milan with exemplary diligence. Without reducing the role of this great bishop, it would seem appropriate to place his work into a larger cultural context. The high-altar tabernacle was by no means an innovation of Borromeo, and we have also seen that most of the theological reasoning behind this practice had already been circulating for some time.

Giberti applied this principle of the tabernacle as the heart of the church in his own cathedral in Verona and prescribed it for every parish church of his diocese.

Borromeo’s ideas on church architecture are expressed most succinctly in his Instruciones fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiae in 1577, which was composed by a group of authors under his auspices. On the question of Eucharistic reservation, the Instruciones refer to the decrees of the first provincial synod of Milan held in 1565, which stipulated that in all the churches where the Blessed Sacrament was reserved, including the cathedral, it should be placed on the high altar, unless some necessity or grave reason would speak against it. The archbishop of Milan set the example by transferring the Blessed Sacrament in his own cathedral from the sacristy to the high altar. While Borromeo’s Instruciones were widely received in the post-Tridentine period, there was still some flexibility about the place of Eucharistic reservation. It is worth noting that the Caeremoniale Episcoporum of 1600 recommended that the Blessed Sacrament should not be kept on the high altar, or on another altar where the bishop was to celebrate Solemn Mass or Vespers. However, I do not think this can be taken to indicate a critique of the high-altar tabernacle, as Christoph Jobst suggests in his magisterial study of the subject. The prescription is not concerned with the general arrangement of churches, but with the rubrics of specific celebrations. At most, one could argue that in pontifical liturgies the older custom of Eucharistic reservation being separate from the altar is reflected.

The Rituale Romanum of 1614 has a relevant paragraph in its Praenotanda on the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, which says: “The tabernacle ought properly to be covered with a canopy, and nothing else kept therein. It should be placed on the main altar or on another where it can be viewed readily, so that due worship may be rendered this great sacrament.” Even here, there is flexibility about the placing of the tabernacle: it can be on the high altar or on another altar of the church that is appropriate for the
veneration of the sacrament. Similar instructions can be found in the acts of many diocesan and provincial synods that were held in the first half of the seventeenth century. For instance, the Synod of Constance in 1609 decreed that the Blessed Sacrament should be reserved “either on the altar itself, according to the Roman custom, or on the left side of the choir near the altar.”

However, the placing of the tabernacle on the main altar according to the “Roman use” was gradually adopted throughout Europe as part of the Tridentine reform.

A variety of factors contributed to this development: first, the Council’s clear and confident reaffirmation of the Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence in the face of Protestant criticism; secondly, the increasing popularity of Eucharistic devotions (Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, Eucharistic processions, Forty Hours’ Devotion); thirdly, the flourishing of baroque art and architecture not just in Europe but throughout the Catholic world, with its emphasis on visibly expressing the truths of the Faith, especially the Real Presence; and fourthly, the standardization of liturgical books after the Council of Trent, with Roman practice being the model for the whole Church.

Seen in its cultural and artistic context, it is evident that this development was not initiated by the Council of Trent but was part of the common tendency in Renaissance and baroque church architecture to create a unified space in which the high-altar tabernacle was indeed, in the words of Bishop Giberti’s biographer, “tamquam cor in pectore.”

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8. See C. Jobst, “Liturgia e culto” (see above, n. 6), p. 94. See also J. Braun, Der christliche Altar (see above, n. 3), p. 592.

9. Council of Trent, Session XIII (11 October 1551), canones 6 and 7; Fourth Lateran Council (11-30 November, 1215), Constitutio, cc. 6, 26, 27; Concilium patriarchum et eclesiastica sub suo conservanda.


15. Jobst, Liturgia e culto” (see above, n. 6), p. 121.


17. “vel in ipso altari, secundum mores romanorum, vel in latere sinistri chori prope altare”; citat after Braun, Der christliche Altar (see above, n. 3), p. 592.
The golden glow of late-day sunlight bathes the hand-carved stars on the ruddy brownstone ashlar of Saint John the Baptist Cathedral in Charleston, SC. The astral allusions merge with the robust pinnacles lining the sides of this fine cathedral, designed by the prolific nineteenth-century church architect Patrick Keely. As the pinnacles and buttresses march down the side of the church, we come to Broad Street, where there is space enough to stand back and view the tower of the church, which climbs to a great height—over eighty feet—and yet still longs to regain much more height.

An earlier church on the site was called the Cathedral of St Finbar, named for an Irish Saint who was the son of an artisan father and a lady of the Royal Irish court. While living in a monastery in Kilkenny, he was given the name Fionnbharr, meaning “white head,” because of his light-colored hair. He became the founder of an abbey that became the City of Cork, Ireland. The Right Reverend John England was consecrated in Cork Cathedral and in 1821 came to Charleston to serve the diocese of the Carolinas and Georgia; he probably brought the idea of honoring Saint Finbar with him.

Patrick Keely, born in 1816 in County Tipperary, Ireland, immigrated to the United States in 1842 and quickly became one of the major architects of Catholic churches in America. He followed in the footsteps of Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, author of Contrasts, or a Parallel Between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, and similar Buildings of the Present Day, Showing the Present Decay of Taste (1836) and True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture (1841). Pugin was swimming against the tide of industrialization with his zeal for Gothic architecture as an iconic connection to a better, more graceful time and much more appropriate for a Christian nation.

Bishop England purchased the site of a much-loved garden in Charleston called “New Vauxhall” and built a wooden structure there to house the church during the planning and fundraising for a grand cathedral. Bishop England did not live to see his hopes come to fruition. Patrick Keely was entrusted with the design of the cathedral, then called the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist and Saint Finbar. Bishop England was succeeded in 1844 by the Right Reverend Ignatius Reynolds, who built a brownstone church. The cathedral was completed in 1854, and it was designed by Keely. Sadly, the cathedral only survived a few years before being ruined in the great Charleston fire of 1861; the Civil War and its aftermath caused the ruin of the cathedral to stand for decades.

A lack of funds caused the spire atop the entry tower to be deleted from construction. The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, designed by Patrick Keely and constructed in 1890, will at last be completed by a spire designed by Glenn Keyes Architect.

A new cathedral was begun in 1890, again by Keely, but it took until
Sacred Architecture

Prior attempts to finish the tower have gone awry, including an impressive spire design by one of Charleston’s best-known architects, Albert Simons, in the 1930s.

1907 to complete the much anticipated church. Like its predecessor, this new building was clad in brownstone from Connecticut. A lack of funds, however, caused the spire atop the entry tower to be deleted from construction. Yet the cathedral was not unassuming—the interior was built with Portland free- stone and the precedent for the stylistic details was fourteenth-century English Gothic, known as “decorative Gothic.”

The firm of Glenn Keyes Architect, with engineering consulting by John Moore of 4SE engineers, has created a filigree-like structure that is built with a core structure made of steel, with engineered laminated plywood forms and copper cladding. The result is in keeping with the tradition of the spire while meeting the required 135 mile-per-hour wind resistance, as well as maintaining a strong connection to the existing tower. This structure is designed to be much lighter in weight than a stone spire would have been.

The new steeple will be fabricated off site in several pieces using light-weight epoxied wood inspired by ship-building technology. The new spire will double the height of the church to 166 feet and place it in a league with other tall churches such as Saint Michael’s, adding another spire to the skyline of the “Holy City,” as Charleston is nicknamed. The design was presented to the City of Charleston Board of Architectural Review and was well received.

The spire will cap the church’s capital campaign, which has already included restoration of the stained-glass windows and has had ongoing restoration of its brownstone cladding. The brownstone was completely re-pointed and failing areas were treated individually. Brownstone expert Ivan Mijer consulted on the restoration. The brownstone cladding is six inches deep over brick masonry, and some pieces are delaminating, as brownstone is apt to do. Replacement or repairs are being made, depending on the situation. Jahn patching mortars are being used in some areas, whereas Dutchman replacements are called for in other areas. Where the brownstone is in tension, pigmented cast stone is being used.

The proudest restoration element will be the spire, not seen in over a hundred years. The innovative approach of Glenn Keyes and his design team will allow for the much hoped for, but quite elusive, spire for the Cathedral of John the Baptist.

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Prof. Muldrow would like to thank Glenn Keyes and Adrienne Jacobsen for their assistance in the preparation of this article.

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7. Ibid.
When I give presentations in parishes or teach in the classroom, I am often asked many intelligent questions by students, building committee members, architects, pastors, and parishioners. These questions have given me great insight into the needs and desires of the People of God. The questions that follow are among those most frequently asked, and shorter summary answers are provided here for the reader’s convenience.

 Didn’t the Second Vatican Council do away with traditional, beautiful churches? What about “noble simplicity”? The documents of the Second Vatican Council relating to art and architecture are in complete continuity with the Church’s great tradition, even as they set certain guidelines for the liturgical renewal. The document on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium, asked that sacred art be composed of “signs and symbols of heavenly realities” that were meant to be expressive of “God’s boundless beauty” (SC, 122). It also asked that all sacred arts be “in accordance with faith, piety, and cherished traditional laws” (SC, 122). It is interesting to note that the Council never used the phrase “noble simplicity” to refer to liturgical art and architecture. It actually asked that churches strive for “noble beauty” (SC, 124). The term “noble simplicity” was mentioned in the Council’s documents in relation to the rites (SC, 34). So, beauty is in fact the goal of new church architecture, according to the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

 Is it possible to build traditional churches today? Can we afford it? Does the architectural and artistic talent exist? Since the advent of postmodernism in the 1960s, the architecture world has been reexamining the place of traditional forms for new work. A large and flourishing movement generally known as New Classicism has been operating successfully for more than two decades. In recent years, designs for new traditional Catholic churches have been appearing with greater frequency. The Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse, WI, the university chapel at Thomas Aquinas College, CA, and the monastery of the Benedictines in Clear Creek, OK, have proven that traditional architecture is possible today. Scores of other projects are doing the same. The process of reaching back into the needs and desires of the People of God is not an exact copy of an old church client by adding a few pointed windows or extra moldings to an otherwise modernist design. This sort of design should be completely rejected or else the result will be the “strip mall classical” or “Disneyland Gothic.”

 Isn’t using traditional styles for architecture just copying the past? Isn’t there room for new development in church architecture? Since the advent of postmodernism in the 1960s, the architecture world has been reexamining the place of traditional forms for new work. A large and flourishing movement generally known as New Classicism has been operating successfully for more than two decades. In recent years, designs for new traditional Catholic churches have been appearing with greater frequency. The Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse, WI, the university chapel at Thomas Aquinas College, CA, and the monastery of the Benedictines in Clear Creek, OK, have proven that traditional architecture is possible today. Scores of other projects are doing the same. The process of reaching back into the needs and desires of the People of God is not an exact copy of an old church client by adding a few pointed windows or extra moldings to an otherwise modernist design. This sort of design should be completely rejected or else the result will be the “strip mall classical” or “Disneyland Gothic.”

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 Since the people are the “living stones” of the Church, why would we need anything other than a simple meeting hall for Mass? Since the people are the “living stones” of the Church, why would we need anything other than a simple meeting hall for Mass? Since the people are the “living stones” of the Church, why would we need anything other than a simple meeting hall for Mass? Since the people are the “living stones” of the Church, why would we need anything other than a simple meeting hall for Mass? Since the people are the “living stones” of the Church, why would we need anything other than a simple meeting hall for Mass?
members (SC, 7), where we “take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, a minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle; we sing a hymn to the Lord’s glory with all the warriors of the heavenly army” (SC, 8). The job of liturgical art and architecture is to make a building that not only serves the needs of the earthly congregation, but also allows them, through the use of sacred images, to “see” the full community of the liturgy: angels, saints, the Trinity, and even the souls in purgatory. The building itself is a sacrament of the city of heaven, described in scripture as orderly, perfect, radiant, gem-covered, and golden. A church building, therefore, aids in our full, conscious, and active participation by showing us by way of foretaste the very realities in which we are participating. The church building not only shows us our earthly reality, but allows us to glimpse the realities of our destiny at the end of time when God has completely restored the world.

The upper room of the Last Supper was a simple place for the Passover meal. Jesus never wore fancy vestments or drank from gold cups. Why should we do this in the liturgy? Shouldn’t we give money to the poor instead?

Because the Sacred Liturgy is in one sense a memorial of the Last Supper, many people often think that the liturgy is supposed to imitate the earthly lifetime of Christ. However, it should be remembered that at the Incarnation, Christ veiled his divinity and power with only a few exceptions, such as his miracles and the Transfiguration. The Catholic liturgy is not primarily a recall of the earthly Christ, but a foretaste of the heavenly Christ of the Second Coming. The fourth-century bishop Saint Cyril of Jerusalem wrote of Christ: “At the first coming he was wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger. At the second coming he will be clothed in light as in a garment. In the first coming he endured the cross; ... in the second coming he will be in glory, escorted by an army of angels. We look then beyond the first coming and await the second.” The earthly liturgy recalls the shadows of the Last Supper and Passover, but more importantly, it serves as an image of the realities of the heavenly Wedding Feast of the Lamb. The earthly chalice is not only a recall of the cup of the Last Supper, but of the glorious, golden, radiant feast of heaven. Similarly, the church building should show us the order and perfection of heaven.

Building beautiful buildings should never be a substitute for feeding the poor and nursing the sick, but it is not an “either/or” question. The poor and the sick are also expected to participate in the liturgy, and they deserve access to the foretaste of heavenly reality as much as anyone. Moreover, the poor are the least likely to have beautiful homes and personal artwork. A beautiful church gives them a refuge of beauty, which they need more urgently than do the wealthy. Serving the poor means serving their human need for liturgical beauty as well as food and shelter.

Didn’t the early Christians worship in simple private homes? Why, then, should we build elaborate public buildings?

Though scriptural evidence speaks of the earliest Christians “breaking bread” in their homes, it also speaks of them returning frequently to the temple for prayer. A number of the important discourses and cures in the Acts of the Apostles happen within the temple courts. Because Herod was a client-king of the Roman Empire, the temple was a grand, high-style architectural ensemble of the type common in imperial Rome. Christ and the apostles walked on the temple mount amid Corinthian columns, classical moldings, and a large basilican hall called the Royal Stoa, which contained wood carvings and looked almost indistinguishable from early churches in fourth-century Rome. Christianity was not only born into Israel, but also into the Roman Empire, well before the emperor Constantine converted to Christianity and made it the religion of the empire.

But even if Christianity had been born in a cultural vacuum, it would still need to develop an art and architecture that could serve as sacramental bearers of the heavenly Jerusalem. So to revert to building churches as “houses” today is to embrace a false antiquarianism that says “older is always better.” The church building is not primarily a house, but rather a ritually public and sacramental building where the many gather to anticipate the glory and perfection of heaven.

What are the ideas we should consider

This mural designed and executed by Felix Lieftuchter in the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Wheeling, West Virginia, shows a foretaste of the glory of heaven and the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.
when thinking about the design of the altar?

In recent decades, the altar in a Catholic church has usually been described as a “table of the community.” In one sense, this is true. A Catholic altar is indeed the table around which the earthly congregation gathers to worship God. But the altar is also a sacramento, a visible sign of otherwise invisible realities. And the prime reality is this: the altar is the glorified table of our future heavenly banquet as well as a symbol of Christ himself.

The book of Revelation tells us that the future holds for us an eternal celebration with God and the heavenly beings when the “rescue mission” of God is complete. God will be “all in all” and his divine presence will completely restore everything. The results of the Fall—death, sorrow, suffering, sin—will be overcome and God will be fully reunited to his creation once again; the two will become one. For this reason, the heavenly celebration is called the “Wedding Feast of the Lamb.” Christ, the Bridegroom, has become one with the Church, his Bride. The heavenly celebration that ensues is not completely unlike the wedding receptions we have on earth, where festivity reigns and we share a banquet eaten on a beautifully decorated table, dressed with linens, candles, and flowers. But the altar signifies a feast of eternal, cosmic, and heavenly importance: Christ’s mission to re-join God and creation is complete! So our worship is a celebration, a doing on earth what is done in heaven. The sacred meal of the liturgy, then, happens on a “table” in a church building, which indicates eternal importance, permanence, radiance, and perfection. We become accustomed to heaven by doing the things of heaven, even while still on earth.

However, the celebration of Mass is also a sacrificial feast. It therefore requires not only a table, but also an altar as a place of offering. The feast is hosted by Christ whose body is simultaneously the “place” of offering (the altar), the offerer (the priest), and that which is offered (the victim). Christ then is the truest altar. Our earthly altar conversely signifies Christ and gives us the old expression “the altar is Christ;” which is why the priest kisses it as he enters the church. To kiss the altar is to kiss Christ.

As a sacramental sign of Christ, the altar is treated in a way that makes its “Christ-ness” most evident. It is made of stone and is affixed to the floor, signifying the permanence and eternity of the Son of God. It is marked with five small engraved crosses indicating the five wounds of his body. When the altar is dedicated by the bishop, it will again be treated as a body: sprinkled with holy water like a Baptism and rubbed with sacred oils in an anointing, which indicates Christ as “the Anointed One of God.” It is then “dressed” in white linen altar cloths, signifying the white robes of heavenly beings, while at the same time showing that the “table” is prepared for the greatest feast ever celebrated. From this table is served God himself in the Eucharist.

What should we consider when planning our baptism?

In the early centuries of the Church, baptistries were often buildings separate from the main body of a church. Those who were not yet baptized were not yet considered “citizens” of the Church, and as such received their Baptisms outside the church, then processed into the church building in triumph. Many such baptistries exist to this day in the great churches of the world. As centuries passed, Baptism was often reduced to a sprinkling of water on the head of a child, and fonts began to shrink and lose their architectural significance. In the twentieth century, Baptism was understood anew as a sacrament of birth, death, and ritual washing. The fullness of the sign was seen as better expressed in immersing (immersion) the catechumen in water rather than a mere sprinkling (infusion), and the notion of larger fonts in which adults could walk became popular. In the years after the Second Vatican Council, a greater emphasis was placed on Baptism as an entry into the ecclesial community, and so baptistries became more prominent and were often located within the body of the church, sometimes at the rear of the church’s central aisle. While this made baptistries more visible, it made it awkward for funeral and bridal processions. Because many pastors wanted their baptistries to be visible at the Easter Vigil, fonts were then often located in the front of the church.

There is no one “correct” place to put a baptism in a church, but the placement should adhere to several principles. First, the location of the baptistry should suggest entering the church as one receives this sacrament of Initiation. The recent trend of putting baptis-
tries in the sanctuary behind or next to the altar should by all means be avoided; Baptism signifies the entry into the church, not the final destination. Second, since Baptisms in large parishes usually involve many family members and multiple children, giving adequate seating and good sight lines to the baptismary is important, though not essential. Third, since Baptism is a preparation for fulfillment in the Eucharist, some connection with the altar is desirable, either in sight lines or materials.

The baptismary is a place of important sacramental activity, so its materials and design should announce that fact. The fiberglass tub baptistries seen in recent years should absolutely be rejected. The octagonal shape of the baptismary connects to a longstanding tradition of symbolizing the “eighth day,” the day after God’s seventh day of creation, signifying the eternal rest of the glorified paradise of heaven. Since Baptism provides the entry point to that paradise, the architecture itself should give a foretaste of that glory. But the glory of Baptism arises out of the symbolism of the baptismary as “womb and tomb.” The centralized plan of the baptismary harkens back to the ancient form of tombs, which were often round buildings based on the shape of burial mounds. Baptism provides the entry to new life, but only as a “death” to the old self, where one descends down several steps, as if descending into burial. After the ritual cleansing with baptismal water, the newly baptized person then rises up the steps on the other side, indicating a rebirth as a new creation, out of the tomb, which is simultaneously like coming forth from a mother’s womb, “born again,” in the proper sense of the term.

Why did we build so many ugly churches after the Second Vatican Council? Why did we take out the marble high altars from older churches and paint over the murals?

In the early and mid twentieth century, the culture still had a great trust in modernity and its notions of progress. The Church, too, desired to prove that the Faith could find expression in our own day as it had in other times and was particularly eager to be a leaven for the world after the Great Depression, two world wars, the Holocaust, and the use of nuclear weapons. While the Church sought to be an antidote to the destruction of the early twentieth century, many strains of the art world moved toward a nihilistic or mechanistic understanding of technology as the answer to modern problems. In the elite circles of architectural philosophy and practice, the machine and the factory (and their materials of glass, steel and concrete) became the model for new buildings. Though this mechanistic understanding of buildings was often foreign to sacramental theology, building a church that embraced the modern world was often seen as a good by individual pastors and bishops. Only later did people start to see that some of the principles of modernism needed to be rethought for ecclesiastical use. We are now living in that post-modern time when many churches are re-engaging with beauty and tradition once again.

Interestingly, after the Second Vatican Council, a strain of theology emerged in the Church, which redefined churches as “meetinghouses” and found its inspiration in the so-called house churches of the time of the apostles. Although this sort of uncritical antiquarianism had been widely condemned by Church authorities over the centuries, including Pope Pius XII in Mediator Dei, many Catholic theologians nonetheless argued that a church building had no import other than as a place of comfortable hospitality, a “skin for liturgical action,” which “need not look like anything else past or present.”

In the late 1960s and forward, then, many people who accepted this redefinition of the church as a meetinghouse for the community’s sacred meal then saw old altars, altarpieces, statues, and murals as relics of the “old” way of understanding the Church. In order to best express the new notion of a church as meeting house, they removed and destroyed many precious artifacts. Under Pope Benedict, the Church has come to understand better the Second Vatican Council as a call for reform within a hermeneutic of continuity rather than rupture, and people are learning to see the value of many traditional forms in the Church once again. However, it should be noted that an uncritical look at the past should be discouraged. There were in fact many reforms that were needed before the Council, and careful theological examination is required in “restoring” old forms in order to avoid simply repeating preconciliar excesses.

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On August 6, 2008, during his two-week retreat at the seminary near Bressanone, Italy—a town at the foot of the Alps near the Austrian border and a long-time vacation locale for Benedict XVI and his brother Monsignor Georg Ratzinger—the Holy Father met with four hundred priests of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone at the Cathedral of S. Maria Assunta for an open question-and-answer session. The questions on beauty and the protection of creation and the pontiff’s responses are reproduced below.

**Question:** Holy Father, my name is Willibald Hopfgartner, I am a Franciscan and I work in a school and in various areas of guidance of my order. In your discourse at Regensburg you stressed the substantial link between the divine Spirit and human reason. On the other hand, you also always underlined the importance of art and beauty, of aesthetics. Consequently, should not the aesthetic experience of faith in the context of the Church, for proclamation and for the liturgy be ceaselessly reaffirmed alongside the conceptual dialogue about God (in theology)?

**Answer:** Thank you. Yes, I think these two things go hand in hand: reason, precision, honesty in the reflection on the truth—and beauty. Reason that intended to strip itself of beauty would be halved, it would be a blinded reason. It is only when they are united that both these things form the whole, and precisely for faith this union is important. Faith must continuously face the challenges of thought in this epoch, so that it does not seem a sort of irrational legend that we keep alive but which really is a response to the great questions, and not merely a habit but the truth—as Tertullian once said. In his First Letter, St. Peter wrote the phrase that medieval theologians took as a legitimation, as it were, a responsibility for their theological task: “Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you”—an apologetic for the logos of hope, that is, a transformation of the logos, the reason for hope in apologetics, in response to men. He was obviously convinced of the fact that the faith was the logos, that it was a reason, a light that came from creative Reason rather than a wonderful concoction, a fruit of our thought. And this is why it is universal and for this is a force of good which resists the millennia; there truly is the light of light. Likewise, if we contemplate the beauties created by faith, they are simply, I would say, the living proof of faith. If I look at this beautiful cathedral—it is a living proclamation! It speaks to us itself, and on the basis of the cathedral’s beauty, we succeed in visibly proclaiming God, Christ and all his mysteries: Here they have acquired a form and look at us. All the great works of art, cathedrals—the Gothic cathedrals and the splendid Baroque churches—they are all a luminous sign of God and therefore truly a manifestation, an epiphany of God. And in Christianity it is precisely a matter of this epiphany: that God became a veiled Epiphany—he appears and is resplendent. We have just heard the organ in its full splendor. I think the great music born in the Church makes the truth of our faith audible and perceivable: from Gregorian chant to the music of the cathedrals, to Palestrina and his epoch, to Bach and hence to Mozart and Bruckner and so forth. In listening to all these works—the Passions of Bach, his Mass in B flat, and the great spiritual compositions of 16th-century polyphony, of the Viennese School, of all music, even that of minor composers—we suddenly understand: It is true! Wherever such things are born, the Truth is there. Without an intuition that discovers the true creative center of the world such beauty cannot be born. For this reason I think we should always ensure that the two things are together; we should bring them together. When, in our epoch, we discuss the reasonableness of faith, we discuss precisely the fact that reason does not end where experimental discoveries end—it does not finish in positivism; the theory of evolution sees the truth but sees only half the truth: It does not see that behind it is the Spirit of the creation. We are fighting to expand reason, and hence for a reason, which, precisely, is also open to the beautiful and does not have to set it aside as something quite different.
Sacred Architecture

Question: Holy Father, my name is Karl Golser, I am a professor of moral theology here in Bressanone and also director of the Institute for Justice, Peace and the Preservation of the Creation. I am pleased to recall the period in which I was able to work with you at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. What can we do to increase the sense of responsibility for creation in the life of our Christian communities? What can we do in order to view Creation and Redemption as more closely united?

Answer: Thank you very much, dear Prof. Golser. You have thus touched on the theme of Creation and Redemption and I think that this indissoluble bond should be given new prominence. In recent decades the doctrine of Creation had almost disappeared from theology, it was almost imperceptible. We are now aware of the damage that this has caused. The Redeemer is the Creator and if we do not proclaim God in his full grandeur—as Creator and as Redeemer—we also diminish the value of the Redemption. Indeed, if God has no role in Creation, if he is relegated merely to a historical context, how can he truly understand the whole of our life? How will he be able to bring salvation to man in his entirety and to the world in its totality? Twenty-three years ago Christians were accused—I do not know if this accusation is still held—of being the ones truly responsible for the destruction of Creation because the words contained in Genesis—“subdue the earth”—were said to have led to that arrogance with regard to creation whose consequences we are reaping today. I think we must learn again to understand this accusation in all its falsity: as long as the earth was seen as God’s creation, the task of “subduing” it was never intended as an order to enslave it but rather as the task of being guardians of creation and developing its gifts; of actively collaborating in God’s work ourselves, in the evolution that he ordered in the world so that the gifts of Creation might be appreciated rather than trampled upon and destroyed.

If we observe what came into being around monasteries, how in those places small paradises, oases of creation were and continue to be born, it becomes evident that these were not only words. Rather, wherever the Creator’s Word was properly understood, wherever life was lived with the redeeming Creator, people strove to save creation and not to destroy it. Chapter 8 of the Letter to the Romans also fits into this context. It says that the whole of Creation has been groaning in travail because of the bondage to which it has been subjected, awaiting the revelation of God’s sons: it will feel liberated when creatures, men and women who are children of God, treat it according to God’s perspective. I believe that we can establish exactly this as a reality today. Creation is groaning—we perceive it, we almost hear it—and awaits human beings who will preserve it in accordance with God. The brutal consumption of Creation begins where God is not, where matter is henceforth only material for us, where we ourselves are the ultimate demand, where the whole is merely our property and we consume it for ourselves alone. And the wasting of creation begins when we no longer recognize any need superior to our own, but see only ourselves. It begins when there is no longer any concept of life beyond death, where in this life we must grab hold of everything and possess life as intensely as possible, where we must possess all that is possible to possess.

Thus, I believe we must strive with all the means we have to present faith in public, especially where a sensitivity for it already exists. And I think that the sensation that the world may be slipping away—because it is we ourselves who are chasing it away—and feeling oppressed by the problems of Creation, afford us a suitable opportunity in which our faith can speak publicly and make itself felt as a propositional initiative. Indeed, it is not merely a question of discovering technologies that prevent the damage, even though it is important to find alternative sources of energy, among other things. Yet, none of this will suffice unless we ourselves find a new way of living, a discipline of making sacrifices, a discipline of the recognition of others to whom creation belongs as much as it belongs to us who may more easily make use of it; a discipline of responsibility with regard to the future of others and to our own future, because it is a responsibility in the eyes of the One who is our Judge and as such is also Redeemer but, truly, also our Judge.

Consequently, I think in any case that the two dimensions—Creation and Redemption, earthly life and eternal life, responsibility for the Creation and responsibility for others and for the future—should be juxtaposed. I also think it is our task to intervene clearly and with determination on public opinion.

Reviewed by Michael Lewis

The historian and the artist bring different questions to a figure like Ralph Adams Cram. The historian wants to understand what social and cultural forces compelled a modern businessman-architect, practicing in the twentieth century, to make buildings in the style of the fourteenth; the artist merely wants to know if they are any good. Do his buildings live—live in the artistic sense—or are they merely clever writing in a dead language, like someone writing Latin verse today? If the answer is that his buildings do not live, then there is hardly any point in trying to answer the first question.

From the formation of his firm in 1889 to his death in 1942, Cram was America’s most distinguished Gothic revivalist. His works include New York’s still-unfinished Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, the United States Military Academy at West Point, and a good deal of Princeton University, along with some five hundred other buildings and projects. This massive output seems to have deterred scholars and, with the exception of Cram’s own charming My Life in Architecture (1936), there is no comprehensive account of his career or life. All the more reason, then, to rejoice at the publication of Ethan Anthony’s handsome new monograph. At last we have an accurate catalogue raisonné of all of the works, painstakingly compiled from the records of Cram’s successor firm (which Anthony heads). The book permits us finally to take the measure of the architect in full.

Born in 1863, Cram spent five years learning architecture in Boston in the office of Rotch and Tilden, followed by several study trips to Europe. During a Christmas visit to Rome, the splendor of Mass in Saint Peter’s overwhelmed him and he converted—not to Catholicism, an inconceivable step for a New Hampshire Unitarian in 1886—but to Episcopalianism. Upon his return he established his firm, practicing with a series of partners, the most brilliant of whom was the mercantile Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue.

In the early years of their collaboration, Cram and Goodhue were literary aesthetes, producing whimsical books and superbly rendered architectural fantasies. The dabbling ended in 1902 with the commission for West Point, which raised them to the first rank of American architects and forced a peculiar change in their mode of work. The terms of the project obliged them to open an office in New York, managed by Goodhue, who had to learn to collaborate at long distance with Cram in Boston. Cram would work out the plan and the rough massing, which he passed on to Goodhue, who would then shape and model the visible envelope of the building. The division of responsibility brought out the particular strengths of each: Cram’s inspired planning and Goodhue’s feeling for the poetry of silhouette and surface.

In large measure it was the interplay between these two rather different personalities that gave the firm its creative tension and saved it from mere archaeological precocity. Anthony makes clear just how different their personal hands were by comparing several designs where Cram and Goodhue proposed a different epidermis, as it were, for the same architectural body. (Unfortunately, these pairs are repeatedly published on back-to-back pages, making side-by-side comparison impossible.) Although the partners quarreled and parted in 1913, Cram never denied the genius of Goodhue, who “never swerved from his vital originality,” he wrote following Goodhue’s untimely death in 1924, “while I suppose I represented the reactionary tendency.”

The crack about reactionary tendencies was not entirely fair, for as a Gothic fanatic Cram was unusually open-minded. He was the first important American architect to study seriously the architecture of Japan, publishing his Impressions of Japanese Architecture (1905), as well as designing Tsuda University in Hokkaido (1919). Looking at The Architecture of Ralph Adams Cram, one is struck by how stylistically variegated the work actually is. Cram lacked the architectural ego of Goodhue, and he was happy to delegate design control to his job captains, such as Alexander Hoyle, who was called forward whenever clients wanted something colonial.

Only in two respects does The Architecture of Ralph Adams Cram fall short. The usefulness of the catalogue is sadly compromised by skimpiness: the entries give only the location of the project, a job number, and whether the project is academic or ecclesiastical. For example, the scholar wanting to see what Cram did at Williams College, my home institution, would find only a listing of job numbers for seven “academic” buildings; he would have no way of knowing that these comprised three dormitories, a library, an alumni hall, a theater, and a power plant. Given that the firm is intact and possesses complete records of these projects, it would have been easy to provide more detailed entries. Also distressing is the haphazard bibliography, which omits some of Cram’s most important texts, including Impressions of Japanese Architecture and his coauthored monograph Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue (1925).

Do Cram’s buildings live? The question goes beyond the scope of this review, but now—with the long overdue publication of this elegant and thoughtful monograph—we are finally able to begin answering it.

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Do the increasingly ubiquitous evangelical megachurches that dot the national landscape represent something new in either Protestant architecture or American culture? In their book, *From Meetinghouse to Megachurch: A Material and Cultural History*, authors Anne C. Loveland and Otis B. Wheeler respond to this question with an emphatic “No.” Rather than representing something new, Loveland and Wheeler contend that evangelical megachurches are part of an ongoing evolution whose antecedents include Puritan meetinghouses, revival tents, tabernacles, and mainline Protestant churches. A sense of continuity that persists even as American church architecture changes is the book’s major theme.

In examining this continuity, the authors reject the ahistorical way that the popular media often treats megachurches and seek to fill a historiographical gap. Specifically, along with other scholars such as Colleen McDannell, they correct the lingering misconception that Protestants do not have a well-developed material culture. Despite the work of scholars such as Dell Upton, Louis Nelson, and Peter Williams, among others, American Protestant architecture remains understudied, but works such as *From Meetinghouse to Megachurch* help rectify the problem. Portions of the book will remind readers of Jeanne Halgren Kilde’s *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (2002), which was published after Loveland and Wheeler sent their manuscript to publishers. Loveland and Wheeler were still able to use Kilde’s dissertation, however, and her interpretations are evident. Since Loveland and Wheeler take a longer chronological view, though, their work complements Kilde’s book well.

In fact, many of the book’s strengths and weaknesses stem from this broad chronological scope. *From Meetinghouse to Megachurch* begins in the seventeenth century and extends through the late twentieth century. In covering such an impressive length of time, Loveland and Wheeler’s survey provides a much-needed introduction to changes in Protestant architecture throughout American history. Of course, as with any book of this breadth, it necessarily sacrifices some depth. Additionally, as a material and cultural history, it leaves both religious historians and architectural historians longing for more detailed attention to their specific concerns. Such is the nature of scholarship.

In the end, the authors do tackle a difficult question: What is the relationship between megachurches (that often seem to be little more than glorified shopping malls) and sacred space? For Loveland and Wheeler, it seems clear that most megachurches intentionally tear down barriers between the sacred and profane. Rather than creating sacred space, the authors claim that megachurch pastors simply infuse their buildings with a sense of “sacrality.” Unfortunately, the exact distinction between “sacred” and “sacrality” is never made clear. Loveland and Wheeler’s final interpretations are somewhat ambiguous, and further scholarship is undoubtedly needed.

Yet, overall *From Meetinghouse to Megachurch* represents an important step forward in the scholarship on megachurches and Protestant architecture more generally. In particular, the authors provide readers with a good introduction to the “church growth movement” of the late twentieth century. In addition, both the exterior and interior spaces of church buildings are considered. Visually, the book also has much to offer. It includes historical drawings, woodcuts, lithographs, floor plans, and photographs, along with an impressive collection of interior and exterior photographs from modern megachurches. The book is well written and would be useful for scholars in multiple disciplines. By placing megachurches in their historic context, Loveland and Wheeler have made a significant contribution to scholarly understanding of this diffuse and remarkably significant phenomenon.

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The discovery, or rediscovery, of linear perspective in the Italian Renaissance is usually credited to Filippo Brunelleschi, the architect of the dome of the Florence Cathedral. Another nearby monument that may be the first existing example of one-point perspective is the funerary chapel in Santa Maria Novella painted by Masaccio in 1428. In a complex and theologically rich explication of Masaccio’s Holy Trinity, with the Virgin, Saint John and Donors, John Moffitt argues that the point to which all of the lines converge is placed at the bottom of the picture in order to correspond with the elevation of the host during Mass. Thus God the Father stands on an altar and presents his crucified Son to the viewer within a perspectival architecture that converges on the Eucharist. The consecrated host becomes the liturgical focal point of the chapel and of the painting.

Later, Raphael’s Disputa in the Vatican stanza has the Eucharist in a monstrance as the focus of the painting and the saints’ disputa or discussion. The consecrated host is again the geometric vanishing point of the saints, who are seated in an apse-like semicircle, surmounted by the Trinity. Likewise, images of the Last Supper such as Leonardo’s famous painting in Milan often focus on Christ and the Eucharist as the centerpoint of converging lines. In Santa Maria presso San Satiro, Milan, Leonardo’s friend the architect Donato Bramante created a “transubstantiated” architecture where the trompe l’oeil sanctuary converges like a painting in order to create the semblance of a much deeper apse. The architecture of Bramante’s renovation includes a coffered barrel vault, Corinthian pilasters and ronduels inspired by Masaccio’s Trinity (by way of Alberti’s church of San Andrea in Mantua). Seen from the central aisle the punto centrico, or vanishing point, of the architecture converges on the Corpus Christi within a monstrance on the altar. This “spiritual vanishing point,” which may be related to the monstrance and to the elevation of the host at Mass, is also focused on the icon of the Virgin along with the tabernacle (added later). According to this fascinating study, the invention of one-point perspective is inextricably tied up with the promotion of the Eucharist and belief in transubstantiation during the Renaissance.

These ideas of “host worship,” are further developed as a way for art and architecture to focus on and give importance to such a physically small element as the Eucharistic host. One example is the Spanish custodias procesionales, in which large Eucharistic monumonents are carried through the streets to enable the faithful to see and worship Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. “In liturgical language a ‘custodia’ is the receptacle that guards the Sacred Host and which during the Mass remains in sight of the faithful so that they can contemplate the miracle of transubstantiation, declared dogma by the Catholic Church in 1215.” Moffitt calls these grand monstrances “micro architecture” due to the fact that these centralized tempiettos, or elaborately crafted towers, are composed of tiny classical elements that can reference the architecture of the city. Like a monstrance, the custodia is meant to exhibit and frame a small Eucharistic host and make it a visual focus. A magnificent example is the custodia procesionale of Seville, which has four levels depicting statues of the Fathers of the Church; the host itself with priests celebrating mass; the agnus Dei; and the Holy Trinity with a statue of Faith on the dome. There is a fascinating connection to the royal chapel of the Escorial from the sixteenth century, in which a small tabernacle is surmounted by a larger one almost like a custodia surmounting a monstrance. The chapel of the Transparente by Narciso Tome in Toledo Cathedral is a tour de force of architecture, sculpture, and symbolism done in the eighteenth century. Above the altar and the famed statue of the Madonna and child is the central motif of the Gloria, the exposed Eucharist from which explodes golden rays of light and angels in ecstasy. Moffitt interprets this baroque confection as having an underlying architecture of forced perspectives and multiple vanishing points which may be related to “anamorphic” perspective. But fundamental to his argument is the analysis of artwork composed upon a central focal point, typically coinciding with an object of devotion, such as the consecrated host.

Along with a number of oversights, such as calling Saint Thomas Aquinas the founder of the Dominican order, some of the specific discoveries or textual connections in this book seem merely speculative. Images, though profuse, could have been of higher quality. However, the book offers a rich art-historical and theological framework for understanding perspective and its use to explicate Scripture and Renaissance and medieval texts. Painterly Perspective and Piety reflects fascinating in-depth research which shows the way in which the Eucharist has been central to the development of one-point perspective.

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From the Publishing Houses
A Selection of Recent Books


William Dyrness explores the roots of Reformed theology from sixteenth-century Geneva to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Puritan New England. Though this tradition impeded development of particular visual forms, Dyrness argues that it encouraged others, especially in areas of popular culture and the order of family and community. Exploring the theology of Calvin and others, Dyrness demonstrates how the tradition created a new aesthetic of simplicity, inwardness and order to express underlying theological commitments.


This coffee-table book published by the Condé Nast group brings together such varied American places of worship as Boston’s Trinity Church, California’s Crystal Cathedral, America’s oldest synagogue in Rhode Island, and a host of temples, tabernacles, chapels, and country churches. Filled with photographs of pew ends and other quaint details and an ecumenical spirit, it allows the browser to travel from a private chapel with stained glass by Marc Chagall to a parish designed by new urbanist Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk to a 1960s concrete chapel in New Mexico with a bell tower saved from a Mexican mission with the flip of the page.


This sixty-four-page manuscript features both historic and contemporary images of Eugene R. Liebert’s (1866-1945) works. Recognized as the leading progenitor of the Germanic styles in the American Midwest in 1900, Liebert executed designs in the German New Renaissance style and the Jugendstil (the Teutonic version of art nouveau). Each of the three chapters, “Residential Work,” “Commercial Work and Schools,” and “Ecclesiastical Work,” includes many previously unpublished images that illustrate Liebert’s artistry and all-encompassing design style. Liebert was recognized for his attention to the smallest design elements in his structures, and the manuscript’s illustrations highlight the detailed as well as the grand scale of his designs.

Reaching Up to God: The Story of St. Martin’s Episcopal Church, text by Lee Adcock Hunnell. Photography by Gary J. Zvonkovic. Houston, TX: St. Martin’s Episcopal Church, 2006. 256 pp. ISBN 0978598601. $60.00

Reaching Up to God details the history of St. Martin’s Episcopal Church in Houston, TX, and the building of its towering new church, designed by Jackson & Ryan Architects of Houston. The pages of this book are filled with expansive photographs of the interior, recording the elaborate wood carvings, each of the thirty-six stained-glass windows and the magnificent "Gloria Dei" organ. The book also discusses the inspiration for the exterior and interior designs of the church, as well as the use of modern architectural, engineering and construction techniques. In addition to the story of St. Martin’s, Hunnell includes a brief history of the Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church in the United States of America.


For this book photographer Sherry Pace has compiled outdoor photographs of 133 of the state’s most historically significant churches and synagogues. The selected images provide a broad overview of the most noteworthy buildings, with origins dating from the 1820s through the 1920s, and invite the reader to look more closely at all of Mississippi’s historic houses of worship. This collection of photographs preserves churches that were either destroyed or damaged by Hurricane Katrina on Mississippi’s Gulf Coast.
We must not forget Sunday as the day of the Lord and the day of the liturgy, in order to see - in the beauty of our churches, of sacred music, and of the Word of God - the beauty of God Himself, and allow it to enter our own being. Thus our lives become great, they become true life.”

~Pope Benedict XVI

June 2009
Jesus

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