Part of the history of art and architecture is the revivification of elements found in the past. Sometimes this is a matter of continuity, while at other times the elements are referenced in order to associate the new work with a building or a historical period. The twentieth-century Liturgical Movement sought a return to the liturgy of antiquity and viewed developments dating from the medieval period or Counter-Reformation as unnecessary accretions or decadences. By the 1920s, the desire to strip the liturgy of these accretions found its architectural corollary in the stripping of saints and altarpieces from high altars. The theorists of the Liturgical Movement, for instance, wanted to focus on the sacrificial nature of the Mass, but to the exclusion of other iconography. Their model, which was adopted in both new and existing churches, comprised an unencumbered stone altar with a bronze tabernacle on top, surmounted by a crucifix with a canopy or baldachin above. It had a classic simplicity inspired by antiquity that continues to resonate with Catholics today. Did this paring down of Gothic and classical churches in the name of an earlier golden age lead to the later adoption of modernist architecture for our churches? The removal of tabernacles, side altars, altar rails, and pews which followed in the 1950s and 1960s, resulted in the reinvention of church architecture as community hall.

In his 1947 encyclical Mediator Dei Pope Pius XII expressed concern about what he called archeologism: “The liturgy of the early ages is most certainly worthy of all veneration. But ancient usage must not be esteemed more suitable and proper, either in its own right or in its significance for later times and new situations, on the simple ground that it carries the savor and aroma of antiquity. The more recent liturgical rites likewise deserve reverence and respect. They, too, owe their inspiration to the Holy Spirit, who assists the Church in every age even to the summation of the world ... it is neither wise nor laudable to reduce everything to antiquity by every possible device.”

While the advocacy of a return to antiquity and the house church is today less strong, the archeologism to which Pope Pius referred is nonetheless emerging in new forms. Christians look to the “good old days,” whether they were the 1950s or the 1250s. The further away the era, the easier it is to mask its imperfections and to reclaim it as some golden age when things were purer. However, as Sacrosanctum Concilium states, “in the course of the centuries, she [the Church] has brought into being a treasury of art which must be very carefully preserved.” Art from the past is a window onto the faith and practice of a specific time, but it can also speak to all ages. To reject periods, other than our favorites, as either primitive or decadent is to miss out on the rich tapestry of art and architecture that the Church has fostered.

One of the most fascinating architectural precursors to the Liturgical Movement was the nineteenth-century Gothic revival. The leading Catholic figure of the revival, A. W. N. Pugin, believed that the Gothic was the only true Christian architecture. He was supported in this belief by the Ecclesiological Society in the Anglican church. Though a talented architect, Pugin rejected the first nine hundred years of architecture as prologue and the last four hundred years as decline. His was an attractive, though simplistic, theory which equated Gothic art and architecture with the presumed purity, chivalry, and piety of the Middle Ages. This romantic conception, along with the dismissal of other periods of architecture as less Christian, has curiously resurfaced in recent decades.

Should we aspire to recover a golden age of liturgy or architecture, or should we seek to create beautiful and timeless works of sacred art and architecture? Both the early Christian house church and the Gothic cathedral should be seen as part of the great tradition, along with the Romanesque, the Byzantine, the Renaissance and Baroque. The history of sacred architecture is the history of revival but also of development.

This is not to argue that it is somehow unnatural for us to have our favorite music, paintings, or churches. It is also perfectly valid, even beneficial, to debate the relative merits of various periods of architecture. However, a catholic understanding of art and architecture can appreciate the high Gothic cathedral as well as the humble mission church, the early Christian basilica and the Baroque chapel of the Rosary attached to it. While it may seem natural to equate different architectural styles with the strengths or weaknesses of an age, it is in fact based on a historiist or modernist approach to history. Seeking to build new architecture because it hearkens back to a golden age, whether antiquity, the Middle Ages, or any other time is archeologism. Sacred architecture must be based on principles and examples of the past, but it cannot recreate that supposed golden age. As Pope Benedict XVI said on the occasion of the five hundredth anniversary of the Vatican Museums in June 2006:

In every age Christians have sought to give expression to faith’s vision of the beauty and order of God’s creation, the nobility of our vocation as men and women made in His image and likeness, and the promise of a cosmos redeemed and transfigured by the grace of Christ. The artistic treasures which surround us are not simply impressive monuments of a distant past. Rather, ... they stand as a perennial witness to the Church’s unchanging faith in the Triune God who, in the memorable phrase of St. Augustine, is Himself “Beauty ever ancient, ever new.”

Duncan Stroik
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Timed to coincide with the African Synod of Bishops at the Vatican in October, an art exhibit of the Christian heritage of Africa was organized by the Centro Orientamento Educativo (COE). On display in the entrance hall of the Paul VI Hall were works such as *Wedding at Cana Celebrated by African Tribes* by Joseph Malenga Mpasi of the Congo, and the *Deliverance of the Chained Angel* by Zeleoe Ewnetu of Ethiopia. Joseph Atangana Ndzie, who works for the COE in Cameroon, suggested that sacred art in Africa reveals the values of the people in Africa and their Catholic identity: “When someone sees this art, there is a universal language that can express devotion. A singular participation in man’s expression to God that enriches the universality of the Church.”

Vatican Museums donated the proceeds from May 10, 2009, to benefit the families of victims of the earthquake in Abruzzo, Italy, in April. Though traditionally closed on Sundays, workers agreed to open their doors for an extra day on one Sunday in May and donate the funds to those impacted by the quake.

$115.9 billion of private donations were given by the United States to help developing countries in 2008, while public aid was $21.8 billion. Foundations gave $3.3 billion, corporations donated $6.8 billion, and voluntary organizations gave $10.8 billion. Religious organizations and churches gave $8.6 billion to help developing countries. In its 2009 Index of Global Philanthropy and Remittances, the Hudson Institute found that despite “the loss of assets in 2008, giving abroad by foundations, corporations, charities, churches, and individuals is not expected to take a sharp downward turn in 2009.” The World Bank predicted monetary gifts to decrease by only 5–8 percent this year. Africa received the majority of foreign aid from corporations and charities in 2008, while Latin America was given the bulk of religious organization aid. Philanthropists are helping people in the developing world start their own businesses and create jobs for others.

The Vatican has designated the Cathedral of Saint Paul in Minnesota as the National Shrine of the Apostle Paul. The cathedral staff announced the designation on June 16, 2009, shortly before the conclusion of the Year of Saint Paul. This is the first national shrine in North America dedicated to Paul and the first national shrine located in Minnesota. In the cathedral, which opened in 1915, the Apostle to the Gentiles is particularly commemorated with a series of bronze grills surrounding the sanctuary that depict the major events in the saint’s life, from his conversion to his martyrdom. Two hundred thousand people visit the cathedral each year, but, following this designation, that number is expected to increase.

The metal-framed freestanding altar that stood in the center of the sanctuary at Westminster Cathedral, the mother church of English Catholics, has been removed. It stood in front of the high altar and baldacchino and blocked sight lines into the sanctuary. After it was temporarily removed for this year’s Holy Week, Archbishop Vincent Nichols allowed for its move to be permanent. The wooden platform, which was erected for His Holiness John Paul II’s visit in 1982, has also been removed and the wooden floor has been repaired. Any celebrant at the cathedral can now face east or west at the original stone altar designed by John Francis Bentley. The cathedral was opened in 1903 and consecrated in 1910, though the interior remains unfinished to this day.
A Superior Court judge in Massachusetts ruled that the Archdiocese of Boston must disclose development plans for a thirty-acre seafront property worth $3.3 million in the town of Scituate, MA, in order to avoid paying the six-figure real-estate tax bill. The former parish, Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini Church, was closed five years ago in the reconfiguration of the archdiocese by Sean P. Cardinal O’Malley. About three hundred parishioners were hoping that a decision by the Vatican’s Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura would overturn the decision to close the church after the 2004 decision and have held a continuous twenty-four-hour vigil at the church for five years to prevent its closure. Currently, only twenty to forty parishioners attend a Communion service held at Saint Frances on Sundays. Though the future of the property remains undisclosed, the spokesman for the archdiocese stated “the Saint Frances Cabrini property, owned by the Roman Catholic Church in Scituate, is tax-exempt under applicable law.”

A 68 percent retention rate of Catholics in the Church was found in a study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. The report indicates the importance of Mass attendance for children and teenagers and notes some of the reasons people leave the faith. Twenty-one percent of those who left became Protestant, while 27 percent are no longer affiliated with any church. Archbishop Donald Wuerl of Washington, commenting on the findings, said “Adolescence is a critical time in religious development and, as the poll shows, what happens in the teen years has a long-lasting effect.”

Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, in a retreat he gave to clergy from around the world at Ars, France, urged priests to engage in the combat of prayer and to encourage all the faithful to pray well. He asked them to keep the doors of parish churches open to invite people to visit the Blessed Sacrament: “In Austria we carry on a constant struggle to keep our churches open, accessible to the faithful and to others who are seeking.” The cardinal noted that many people who no longer attend Mass might still step inside a church to light a candle or spend a few minutes in prayer. He asked the priests to “do everything possible, and the impossible, to allow the faithful and persons seeking God—who, God awaits—to have access to Jesus in the Eucharist: don’t close the doors of your churches, please!”

A “Mass for Thanksgiving for the Gift of Human Life” was approved by the United States Bishops at their meeting in San Antonio, TX. The Mass was requested by the late John Cardinal O’Connor of New York in 1990. The text was approved by the bishops in 1992 and was sent to the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments for review.

On the feast of the Triumph of the Cross, September 14, 2009, four Cistercian monks from France formally established a new monastery in Munkeby, Norway. Munkeby Mariakloster is the first new monastery founded by the Abbey of Citeaux since the fifteenth century. Situated on a former farmstead, the new monastery stands only one-and-a-half kilometers from a medieval Cistercian foundation of which only ruins survive. The monks will first reside in an interim monastery, while they raise funds for a permanent structure capable of housing a small monastic community of ten to twelve monks. Following the construction of the larger monastic complex the interim facility will become a guesthouse.

On August 22, 2009—the Feast of the Queenship of Mary—the National Shrine of Mary, Queen of the Universe, in Orlando, FL, became the sixty-third minor basilica in the United States. It is the third church in Florida to be granted the honorific by the Vatican. Located one-and-a-half miles from the entrance to Walt Disney World, the central Florida shrine’s primary ministry, and the reason it is being recognized as a basilica, is serving the many tourists who travel to the area. This special ministry began in the 1970s when the shrine’s founding rector, Monsignor Joseph Harte, traveled from hotel to hotel to offer Mass for travelers to the area. Harte realized that a more permanent venue was needed in order to better serve the growing number of tourists and the Orlando diocese eventually purchased seventeen acres near Interstate 4. Ground breaking for the first facility on the shrine’s campus occurred in 1984 and construction of its two-thousand-seat church began in 1990 and was completed in 1993; the church was designated a national shrine in 2007.

The annual Church Music Association of America Colloquium that will take place June 21–27, 2010, at Duquesne University is the world’s largest conference and retreat for sacred music in the world. The focus of the colloquium is instruction in the sacred music tradition and participation in Gregorian Chant classes and both English and Latin liturgies. There will be training for parish music management, vocal technique, and the sung parts of the Liturgy. Meals and lodging are included in the colloquium. Registration at www.musicasacra.com.
On July 16, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI elevated Saint John the Evangelist Church in downtown Stamford, CT, to the status of a minor basilica. Originally founded in 1847, the present church was built by Irish immigrants in 1875 of stone from a local quarry, fifteen years after construction of the Catholic school. The church is considered the mother church of southwestern Fairfield County, since twenty-three parishes in the area trace their heritage to Saint John the Evangelist Church. Bishop William E. Lori welcomed the designation by Pope Benedict: “It becomes the pope’s church and a center for the promotion of the teachings of the Holy Father and the Catholic Church’s magisterium, as well as a center for a deeper devotion to the pope as the successor of Saint Peter.”

In Santa Fe, Mexico, a suburb of Mexico City, a new parish church named for Saint Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei, was dedicated on July 28, 2009. The process of building this church began in 2002 when His Eminence Norberto Cardinal Rivera Carrera, Archbishop of Mexico City, asked Opus Dei to build a church and establish a parish served by priests of the Prelature. Mexican architect Javier Sordo Madaleno designed the church and construction began in 2005. The parish serves an average of two thousand local faithful every weekend and is an essential part of the Santa Fe Community Center, which offers medical, personal, and spiritual care to area residents, a majority of whom live close to the poverty line.

A large generational gap in vocations to religious orders in the United States was found in a study done by Georgetown University’s Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. The largest gap is between the “Vatican II generation” born between 1943 and 1960 and the “millennial generation” born in 1982 or later. Currently in the United States, 75 percent of male religious and 91 percent of female religious are aged sixty and older. However, there are now 2,630 new men and women in the initial stages of formation for religious life throughout the country. The younger members are more diverse in ethnicity than the Vatican II generation: 58 percent are Caucasian; 21 percent are Latino; 14 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander; and 6 percent are African-American.

The American Institute of Architects selected the Saint John’s Abbey Guesthouse for the 2009 AIA Special Housing Award. The guesthouse is located on the Collegeville, MN, campus designed by Marcel Breuer in the 1950s. The architects, VJAA, were inspired by the Benedictine precepts of frugality, durability, and environmental sustainability. The guesthouse is designed with a dining room, library, offices, meeting rooms, and guest rooms that face Lake Sagatagan. Sustainability is now a required element of the AIA Housing Awards.

The Catholic faithful are being prepared for textual changes in the prayers of the Mass, set to take effect in the United States by the end of the year. Bishop Arthur Serratelli, chairman of the USCCB’s Ad Hoc Committee for the Review of Scripture Translations explained the reason for the changes: “The words used in liturgy bring God’s revelation into our present moment and because they lift our prayer to God in worship.” One example of a change is the response to the priest’s invitation “The Lord be with you,” to which the people should now respond “And with your spirit.” Other well-known prayers set to be altered include the Confiteor, Gloria, and Nicene Creed. “The new translations also have great respect for the style of the Roman Rite,” Bishop Serratelli said. “Liturgical language should border on the poetic. Prose bumps along the ground. Poetry soars to the Heavens.” The website developed by the USCCB to educate Catholics about the new translation is www.usccb.org/romanmissal.

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The Saint John’s Abbey Guesthouse received a 2009 AIA Special Housing Award.
The Bernini colonnade that surrounds Saint Peter’s Square is undergoing structural restoration in sections over the next four years. Antonio Paolucci, who is also the director of the Vatican Museums, is coordinating the project, estimated to cost $14–28 million. Gian Lorenzo Bernini began work on the colonnade for Pope Alexander VII in 1657 and took ten years to complete the work. A large portion of the project will consist of roof and gutter repair. In addition, the columns will be given a protective treatment to prevent rapid deterioration. Since the repairs will be carried out in sections, the square will not have to be closed during the restoration.

Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago reopened on July 31, 2009 after being closed for nearly six months to repair damage caused by an early morning fire in the church’s attic on February 4, 2009. This was the second time in two years that the 1875 cathedral had to shut its doors, having only reopened in August 2008 following a six-month closure for structural repairs. Executed by the Chicago-based Daprato Rigali Studios, the renovation work included the inspection, sanding, and polishing of more than twenty thousand pieces of the cathedral’s intricate wooden ceiling, the replacement of faded gold leaf with a new twenty-three-karat coat, and the glazing and gilding of previously whitewashed columns. In addition, artists installed a hand-painted rendering of the crest of Chicago’s archbishop, Francis Cardinal George, on the back wall of the sanctuary. The estimated cost of repairing the fire and water damage amounts to more than $8 million.

The colonnade at Saint Peter’s Basilica built for Pope Alexander VII

The Liturgical Institute in Mundelein, IL, has announced their 2010 Conferences. A day-long conference called "The Glory of Catholic Architecture" will take place April 30, 2010. Dr. Denis McNamara will explain how the Garden of Eden, the Temple of Solomon, the Heavenly Jerusalem, and the notions of ordained and baptismal priesthood inform the theoretical and practical elements in the design of Catholic churches. The Liturgical Institute’s fifth "Sacred Music Retreat" will take place June 20–25, 2010, led by church musician Fr. John-Mark Missio as retreat master. It will be preached retreat on the ministry of liturgical music with spiritual talks, time for prayer and reflection, Mass and Liturgy of the Hours, with a special lecture by Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, OFM, Cap., of Denver.

Scott Turkington, Organist and Choirmaster at the Basilica of Saint John the Evangelist in Stamford, CT, will lead the Summer Chant Intensive at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA. Organized through the Church Music Association of America, the Intensive is a five-day seminar in which students will not only study the basics, but also explore the world of modes, interpretation of neumes, rhythm, and the style required by chant. In addition, the Intensive includes sessions on conducting and the art of singing the Psalms. Attendance is open to anyone interested in improving the quality of music in Catholic worship, both professional musicians and enthusiastic beginners. Classes begin on the afternoon of Monday, June 14, 2010 and continue through noon on Friday, June 18, 2010.

The seventeenth-century Basilica of Bom Jesus in the old city of Goa, India, was nominated as a wonder of the world by the New7Wonders Foundation. Built in 1605, the baroque basilica contains the relics of Saint Francis Xavier and is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The declaration of the basilica as a Portuguese wonder provoked protests from members of the Goa Freedom Fighters Association, which claimed that the human and material resources to construct the basilica were Goan, including people who reverted to their former religion from Christianity and were punished with hard labor. The builders “were indigenous people who worked until they dropped dead” said Naguesh Karmali, association president. Almost a quarter of a million people voted to select the seven Portuguese wonders from a list of twenty-seven places around the world. Some of the other monuments are the Church of Saint Paul in Macau and two convents of Saint Francis of Assisi in Brazil.

The seventh-century Basilica of Bom Jesus in Goa, India

The Vatican City State officially celebrated eighty years since the Lateran Pacts were signed on February 11, 1929, granting political sovereignty to the Vatican from the Italian nation state. Pope Pius XI’s cardinal secretary of state Pietro Gasparri signed the pact with Prime Minister Benito Mussolini, who represented King Victor Emmanuel III. After the treaty was signed, the Vatican guaranteed neutrality in all international relations in return for its clear independence from Italian political power. The city-state automatically adopted all Italian laws as its own after 1929, until in 2008 it was decided that too many new laws conflicted with the right to life.
The Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C., solemnly blessed and dedicated the institution’s new Academic Center and Theological Library on April 19, 2009. The addition is the first major capital improvement to the campus of the Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception in decades. Designed by DeLluzzio Architects & Planners, PC, of Rockville, MD, the four-story, $18-million addition to the hundred-year-old Immaculate Conception Priory, the residence of the Dominican friars, recalls the priory’s Gothic architecture, while incorporating modern amenities such as large windows that not only allow light to flood the interior but also frame views of the adjacent campus of the Catholic University of America. The Dominican Theological Library is housed on the main and lower level of the new building and features a spacious reading room and climate-controlled facilities for the its rare book collection. Located on the two upper stories are faculty and administrative offices and instructional spaces equipped with a wide range of educational technology, including a 150-seat lecture hall (aula magna), a preaching studio, seminar rooms, and an audio-visual studio.

On April 19, 2009, The Dominican House of Studies dedicated its new Academic Center and Theological Library.

A new mural on the wall behind the altar in the gym at Xavier College Preparatory in Phoenix, AZ was executed by teacher Ruth Ristow. It depicts the Mass in the context of the Book of Revelation. Christ sits in the center of the painting wearing white linen and is surrounded by angels. The painting also incorporates the tree of life and sea of glass mentioned in the Book of Revelation. “The mural provides direction for the students’ prayer,” said Father Muir. Xavier opened sixty-six years ago by the Founding Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and remains a female-only high school to this day. Commenting on the installation of the new twenty-four-foot by sixteen-foot canvas, Sister Joan Fitzgerald, B.V.M., principal of Xavier, said “I think it really has turned the gym into a very reverent and more solemn place.”

The Book of Revelation inspired the design for the new mural used during Mass at Xavier College Preparatory.

A study by the Barna Group found that twenty thousand fewer churches in the United States had Sunday school in 2004 compared to 1997, though 80 percent of churches still offer a program to high-school students and 86 percent to middle-school students. Only 15 percent of ministers today describe Sunday school as a priority. Sunday school was always considered a foundation of Protestant churches in the US. It became common after Sunday classes were developed by newspaper editor Robert Raikes in eighteenth-century England to educate the poor in the faith. Charlotte Hays, editor of In Character, laments the loss of Sunday school: “In short, Sunday school was a civilizing experience that assured some level of religious literacy.”

The design of Holy Family Catholic Church honors the six parishes that merged to form the new community.

Six parishes merge into one at Holy Family Catholic Church in Fond du Lac, WI. In 2007, a 53,000-square-foot building with a fellowship hall, offices and a 1250-seat church was designed by Plunkett Raysich Architects. Six beams that span the space symbolize the six parishes that merged. Local stone was used to construct six octagonal pavilions that link to colonnades of the church. Three of these pavilions contain precious artwork from Saint Joseph, Saint Louis, and Saint Patrick churches to incorporate the history of each contributing parish. In addition, stained-glass windows and other elements from the six merging parishes were included in the design of the interior of the church.
On August 16, 2009, one thousand faithful gathered in Salt Lake City, UT, for the Mass celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of the Cathedral of the Madeleine’s dedication on the feast of the Assumption of Mary after months of preparation and celebration. The cathedral was built under the direction of Bishop Lawrence Scanlan, who became the first bishop of Salt Lake City in 1886. The architects of the Romanesque and Gothic church were Carl Newhausen and Bernard Mecklenburg. The sandstone is from Carbon County, UT, while the stained glass was produced by Zettler in Germany. The project took ten years to complete and cost $344,000, twice the original budget. Bishop Joseph Glass, who succeeded Bishop Scanlan, decorated much of the interior and added a carved depiction of Christ with the apostles and doctors of the Church over the entrance. From 1991 to 1993 the cathedral was closed for the cleaning of soot from the walls and ceilings of the interior, a new baptismal font and pipe organ were installed, and a plaza was built flanking the church. While there were only ten thousand Catholics in the diocese when the Cathedral was dedicated in 1909, there are over one hundred thousand living there today. The Most Reverend John C. Wester, bishop of Salt Lake City, told the people present at the Centennial Mass: “If you listen closely enough, you may hear the echoes of those bishops and congregations before us.” Also in attendance at the Centennial Mass was William Joseph Cardinal Levada, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He praised the Cathedral’s architectural decoration, much of which was renovated in the 1990s: “It is nothing less than the sign of the beauty of the New Jerusalem.”

An architect and writer on modern architecture, Peter Zumthor is a master of minimalism who has received many awards throughout his career. On May 29, 2009, he was awarded the prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize in Buenos Aires. It is the highest honor in his field. "If you look closely enough, you may hear the echoes of those bishops and congregations before us," he said. "In the heart of the city, in the heart of the Cathedral, in the heart of the faith, we can hear the echoes of those bishops and congregations before us." His next big project will be a new cathedral for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, DC. Zumthor has described his approach to architecture as "a search for a language that is both simple and profound." He believes that architecture should be a reflection of the human spirit and that it should be designed to reflect the values of the community it serves.

When asked about his future projects, Zumthor said, "I am a bit of a hermit, so I don’t really have any plans." However, he did mention that he is currently working on a project in Spain for a new church designed to be a "symbol of peace and reconciliation." He also said that he is interested in working on projects that involve the use of natural materials and the integration of technology into architecture.

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A new monastery called Thien Tam, which is Vietnamese for “heavenly heart,” has been established in the Diocese of Dallas, TX. The six Vietnamese-American monks who live at the monastery grew out of a New Mexico monastery called Christ in the Desert, which is helping to pay for the new offshoot. Their goal is to increase to twenty or more monks and become self-sufficient by running retreats and selling homemade products.

On August 16, 2009, one thousand faithful gathered in Salt Lake City, UT, for the Mass celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of the Cathedral of the Madeleine’s dedication on the feast of the Assumption of Mary after months of preparation and celebration. The cathedral was built under the direction of Bishop Lawrence Scanlan, who became the first bishop of Salt Lake City in 1886. The architects of the Romanesque and Gothic church were Carl Newhausen and Bernard Mecklenburg. The sandstone is from Carbon County, UT, while the stained glass was produced by Zettler in Germany. The project took ten years to complete and cost $344,000, twice the original budget. Bishop Joseph Glass, who succeeded Bishop Scanlan, decorated much of the interior and added a carved depiction of Christ with the apostles and doctors of the Church over the entrance. From 1991 to 1993 the cathedral was closed for the cleaning of soot from the walls and ceilings of the interior, a new baptismal font and pipe organ were installed, and a plaza was built flanking the church. While there were only ten thousand Catholics in the diocese when the Cathedral was dedicated in 1909, there are over one hundred thousand living there today. The Most Reverend John C. Wester, bishop of Salt Lake City, told the people present at the Centennial Mass: “If you listen closely enough, you may hear the echoes of those bishops and congregations before us.” Also in attendance at the Centennial Mass was William Joseph Cardinal Levada, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He praised the Cathedral’s architectural decoration, much of which was renovated in the 1990s: “It is nothing less than the sign of the beauty of the New Jerusalem.”

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Fifteen percent of Americans no longer identify with any religious denomination, a larger number of people than any religious group in the United States except Catholics and Baptists, according to a study by Trinity College in Hartford, CT. The state with the largest percentage of people without religion is Vermont, at 34 percent. In addition, 22 percent of all adults in their twenties no longer consider themselves members of a particular religion. However, not all those in the “no religion” group can be described as atheists, since 51 percent of them still believe in God or a higher power. Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysas found the “no religion” population to be very similar to the rest of Americans in other categories. “There’s no statistical difference on education, or income or marital status … they are present in every socio-demographic group.”

The former parish church of Saint Mary in Pittsburgh is now Saint Mary Mausoleum, possibly the first such conversion of a Catholic church building in the United States. The former sanctuary will become the new commitment chapel with 200 seats, while the nave will contain 880 crypts and 712 niches for the remains. The exterior of the building will remain unchanged, though the work on the interior includes a new concrete foundation, heating system, and restored stained-glass windows. The new mausoleum sits adjacent to the historic Saint Mary’s Cemetery with over 100,000 graves. Some of the oldest graves include Catholics who died during the French occupation of Fort Duquesne in the 1750s.

The new Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Charleston, SC, also destroyed a 1947 Benedictine monastery of the Episcopal Order of the Holy Cross. The six resident monks were able to escape to safety, but the twenty-thousand-square-feet retreat house was burned to the ground. Precious objects were lost in the fire, including a seventeenth-century painting and gold altar. Before its destruction, the monastery had more than two thousand visitors every year. “The brothers are in shock and grief,” said Nancy Bullock, director of the Mount Calvary Retreat House.

The 2008 wildfires that consumed 20,000 acres outside Santa Barbara, CA, also destroyed the 1947 Benedictine monastery of the Episcopal Order of the Holy Cross. The six resident monks were able to escape to safety, but the twenty-thousand-square-feet retreat house was burned to the ground. Precious objects were lost in the fire, including a seventeenth-century painting and gold altar. Before its destruction, the monastery had more than two thousand visitors every year. “The brothers are in shock and grief,” said Nancy Bullock, director of the Mount Calvary Retreat House.

Buddhist ceremonial paintings and sculptures from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation are on exhibit at the San Francisco Asian Art Museum this winter. Conservators at the museum had to spend seven years restoring some of the works, which were stored in Ms. Duke’s shooting gallery and indoor tennis court at her Princeton, NJ, estate. Some items were already in poor condition when acquired in Burma and Thailand, while others needed touching up as a result of imperfect storage methods at the Duke estate. Items on display in the exhibition include gold shrines, theatrical masks, and puppets. One painting on gilded cloth portrays Buddha descending to earth with Hell underneath. Items are decorated with wooden pineapple-shaped carvings. The pineapples are a Javanese symbol of the effort needed to earn the sweet things of life. The ends of the roof frame are shaped carvings. The pineapples are a Javanese symbol of the effort needed to earn the sweet things of life. The opening Mass was celebrated in Javanese by Monsignor Ignasius Suharjo, and the inauguration was led by Governor Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X, who praised the church for its unifying role in the community.
The Saint Mary Parish Council voted in August to close the church, which has served Dubuque, IA since 1867, pending Archbishop Jerome Hanus’s approval. Numerous reasons were cited for the church’s closure. Fewer young families join the parish, over 60 percent of the church’s current members are over seventy years of age, and at least 90 percent of the parishioners live outside the neighborhood. The church building requires more than $2 million in repairs on top of current debt. “It’s not easy, and nobody is happy about it,” said pastoral associate Ann Wertz. German immigrants built the Church of Saint Mary in 1867 with one of the highest steeples in the Mississippi River Valley. The stained-glass windows were brought from Bavaria in 1914. “This church means everything to us,” said parishioner John Nicks. “All we can do now is pray.” While the church will close in May of 2010, there has been no decision on the fate of the property after closure, once the parish is closed.

Remains of a synagogue from Jesus’ time were uncovered during the excavation for the Magdala Center, a new institution for pilgrims being built on a site overlooking the Sea of Galilee. The Israel Antiquities Authority, in charge of the excavation, concluded that the synagogue may have been destroyed during the Jewish uprising of 66–70 A.D. A stone engraved with seven-branched menorah was found in the middle of the building. The authorities have asked the Magdala Center to preserve the excavation on their site. Christian communities were born in places all around Galilee, including Magdala, and many times the Christian faithful shared the use of synagogues with Jews until the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. The Magdala Center is scheduled to open in December, 2011, but may be delayed due to the synagogue’s discovery.

Fifty Catholic churches in Cleveland, OH, are slated for closure, including fourteen which have already closed their doors. Some architectural masterpieces still face closure. Many of the churches are already listed on real-estate websites for sale, including Saint Stanislaus church, rectory, school, and convent for $525,000. Diocesan spokesman Bob Tayek said “They have to be very careful, want to be very careful, and are being very careful about who would be the potential buyer.” Though parishioners at some churches were disturbed with the speed at which the churches were put up for sale, Tayek noted that the sooner existing church properties move into new hands, the less likely any vandalism or disrepair will occur. One example of a church set to close is the beautiful Saint James in Lakewood, designed in the Sicilian Gothic style in imitation of the Cathedral in Monreale outside Palermo. While the parish waits for a response to an appeal to the Vatican, the City of Lakewood is proposing to designate the church as a Historic Landmark so that the church building will remain intact. Elsewhere, in Elyria, OH, a group called the “House of Healing” hopes to purchase Holy Cross Church after fundraising the necessary $299,000. The wife of Pastor James Knight said “We want this place to bring life back into this community and serve this neighborhood.” As fifty parishes close their doors, the Cleveland diocese is expanding in other geographic areas, including a new three-hundred-seat church in Grafton, OH, for $3 million.
The celebration of Christmas in Rome has its own unique flavor, combining sumptuous liturgical celebrations and festive religious and cultural traditions. One of the most renowned traditions during this joyful time is the construction of the presepio. The Italian word “presepio” comes from the Latin “praesaepe,” a combination of “prae” (in front of) and “saepire” (to enclose), which is rendered in English as “manger,” or “stall.” The Christmas ritual of constructing a presepio is a tradition that has been passed down for generations, possessing an important place in symbolic Christmas representation and devotional practice. At Christmastime these displays attract visitors to the city of Rome from all over the world. They are usually artistic masterpieces, spectacular, dramatic, and adorned with delightful figurines and stunning landscapes.

Tracing the development of the presepio “ritual” entails a passage into the history of Roman religion, art, theater and what may be referred to as present-day micro-architecture. Originating centuries ago in Rome, extant documentation places the earliest evidence of commemorating the Christmas story in this manner to 432 A.D., when Pope Sixtus III reconstructed a “cave of the Nativity” similar to the Bethlehem stable in the ancient Liberian basilica (founded by Pope Liberius (352-366) and known today as the papal basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore). A festive celebration was then introduced to commemorate the occasion of the “Infant Savior’s birth.” This devotional reconstruction resulted in what can be termed the building of the world’s first presepio.

Further evidence suggests that the custom of constructing a manger scene dates to the seventh century, when the same basilica became the home of the legendary relic of Christ’s crib, the venerated cunambulum or sacra culla, behind the main altar of the same basilica to be at the center of an August event—the Holy Christmas Mass—around which all other events were to take place. A similar experience is also recorded to have taken place there in the eighth century when Pope Gregory III (731-741) placed a consecrated Host in the crib to commemorate the laying of the body of the Christ-child in the manger at Bethlehem. A similar tradition is also attested to by the placing of a "golden image of the Mother of God embracing God our savior" in the crib.

Many scholars, however, place the origin of the presepio tradition which, according to tradition, the baby Jesus was placed in at the stable at Bethlehem. This relic, an object of pious devotion for pilgrims from around the world, comprises five long narrow pieces of ancient wood purportedly brought to Rome from the Holy Land during the pontificate of Theodore (640-649). On account of hosting this relic at the Liberian Basilica, the church was also known during Theodore’s time by the title Santa Maria ad Praesepe, and some devout locals even called the neighborhood on the Esquiline Hill as “Bethlehem in Rome.”

Subsequently, in the ceremonial liturgy known as the Officium Pastorum, a practice common to eleventh century, a presepio was erected behind the main altar of the same basilica to be at the center of an August event—the Holy Christmas Mass—around which all other events were to take place. A similar experience is also recorded to have taken place there in the eighth century when Pope Gregory III (731-741) placed a consecrated Host in the crib to commemorate the laying of the body of the Christ-child in the manger at Bethlehem. A similar tradition is also attested to by the placing of a "golden image of the Mother of God embracing God our savior" in the crib.
in the thirteenth century. In 1223 Saint Francis of Assisi commissioned Giovanni Vellita from the town of Greccio to build a large-scale manger scene for the faithful to venerate on the anniversary of the Christ’s birth. Vellita therefore constructed a three-dimensional nativity scene out of straw in a cave of Greccio and Saint Francis had Christmas Mass celebrated there that year. According to the various accounts, Francis also used real people and living animals to illustrate the revered event.

As a consequence of Saint Francis’s initiative, the latter part of the thirteenth century saw the development of elaborate small-scale architectural and artistic constructions of splendid ornamental nativity scenes. Figurines in marble, wood, and terra-cotta were introduced in various basilicas throughout Rome. This practice became part of a popular devotion characteristic of Roman Christmas ritual up until the end of the sixteenth century. At that time even more elaborate representations of the nativity scene were introduced by Roman nobility extending the practice to a feat of grandiose artistic proportions. Impressive presepio scenes were then composed of permanent figurines arranged with realistic pedestrian elements such as local costumes, houses, inns, shepherd’s cabins, trees, panoramic backgrounds, all with the simple adornment of commonplace symbolism. During the seventeenth century, the Roman nobility continued to display these scenes in their homes, one being created by the baroque master Gian Lorenzo Bernini for the Barberini family of Pope Urban VIII. Later the presepio included moveable figurines dressed in the ornate costumes of the day. The triumph of baroque nativity ornamentation made it the most popular expression of Christmas devotion and ritual. By the beginning of the eighteenth century the practice had already extended beyond the enclosed dwellings of churches and private homes into the public spaces and piazzas of the city.

This tradition, now ever more ostentatious, had spread throughout the churches and homes of all the social classes of Italy, acquiring a typically popular characteristic with extravagant constructions aimed more at inciting competitive admiration rather than pious devotion. The presepio reached its highest artistic and cultural expression in the eighteenth century. Neapolitan artisans added candlelit lamps and floral arrangements, and the scale of individual scenes had now reached life-size proportions. The noted British professor of Latin, W. H. D. Rouse, commented of such scenes:

"These are very often life-size. Mary is usually robed in blue satin, with crimson scarf and white head-dress. Joseph stands near her dressed in the ordinary working-garb. The onlookers are got up like Italian contadini. The Magi are always very prominent in their grand clothes."

Today the typical presepio, constructed with three-dimensional sculptural pieces set in a stage-like atmosphere, comprises three principal figures: the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, and the baby Jesus. Typically it displays Joseph and Mary in a barn or a cave beside the baby Jesus laying in a manger. They are attended to by secondary figures: the Magi (three kings from the Orient), a few shepherds, and some farm animals, usually a donkey, an ox, and some sheep. The crib itself...
The Presepio scene sculpted by Arnolfo di Cambio, 13th century sculptor and architect, is presently displayed at the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome.

The Presepio at San Marcello al Corso in Rome.

is the focal point of the scene. It may also include some angels in the vicinity of the crib, although the archangel Gabriel is characteristically present and usually hovering above the crib proper just outside the barn. The star of Bethlehem is typically present as well in the distant sky. The traditional scene that shows the shepherds and Magi together is not proper to the Biblical story since the Magi arrive later (Matthew 2:1-12) than the shepherds (Luke 2:7-16), and Matthew indicates that the Holy Family was no longer in the stable at that time. Continuing this tradition today, the ritual of constructing the nativity scene comes close to what may be called “architectural drama,” an interface between architecture and theater.

Indeed, the construction of a presepio may be referred to as a type of religious architecture, or “micro-architecture,” a small-scale building of the most intricate type. Sometimes this kind of elaborate construction is not so small. The process of building such nativity scenes has come to take on a life of its own, involving the composition of various refined structural designs and architectural morphemes of large proportions. Not infrequently traditional nativity scenes throughout Rome at Christmastime comprise the building of monumental outdoor structures and landscapes. They can be as large as 280 m², and use materials such as sand, stone, and cork in their construction and include over eight hundred figurines. Sometimes the figurines are larger than life. Light effects, water streams, rain, music, and automatons are also used to give a realistic touch to the scene.

Many visitors have commented that viewing a presepio is not unlike going to the theater. Such an event may be classified as a type of “Christmas drama,” a performance fundamentally religious in nature, a festive theatrical occasion in which the entire setting becomes a kind of stage and the viewer becomes a participant in the event that again renders present the remote and spectacular episode of Christ’s birth. In this context the visitor becomes an ospite (guest) who is invited to renew the experience of the first Christmas by participating in the event.

For some the experience is merely one of aesthetic religiosity, while for others it is more a practice of faith, although however experienced, it is always characteristic of a religious incident. Most people go to see how the artistic representation is rendered, although a religious experience is realized because the event has a sacramental quality. In achieving this effect the presepio manifests an interface between architecture and theater, though still much more. The religious import, even to the non-sectarian visitor, cannot be undermined. A visit to a presepio, therefore, or the “presepio event,” becomes a fusion of architecture, drama and, on some level, faith. Some presepî are scenes for...
drama, while others themselves exhibit popular piety by providing the visitor with a setting in which both a social and religious ritual is experienced. The occasion becomes one in which deeper religious meaning, the very significance of Christmas, is afforded in a setting now designed for popular cultural entertainment.

In Rome today, as throughout the entire world, presepi have come to be celebrated in the context of dramatic small-scale architectural arrangements in piazzas and public spaces throughout the city. Every year, the Vatican constructs two nativity scenes for the Christmas season. The first is assembled inside the basilica of Saint Peter at the chapel of the Presentation, and the second is built in the Piazza di San Pietro in front of the obelisk. The city of Rome also erects a large presepio on the central landing of the Spanish Steps, comprising accretions not necessarily related to the Christmas story but rather associated with local popular culture. Sometimes even such large municipal nativity scenes have a caricature of a disliked public figure such as the caganer in the corner of the scene. On occasion life-size nativity scenes are erected with live animals, donkeys, oxen and camels, and people stand in for the kings and shepherds. Nearly all of Rome’s churches set up presepi for the Christmas season, although some presepi are left as permanent exhibits for the visitor to admire throughout the entire year. The church of the Scala Sancta next to Saint John Lateran, the church of the Gesù and Santa Maria in Via, near the junction of Via del Corso and Via Tritone, are among the latter. Among the many churches in Rome that build a nativity scene, three particular sites demonstrate the dramatic beauty and architectural grace of the presepio: the papal basilica of Saint Mary Major (Santa Maria Maggiore) on the summit of the Esquiline Hill, the basilica of Saints Cosmas and Damian at the Roman Forum, and the basilica of Santa Maria in Aracoeli on the Capitoline Hill.

At Santa Maria Maggiore one may still visit the site intended to provide a special place for the innovative Christmas festivities introduced by Pope Liberius (352-366). At this location splendid Christmas rituals and liturgical celebrations still revolve around the relic of Christ’s crib. During Midnight Mass, for example, an impressive ceremony occurs comprising a solemn procession and the unveiling of a rich reliquary designed by Giuseppe Valadier and adorned with bas-reliefs and statuettes to enshrine the sacra culla. The relic is then solemnly exposed for veneration by the faithful until the Octave of the Epiphany. Santa Maria Maggiore also boasts one of the world’s finest and most antique presepi made by the thirteenth-century sculptor Arnolfo di Cambio (ca. 1245-1310). Di Cambio sculptured this masterpiece in white Carrara marble between the years 1285-1291. It portrays an artistic warmth and gracefulness typical of the late medieval style, a sort of prelude to fine Renaissance art. Conforming to the criteria of full visibility, nothing in this nativity is more striking than the sumptuous corporeality of its figurines. The Virgin Mary with the baby Jesus in her arms, Saint Joseph and the three Magi, and an ox and ass convey a deli-
cate naturalism comprising the most attractive and refined of medieval art. The faces are elegant and marked by a formal beauty. It is no understatement to say that this presepio is the most “sacred” of all.

A visit to the basilica of Saints Cosmas and Damian at Christmastime is most worthwhile. Adjacent to the basilica’s cloister is a famous Neapolitan presepio, a monumental eighteenth-century nativity scene with exquisitely carved figurines. The artistic finesse of this presepio intricately portrays the life and culture in Naples revolving around the sacred event of Christ’s birth. In a triumph of Christmas atmosphere stand precious statuettes representing the entirety of humanity. Beautiful figurines delicately carved from wood and sumptuously clothed in costumes of velvet, silk, satin, and leather decorate the scene in a typically Neapolitan style. There are over fifty angels and scores of animals as well. The presepio abounds with life and colorful details that recreate the nativity spirit within a vibrant and detailed panorama of eighteenth-century Neapolitan life. It is particularly interesting to observe here how those who visit this presepio do so in a manner similar to going to the theater. Admiring a presepio of this scale is not unlike going on a tour of Naples in the 1700s, viewing the craftsmen, farmers, street vendors, and all the respective dwellings, inns, and landscapes. Of particular importance is the extraordinary care given by the craftsmen who reproduce the dresses, using the textiles available only at that time.

Another precious presepio lies not too far from “caput mundi” on the Capitoline Hill. Here sits the imposing basilica of Santa Maria in Aracoeli (Altar of Heaven) that boasts of one of Rome’s most celebrated life-size presepi. The scene is a cultural and devotional masterpiece of the central Italian tradition enriched with a number of ancient wooden figurines that belonged to an older Roman nativity from the church of San Francesco a Ripa. A particular feature of this presepio is the colorfully painted three-dimensional illustration of the “Gloria in excelsis Deo.” Here hierarchies of angels descend from heaven to earth, “singing on high.” This basilica is usually crowded at Christmastime, especially with children who come to recite festive poems at the chapel of the presepio.

This site is also home of the famous Santo Bambino (Holy Child), a strange though comely little statuette of the new-born Savior that attracts the visitor on account of the odd beauty in the bizarrely mature and sapient baby’s face, and the pilgrim on account of the miraculous activity associated with its curing powers. Clement A. Miles, the Christmas-stories author, describes this child as: “a flesh-colored doll, tightly swathed in gold and silver tissue, crowned, and sparkling with jewels.” An inscription outside its chapel states that time another procession sees the doll brought to the landing at the top of the marble stairs that lead to the basilica’s main entrance where the celebrant raises it on high and solemnly blesses the Eternal City.

Still today in the city of Rome, the tradition of the Italian presepio, and all the Christmas festive ritualism that encompasses it, remains a spectacular theatrical experience and an opportunity to enjoy small-scale religious art and architecture. Along with the singing of carols and other church events, the presepio plays a vital role in Roman culture and religion when celebrating the birth of Christ. Visiting these sites at Christmastime to celebrate their respective presepi, admiring the scenes and participating in the nativity makes for a most meaningful Christmas pastime.

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Other famous presepi in Rome can be found at: San Marcello al Corso (Via del Corso); Santa Maria in Via (Via S.M. in Via/Largo Chigi); Santa Maria del Popolo (Piazza del Popolo); S. Pietro in Montorio (Piazza S. Pietro in Montorio); SS. Trinità dei Monti, P. Trinità dei Monti (Spanish Steps); SS. Apostoli (Piazza SS. Apostoli); S. Ignazio (Piazza Sant’Ignazio); and S. Andrea della Valle (Corso Vittorio Em. II).

Further reading:


The People or the Steeple?

An Examination of Sacramental Architecture among Parishioners

Kevin C. Manning, Nicholas J. Watkins, and Kathryn H. Anthony

The People or the Steeple?

Designs among Catholic churches in the post-Vatican II era have been diverse. These changes have evoked strong opinions in both those advocating newer styles and those desiring a traditional approach to church design. Objective inquiries into this issue have been lacking since the council adjourned in 1965. Filling this data gap in the discussion requires empirical studies about how Catholic church design affects the faithful regarding prayer, devotion, and other communal factors.

Throughout Catholic history, church structures have prompted worshippers to bond with the sacred by evoking feelings of devotion, transcendence, and prayerfulness. This bond can promote a distinct form of place attachment; a religious place attachment. However, some congregants may say that their church “doesn’t feel like a church,” seems “too old-fashioned” or “doesn’t speak to me.” Evidently, a strong religious place attachment does not appear among some congregants. Is there a measurable link between a church’s design and the parishioners’ worship experience? Do traditional churches really enhance a person’s prayer life as many supporters purport? Most importantly, can congregants’ spiritual lives be influenced—either heightened or reduced—by modern church design?

Answers to these questions require investigations into the relationship between Catholic church buildings and their worshippers. For this purpose, our study examined two Catholic parishes from central Illinois. These churches were matched on physical size, congregation size, and ethnic composition. The study examined design features that satisfy or dissatisfy worshippers who attend Mass at a traditionally designed Catholic church (parish 1) and a modern Catholic church design (parish 2). Congregants’ preferences for traditional and modern design features, sacramental and functional design features, and communality were all examined. Ours is one of the first studies of its kind and presents a prototype for research that can be replicated elsewhere.

Parish 1 is a traditional Romanesque-style church built in 1903. It has a longitudinal plan with a composition centered on the altar and Eucharist. It has many original stained-glass windows depicting various saints and Eucharistic symbols. In addition, frescoes adorn the marble-clad sanctuary. The tabernacle is elevated slightly in the sanctuary and aligned on the center axis of the church.

Constructed in 1996 in accordance with Environment and Art in Catholic Worship, parish 2 lacks a historical style. EACW was a postconciliar statement from the US Bishop’s Committee on Liturgy that served as a foundation for many church designs in the post-Vatican II era. In contrast to the basilica plan of parish 1, parish 2 is laid out in a fan shape. The tabernacle is in a separate chapel/nook detached from the sanctuary. In front of the chapel and removed from the altar are the chairs for the priest and deacon. The choir area flanks the other side of the sanctuary opposite the tabernacle (not in a balcony behind and above the worshippers as in parish 1). In comparison to parish 1, parish 2 has minimal décor and iconography. A baptismal font for semi-immersion is located near a spacious narthex that doubles as an entry and gathering area.

The Study’s Results

Our analysis of survey data from parishioners at both parishes uncovered several fascinating findings. An exploratory factor analysis revealed four factors of related design characteristics. Each factor represents a group of what parishioners believe to be interrelated...
design characteristics of a church.

The first factor is “Environmental Quality.” Design characteristics that were related in this group pertained to the quality of the floor, wall, ceiling, pews, and overall environmental quality of the church. Parish 2 parishioners were more satisfied with their church in this category than were parish 1 parishioners. This may be attributed to parish 2’s relative newness (only six years old at the time of the study).

The second factor, “Spatial Quality,” contained items that pertained to the quality of gathering spaces, accessibility for the disabled, security, and spaciousness. Parish 2 garnered the most satisfaction for these characteristics. Many parishioners found the rather large gathering area/narthex in parish 2 was very desirable. The traditional church had only a small vestibule area that served as the narthex. Parishioners would gather outside after Mass, a source of dissatisfaction for several parishioners during inclement weather.

The third, “Preference for Sacramental Design Features,” contained items that pertained to the preference of paintings, statues, tabernacle placement in the center of the sanctuary, and stained-glass windows. Parishioners at the traditional parish were more satisfied with their sacramental design features than were those at the contemporary parish. What might account for the higher satisfaction in parish 1 for the sacramental design features? The unique design characteristics of each church provide some possible explanations. Parish 1 sets up a hierarchy of forms within the building with a linear axis culminating at the altar and tabernacle area. Thus, a parishioner’s sight focuses on the mysterious and sacramental nature of the Eucharist. Parish 2 places more emphasis on the meal aspect of the Eucharist and set up the altar as the main focal point of attention in the nave. The design of parish 2’s altar is more table-like as well. Overall, the design of parish 2 encourages communality among congregants coming together for the Eucharistic “meal.” However, tangible reminders of the mystical community, or rather the Communion of Saints, are lacking in the design and iconography of this church.

The fourth factor, “Paschal Mystery Design Features,” contained questions reflecting the appearance of Paschal Mystery themes in the sanctuary, tabernacle placement, and crucifix location. These characteristics were favored significantly by parish 1’s congregation whose building centered more on the mystical aspect of the faith. For example, parish 1’s sculpted Stations of the Cross were noted by parishioners when commenting on this theme. In both parishes, the Paschal Mystery ranked in the top three religious concepts that a Roman Catholic Church should reflect. At parish 1 it ranked first. In both parishes, though, there was clearly a desire among the faithful to see the Paschal Mystery reflected in the iconography and designs of their church. At parish 2 this theme is best played out in the Stations of the Cross, which although abstract in design, were still important to the faithful.

Our study also explored the parishioners’ overall connection or religious place attachment to the church building and parish. Parish 1’s congregation expressed a deeper, more prayerful connection to their church building than did members of parish 2. This church/religious place attachment prompted worshippers to bond with the sacred by evoking feelings of devotion, transcendence, and prayerfulness. Several reasons may account for why parishioners at parish 1 had a deeper religious place attachment with their church. The visual styles of the parishes are different. Parish 1 consists of a traditional arrangement and furnishings that adorned the interior. By contrast, parish 2 has a stark minimalism and lack of iconography and sacramental architecture that may have failed to inspire. The Christian faith has long held that God reveals himself through sacramental architecture, since perception limits worshippers to objects that they can experience directly through the senses. Iconography can materialize Catholic beliefs and provide a window to heaven for the believer. Several open-ended comments from members of parish 2 indicated that a prayerful inspiration was induced with the addition of the Sta-
Reconstructions of the Cross and a statue of the parish’s patron saint in 2002, six years after it was built.

Connection among parish members was equivalent for both churches. This was unexpected as it should follow that with parish 2’s explicit attention to community in its design intent, there would have been a higher connection between parish members. For instance, the church is more accessible to the disabled and elderly, has larger interior gathering spaces, and has a fan-shaped arrangement of pews and visual focus on the altar consistent with “communal” design. But, based upon the results of our study, these features might not inspire a communal feeling above and beyond that which a traditional pre-Vatican II church already offers. This finding suggests that churches may not have to conform to design ideas such as those set forth by EACW in order to encourage community among parishioners.

Concluding Thoughts

The results of this study should cause us to reconsider how parishioners perceive their churches and how architects should design, restore, and renovate churches. For example, it is apparent that the Paschal Mystery should play a vital role in the design of a Catholic Church. Parishioners’ desire to reinforce community should not preclude the prayerfulness evoked by designs reflective of the Paschal Mystery.

Religious place attachment can foster the faithful’s prayer life and a sense of community (e.g., Baptism, First Communion). Parish 2’s primary emphasis on user-friendly design and communality may have facilitated relationships among church members, but not to a greater extent than in parish 1. Moreover, it appears that parish 2’s church did not facilitate a personal or communal relationship with God and the mystical body of the church as much as the design of parish 1. Parish 2’s diffuse placement of sacramental design features throughout the church might encourage congregants to focus on other parishioners and not as much on the character of divine sacrifice and other-worldliness found in the Eucharistic celebration. Overall, this study seems to indicate that traditional churches designed to house God may well foster communion with God and, in turn, other congregants.

If future empirical research studies indicate similar findings, then leaders within the Roman Catholic Church could benefit from a reassessment of what they ultimately intend their churches to communicate and what kinds of designs may strengthen or weaken parishioners’ religious place attachment towards their church. Seemingly harmless alterations like the placement of a tabernacle or removal of iconography to limit “distractions” could influence congregants’ perceptions of the Eucharist, and, therefore, the foundation of Catholic ideology and identity.

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* All differences between the parishes reported in this article were statistically significant (p<0.05)

2. Ibid.

Comparative plans of Parish 1 (above) and Parish 2 (below)
AWE FOR THE NOBLE THINGS

LEON BATTISTA ALBERTI AND THE MEANING OF CLASSICAL ARCHITECTURE

Carroll William Westfall

Churches such as Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome that were built by adapting pagan Roman building practices served the early Christian community, and these churches continued to guide construction south of the Alps right up to the Renaissance. In the meantime, north of the Alps, bishops and princes who sought a larger role in the Church developed Gothic architecture. Not surprisingly, it never took hold south of the Alps except for a few places in northern Italy.

In the resurgence of the papacy that began in 1417 following the Babyloni-an Captivity and the Great Schism, the Church reasserted the authority it claimed from its foundation in Rome by Saints Peter and Paul. The new buildings in Rome and elsewhere in Italy, both sacred and secular, were aggressively ancient in their form, their builders excoriating the Gothic as modern and barbarous. In 1506, to make the point that the Church was being rebuilt on its ancient foundations, the Basilica of Saint Peter that the emperor Constantine had built was torn down. During the century that followed the classical basilica we know today rose in its place.

The reaction to the restoration in Rome of the “modo antico” in architecture was a style war that involved three combatants and lasted into the eighteenth century. One combatant was the Roman Catholic Church, which used the new, Renaissance and then baroque architecture to put before the worshipper an aggressive architectural setting with decoration, painting, and sculpture that stressed the Church as the recipient of a miraculously conferred authority in matters of doctrine and governance reaching back to its foundation by saints martyred by pagans. This architecture’s enemy was the Gothic, which quickly fell out of favor as the princes of Europe fell in line with Rome’s position. The third combatant was a kind of anti-architecture used by a loosely affiliated group of Protestants. Theirs was an anti-Catholic architecture, a spare box or perhaps a former Catholic church, Gothic or classical, whitewashed and stripped of statues, the Crucifix banished and replaced by a Bible on a wooden altar table.

The new Catholic churches were classical, but they were composed and constructed as a doctrinal statement, just as their Gothic predecessors in the North had been. Using both architecture and its enrichment with paintings and sculpture, they presented a visible sign of an invisible grace. They taught the faithful. They fortified belief. But this capacity declined during the eighteenth century, when the factual (to which empiricism had given primacy) replaced the true as the basis of belief. Gradually during the nineteenth century, as Romanticism allowed sentiment to overwhelm doctrine as the basis for belief, the Gothic, with its lofty heights, gloomy interiors, and enrichment with hard-to-see paintings, sculpture, and stained glass, came to be considered the right architecture for Christian worship among Catholics and others whose worship was liturgically based. Sentiment nourishes moods rather than thoughts and bypasses the intellect on its way to the emotions. The Gothic fed moods, with heavenly, lofty heights and a gloomy darkness that promoted concern for man’s fallen state. The building as a material, architectural entity receded from view, and people forgot that it too conveyed meaning.

Florence was divided into four political wards, each represented by a church. This was one of them, and the sunburst in the pediment served both as an emblem of the quarter and a symbol of the Divine Presence.

Santa Maria Novella, Florence, 1456; Alberti completed and transformed an older, unfinished façade with a triumphal arch suggested on the lower story, a temple front on the upper one, and a decorative, multi-colored marble portal surround.
John Paul II’s 1998 encyclical *Faith and Reason* rejected sentiment in favor of philosophy. He put the admonition “Know thyself” at the center of the life of faith (FR 1.1). “The quest for meaning... has always compelled the human heart (FR 1.2).” “Through literature, music, painting, sculpture, architecture, and every other work of their creative intelligence [men and women] have declared the urgency of their quest. In a special way philosophy has made this search its own” (FR 24). In wrapping the arts within the mantel of philosophy he suggested that thoughtful arts and not emotional exaltations, that reason-based artistic artifacts and not sentimental expressions, provide the nourishment for faith. The Holy Father’s argument can be extended to endorse buildings that draw from the same ancient sources and are as innovative, and beauty makes its justice visible (VI, i, 191). “[A] well-maintained and well-adorned temple [i.e., church] is obviously the greatest and most important ornament of a city” (VII, iii, 194):

There is no doubt that a temple that delights the mind wonderfully, captivates it with grace and admiration, will greatly encourage piety... I wish the temple so beautiful that nothing more decorous could ever be devised; I would deck it out in every part so that anyone who entered it would start with awe for his admiration at all the noble things, and could scarcely restrain himself from exclaiming that what he saw was a place undoubtedly worthy of God. (VII, iii, 194)

**Alberti is clear:** architecture conveys content. This is not the first thing about a building that comes to mind in the present-day world. Architecture is immersed in modernism, religion no longer resides within an established church, and there is no systematic understanding of the role that the content of architecture can serve in nurturing religious faith. These circumstances do not, however, invalidate Alberti’s thoughts about the content of architectural forms. He still provides the best guide to how a church building can assist in the admonition to “Know thyself.” Alberti built his ideas on traditions and learning reaching back to Saint Augustine. That Church Father argued that beauty makes love visible. The beauty resides in the meaning of things, and it is through things heard and seen that we come to know truths about God that are matters of faith rather than merely of knowledge. The Jewish prohibition of graven images and the theology signaled by the opening of Saint John’s Gospel “In the beginning was the word [Vulgate, *verbum*; Greek, *logos]*)” had invested the word with primacy over the image as a means of conveying significant

Alberti’s comments about a simple altar can be seen in this one built and decorated with an altarpiece in Brunelleschi’s Santo Spirito in Florence built during his lifetime.

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**Articles**

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and symbolic content. Hugh of Saint Victor (1096-1141) found equal stature for images, laying the foundations for investing Gothic buildings with symbolic content.

A symbol is a visible thing that embodies and makes present that which is immaterial and invisible, generally something that is multivalent, ambiguous or mysterious, ungraspable in its totality, and not reducible to a sign or translatable into another form of representation. For example, a cruciform church plan uses the sign of the cross (only fictively present in the church) to point to the Passion (invisible in the material church) and thus, like the Passion, is a symbol of the true promise of the gift of grace available through the Church. A symbol may also be less explicitly factual, as, for example, when the symbolic content of a church building is explained by, but is not a substitute for, the theology of the Church as the Body of Christ and as a symbol of the city of God, or when its meaning is in qualities such as its proportionality and light.

The humanists in Alberti’s circle transformed these ideas. As Charles Trinkaus explained, they constructed a theory in which “[e]ither words or things can represent or constitute substance, quality and action either in speech or in actuality.” This transformation allowed a substantive, material thing such as a building to make immaterial qualities visible and nonetheless retain its claim to attention for its very materiality. A beautiful building was both a building and a symbol of God’s love, and the building’s physical beauty could be enjoyed because it conveyed that immaterial beauty.

A building, unlike a painting, must convey its meaning without reference to other visible things. Its content must be embodied in forms unique to architecture, and these are quite limited. We might put architecture’s content in four aspects of a building, using a church as our example:

The first aspect is a church’s plan, which can be in the form of a cross, or be basilical, which reinforces the sacramental worship of a congregation and invokes the prototype of (i.e., serves as a sign of; signifies) Solomon’s Temple, or it can be centralized, with its emphasis on the veneration and contemplation of the central element, usually the altar, and thereby symbolize the unity and proportionality of God’s order and the unity of God and man within the Church. It can also, as has been common since the Renaissance, be a composite of these plan types. The second aspect are the various forms used for interior and exterior façades. A triumphal arch symbolizes the triumph
of life over death through Grace; a temple front signifies the triumph of Christianity over the pagan world in which Christ became incarnate. The third aspect is the building’s three-dimensional configuration, although this is less common, as when a basilical volume with an array of towers or a centralized building with a grouping of five domes symbolizes the Heavenly Jerusalem.

The fourth aspect is that these three preceding methods have their counterparts in other media (for example, in a painting showing a triumphal arch or in ornament that images the Heavenly City). But this fourth belongs to architecture alone. It resides in the building’s abstract visual elements, making available a building’s immaterial content by using particular, perceptible proportions, geometries, and quantities of building components. Saint Thomas acknowledged these when he defined beauty as residing in integrity, proportionality, and luminosity, but he did not extend these ideas into a discussion of the qualities of buildings as material constructions. Alberti, with full knowledge of Saint Thomas’ trilogy, did.

In Alberti’s treatise the beauty of buildings is a central theme. His definition is well known: beauty resides in a reasoned harmony of all the parts within a body, so that nothing may be added, taken away, or altered, but for the worse. It is a great and holy matter, all our resources of skill and ingenuity will be taxed in achieving it; and rarely is it granted even to Nature herself, to produce anything that is entirely complete and perfect in every respect. (VI, ii, 156)

Later on he presents beauty as the result of the steps the architect must follow to produce it:

Beauty is a form of sympathy and consonance of the parts within a body, according to definite number, outline, and collocation, as dictated by concinnitas, the absolute and fundamental rule in nature. This is the main object of the art of building, and the source of her dignity, charm, authority, and worth. (IX, v, 302)

And one more thing is called for, namely, the ornament that makes the beauty visible. In his first definition of beauty he had explained that ornament may be defined as a form of auxiliary light and complement to beauty. From this it follows, I believe, that beauty is some inherent property, to be found suffused all through the body of that which may be called beautiful; whereas ornament, rather than being inherent, has the character of something attached or additional. (VI, ii, E156)

In his second definition of beauty, ornament, and beauty’s doppelganger concinnitas take on the enlarged role of giving a building its appeal: “The eyes are by their nature greedy for beauty and concinnitas, and are particularly fastidious and critical in this matter.” In works that are deficient, “it is impossible to explain what it is that offends us, apart from the one fact that we have no means of satiating our excessive desire to gaze at the beautiful. In view of all this,” he continues directly, “surely it is our duty to strive with all enthusiasm, application, and diligence to make what we build as ornate as possible, especially those buildings which everyone would want to be dignified. Within this group lie public works, and in particular sacred ones: since no man would allow them to be naked of ornament” (IX, viii, 312). Alberti is clear: no beauty, no ornament; no ornament, no beauty. Ornament makes beauty visible; beauty provides scaffolding for ornament, which is an inherent part of architectural form.

In listing and explaining number, outline, collocation, and concinnitas, Alberti laid out a systematic program for an architect to follow. Number refers to the quantity of things to be included in a building, although the quantities were not lacking in significance, as has become the case in the present-day, where factuality of empiricism often holds sway. Outline refers to the bounding of material by geometric limits. It makes designing congruent with numerical reasoning, and it makes available to perception the lineamenta that the architect manipulated when designing. Lineamenta were fundamental to his procedure. He defined them as “the precise and correct outline, conceived in the mind, made up of lines and angles, and perfected in the learned intellect and imagination” (I, i, 7). Lineamenta as outline allow number to become perceptible as proportions: “The very same numbers that cause sounds to have that concinnitas, pleasing to the ears, can also fill the eyes and mind with wondrous delight.”

Outline has an additional task. It binds material with proportions to wring from nature the actual material, physical elements, or what he had called the weights the architect moves and joins when massing bodies: outline makes proportions and dimensions visible. The proportions reside in lineamenta, which are subject to the mind’s discipline and reasoning. In using dimensions based on propor-
tions to define the outlines that bound the material, a person can reason about the symbolic presence in the building of both transcendent and immanent order.

Next comes collocation, or the composing of elements. To achieve proper collocation the architect “relies to a large extent on the judgment nature instilled in the minds of men” (IX, vii, 309-10). That judgment resides in concinnitas, which Alberti had called “the absolute and fundamental rule of nature” (IX, v, 303). Vitruvius, Alberti’s pagan predecessor, had entrusted the final authority for a building’s appearance to its decorum, or its role in making visible the city’s social and political order. So did Alberti, although with added importance. Decorum becomes embodied in concinnitas because concinnitas is a concordance between transcendental truth and its presence in the actual facts of the material world and in the activities of men living in political communities. Decorum, i.e., concinnitas, dictates the place of each building within the hierarchy of buildings in a city, a hierarchy in which sacred is superior to profane, and public is superior to private, a hierarchy that encompasses all the buildings of the city and that the concinnitas of the design of each building makes visible. The visibility occurs principally in the ornament, which allows the beauty to be seen.

Alberti exclaimed that the “well-maintained and well-adorned temple [i.e., church] is obviously the greatest and most important ornament of a city” (VII, iii, 194). Its beauty can move a person to exclaim, “[W]hat he saw was a place undoubtedly worthy of God” (VII, iii, 194). Every aspect of the church’s beauty was to conspire to that end. Nothing within it should “divert the mind away from religious meditation toward sensual attraction and pleasure” (VII, x, 220). The church fulfilled its high office by presenting significant and symbolic content. At one level this content is available in what the church holds or contains, particularly the altar. The divine matters, Alberti states, are most intensely present in the sacrifice of the Mass. He advised restoring its architectural setting: the “sacrificial altar is to be set up so as to give it the greatest dignity: the ideal position, surely, is before the tribunal.”

The beauty of the building itself also symbolizes God’s love. Alberti’s constituent of beauty, which receives little explicit treatment in the treatise, the usual fate of things too well known to need explanation and obviously related to the Thomistic trilogy that described beauty.

Alberti’s method of design knowingly and rationally connects the building to the transcendental truth and its visible beauty immanent in the things God and men make within the material world. These transcendental qualities are present in the proportions that reveal the harmonies God used when He created the universe and provide Alberti with the proportions he uses when building. They can also be discovered in the form and figure of man, in Noah’s Ark, and in the very fabric of God’s universe. They furnish the beauty that places the building within the continuum that has nature at one extreme and culture at the other. These beautiful things, be they buildings, columnar orders, or whole cities, occupy the highest rank among created things. As concrete, material parts of the world we live in, they are visible forms of God’s invisible love. As symbols of that love they reach directly into man’s reason and soul:

“[W]hen the mind is reached by way of sight or sound, or any other means, concinnitas is instantly recognized. It is our nature to desire the best, and to cling to it with pleasure. Neither in the whole body nor in its parts does concinnitas flourish as much as it does in Nature herself; thus I might call it the spouse of the soul and of reason. (IX, v, 815)

Alberti’s understanding of beauty is intimately connected to the anthropomorphic analogy. Alberti’s references to this staple in architectural theory are few, but its role is profound. Like his fellow humanists, he saw man as an active agent using his energy to serve the good, as a person whose actions are
motivated by virtù, that is, by his capacity to allow his will to do the good to direct his actions in the world. This is perhaps the fullest meaning of the analogy sanctioned by Genesis 1:26 that tells us that we are made in the image and likeness of God. The similitude for Alberti is lodged less in the image and more profoundly in the likeness to God as creator of a universe accessible through inspection and reason and a world available as a stage for his actions.

The most visible sign of the anthropomorphic analogy has always been the group of columnar orders. Alberti declares that these ornament the temple, the city, the city that provides the temple, the same building that ornamens the city, the group of columnar orders. Alberti’s profound anthropomorphism arises from the judgments made about the reasons of things as these can be known in the intellect wherein lies the analogy between beauty and justice, an analogy that beauty makes visible. For he who has eyes that see, architecture opens the way for justice to enter the public square and piety to enter the soul of the faithful.

In this life virtue as an active direction of the will joins truth as a quality that unites man with God. In the city of man that is built in accord with what Alberti offers in his architectural treatise, the reason of nature permits the architect to investigate nature (including the acts of men acting in nature) and become equipped to produce buildings. Central to those activities is the ability to perceive and apply concinnitas, which Alberti had called the “spouse and soul of reason” and had described as the linkage between beauty and justice, an analogy as the application of the law embedded in nature. This bridge between man and created things that consists of reason and concinnitas seems very much to be for the architect what Saint Thomas said synderesis is for the individual, namely, “the law of our mind, because it is a habit containing the precepts of the natural law, which are the first principles of human actions.”

Alberti was the first to immerse architecture based on the classical tradi-
Called to Beauty through Iconography
Sacred Images in the Christian Tradition
Joan L. Roccasalvo, C.S.J.

Iconography proclaims the Christian faith in color and form. It is visual theology capable of moving people at their very core. Icons give pleasure and deep satisfaction, but by their very nature, they have been designed to mediate the presence of God and to call the Church to worship.

Icons of the Trinity and of Jesus Christ, of the Mother of God and the saints, invite us to imagine ourselves as “God’s works of art” (Eph 2:10). They ask us to imagine our lives of “faith made powerful through love” (Gal 5:6). The call to participate in God’s beauty was already anticipated in the Old Testament verses, “let us make man and woman in our image, according to our likeness” (Gen 1:26) and “yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor” (Ps 8:5). For the Lord, the God of Israel, the Israelite nation was exceedingly beautiful as “with the dignity of a queen” because of the divine splendor bestowed on them (Ez 16:14).

Without the experience of love, which includes beauty, truth, and goodness, people of faith and those of no faith wither and die like a branch detached from its vine. Icons are a powerful guide to inner beauty. Today, we gasp for such loveliness.

The Incarnation: the Historical and Doctrinal Basis for Veneration of Icons

In 1987 the Eastern Churches celebrated the twelve hundredth anniversary of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, which met in Nicaea to affirm the value of venerating icons. Eighth-century opponents, iconoclasts, argued that God could not be depicted in human terms. Advocates, known as iconodules, and in particular Saint John Damascene, taught that the doctrinal basis for venerating icons lies in the fact of the Incarnation. Because Jesus, the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), entered into the human condition, he could be depicted in his human nature. The Creator of matter became matter for us and, through matter, redeemed us. In the mystery of the Incarnation, the formless becomes a visible form. Eventually the iconoclast controversy was resolved in favor of the veneration of icons.

The Christian East best sums up the Incarnation in the words divinization, deification, or theosis: “God became one of us that we might become like God.” Eastern fathers such as Saints Irenaeus (died ca. 202), Athanasius (died 373), Gregory Nazianzen (died 390) and Gregory of Nyssa (died ca. 395) developed the doctrine of “image and likeness” and the theology of symbol. When a reality, the pure component appealing to the sublime in man and woman, is grasped, then we are able to share the divine nature and to escape corruption” (2 Pet 1:4). Saint Paul describes our transformation into Christ as the ascent from glory to glory” (2 Cor 4:18).

An Overall Understanding of Iconography

The theology of the icon is linked to the theology of symbol. When a reality, interior and spiritual, is expressed in the external and material, it is called a symbol.

Early Christian symbols, like the cross, the Chi-Rho, or the fish, became shortcuts for teaching the various aspects of the Paschal mystery, the passion, death, and Resurrection of the Lord. Symbols are meant not so much to question suffering but to offer Christian hope as a response to suffering. If iconography and other sacred arts are intended to put us in touch with the Transcendent, they do so from within their specific disciplines.

Our language limps when it tries to affirm the sacred or any attribute of God. To say something about God’s holiness, we normally observe the sacred in our own experience: in nature, in human beings, and in their activity. From this limited knowledge, we come to know something about the sacred, even while acknowledging that God’s holiness far surpasses our capability to understand it. In order to identify it as sacred, an icon must pass through three steps: similarity, dissimilarity, and the thrust or leap toward Transcendence. How then can the mind and heart make their ascent to God through iconography?

(1) Similarity: the Familiar
When iconographers craft their materials for worship and prayer, they use what is universally familiar as their starting point. Visuals first attract the senses; iconic human figures can readily be identified as human. Still, icons depict not primarily the aspects of the person that are physical, emotional, or psychological but the graced, divinized person. When the eye first notices an icon, it sees not only what is familiar but also what is unfamiliar. The latter is the purified component appealing to the sublime in man and woman. Why are both needed? Because we are embodied spirits. In iconography, the holiness of the graced person lives in the body, but the body takes on the aura of holiness. With other sacred arts, iconography is a complete art form.

To create color, iconographers...
select natural rather than synthetic products. All elements of creation are part of the iconic process—animal, vegetable, and mineral. Primary colors, especially gold, red, blue, and green, each with its own symbolism, are brilliant. If less distinct colors are used, there is a reason for it. Moreover, iconographers make skillful use of symmetry and balance as well as geometric forms, especially the circle. These patterns express peace, unity and harmony.

(2) Dissimilarity; Remotion, or Negation
In this step, iconographers make a transition from the familiar to the less familiar. They introduce a note of strangeness to the figure in order to suggest “the Beyond they are trying to express through the icon.” They change, remove, or exaggerate some of the similarity to indicate that “the goal is far different and higher than the original familiar and sensible springboard” from which they started in step one. If a work of art, though referred to as religious, remains stuck in the first step, the likeness to the human, it is disqualified from meriting the title sacred art. It remains absorbed in the natural. It is too earthbound. In the stylized iconic form, artists bring about dissimilarity—a kind of negation—to elevate the viewer toward the heavenly. How does the iconographer introduce a note of dissimilarity or strangeness when writing (painting) an icon?

To begin with, no real person has modeled for the iconic figure. Iconographers have committed to memory set patterns that have been handed down through the centuries. The figures appear otherworldly and less earthbound, more removed, more remote than realistic. There is no ostentation or theatrical pose except insofar as theological meaning calls for it. The body is slender to suggest an abstemious way of life. Icons are conspicuous more for exacting craftsmanship than for artistic innovation.

How are the facial features changed to convey the quality of holiness? The straightforward pose, disciplined and reserved, conveys moral authority. There is no substitute for eye-to-eye contact. To represent God’s glory shining forth to the exterior, the complexion has a copper or rosy sheen to it. The oversized eyes, large and expansive, see everything through the vision of faith. Curiously enough, the eyes remain fixed on the viewers regardless of where they are in a room. The mouth, small and pinched, suggests a decided reserve. These figures speak little; they are more attuned to God than to worldly taste. The noses are elongated and thin, as are the hands, whose fingers are long, nimble, and graceful. Wide foreheads symbolize wisdom.

Through change, negation, or exaggeration, the icon is intentionally set apart from the familiar, though it is not devoid of it. The importance of this second step cannot be overstated. Dissimilarity distinguishes iconography from western forms of painting and portraiture.

(3) The Leap toward Transcendence
Dissimilarity can trigger the élan of the spirit to soar beyond the familiar toward Transcendence. Through the dynamism inherent in the negation of step 2, this religious work can stimulate the leap toward the Infinite. God’s grace activates the mind, heart, and will to leap beyond itself heavenward to transcendent Mystery. In this step, the holiness of the image has been depicted. This graced figure expresses the belief that God’s life is at work defying man and woman and the world in which we live. Let us apply these steps to three icons, Jesus the Teacher (Jesus the Pantocrator), the Vladimir Mother of God, and Rublev’s Old Testament Trinity.

Jesus the Teacher, Jesus the Pantocrator
From the beginning of the third century, Jesus has been depicted in several guises, for example, as a young shepherd dressed in a simple tunic, as Jesus the Teacher, and as Christ the majestic Ruler of the world (the Pantocrator). Jesus is the manifestation of the hidden God, whom he has shown to humanity. One of the earliest and most beloved icons of the Christian East is that of Jesus the Teacher, located in Saint Catherine’s monastery at the base of Mount Sinai. It is the oldest still-inhabited monastery in the world. Dating perhaps as early as the reign of Justinian (527-65), this icon is painted with heated wax colors, encaustic pressed into wood. Its iconographer is unknown.

A bearded Christ wears a brownish-purple imperial tunic and a dark blue cloak. His head is encircled by a mandorla or halo. His oval face, emphasized by the circular contour of a well-trimmed and full head of hair, radiates quiet strength. The light of God’s glory illumines his face and is depicted by a warm copper glow with a touch of rose. His penetrating eyes, in direct contact with the viewer, are highlighted by short white lines above and below them. The same white lines highlight his forehead and nose. Not surprisingly, his nose and mouth are small and pinched.

The left hand holds a jeweled book, the Book of the Gospels. If it is opened, a consoling and didactic scripture verse is printed across its pages: “I am the light of the world,” or “Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart.” His right hand is strong and secure. The
fingers, elongated and thin, are arranged in a stylistic way: the thumb, fourth and fifth fingers touch and are curved inward toward the palm. The index and middle fingers are raised and symbolize the two natures of Jesus, the human and divine. With this pose, he blesses the viewer.12

Christ the Teacher may also be depicted in a Deesis, a triptych, sometimes of mosaic, with the Mother of God and Saint John the Baptist on either side of him.13 An exceedingly attractive man, Jesus is “as handsome as a man can be,” an apt commentary on Ps 45:2, “you are the fairest of the sons of men; grace is poured out upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you for ever.” This man who is God is on a mission.

If the figure of an iconic Christ is enthroned on the ceiling in the apse of a church, it is called Christ the Pantocrator, the majestic ruler of all things. The throne is symbolic of the final coming; Christ is the God of judgment. The icon is expressive of Saint Matthew’s verse: “Unto me all power is given in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). The icon is seen as the image and glory of God. A famous example of Christ the Pantocrator is located in the Church of the Cefalù in Sicily.14

The Vladimir Mother of God
The Vladimir Mother of God belongs to that class of icons called “loving-kindness.” This icon depicts the mutual tenderness of the Mother and her Child in contrast to other icons in which the primary emphasis is on the divinity of the Child and the majesty of the Mother.15 In 1155, Luke Chrysoberges, patriarch of Constantinople, presented the icon as a gift to the Rus prince George Dolgoruky. Subtitled “A Miraculous Icon,” the icon remained intact during a raging fire in the Cathedral of the Assumption.16 The iconographer is unknown.

We notice that Mary is depicted as a slender, middle-aged Oriental woman. Not surprisingly, her head is covered with a black veil that contrasts with the Child’s bright garment. The golden-edged border, falling symmetrically, encircles her face like a mandorla, highlighting her delicate features. The prominent star on her veil suggests nobility of thought as does a similar star that covers her heart. The copper flesh tones of her complexion, with a touch of rose blush, suggests God’s light shining forth on her face.

Mary’s dark, almond-shaped eyes gaze into space with sorrowful concentration. The shadows cast by her eyebrows and lashes intensify her sadness. Her nose is curved, long, and slender, and the corners of her mouth are slightly lowered. She is mindful of Old Testament prophecies that foresee the suffering her Son will have to undergo. There is, of course, Simeon’s own prediction that a sword would “pierce her soul” (Lk 2:34-35). Mystically, she ponders without brooding.

The Christ-Child is depicted not like a typical babe in arms. Instead, the Child assumes the weight of the God-Man. In pressing his face against his mother’s cheek, the Child takes the initiative and offers solace to her. The artist has painted the Child’s complexion in tints, lighter and brighter than his mother’s to offer hope to her. Lovingly, she tilts her head toward him. His left hand has slipped behind his mother’s head to clasp her neck, and he presses his left cheek to hers. As his lips approach hers, he stretches his right hand toward her left shoulders to embrace and kiss her. Strength from his small but powerful right hand stretches toward his mother. The high sheen of the royal garment, with its shadows and fine lines, looks majestic. Who cannot be moved by the icon’s tender expressions of human feeling. This beloved icon of elegant yet simple beauty is located in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow.

Rublev’s Old Testament Trinity
The icon of the Old Testament Trinity was painted by the Russian monk Andrei Rublev (1370-1430). Anticipating persons and events in the New Testament, he depicts the mystery of the Trinity through the Old Testament story of the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah (Gen 18).17 In the narrative, the couple hosts the three angel-visitors at Mamre who will foretell the birth of Isaac to the elderly couple. The angels are seated at a table on which stands a cup with a sacrifice offering. The angels hold traveling staffs. Abraham and Sarah are not in the icon.

The basic form of this icon representing the Trinity is a circle. It is seen in the bowed figure of the angels deferring to one another. Their wings touch each other as a trinity, while the hands of the two outer angels lean toward the center angel who clearly attracts attention. The circular shape of the picture encompasses and calls attention to the cup on the table, the symbol of the Eucharist.

The angels wear a common blue and green in varying degrees of intensity to symbolize unity in color. The center angel is Jesus, clothed in strong, clear colors because of his coming in history. He wears a magenta tunic with a gold ribbon draped over the shoulder under the cloak of solid blue-green. Because the Father has never been seen by human eyes, Rublev has chosen indistinct hues of pale orange colored with a tint of blue-green for his clothing. Wearing a green cloak over a tunic of azure blue, the Consooler-Spirit symbolizes life and sanctification. With the other two figures, Jesus blesses the cup with the stylized Eastern blessing. The facial features of the three figures suggest a set of identical triplets of dignity and rare beauty. The raised eyes of the Father appear anxious because of the sacrifice his Son will accept.

The unity brought about by the clothing and circular form and motif of the composition reveals Rublev’s masterful insight into the mystery of the
unity of the Godhead in three Divine Persons.\textsuperscript{19} The icon offers deep satisfaction because through color, form, and symbol, we grasp with delight the truth of the central mystery of Catholic Christian faith. Its loveliness has captured the admiration of the Christian West, thereby surpassing abstract Trinitarian symbols. The beauty, truth, and formal goodness of the icon invite one’s contemplation and a resolve to live in the presence of the life-giving Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One way to do this is carry about in our imagination this work of art that serves the life of prayer.

**The Icon Screen**

The most noticeable external difference between Eastern and Western Churches lies in the presence of an icon screen which separates the apse from the nave of the church. Also referred to as an iconostasis, it is a piece of furniture measuring several feet high and often reaching to the ceiling. The icon screen may be viewed either as a link or as a separation. It is the place where heaven and earth meet. The heavenly mysteries are enacted on earth where the Church lives and struggles. Used mainly in Byzantine Churches, the icon screen comprises several panels and three doors: the Royal Doors in the center, the Deacon’s Door on the south side, and the Server’s Door on the north. It is decorated with icons of Jesus, the Mother of God, and the saints.\textsuperscript{20}

**Breathing Again with Two Lungs\textsuperscript{21}**

In 1985, John Paul II stated in a striking metaphor, first used by Yves Congar: “The Church needs to learn to breathe again with its two lungs—its Eastern one and its Western one.”\textsuperscript{22} He wrote the apostolic letter “Light from the East” (Orientalis Lumen) to mark the centenary of Pope Leo XIII’s apostolic letter. Both documents were intent on safeguarding the significance of the Eastern traditions for the entire Church. As if to confirm the equal dignity of the Churches of the East and the West, iconography has assumed its proper role, and even priority of place, in many sectors of sacred art because of the sacrality inherent in it.

**Beauty and Catholic Faith**

Finally, beauty and the Catholic faith belong together. The sacred arts in all their beauty proclaim the great Christian truths in non-discursive ways and for their pleasure, delight, and deep satisfaction they offer to the beholder. More importantly, beauty is a stepping stone to contemplation that Saint Irenaeus of Lyons (died second century) expressed in his dictum: “The glory of God is man and woman fully alive, but the glory of man and woman is the contemplation of God.”\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{Rublev’s depiction of the Holy Trinity as the three angels who visited Abraham and Sarah in the Old Testament narrative.}
The theological work of twentieth-century theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar has only recently begun to take its proper place in Catholic theology. In his lifetime he certainly took a back seat to contemporaries such as Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, and those men who were known as the theological architects of Vatican II. Balthasar never attended Vatican II, unlike so many of his fellow theologians and friends. This absence, combined with the difficulty inherent in classifying such a diverse corpus as his, has slowed his acceptance as a theological authority in the Church. But for the past thirty years—since the election of John Paul II to the Holy See—Balthasar’s star has risen as one of the great theologians after Trent, a status that the election of Balthasar’s close personal friend and theological sympathizer Joseph Ratzinger to the Chair of Saint Peter seemingly stamped with an imprimatur of the highest rank. At Balthasar’s funeral, Henri Cardinal de Lubac described him as “probably the most cultured man in the Western world.” Indeed, when one looks at the cultural topics that Balthasar treated, Cardinal de Lubac’s statement becomes hard to refute: Balthasar wrote his doctoral dissertation on German literature; his first major work was on music; he was one of the foremost patristic scholars of his time; and, thanks to his father’s practice of church architecture in Switzerland, he loved the visual arts and architecture.

It is due to his expansive cultural awareness that Hans Urs von Balthasar’s corpus does not describe a program or system for sacred art; for a system would too greatly limit both the workings of the Spirit and the creative freedom of the artist. Rather, Balthasar persistently meditates upon the first principles of the drama of prayer, and only out of these principles can his understanding of sacred art and architecture be gleaned. Above all, his understanding of prayer begins by placing silent contemplation at the core. Only through this silent contemplation can we hear God’s Word to us and enter into union with his Word. This study of Balthasar’s view of architecture suggests an approach to sacred architecture in the modern world based upon how the drama of prayer inhabits the form of sacred art and architecture.

The natural place to begin a study of Balthasar’s understanding of contemplation is the same place he believes all theology must begin, namely, with the creatureliness of man. Balthasar repeatedly quotes the famous passage of the Fourth Lateran Council that states: “As great as may be the similarity, so much greater must the dissimilarity between creator and creature be preserved.” The distance between God and his creatures should not be brushed aside or taken for granted, because it is the first key to understanding the glory of God. Not surprisingly, Balthasar emphasizes the principle of creatureliness in the writings of the Fathers of the Church. In Presence and Thought, his groundbreaking work on Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Balthasar begins by describing the saint’s habit of beginning his theological works with “spacing.” that is, with an emphasis on the dissimilarity between God and man: “Every time he undertakes a development of the fundamentals of his metaphysics, Gregory begins from the irreducible opposition between God...
and creature.” Balthasar’s description of his model Saint Gregory could justly be applied to Balthasar himself. Opposition, however, is not something that keeps man from communion with God; rather, it is only through an understanding of God as incomprehensible that the drama can begin to unfold. As Balthasar explains: “ ‘Incomprehensibility’ does not mean a negative determination of what one does not know, but rather a positive and almost ‘seen’ and understood property of him whom one knows. The more a great work of art is known and grasped, the more concretely are we dazzled by the ‘seen’ and understood property of him whom one knows. Balthasar explains: “ ‘Incomprehensibility’ does not mean a negative determination of what one does not know, but rather a positive and almost ‘seen’ and understood property of him whom one knows. The more a great work of art is known and grasped, the more concretely are we dazzled by its “ungraspable’ genius.”

The distance between God and his creatures properly silences the worshipping participant. Awe-inspired silence becomes the starting point of the liturgy: “prayer, we can now see, is communication, in which God’s word has the initiative and we, at first, are simply listeners.” Neither is this task of silence too difficult for man. On the contrary, it is that for which he was created: “Since God himself has made us such that, to be truly ourselves, we have to listen to his word, he must, for that reason, have endowed us with the ability to do so.” The danger at the initial stage of the liturgy is all too clear: that the participants may drown out the Word with their chatter, with their opinions, with their noise— with a one-sided conversation originating and ending in man. Not even communal liturgy can substitute for personal silent prayer. Balthasar exclaims:

As if a break of two minutes after the sermon or after communion could satisfy man’s elementary need of silence in God, of communion from heart with him! And who can, as he swallows the Host, “realize” what Holy Communion means? Does he not need for that the unfunctional, silent “adoration of the holy of holies”? Or silent, personal meditation on the Holy Scriptures?

Saint Joseph with the Infant by Guido Reni, 1635.

In John, Jesus summarizes his whole mission in the "high-priestly prayer" (ch. 17) in which he commends all his work, from his going forth from the Father to his return to him, into his Father’s hands. Even in his dying words he is still in dialogue with God. Christians of all ages, including now are drawn into this prayer. There is no excuse; no evasion will be permitted. Nor may refuge be sought in mere action, nor simply in the liturgy.

God does not simply speak down to man, leaving him in his earthly state; through Christ, he catches the contemplator up with him into heaven. Balthasar’s anatomy of prayer consists, therefore, in three parts: first, the participant is silent; second, God speaks the Word to man in his silence; third, God catches man up into the divine conversation. The liturgy does not replace the personal prayer of the Church, but rather it flows out of it. For Balthasar, action and liturgy ground and manifest the fruits of personal prayer, but they never replace it.

The Word God speaks to man is the Logos of Scripture—Jesus Christ himself. As the Word spoken by God to Man, Christ is the perfect “image” of God because he is God, the visible mediator of the invisible Creator. For this reason, when Balthasar asks the question whether contemplation should be “Image-filled” or “image-less” he is able to answer simply: “In this much—discussed matter all depends on whether the contemplator is a Christian or not. If he is not a Christian, he will from the beginning strive for imageless contemplation. ... For the Christian all is different.” He goes on to explain that that, in this sense, Christianity is unique in the world, in that it is based upon Christ who is the “Son, radiance, reflection, Word, Image.” Not only is Christ the Image of the Father, he surrounds himself with images of himself in the form of parables. Christ, in his parables describes common things, rocks, wheat, sheep, and his use of them causes “even the rocks to cry out.” These stories provide a key part of the Image of the Father that Christ presents. The Church too, as the body of Christ, acts as an image of Christ. Parables, Christian art, even the lives of the saints, are thus, images of the Image Christ. For Balthasar, a Church totally devoid of images is not something that could concentrate the eyes of the congregation purely on Christ (as many Protestant and even some Catholic thinkers would assert), but is rather much more akin to a Gospel in which half the parables of Christ were removed. It is against the justification of iconoclasm that Balthasar writes: “If a people were to be incapable of creating genuine religious images or statues for the churches, it should not say that empty walls concentrate the spirit more effectively upon what is essential. If we have become a small people we should not seek to reduce the mystery we celebrate to our dimensions.” We should make no mistake, however; the incapacity of “creating genuine religious art” would be a huge loss in Balthasar’s mind. The Church would lose in art one of the fundamental images of Christ. And yet, if the image were to become ugly, then they would no longer be a truth-ful image of Christ. Guido Reni’s Saint Joseph with the Infant, for example, illustrates the image of Christ in a way.
that adds depth to the story alone. A blank canvas represents a loss for the Church, but an ugly painting would have conflicted with the image of Christ and been worse than a blank canvas. Christ is the Word, and sacred architecture, Sacred Scripture, and the liturgy reveal the Image of Christ in their unique ways, so that they must all work in unison to provide a fuller image.

In the wake of Balthasar’s expression of the principals of prayer, especially distance, silence, dialogue, and image, the direction that sacred architecture should take becomes clearer and its pitfalls less hidden. First, sacred art and architecture should avoid taking on merely human dimensions, seeking rather to preserve the “dissimilarity” between God and his creatures. Sacred architecture’s first duty is to create a sense of “spacing” between God and man. The church, but especially its sanctuary, must clearly depict a distance between God and his creatures. A church that looks like a living room makes an awareness of the difference between Creator and creature more difficult to perceive—it makes it an act of near heroic virtue.

“Spacing” can be achieved first and foremost by scale, ornamentation, art, and architectural cues such as rails, screens, stairs, or curtains. All of these elements, insofar as they make the glory of God more clear to the participant, express true beauty. This beauty must lead to God, however, not simply to an aesthetic experience. “The awareness of inherent glory,” writes Balthasar, “gave inspiration to works of incomparable earthly beauty in the great tradition of the Church. But these works become suitable for today’s liturgy only if, in and beyond their beauty, those who take part are not merely moved to aesthetic sentiments but are able to encounter that glory of God.”

Architecture, just like sacred music or art, must fulfill its highest calling, aiding the participant in seeing the glory of God.

An architecture that is ordered to fulfill only its human, or even liturgical use, fails its higher purpose: “For good reason the people of the Middle Ages built cathedrals larger than a liturgy could fill. Only in an age when one gives up personal prayer in order to be simply a communal animal in the church can one design churches which are determined purely functionally by the services of the congregation.” Balthasar’s “good reason” is twofold: the medieval cathedrals were built on a grand scale to glorify God and preserve distance—but they were also built to accommodate personal devotions, reverence of relics, and personal prayer beyond the scope of the public liturgies. God brings himself near to man through these encounters even as distance creates awe. Sacred architecture must accommodate these personal devotions if it is to fulfill Balthasar’s expectations. The danger of an architecture that does not accommodate personal prayer and devotion, or Eucharistic adoration, is not, within Balthasar’s drama of prayer, one that fails in merely a “secondary” purpose. For, though Balthasar would certainly not deny the centrality of the Mass, the spiritual benefits for the person attending Mass depend upon one’s own personal devotion. To deepen the public prayer of the Church, architecture must accommodate personal devotions as well.

For a Balthasarian Church to witness both to the distance between God and man, and accommodate the personal devotions of the participants, its guiding principle must be the silence and rest that are the beginning of prayer. A double danger exists here: first the architect might create a space that is silent, not with a living silence, but with the silence of the tomb where there is nothing to inspire awe, longing, or the understanding that the repose should lead to prayer. Secondly, the architect might create a loud architecture that wars with contemplation. The architect might create the necessary “spacing” between God and man through a wholly unique and even strange church without accompanying this distance with the necessary repose. This “spacing” without repose might, for example, occur in a poorly executed baroque church, a non-tectonic church, an anti-symmetrical church, or any sacred architecture that disregards the principles that allow the architecture to rest.

A war on silence could include...
either agitated architecture designed only to excite or unsettle, a merely communal architecture that does not allow for any places in which personal devotions may be practiced in solitude, or an architecture that is constantly in flux with renovation and fuss. On this final point Balthasar acknowledges that renewal may sometimes be necessary, but that it can fall into change for the sake of change: “What a welcome alibi it provides for a new clerical dirigisme, for a busy clerical activity which never stop moving the altar around, fumigating churches, buying new vestments for the servers and a thousand other oddments, while all the time it is putting the emphases in the wrong place.”

If bustle and noise are the wrong place, what is the right place? An ideal Balthasarian church building has shown the distance between God and his creatures. It has awed and silenced the faithful. It has enfolded them in its side chapels to await the Word from God, the Logos. But where in the architecture is the image of Christ to be found? Balthasar answers—everywhere—every image of the life of Christ, every station of the cross, every statue of a saint, every stained-glass window works as an image of Christ. The architecture must orchestrate as much imagery as it can without destroying the “repose” of the building. These images are the image of Christ who bridges that “spacing” or gap that first brought the faithful into awareness of their need for God. The rood screen separates man from God, but it is called a rood screen because it is surmounted by an image of Christ on the “rood,” or cross. The altar rail divides men from God, but that is exactly where Christ meets them in his own Body and Blood. When iconoclasts destroyed the images and whitewashed the cathedrals (whether the Protestant iconoclasts of the sixteenth century or the modernist iconoclasts of the twentieth), they preserved the question in the stones and mortar, but hid the answer that existed in the images. When the crucifix is removed the rood screen does become simply a barrier. When the icons are removed, the iconostasis becomes a wall.

The nature of these images must, ultimately, depict the “whole” Christ, not simply a part of him. Thus, sacred art and architecture must not reflect only a few sides of Christ’s nature and mission. Balthasar writes, “Every element calls for the other, and the more penetrating the gaze of the beholder, the more he will discover harmony on all sides. If one essential element should be broken off … all the proportions will be distorted and falsified.”

Christ must be depicted in a vision that is as whole and multisided as possible, and a church that makes reference to only a part of Christ necessarily presents a distorted view of Christ: “The eschatological theme, taken on its own, is incomprehensible without the cadence of Christ’s suffering. The vertical form of the Son of God who descends from the Father and goes back to him illegible without the horizontal form of historical fulfillment and the mission entrusted to the apostles.”

The goal of an art or architecture that strives to depict the “whole of Christ” summarizes Balthasar’s understanding of appropriate forms of sacred architecture.

Salisbury Cathedral, consecrated in 1258, is an example of a church stripped of its images in an attempt to focus the congregation upon God.

Photo: Ian Kaminski

Salisbury Cathedral, consecrated in 1258, is an example of a church stripped of its images in an attempt to focus the congregation upon God.
and some churches inspire more awe (Saint Peter’s and Chartres), but no single church perfectly expresses the glory of Christ. A program for perfect architecture is always attractive: some have claimed that decorating the sanctuary with the scenes of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb constitutes the proper backdrop to the mysteries being celebrated; or that the saints should never find their way into the images of the sanctuary; others have suggested that every church should be built in a Gothic, classical, or Romanesque manner. But as John Henry Cardinal Newman, a particular hero of Balthasar, put it, “There is no one aspect deep enough to exhaust the contents of a real idea, no one term or proposition which will serve to define it; though of course one representation of it is more just and exact than another.”14 Balthasar opposed “systematic” studies of either theology or art—not because these fields are not full of truth, or because this truth is unintelligible, but because systems tend to reduce that which they study to their dimensions.

In Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism, Balthasar returns to Newman’s concept of the many-sided nature of an idea. Balthasar develops the idea of a symphony as an analogy for Christian doctrine: “The difference between the instruments must be as striking as possible. Each one keeps its utterly distinctive timbre, and the composer must write for each part in a way that this timbre achieves its fullest effect.”15 This analogy can be applied to architectural styles with ease: Byzantine Church architecture, in order to achieve its full effect, must become even more distinct from other styles, not less. When John Paul II spoke of the Western Church

The University of Basel, where Von Balthasar served as chaplain.

needing to “breathe with both lungs” as regards the East, for example, he did not mean that the West should somehow become quasi-Eastern, but that both should work in concert with a distinctive timbre, expressing the oneness of God’s truth through their unique traditions. Architecture, like creation, is a facet of the doctrine of plenitude: the distance between God and his creation, of the goodness of his creation, and even more of His goodness in coming to his creation through Christ, the Image of the Father: “In the Symphony … all the instruments are integrated into one sound.”16 The breadth of sacred architecture constantly grows, just as theology grows; but art and architecture cannot lose contact with the reality of silence, creatureliness, beauty—or the Word.

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4. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
In November of 2008 I went up into the mountains of Peru for a month. There I saw over fifteen towns and villages, traveling by a combination of train, bus, minivan, station wagon, motorcycle, and my own two feet. Much of my transportation was older than I am, and had a disturbing tendency to stall. Yet even as I watched the miles go by, it seemed as if time as well were slipping by. In those areas of desperate poverty, I saw houses built from adobe mud without windows or doors, streets with no paving, and people pulling plows in fields. Men with typewriters set up business in the streets to produce letters, and knife sharpeners wandered with their wheels on their backs. At the center of almost every village, and often enough the village life, was a Catholic church, usually from the colonial period, with its original altarpieces, pulpits, and decorations. As the weeks went by, I noticed extraordinary similarities between them on several levels. While at first glance, they seemed similar to Spanish churches, I quickly saw I was wrong, and that these were Andean churches: particular products of convulsive shifts in Christianity, architecture, global balances of power, and Andean building traditions and religious customs.

The white church of Santiago Apostol sits high on a score of steps, at the top of a sloping plaza. Around it are earth colored one and two story houses; mountains and volcanoes frame it in the distance. Starting at 6 A.M., my bus had climbed five thousand feet up single-lane switch-backed dirt roads, before I transferred to a minivan that sputtered and jerked along the canyon’s edge to the town of Corporaque and Santiago Apostol. I wanted to see the church because Santiago Apostol is one of the oldest churches in Peru. When it was built, the last Inca emperor was still holding out against Spanish soldiers in the jungles. I would see that the church captures a transitional moment. While recognizably a late Renaissance church, the classical detailing and ornament has subtly morphed, and a simple architectural space has been made liturgically complex.

Twin, plain-plastered stone towers flank a central square composition. This composition consists of three levels of orders: composite at base with a triumphal arch motif; above it a plain attic level; and at top a heavy, Romanesque Corinthian in an open, roofed loggia. The proportions and profiles of many of the classical elements seem odd: a result of Andean builders interpreting a style they had only seen in line drawings.

Inside the space is simple: a rectangle about as wide as it is tall (27 feet), and about 100 feet deep, with an open wood roof structure. The final 20 feet of the space is separated into a sanctuary by a step and a frescoed arch. There is a modern pulpit and altar, while the baptismal font is in a chapel by the narthex. Thirteen altars crowd the space by the sanctuary, six on each wall, plus the high altar. Each is roughly six to eight feet wide, and projecting on average three feet, with one niche for a sculptural figure or group. Some have columns with capitals on the base and top, or entablatures without cornices, or pediments that angle at almost forty-five degrees. Behind them at eye level a fresco runs along parts of the wall. At first glance it seems almost rococo with its light colors and lines, but a repeating pattern of condors and local fruits is discernable between the urns. The fresco runs to the narthex, where it shows Christ on the cross, surrounded by Seraphim. This motif is repeated at the arch and narthex, and is almost a local signature by the builders.

The high altar is taller than even the masonry walls and seems as though it
would like to burst through the roof. Like most of the side altars, it is fashioned from masonry, finished with plaster, and painted a mix of light blue and white. The altar has two levels of Corinthian columns, with three bays on each level. These columns are more classically correct than the side altars. While the high altar’s bottom center bay houses the tabernacle, raised 10 feet from the sanctuary floor on a zigzag-like pedestal, the five other bays have niches for sculptural figures (due to current restoration work, some artworks have been removed). Most unusually, steps rise from either side of the high altar and curve behind it. This is the only way to reach the tabernacle. Behind the high altar, at the level of the tabernacle, and not visible from anywhere else, are the ruined remnants of another, possibly older, altar.

Consider the effect: the worshipper is surrounded and dwarfed by holy images in powerful architectural frames. From above, light pours down, and is reflected from the white walls. The Holy Family is at eye level to the right but dressed as local potentates. This is a church designed to fill the eyes with sacred imagery. Yet theological concerns rather than aesthetic drove this emphasis on images, and those came directly from the seismic events happening in Europe.

By the early sixteenth century, Protestant theologians were challenging traditional church design on many levels. Theologically, they questioned the validity of most of the sacraments, and aesthetically they rejected use of most artwork. At the Council of Trent in 1563, the Catholic Church reaffirmed its positions, just as Santiago Apostol was being built. The Council directed that visual images were to be used as aids for instruction, devotion, and evangelization. Thus the Real Presence, the priest’s active role in transubstantiation, the intercession of the saints, the efficacy of good works, and all of the other sacraments were to be stressed rather than denied. The presence of the crucified and risen Christ was indicated by artwork. Framework for the imagery already existed. Under common Habsburg rule, Flemish and North German freestanding carved altarpieces (retablo and reredos) made their way to Spain. Among others, El Greco adapted the retablo as a framework for his artwork, but expanded and gilded. Where the Flemish retablo was a triptych with doors that could be closed, the Spanish retablo was a permanent altarpiece with multiple bays for carved figures and paintings. Gilding was important to the conception of the complete sacred work; figures as diverse as Abbot Suger and Saint Charles Borromeo had identified light with divine qualities, and those materials that reflected it were presumed to add to that effect. Thus some altarpieces also incorporated mirrors.

While the European Catholic Church was concerning itself with existing and wavering Catholics, the Church in Peru was trying to reach a population unfamiliar with Christianity. The Church would soon insert images in the retablo done by an indigenous school of artists depicting Christian figures in Peruvian contexts. Combined with the side altars that were also typical, the high altar would form a unified presentation of the order of the universe, the panoply of the saints, and on an aesthetic level, a glimpse of heaven.

Painting and sculpture were crucial to this unified presentation. Early on in the conquest, European masters arrived in Peru who took on apprentices. Apprentices in the Cusco opened their own shops and formed a school of religious painting that lasted until the nineteenth century, known for its clarity and simplicity. Saints were always shown with the symbols they were known by: the Virgin Mary frequently appeared as Marie Regina, or the Queen in her Glory, with gold leaf applied to the painting. Sometimes allegorical, cartoon-like paintings were produced to illustrate a theme. One such allegorical painting shows the doctors and fathers of the church rowing the ship of the Church, while the pope steers, and the angels are engaged in battle with Turks and devils. Many of the figures spout captions, and some hold books that they wrote. These were all useful pictorial aids for instruction.
in the faith, especially for those concepts that were difficult to grasp. This tendency toward clarity occasionally overreached. For a time, the Cusqueña School produced portraits of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit as three identical bearded men in heaven, seated side by side. The motif was declared heretical, and the painters reverted to showing God the Father as a Mosaic figure, Christ a younger man seated to this right, and the Holy Spirit a Dove above. Culturally, the Cusqueña School also represented an extraordinary integration of Indians into Spanish culture: some historians estimate up to 90 percent of the artists producing paintings and sculptures in the Cusqueña School were Indian or mestizo.

Architecture developed with art. Consider later examples from the nearby town of Yanque, and the façade of the Jesuit Church in Arequipa, where traditional Andean flat relief carving with stylized figures and plant motifs have been integrated into a baroque façade. Within that time period four basic architectural types developed, some common to Spanish America. Within Peru, churches had the same sitting, approach, scale of altarpieces, and Andean influence on ornament and details. Santiago Apostol represents the simplest and smallest type. The next type simply increased the nave, and added two side chapels, such as the cathedral at Andahuaylas. It has essentially the same interior design as Santiago Apostol, but wider (40 feet) and about 160 feet deep. Just as at Santiago Apostol, the walls are roughly as tall as the nave is wide, covered by an exposed roof structure. Close to the altar are small side chapels, facing each other. The third type is commonly found in wealthier urban parish churches, and is the familiar Latin Cross plan, with side aisles. This usually does not have side chapels, other than two in the transept commonly dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament and the Virgin Mary. The final type is generally reserved for cathedrals and is common throughout Spanish America. It is a three-aisle plan, with the side aisles lined with shallow chapels. The dimensions of the main and side aisles are generally consistent with the other plan types; conceptually it is almost as though the cathedral at Andahuaylas has had a Santiago Apostol added on both sides, and the common walls broken through with arcades. Volumetrically, the buildings generally had and altars and as flat compositional elements on the main façade. The architectural spirit remained a sober late Renaissance. There are practical explanations (frequent earthquakes limited the ability to construct elaborate vaulting characteristic of the baroque), but these are at best partial reasons. The austere classicism of Phillip II’s time, which vanished in Spain, found solid roots in Peru and set the tone for future design. Even more so than in Spain, Peruvian churches expressed materials and structure clearly. Coupled with the Andean influence on ornament, this contrast between ornate and gilded elements, and the simple architecture give Peruvian churches much of their distinctiveness. Behind this lie the decisions of many patrons, and their reasons are beyond the scope of this article. However, we can see one church that embodies many of the conflicting pulls of design. We leave the mountains for Lima, and a church Pizarro himself founded.

Lima today has seen more than a decade since the last terrorist bombs went off, and now the main problem in the streets is an overabundance of cars, from new black government sedans to the rickshaw-like mototaxis. Those taxis usually deposit modern
visitors on the far side of the Plaza des Armas, and once passed the shoeshine boys and riot police, the cathedral is reached. Upon entering, it seems as though one is in a luminous and large mosque. Light filters in indirectly from windows above, and the massive 10-foot-square piers block any visual end to the space. Lanterns produce all other optical effects; one is placed in each side chapel, and others appear at points along the main aisle. However, move to the left, and the visitor finds himself or herself at the end of the 200-foot-long nave, looking directly at the high altar and able to comprehend the entire space of the cathedral. That space is divided into three parallel aisles, the center aisle about 35 feet wide and a similar height to the top of the main order and side aisles about 22 feet wide, each of those flanked by a continuous row of deep side chapels. The sanctuary is simply a raised portion of the last two bays of the center aisle, with no apse or ambulatory behind it. In plan the church is almost two squares, with one of them given over to the sanctuary area.

While the first impression is of serene space, closer inspection, and a bit of historical knowledge, reveals a design that was caught between several periods. The Lima cathedral was begun in 1582, likely from plans of a student of Juan de Herrera, known for the austere late Renaissance chapel at the Escorial. Herrera’s plans for the cathedral of Valladolid show a striking similarity to the plan for the cathedral at Lima. The geometric rationalism of Herrera’s plans meant that wherever the rhythm of the bays was interrupt-
Apostol. Thus we have the irony of colonial cathedral design in Peru: holding on to medieval layouts and elements, they obscured the clarity of the spaces, and the overwhelming impact of the images. Nineteenth-century cathedrals completed Herrera’s work and remade their spaces along the lines of the other three church types in Peru.

Many modern Peruvian churches have largely abandoned the colonial style of architecture and the colonial rectangular plan. Modern churches tend to be square in plan, with low ceilings. However, many of the characteristics we first saw at Santiago Apostol remain. One example will serve. The church of Virgen Peregrina sits in a fairly grim middle- to working-class area south of the historic center of Lima. In the middle of concrete apartment blocks rising five and six stories, the parish has carved out a green block. The church itself is a delicate looking timber frame structure, with an exposed metal roof and polished concrete floor. The outer timber posts are filled in with brick. One suspects the architect had a small budget. However, much has been accomplished within that. The walls stop short of the roof the entire perimeter, and resting on the glow of natural light, the roof seems to float. The posts are laid out to form three aisles, and the central aisle is stressed by the roof being raised another two feet above it. The remnants of a high altar may be seen in the green sanctuary wall that has gilded borders framing the tabernacle and crucifix (at the center) and sculptures of four saints. Figures and prints of the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, and Child Jesus are mounted to the walls along the side aisles with racks for candles before them. While the plan is square, the architect has chosen to stress the linearity of its central aisle. The church itself is about 35 feet wide, similar to Andahuaylas. Even though the high altar has been much reduced, the congregation is still facing a prominently placed tabernacle, crucifix, and images of the saints, while surrounded by other holy images. As in all of the modern churches I saw, the images are done in traditional, representational styles, and are painted and sometimes clothed, just as in colonial churches.

The church has a gated plaza before its entry and the front elevation is stressed by the placing of a small bell tower at the gable. Intentionally or not, the architect has used light, images, space, and procession to point us back to 1563 and Trent.

This article has spoken of the continuity of church design in Peru. One could also interpret it as a stagnation of ideas to match the absolutism, and often brutality, of the colonial and republican regimes. However, traveling through Peru, I was continually surprised by its churches. Within the framework outlined here, they manage to be unique, inspiring, and despite their massive size, luminous. Herein may lie the answer for the long survival of the Peruvian Catholic church. Simple (and cheaper to build), yet capable of containing much complexity, these buildings reflected the culture that imposed them and the culture that adopted them, while satisfying the theology. This grand compromise seems to have been satisfying to all. Today 89 percent of Peruvians identify themselves as Catholics, and two thirds of those actively participate. Personal observation bears out the extent to which worshippers pray before all the altars, often making a round before the daily Mass. At any time of day, I never found an open church that was empty. Since life in Peru is still urban rather than suburban, the colonial churches are still important parish centers, and many have up to four well-attended daily Masses. Whatever the opinions of liturgical consultants, architects, and modern theologians, the people may still be demanding churches that they know and that have inspired them during the last few centuries.

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Today, a few days after the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul and the conclusion of the Pauline Year, my wish to reopen the Pauline Chapel for worship is fulfilled. We have taken part in solemn celebrations in honour of the two Apostles in the Papal Basilicas of Saint Paul and Saint Peter. This evening, to complete them, as it were, we gather in the heart of the Apostolic Palace, in the Chapel desired by Pope Paul III and designed by Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, the place of prayer reserved for the Pope and the Pontifical Family.

The paintings and decorations adorning this chapel particularly the two large frescoes by Michelangelo Buonarroti which were the last works of his long life are especially effective in encouraging meditation and prayer. They depict the conversion of Paul and the crucifixion of Peter.

The eye is first drawn to the faces of the two Apostles. It is evident from their placement alone that these two faces play a central role in the iconographic message of the Chapel. But, aside from their positioning, they immediately attract us "beyond" the image: they call us to question and lead us to reflect. First of all, let us dwell a moment on Paul: why is he portrayed with such an elderly face? It is the face of an old man, whereas we know and Michelangelo also knew it well that the calling of Saul on the road to Damascus occurred when he was about 30 years old. The artistic choice takes us outside pure realism; it makes us go beyond the simple narration of events to introduce us to a deeper level. The face of Saul-Paul which is that of the artist himself, who by then was old, troubled and in search of the light of truth represents the human being in need of a greater light. It is the light of divine grace, indispensable in order to gain a new perspective from which to perceive reality, oriented towards the "hope laid up for you in heaven", as the Apostle writes in the initial greeting of the Letter to the Colossians which we have just heard (1: 5).

The face of Saul fallen to the ground is lit from above, by the light of the Risen One and, despite its dramatic nature, the figure inspires peace and instils a sense of security. It expresses the maturity of a man illuminated from within by Christ the Lord, while around him a flurry of events occurs in which all of the figures seem to be within a vortex. The grace and peace of God have enveloped Saul, they have internally conquered and transformed him. It is the same "grace" and the same "peace" that he was to announce to all his communities on his apostolic journeys, with the maturity of one who has aged not in years, but spiritually, a gift from the Lord himself. Therefore, in Paul's face we can already perceive the heart of the spiritual message of this Chapel: the wonder, that is, of Christ's grace which transforms and renews mankind through the light of his truth and his love. This is what constitutes the newness of conversion, the call to faith which finds its fulfilment in the mystery of the Cross.

From Paul's face let us pass to that of Peter, depicted at the moment when his inverted cross is being hoisted up and he turns to look at the onlooker. This face too surprises us. Here the age represented is the correct one, but it is the expression that amazes and questions us. Why this expression? It is not an image of suffering, and Peter's body communicates a surprising degree of physical vigour. The face, especially the forehead and eyes, seems to express the state of mind of a man confronting death and evil. There is a bewilderment, a sharp, projected gaze that seems almost to search for something or someone in the final hour. And the eyes also stand out also in the faces of those surrounding him. Agitated glances emerge, some even frightened or confused. What does all of this mean? It is what Jesus had predicted to his Apostle: "When you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not want to go". And the Lord had added: "Follow me" (John 21: 18,19). In this precise moment the culmination
of the sequel is reached: the disciple is no longer with his Master, and now tastes the bitterness of the cross, of the consequences of sin that separates from God, of all the absurdity of violence and falsehood. If one comes to this chapel to meditate, one cannot escape the radicalism of the question posed by the cross: the Cross of Christ, Head of the Church, and the cross of Peter, his Vicar on earth.

The two faces on which our gaze rests are opposite each other. One might therefore imagine that Peter’s face is actually turned towards the face of Paul, who in turn does not see but bears within him the light of the Risen Christ. It is as though Peter, in the hour of supreme trial, were seeking that light which gave true faith to Paul. It is in this sense, then, that the two images can become the two acts of a single drama, the drama of the Paschal Mystery: Cross and Resurrection, death and life, sin and grace. The chronological order of the events portrayed might be inverted, nevertheless the plan of salvation emerges, the plan that Christ realized in himself by bringing it to fruition, as we have just sung in the hymn of the Letter to the Phillippines. For those who come to pray in this chapel, and above all for the Pope, Peter and Paul become teachers of faith. With their witness they invite us to go deeper, to meditate in silence upon the mystery of the Cross, which accompanies the Church until the end of time, and to absorb the light of the faith. It is thanks to this light that the apostolic Community can extend to the ends of the earth the missionary and evangelizing action entrusted to it by the Risen Christ. Solemn celebrations with the people are not held here. This is where the Successor of Peter and his collaborators meditate in silence and adore the living Christ, present above with the people are not held here. This is thanks to this light that the Church can become the dwelling place of God, of all the absurdity of violence and falsehood. If one comes to this chapel to meditate, one cannot escape the radicalism of the question posed by the cross: the Cross of Christ, Head of the Church, and the cross of Peter, his Vicar on earth.

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The Eucharist is the Sacrament in which the whole work of Redemption is concentrated: in Jesus as Eucharist we can contemplate the transformation of death into life, of violence into love. Hidden beneath the veils of the bread and the wine, we recognize through the eyes of faith the same glory that was manifested to the Apostles after the Resurrection. It is the same glory that Peter, James and John contemplated as a foretaste on the mountain, when Jesus was transfigured before them: a mysterious event, the Transfiguration, which the large painting in this Chapel by Simone Cantarini presents anew with unique force. In fact, however, the entire chapel the frescoes of Lorenzo Sabatini and Federico Zuccari, the decorations of numerous other artists brought here on another occasion by Pope Gregory XIII all of it flows together into a single, unique hymn of the triumph of life and grace over death and sin, in a symphony of worship and of love for Christ the Redeemer that is highly evocative.

Dear friends, at the end of this brief meditation, I would like to thank all those who have cooperated so that we may once again enjoy this completely restored sacred place: Prof. Antonio Paolucci and his predecessor Dr Francesco Buranelli, who, as Directors of the Vatican Museums, have always had this extremely important restoration at heart; the various specialists who, under the artistic direction of May the expression of my most cordial gratitude reach each and every one of you.

We shall shortly be singing the Magnificat. May Mary Most Holy, Teacher of prayer and of adoration, together with Saints Peter and Paul, obtain abundant graces for those who are gathered in faith within this Chapel. And this evening, thankful to God for his wonders, and especially for the Death and Resurrection of his Son, may we lift up to him our praise also for this work that reaches its completion today. "To him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever! Amen" (Eph 3: 20-21).

On July 4, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI delivered the above homily during Vespers on the occasion of the reopening of the restored Pauline Chapel in the Apostolic Palace.
I
n 1955, Per Gustaf Hamberg published in Swedish his *Temples for Protestants*, an extraordinarily well-researched, nuanced study of the early (sixteenth- and seventeenth-century) Reformed and Lutheran Churches of Northern Europe and Scandinavia. Now, finally, this illuminating and useful book is available in English. As a scholar of early American Protestant architecture, I found myself wishing I had had access to this book years ago. It contains numerous, thorough descriptions of churches and fascinating discussions of important relevant primary texts of the period, many of which are unavailable in English. The translation is fluid, despite minor inaccuracies. Lengthy quotes in Latin, German, French, and Italian are not translated, which is a bit frustrating for the provincial. Nonetheless, this is a necessary book for anyone interested in the religious architecture of this period and its influence on later buildings.

In the first three chapters, Hamberg mines period texts to clarify the different emphases of Catholic, Calvinist, and Lutheran churches regarding the architecture of worship. For instance, he compares the Jesuit Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino’s reaction to Protestant views on art and architecture, as stated in his *Disputationes* (ca. 1576), to the *De Templo* of Swiss Reformer Rudolf Hospinianus (1587), the “most important Protestant contributor to the controversy.” Although the buildings of French Huguenots largely disappeared after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, Hamberg demonstrates the influence of the work of architects such as Jacques Perret throughout northern Europe. His careful study of *Des Fortifications et Artifices, Architecture et Perspective de Jacques Perret* shows the overall conception of the fortified Huguenot town and the place of the Protestant temple within it—a simple “monumental assembly hall” potentially for both religious and secular purposes, designed to seat nearly ten thousand people. Perret’s designs for rural churches are remarkably like the unadorned auditory spaces of early New England. Hamberg contrasts Perret’s designs with a utopian work by the German Johann Valentin Andrae, *Republicae Christianopolitanae*, published in 1619 in Strasbourg. In the center of Andrae’s modest and practical city, the temple is a magnificent round structure, full of light and beauty and hosting a central crucifix. A true liturgy takes place at a central altar, the walls are adorned with pictures, and there is even a sculpted statue of Christ. Clearly Andrae was rejecting iconoclasm, and Hamberg argues that his design presages later eighteenth-century Lutheran church architecture. Another important text Hamberg discusses is Joseph Furttenbach the Younger’s *The Younger’s Kirchen Gebau*, a pamphlet printed in Augsburg in 1649 to instruct the designers of new, small churches for war-torn regions. Hamberg calls this “the first real handbook on the art of German Evangelical church building,” a text that established common principles, such as the separation of the sexes in worship, and promoted the combination altar-pulpit-font-organ, as well as the use of a secondary, “lay” altar.

The final four chapters describe in wonderful detail the churches of Dutch Reformed and Dutch Free congregations, the churches of Denmark-Norway and Sweden-Finland. For the scholar interested in the wider impact of these churches, the two chapters on the Dutch “Golden Age” buildings, with their “strange mix of traditional *residua* and radical innovation” are most illuminating. Hamberg takes the reader on an extensive tour of the most important Reformed churches of cosmopolitan Amsterdam (including the Suiderkerk and the Westerkerk) and also details the adaptation of Catholic churches by Reformed congregations. In Saint Bavo, Haarlem, for example, although Protestants cleared the church of Catholic art and stripped the altars, the center of preaching remained where it was, and the congregation crowded into the east end of the nave under the medieval pulpit. This sort of continuity was not uncommon in Dutch churches, leading to an interesting mix of old and new. Interiors retained some arrangements of older liturgical practices, and the style of architecture was throughout this period a mix of a surprisingly persistent medieval Gothic, Renaissance, and classical, often mixed together in the same buildings. In sum, Hamberg writes, “official Calvinism, with its doctrine of predetermination and its often open hostility to art, did not prevent the development of a monumental church architecture.” Meanwhile, “there also emerged a Free Church tabernacle environment of Spartan simplicity ... [that] came to serve such different persuasions as the Arminian Calvinists who were something of a cultural elite, the Lutherans with their appreciation of art and love of music, and the puritanically self-denying Anabaptists with their total rejection of any kind of beauty” (149). Hamberg’s final chapters on Norwegian and Swedish churches show a similar, if more conservative, development, with regional characteristics such as the common use of wood as primary building material. In his final chapter, Hamberg describes the Swedish progression from “a long, late-flowering Gothic survival of [indeterminate] confessional affiliation to an architecture classical in form but pronouncedly Protestant in spirit” (234).

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**NEW MEXICO REGIONALISM**


Reviewed by Norman Crowe

John Gaw Meem, while relatively unknown outside New Mexico, is regarded among New Mexicans as their most significant interpreter of regional forces in architecture. Lehmberg's book, the first to focus on the architect's ecclesiastical designs, provides a careful account of Meem's engagement with church commissions from about 1920 until his last church design in 1949. Meem began his career not by designing, but by restoring churches, especially very venerable ones—such as the San Estevan del Rey Mission, the only surviving church built prior to the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, and Saint Francis Cathedral of Santa Fe, erected by Bishop Lamy in the 1860s. It is likely that this early involvement in restoration set Meem's approach to both sacred and secular architecture throughout his career.

Born in Brazil, Meem came to the United States in pursuit of an education in engineering. When he was told he had tuberculosis and should find a sanatorium in the Southwest, he opted to travel to Santa Fe, inspired by a poster of its architecture he had seen in the window of a New York travel agency. He was encouraged to consider a career in architecture by a newfound friend, a Portuguese architect working in California. After study and apprenticeship, he began his practice by working on the restoration of churches.

Lehmberg's book provides us with a step-by-step account of Meem's ecclesiastical commissions and the development and refinement of his approach to the design of churches. It is illustrated with excellent recent color photographs throughout, accompanied by earlier black and white photographs and architectural drawings from the Meem Archives at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, where Meem was campus architect during the critical formative years of the U.N.M. campus. Meem was architect of numerous university and commercial buildings as well as residences during his career, but it is likely that his early experience with the restoration of churches had a profound influence on his approach to architectural design. The humility Meem felt from working on those great and sacred buildings, I believe, instilled in him a sense of humility toward architecture in general, which may be responsible for his focus on traditional architecture and building methods across all his work.

Particularly informative in this book are the snippets of correspondence between Meem and building committees, bishops, ministers, and priests for whom he worked. These communications demonstrate the strong mutual respect Meem and his ecclesiastical clients had for one another. Further, Lehmberg points out evidence of the importance of religion to Meem. He often contributed his own funds to special features of the churches he designed or reduced his commissions as an expression of his regard for the churches, congregations, and clergy he served. It is obvious that his church commissions were more than just projects of professional importance.

Implicit as one progresses through this book is Meem's keen sensitivity to liturgical requirements and traditions, all the while carefully reflecting regional architectural attributes. His commissions included designs for Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Baptist churches, as well as the Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches that are among his better-known works. Lehmberg touches upon, but does not elaborate, Meem's especially sensitive attention to the differing liturgical requirements and specific historical settings of each church. Additionally, the author does not delve very far into Meem's lifelong involvement with theories of regionalism in New Mexico architecture. In fact, it is Meem's attention to regional precedents that led him to articulate an almost canonical clarification of "styles" considered to be uniquely New Mexican. Meem's work reflects each of these styles, or architectural modalities, both for his churches and for his secular architecture—having defined the respective details, appropriate materials, and expressive qualities of each. Perhaps because Lehmberg is a historian but not an architectural historian, he shied away from more in-depth descriptions of Meem's architectural theory and the way it manifested itself in his churches. To have done so might have taken the book to a more profound level, although at the same time it might have discouraged some readers who would find such discussions exclusive to the province of architects. But it is here that Meem's significance as an architect beyond New Mexico resides. Many skilled architects who worked during the same period also designed works of significance and beauty, but the added dimension of thoughtful attention to regional and historical circumstances developed by Meem places him in the forefront of a particularly noteworthy intellectual tradition. Lehmberg does point out however that Meem "possessed an exceptional understanding of the relationship between liturgy and space, the intersection between religion, art, and history."

I would recommend this book to church building committee members and clergy approaching the daunting task of selecting an architect and setting requirements for a new church or the renovation and restoration of existing ecclesiastical architecture in their charge. This book provides a vital overview of the experience and engagement of a conscientious and knowledgeable architect in the design and renovation of churches.

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HOW SACRED ART FITS INTO THE DEVOTIONAL LIFE


Reviewed by Michael Morris, OP

The author of this book, Roger Homan, is professor of religious studies at the University of Brighton in England. For Anglophiles the slim volume will prove to be an absolute treat, for Professor Homan casts new light on English figures and subject matter seldom treated in general surveys of Christian art and architecture. This is done, however, at the expense of omitting major figures and monuments from the modern movement on the Continent and in America, thus rendering the book either extremely chauvinistic or the right book with the wrong title.

At the very beginning of his work, Professor Homan laments the loss of the beautiful language found in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, and he abhors its replacement by the Alternative Service Book of 1980. The former carried with it the encoded phrasing and tradition of generations of believers, while its modern replacement de-flowered the original, producing a functional but dull offspring.

Ignoring the supportive work on natural symbols that Mary Douglas advanced in this area, Professor Homan also fails to mention and compare the struggle found in contemporary Roman Catholicism, where advocates for a more beautiful translation of the Mass align with those who would return to Latin itself in an effort to recapture the sublime beauty of a ritual supported by cultic language. Professor Homan’s concerns and arguments may be frustratingly parochial, but they are far from uninteresting. He is a skillful writer who incorporates fascinating detail into his argumentation. And the issues he raises are not small ones, but rather problems that have plagued Christian art for centuries. For instance, Eric Gill had long been considered England’s foremost engraver of the twentieth century and a designer and sculptor of the highest rank. Yet when Fiona MacCarthy investigated his diaries for her 1989 biography of the artist, she found accounts of pedophilia, incest, and bestiality sprinkled throughout. This caused some to re-appraise his work and even demand that Gill’s Stations of the Cross be taken down from Westminster Cathedral in London. Knowing how an artist’s private life can influence the way we look at his public art, the question arises: How moral must an artist be in order for his work to be embraced by the Christian community? Professor Homan’s strongest chapter, “Morality and Christian Art,” admits that too few artists can measure up to the fabled Dominican painter Fra Angelico, who allegedly fell on his knees while painting and was overcome with tears as he formulated scenes of the Crucifixion. When the viewer is given information that Michelangelo had a boyfriend, that the model for Caravaggio’s Madonna was a prostitute, and that the Carmelite Fra Filippo Lippi impregnated the nun posing for him, does it make one look at the excellence of their art in a different way? Professor Homan deftly handles this issue and draws the reader’s attention to ultimate questions like: “Does a work of sacred art lead a viewer to prayer?” If prayer is the ultimate purpose for Christian art, then its ability to connect the human to God can be equally accomplished through high art and low. This becomes a provocation for old-school art historians, connoisseurs, and cultural elitists who cherish the idea that museums have become the new temples to Beauty, even as historic churches survive only on the tourist trade. The author dares to state that kitsch holds a powerful place in devotion and to ignore this fact is to cut out a large portion of Christian art. He relies on many contemporary Protestant theorists in his argumentation (Margaret Miles, Frank Burch Brown, David Morgan) and rightly so, for Catholics have fallen comparatively behind in their appreciation and understanding of sacred art since Vatican II, not by the Council’s intent but by the irrational surge of Catholic iconoclasm that erupted afterward.

Perhaps Professor Homan’s book would have a more ecumenical appeal had he included some modern Catholic theorists in the mix. He mentions the Protestant Tillich and yet ignores the Catholic thinkers who grappled with the ideas that preceded the aesthetic malaise in which we now find ourselves: Maurice Denis, Père Couturier, Jacques Maritain, Etienne Gilson, and Hans Urs von Balthasar are all missing. While Professor Homan’s discussion of Pugin is nothing short of delectable, he leaves out major artists who have left their mark on modern sacred art like Le Corbusier, Henri Matisse, Wassily Kandinsky, Georges Rouault, and the abstract expressionists. Their work has now morphed down to the bargain basement catalogues of contemporary ecclesial architecture and parish church decoration. An analysis of that begs scholarly attention. This is not the book to address that subject, but for Anglophiles and Protestants wishing to continue the discourse on how sacred art fits into the devotional life of all Christians, Professor Homan’s book is well worth purchasing.

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This book surveys two centuries of Russian history through a succession of ambitious architectural projects designed for a single construction site in central Moscow. Czars, Bolshevik rulers, and contemporary Russian leaders alike have dreamed of glorious monuments to themselves and their ideologies on this site. The history of their efforts reflects the story of the nation itself and its repeated attempts to construct or reconstruct its identity and to repudiate or resuscitate emblems of the past. The Holy Place explores each project intended for this ideologically-charged site and documents with 60 illustrations the grand projects—many of which were designed to be the world’s largest or tallest structure of their kind—that were built as well as those that were only dreamed.


This dedicated volume of the Journal of the British Archaeological Association draws together ten papers which explore something of the art and architecture, styles and uses, of the medieval cloister in England and Wales. Contributors consider the continental context, cloisters in English palaces, Benedictine and Augustinian cloister arcades in the 12th and 13th centuries, architecture and meaning in Cistercian east ranges, late medieval vaulted cloisters in the West Country, cloisters at the cathedrals of Old Sarum, Canterbury, and Lincoln, and assess the extent to which the cloister bosses at Norwich cathedral priory reflect contemporary religious politics. The volume also contains an extended consideration and gazetteer of all Cistercian cloisters in England and Wales.


The Substance of Things Seen explores the intersection of art and faith, offering thoughtful reflections on the way art functions in Christian life and practice. Readable and featuring instructive illustrations, this book is meant to engage church leaders as well as artists in constructive conversation about the critical role that art can play in the renewal of Christian education, worship, and study. It also challenges anyone who thinks the arts are only of marginal importance to the religious life. Robin Jensen considers here a broad range of topics relevant to Christian faith and culture, including the construction of sacred space, the use of art in worship and spiritual formation, the way that visual art interprets sacred texts, and the power and danger of art from a historical and contemporary perspective.

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From the Publishing Houses
A Selection of Recent Books

This book describes one of the great sources of British architectural history: the collection of nearly five hundred drawings from the office of Sir Christopher Wren, today housed at All Souls College, Oxford. The collection reveals how Wren went about designing one of the largest buildings in Christendom - St Paul's Cathedral; how he rebuilt fifty parish churches after the Great Fire of London; and how he furnished England with some of its best-loved public buildings, including Hampton Court Palace, the Royal Naval Hospital at Greenwich, and the Library at Trinity College, Cambridge. The drawings also shed light on the internal workings of Wren's office. Geraghty introduces us to Wren's team of assistants and draughtsmen, including the young Nicholas Hawksmoor, who spent the first twenty years of his career in Wren's office. This is the first catalogue of the All Souls drawings in sixty years, and the first to reproduce the whole of the collection in colour. It will be an indispensable work of reference for students of British architectural history.


Henry Wilson (1864 - 1934) worked in a highly individual style, uniting influences from the Arts & Crafts Movement and Art Nouveau with his own interpretation of traditional forms, symbols and nature. Drawing on original archives, biographical details and insights from family members, this is the first published study devoted wholly to Wilson and his work. This book discusses examples of his work throughout the UK and in North America, where he designed the bronze entrance doors for a leading Boston tea importer and the great West doors of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York. Of equal impact were his exhibition designs, and his influential teaching at the Royal College of Art, the Central School of Arts and Crafts, and at the Vittoria Street School for Silversmiths and Jewellers in Birmingham.


Reviewed by Gretchen Buggeln

Published posthumously, Professor Nigel Yates' final work is his meticulously researched Preaching, Word and Sacrament: Scottish Church Interiors 1560-1860. Emphasizing the historical and liturgical developments in the Scottish Church and their effects on church architecture, Yates offers the "most accurate and up-to-date list of 'substantially unaltered' pre-1860 church interiors available." He includes a helpful chapter contrasting the Presbyterian churches with Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches of the same period, and a final chapter that takes these buildings to the present. Extensive appendices contribute to the book's value as a research tool.
“In Austria we carry on a constant struggle to keep our churches open, accessible to the faithful and to others who are seeking, as it is a grave wound to the Body of Christ that churches have their doors closed.”
~Christoph Cardinal Schonborn, Archbishop of Vienna in Ars, France on September 30, 2009

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