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 contemplation 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 better, 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 historicist 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

Duncan Stroik
November 2009

On the cover: Altar of Saint Peter, Cathedral and National Shrine of Saint Paul, Saint Paul, Minnesota. Photo by Doug Olman.
Sacred Architecture

Issue 17 2010

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Journal of the Institute for Sacred Architecture

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

After a fire destroyed their church in June 2005, Sacred Heart Parish in Weymouth, MA, rebuilt the church using its original design by noted ecclesial architect Patrick Keely (1816-1896) as a guide. Completed in 1882, the original church served the local Irish-Catholic population. Since then the parish has grown to include an elementary and high school. Architects from the Boston office of the S/L/A/M Collaborative, developed the plans for rebuilding the church. The new church incorporates stained-glass windows, light fixtures, and Stations of the Cross salvaged from closed churches in the Boston Archdiocese, along with the newly created furnishings designed to complement the traditional architecture of the church. His Eminence Sean Cardinal O’Malley celebrated the Mass of Dedication of the new church.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation included Unity Temple in Oak Park, IL, on its 2009 list of America’s Eleven Most Endangered Historic Places. Designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and constructed between 1905 and 1908 for the Unitarian Universalist Congregation, the building features a flat roof and exposed concrete walls. The worship space has two balconies that supply additional seating for the congregation, which today numbers around five hundred people. After continual water infiltration and severe damage in a 2008 storm, the Unity Temple Restoration Foundation—a nonprofit organization established in 1973 to care for the historic structure—developed a plan to restore the National Historic Landmark. The Foundation has raised nearly $500,000 for stabilizing the roof and is working with Harboe Architects of Chicago to implement a comprehensive restoration master plan that will cost $20–25 million.

Salve Regina University in Newport, RI, is currently building a new campus chapel entitled Our Lady of Mercy Chapel designed by architect Robert A.M. Stern of New York. The current chapel is in the first-floor ballroom of Ochre Court, a former mansion that also provides for administrative offices for the university. Sunday Masses hosted by campus ministry have 30-50 students in attendance, while the total student population is 2,700. The new building will house a chapel to hold 225 people, campus ministry offices, and an interfaith worship space. It is hoped that the new chapel building will strengthen the spiritual identity of the school and encourage participation in the faith community.

On November 9, 2009 the Vatican launched a website that offers a virtual tour of Saint John Lateran Basilica. Professor Paul Wilson, of the Communications Department at Villanova University, proposed the idea in 2007, and a team of Villanova staff and students carried out the project with a camera on a tall tripod. Positioned at the papal altar, apse, nave, and several side chapels, the camera photographed the details of the interior at a very high quality. The project intends to foster interest in the art and architecture of sacred places in Rome and has previously captured the interiors of the Sistine Chapel and the Basilica of Saint Mary Major among others.

The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception celebrated its fiftieth anniversary over the course of four days in November 2009. Archbishop Donald Wuerl of Washington celebrated the Mass on November 19 with forty bishops from across the U.S. Archbishop Pietro Sambi, Apostolic Nuncio to the U.S., read the original letter written for the occasion of the dedication of the shrine in 1959 by Blessed Pope John XXIII. At the solemn closing Mass, the main celebrant Monsignor Walter Rossi, rector of the basilica, wore the vestments Francis Cardinal Spellman wore for the dedication in 1959.

Saint Vincent de Paul Church, in downtown Portland, OR, is building a new exterior canopy, belfry, and art gallery facing the street to improve its visibility in the neighborhood. The 14,000-square-foot concrete building, a former hotel, will also have improved lighting and a new baptismal font. The parish church moved into the building in the 1970s, when their former chapel was demolished for construction of the U.S. Bancorp Tower. After the Jesuits served at the parish for many years, the Holy Cross Fathers took over in the 1980s and have developed a network of student volunteers from the University of Portland to assist in their ministry to the poor. The parish is planning an $800,000 campaign to pay for the project and to create a fund for future improvements.
The town council in Gesté, France voted to raze the Church of Saint Peter and replace the aging stone building with a newer, smaller church. Finished in 1870, the Neogothic church stands over the ruins of a sixteenth-century church destroyed in the French Revolution. Cost estimates put the price to renovate the existing church at $4.4 million as opposed to $1.9 million to demolish it and build a new one. However, local townspeople dispute the proposed cost and claim that the decision was made to fight unemployment. The church’s pastor, Father Pierre Pouplard, who also serves at four other nearby churches, has accepted the budget calculations of the town council and supports the building of a new church. The Paris-based Religious Heritage Observatory estimates that of the approximately 90,000 church buildings in France only about 20 percent are protected by the government for their architectural significance. The organization’s president, Béatrice de Andia, said, “the Church may be eternal, but not the churches. In the past, these buildings were sacred, but today there is no sense of the sacred.”

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has pledged support to the Church in Haiti as it rebuilds its church buildings. Francis Cardinal George, Archbishop of Chicago and president of the USCCB, expressed condolences for the terrible tragedy that has taken 217,000 lives and left 1 million Haitians homeless. Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York, representing the USCCB and all American Catholics, attended the funeral of Archbishop Joseph Serge Miot of Port-au-Prince, who died in the earthquake. In his letter, Cardinal George wrote, “In this hour of sorrow, I want you to know that the Church in the U.S. stands with you.”

His Holiness Benedict XVI appointed Antonio Paolucci, director of the Vatican Museums, as the new president of the Permanent Commission for the Protection of Historical and Artistic Monuments of the Holy See in January. Originally established in 1923, the commission is under the direction of the President of the Pontifical Commission for the Vatican City State, Giovanni Cardinal Lajolo.
A group of lay theologians, musicians, artists, and architects from around the world, including art critic Carlo Fabrizio Carli, architect Ciro Lomonte, and author Martin Mosebach, drafted a formal appeal to the Holy Father to restore Catholicity to the arts and to restore beauty to churches, focusing on seven key issues:

• The need to articulate clearly integrity, proportion, and splendid form as the three tenets of Catholic aesthetics. These culminate in their depiction of the truth of Christ in the realities of the liturgy.

• The need to correct the ignorance and misguidance of commissioned artists, who fail to recognize their task as fulfilling the requests of their patrons.

• Some have attempted to desacralize the House of God. The Church should integrate artistic and architectural courses in seminary curricula in order to encourage new priests to take responsibility for a coherent presentation of the tradition of Mother Church.

• Improve catechetical training for artists, so that even nonbelievers may be introduced to the liturgy and Scripture.

• Reintroduce the idea of “templum” in the definition of sacred space: the consecrated church building is distinct from the profane, and thus its architectural design demands a monumental entrance; an ordered arrangement that is appropriate to the Body of Christ (for example, the cruciform plan); a hierarchy of spaces that elevates the sanctuary from the nave to symbolize the spiritual journey of man to God; and the skillful use of light to raise the hearts of the faithful. In this context the historical tradition is not an obstacle to creativity but rather serves to “communicate the shared objectivity” in which the church building teaches the truths of the Faith.

• Promote a sacred music that has a closer connection to the liturgy, since music that does not refer to a good beyond itself has increasingly spoiled the Holy Liturgy. Instead a renewal of Gregorian chant and forms of music that embody the sacred liturgy in their “true aesthetical, verbal, and sensitive universality.” should be promoted.

• A request for new definitions of artistic and architectural canons, similar to the “naodomia” defined in the Eastern Church.

The letter laments the “rebellion of contemporary art” and our “era of irrational, mundane and miseducative barbarism.” References to Pope Paul VI’s speech to artists that established a pact between artists and the Church suggest the need to infuse faith into sacred art: “It is no longer only art, but spirituality.” The letter argues that forty-five years after the new pact, the artistic images in our churches are only nominally religious, and that some even distort the teaching of the Incarnation. Thus far, the letter has garnered over 1,800 signatories.

The Liturgical Institute at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake is hosting a one day workshop on Catholic Architecture April 30, 2010 in Mundelein, IL. The workshop, presented by architectural historian Dr. Denis McNamara, will explore the meaning of liturgical architecture and practical applications. Priests, architects, artists, liturgy directors and members of building committees and lay Faithful are invited to learn more about Catholic art and the pursuit of beauty for the House of God. Register at www.liturgicalinstitute.org.

Archeologists may have discovered the world’s oldest church in Rihab, Jordan. The underground chapel dates to the year 33 AD and served as both a home and a place of worship. Located below the foundation of the Church of Saint Georgeous, the chapel is forty feet long and twenty-three feet wide and includes an apse and stone seating for clergy. In addition, coins and iron crosses were discovered in a nearby tunnel leading to a cistern. An inscription dedicated to seventy refugees believed to have worshipped here after the persecution in Jerusalem appears in the floor of the church above the chapel. However, many archeologists discredit the accuracy of the chapel’s age. Currently, it is unclear which church holds the title of world’s oldest, though several places date to the third century after Christ.

The Cathedral of Saint Mel in Longford was destroyed by fire.

An early morning fire on Christmas Day destroyed Saint Mel Cathedral in Longford, Ireland. Passersby alerted the fire department of flames in the cathedral 5 A.M., but it was too late to save the building. An investigation into the cause of the fire is underway by the Garda. Bishop Colm O’Reilly of the Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois, who had just celebrated Midnight Mass in the cathedral hours before, described the building as “burned out from end to end.” He has already begun fundraising efforts for a replacement cathedral. The stone neoclassical cathedral, dedicated to fifth-century Saint Mel, was designed by architect Joseph Keane and built between 1840 and 56, while the belfry and portico were added later.
In Dong Chiem, Vietnam, police injured at least a dozen Catholics who tried to prevent the destruction of a crucifix in their parish cemetery. The Communist authorities, who claim the cemetery property belongs to the people and that the state manages it for the people, destroyed the crucifix with explosives. The Hanoi Archdiocese condemned the event as a sacrilege against the Catholic faith.

The Church of the Holy Trinity and four statues at the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal were vandalized in the early hours of January 10, 2010. Graffiti on the side of the church building and statues of John Paul II, Paul VI, and Pius XII included words such as “Islam,” “moon,” “Muslim,” and “mosque.” The shrine, which developed after the miraculous visions of Lúcia Santos, Jacinta Marto and Francisco Marto in 1917, attracts four million pilgrims every year.

On December 1, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI celebrated Mass ad orientem in the Pauline Chapel of the Apostolic Palace, which was recently re-inaugurated after restoration work. It was the first time the Holy Father publicly celebrated Mass in the traditional posture at a freestanding altar that allows for either form of celebration.

The Indianapolis Museum of Art recently ended their free exhibit Sacred Spain: Art and Belief in the Spanish World, which displayed seventy religious works of seventeenth-century Spain and Latin America never before seen in the United States. Highlights included the legendary gold and emerald Crown of the Andes that adorns the statue of the Virgin Mary in Popayán, Colombia; a life-size wooden sculpture of Christ by Juan Sanchez Barba that is used in Holy Week processions in the Spanish town of Navalcarnero; and Francisco Zurbarán’s Agnus Dei, a depiction of a lamb bound for sacrifice. More than 50,000 visitors attended the three-month-long exhibit.

The Holy Father had a busy 2009. He canonized ten new saints, made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, published his third encyclical, Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth), took a weeklong Apostolic Journey to Cameroon and Angola in Africa, and hosted an African synod at the Vatican. Father Damien de Veuster, one of the newly proclaimed saints, was a nineteenth-century Belgian missionary who worked with leprosy patients on the Hawaiian island of Molokai. The pope’s eight-day pilgrimage to Jordan, Israel, and Palestine included a visit to a mosque, the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, and the blessing of cornerstones for new Christian churches and facilities in the region. Caritas in Veritate, Benedict XVI’s first social encyclical, calls for the reform of international economic institutions and practices and draws attention to how the moral failures of greedy financiers and investors contributed in the global economic crisis. The Synod of Bishops for Africa concluded with fifty-seven pastoral proposals for the Church in Africa.

The new Saint Joseph Regional Medical Center near South Bend, Indiana is home to a Spiritual Center that comprises a seventy-five-seat Catholic chapel under the patronage of Our Lady of Fatima as well as Jewish and Islamic prayer rooms. The chapel features artwork salvaged from previous locations, including stained-glass windows dating back to 1902 from the hospital’s original South Bend location and Stations of the Cross from their campus in nearby Mishawaka. In addition to the historic pieces, the chapel has a new wooden altar handmade by a Holy Cross priest. The chapel is part of the 663,000 square foot hospital designed by Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum Architects.
mural executed in 1821 by local Salinian Indians and a wooden retablo painted in pastels of green, pink, and blue with a statue of Saint Michael the Archangel. Earthquake insurance defrayed the cost of restoration after the joint owners, the Diocese of Monterey and the Franciscan Fathers of California, fought to get the claim paid. Mission San Miguel was the sixteenth California mission and was returned to the Franciscans in 1928 after changing hands through the Mexican government, several private businesses and the Diocese of Monterey.

**The Mission in San Miguel, CA**

Mission San Miguel, CA, re-opened to parishioners last fall after six years and $10 million in seismic retrofitting and repair to address the severe damage caused by a 6.5 magnitude earthquake in December 2003. Founded by the Franciscans in 1797 and rebuilt in 1818, the mission church features lime-plaster murals executed in 1821 by local Salinian Indians and a wooden retablo painted in pastels of green, pink, and blue with a statue of Saint Michael the Archangel. Earthquake insurance defrayed the cost of restoration after the joint owners, the Diocese of Monterey and the Franciscan Fathers of California, fought to get the claim paid. Mission San Miguel was the sixteenth California mission and was returned to the Franciscans in 1928 after changing hands through the Mexican government, several private businesses and the Diocese of Monterey.

**Immaculate Conception Parish in Cottonwood, AZ**

Immaculate Conception Parish designed by C.C.B.G. Architects, in the Diocese of Phoenix on December 8, 2009. One thousand parishioners attended the ceremony during an unusually cold day. The parish, formed in 1930, moved to its current site in 2002 and held Masses in a temporary structure until the completion of their new church. Based on the results of a survey of its parishioners, Immaculate Conception decided to build a traditional cruciform church to accommodate 1,500 people for $5.4 million. During the dedication homily, Bishop Olmsted stated, “Those who generously live out their love for God will undoubtedly love their neighbor, who is made in the image and likeness of God. Doesn’t the building of this church help us carry out our vocation with enthusiasm?” The Diocese of Phoenix is in the midst of a building boom with the dedication of three new churches in 2009 and another six church currently under construction. One example is the new 35,000 square-foot Church of All Saints, which broke ground November 1, 2009. Because of the limited capacity in the current church, priests offer thirteen Sunday Masses during the crowded winter months. The parish has already raised $4 million of the $6.5 million budget.

**The Vietnamese Dominican Sisters of Mary Immaculate Province in Houston**

lost their preschool building to a devastating fire on December 4, 2009. No one was hurt in the blaze, but it burned the entire building to the ground. The sisters are in the midst of reconstructing their convent building, which Hurricane Ike damaged in 2008. However, the need to rebuild their convent enabled the sisters to address deficiencies in their prior facility, such as its small 40-seat chapel and sleeping quarters, as well as an inadequate library for the sisters’ studies. The new convent will include a 160-seat chapel and 20 additional bedrooms at an estimated cost of $3.5 million. The Dominican sisters trace their origin to Father Bustamante, who founded the first house for women in 1715 in North Vietnam. The houses grew in number, first as independent organizations of Third Order Dominicans and then as the Dominican Sisters of St Catherine of Siena. After the fall of Saigon in 1975, the Communist authorities seized schools and formation houses, and some of the religious sisters were scattered. Established in 1978, the Mary Immaculate Province in Houston today includes 100 members with a median age of 38.

**Spassky Monastery is becoming the model of spiritual rebirth in Russia, as the Orthodox Church gains ground after seventy-five years of persecution by the Communist government.**

The abbot, Father Kirill Epifanov, was appointed to resurrect the eleventh-century religious center in Murom along the Oka River east of Moscow. First he built a bakery to supply an income to the monks, and then he slowly refurbished the grounds of the monastery. Today the town of Murom receives busloads of tourists to visit the medieval town and its churches. While in 1987 there were only three monasteries, two seminaries, and two thousand churches in all of Russia, today
there are four hundred seventy-eight monasteries, twenty-five seminaries and thirteen thousand churches. Sixty percent of Russians identify themselves as Orthodox, but less than one percent attend a church at least once a month.

A three-quarter-scale reproduction of All Saints Church, Brockhampton, in Herefordshire, England, has been built on the twenty-first and twenty-second floors of a high-rise in Osaka, Japan. Intended as a place for couples to marry, a photo studio, restaurant, and hotel suites are located on the same floors. The Japanese developers, European Connections Ltd., contacted All Saints Church for permission to build a replica and used laser-scanning technology to measure the English country church. Built by local craftsmen in 1902, the original limestone church in Herefordshire is one of the few remaining thatched roof churches in England.

On January 20, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI blessed a statue of Saint Rafaela María Porras y Ayllón (1850-1925) at the Vatican. The Spaniard founded the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart, a religious order committed to education and the Eucharist. The statue, carved by Marco Augustus Dueñas of Spain, stands twenty feet tall and has a young girl depicted below the saint. The superior general of the order, Mother Mitsuyo Fukusawa, and the Spanish and Japanese ambassadors to the Holy See were present at the statue’s unveiling. There are currently 1,300 Handmaids of the Sacred Heart in over twenty countries around the world.

Sainte Marie de la Tourette Dominican priory near Lyon, France, celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. The monastery, designed by Le Corbusier, is a registered historic monument and is undergoing a five-year restoration project to improve security and the roofing system. The buildings contain one hundred sleeping rooms, study and recreation halls, a library, refectory, and chapel. Arranged around a central courtyard, the reinforced concrete structures utilize vertical brise-soleils and multiple horizontal windows. La Tourette continues to attract students of architecture who can arrange overnight accommodations in the unoccupied cells.

In December 2009, the Cathedral of Sulmona, Italy, dedicated to San Panfilo, installed a series of new paintings by Rodolfo Papa of Rome. Bishop Angelo Spina commissioned the painter and academic to depict the Resurrection, the theological and cardinal virtues, and the Church of today as part of the city’s celebration of the eight-hundredth anniversary of native son Pope Saint Celestine V’s birth. Papa intends to produce paintings that are part of the continuous tradition of sacred art, in order to introduce fresh inspiration to the faithful who visit the eleventh-century cathedral church.

The Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Conyers, GA, near Atlanta has developed a long-range plan to encourage more visitors to their property. Home to forty Trappist monks, the community is in need of greater financial stability to pay medical costs for some of the elderly brothers. Monks departed from the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky and established a temporary monastery in a barn in 1944 on the current property. Over time, they have built a cloister and dormitories, a chapter room, refectory, a retreat house, and a Gothic church. The new plan for the site, designed by Jones Pierce Architects of Atlanta, includes a new abbey store, welcome center, and a small café. The plan also calls for the renovation of the historic barn into a museum to exhibit the history of monasticism. Of the $6.5 million needed for the project, $3.5 million has already been pledged.
Sacred architecture

His Holiness Benedict XVI named the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Charleston, WV, a minor basilica. It is the sixty-third minor basilica in the U.S. and was a welcome gesture to the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. The parish began in 1866 and used a two-story brick house purchased by Bishop Richard Whelan, the founding bishop of the diocese, as a church and school until 1869 when it moved into its first church. In 1885 the parish started collecting funds for a new church and on July 28, 1895, Bishop Patrick J. Donahue laid the cornerstone of the current edifice designed by H.B. Lowe of Lexington. The dedication of the new church occurred on Christmas Day, 1897. Many prominent Protestants of Charleston contributed to the $30,000 project. Sacred Heart has undergone three significant renovations during its more than century-long history. An extensive interior renovation took place in 1950-51 and then in 1974—the year it was designated a co-cathedral—the sanctuary was refurbished. The most recent work, which involved new landscaping and an addition to the church, concluded in 2004. Also in 2004, the co-cathedral hosted a meeting between Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, then-president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and Jewish and Muslim leaders, at which an “Abrahamic” tapestry was dedicated.

On December 1, 2009 a judge in Schuylkill County, PA, dismissed a lawsuit filed by parishioners to halt the demolition of America’s first Lithuanian Catholic church. The Diocese of Allentown closed Saint George Catholic Church in Shenandoah, PA, in May 2006 after it determined the 1891 Gothic structure was a safety hazard. WJP Engineers of Pottsville, PA, who have performed work on the church for over a decade, estimated that it would cost $1.3 million to repair the exterior granite, while diocesan estimates for necessary repairs were closer to $10 million. Before demolition commenced, efforts to salvage church furnishings resulted in the removal and storage of statues, pews, and other important elements. Founded in 1872, the historically Lithuanian parish had twelve hundred registered parishioners as recently as 2004.

The winners of the 2010 Palladio Awards for traditional design were recently announced. John G. Waite Associates, Architects of Albany, NY won the Restoration and Renovation Award for their work at the Basilica of the Assumption in Baltimore. Atkin Olshin Schade Architects of Philadelphia won the Sympathetic Addition Award for the addition to Saint Paul Episcopal Church in Indianapolis.

Notre Dame’s Alliance for Catholic Education proposes to increase the number of Latino students in U.S. Catholic schools to one million by 2020. The number of Hispanics enrolled in Catholic schools has remained unchanged for the past fifteen years despite the increase in Hispanic population. Currently, only 3 percent of Latinos attend Catholic schools for elementary education. One in five Catholic schools have closed since the year 2000 due to dropping enrollment and revenue, with elementary schools located in major cities being hardest hit.

The Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Charleston, WV

The work completed on the Basilica of the Assumption in Baltimore garnered a Palladio award for John G. Waite Associates

The Martha J. Burke Adoration Chapel at Ave Maria.

Founded in 2009 by artist Carl Fougerousse, the Sacred Arts Academy intends to teach aspiring artists both technical skills and the deeper purpose of Catholic art. This summer’s workshop will be based in Florence, Italy from June 10th through July 3rd. The intensive sessions include drawing and painting, classes in anatomy, art history, philosophy and theology, and visits to the museums and churches of Florence and Rome. Visit www.sacredartsacademy.org for more information.

The Martha J. Burke Chapel at Ave Maria University.
The new poll by the IONA Institute for Religion and Society showed that two thirds of people in Ireland attend church at least monthly, a 10 percent increase from the year before the economic crisis. About one half of Irish people attend church weekly, up from 42 percent the year before. Among young people aged 18–24, 31 percent attend church weekly.

The University of Saint Thomas, MN, dedicated its expanded Center for Catholic Studies building, Sitzmann Hall, on November 30, 2009. The $3.9 million addition to the 1927 Georgian Revival edifice provides a larger chapel, classrooms, offices, and an outdoor garden with a Marian shrine. The new chapel dedicated to Albertus Magnus, a thirteenth-century Dominican friar and teacher of Saint Thomas Aquinas, holds fifty people. Established in 1993 and led by its founding director Dr. Don Briel, the Saint Thomas Center for Catholic Studies is the largest of the seventy Catholic Studies programs in the United States, with three hundred undergraduates pursuing a major or minor in Catholic Studies, and eighty students enrolled in a Master of Arts program. The University of Saint Thomas was founded in 1885 by Archbishop John Ireland and continues to be an archdiocesan university. Enrollment this academic year is 10,851 students.

Meaux Cathedral, east of Paris, France, is undergoing extensive restoration, including the reconstruction of some exterior walls and structural arches. Completed in the sixteenth century to a height of one hundred sixty-eight feet, construction of the cathedral started in the twelfth century. King Charles IV generously funded the construction project in the early fourteenth century.

The Victoria and Albert Museum in London reopened their medieval and Renaissance galleries on December 2, 2009, with particular attention to the explanation of the Christian faith to visitors. Each room has a narrative and date frame, with areas titled “Signs and Symbols” and “Personal Devotion” among other names. One exhibit recreates a religious procession by arranging floating vestments behind a processional cross, banner, and crosier. The curators did five years of preparation for the new galleries and consulted scholars worldwide, including a priest at the Brompton Oratory who corrected descriptions of the Holy Liturgy. The Royal College of Music even performed and recorded some of the music from medieval manuscripts on display to bring the notes to life.

The 7.0 magnitude earthquake in Haiti destroyed the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption in Port-Au-Prince. Built between 1883 and 1914, the cathedral was the tallest building in the city and served as a beacon for ships arriving at the harbor. The destroyed building replaced the older 1772 cathedral, also dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption. Haitian architect René Ménard initially designed the new cathedral in 1882 for Archbishop Alexis Jean-Marie Guilloux of Port-au-Prince, who began raising funds from private donors and the State. The cornerstone was laid in 1884, and when the fundraising for the $600,000 project dried up, the archbishop travelled door to door to collect greater financial support. In 1904, the new Archbishop Conan asked for a loan from the government to cover construction expenses and hired the Belgian construction firm Perraud et Dumas and Haitian architects Léon Mathon and Louis Roy to finish the project. The cathedral was completed with a concrete structure and a white stucco surface. The interior was 276 feet long and 85 feet tall, and the stained-glass windows depicted the patron saints of churches throughout the archdiocese. The four bells weighing a total of 15,000 pounds were installed in 1910, and the cathedral was solemnly consecrated on December 20, 1914. In 1966, Archbishop François Wolff Ligondé oversaw the complete restoration of the church with architect Louis Pélisier. The stained glass was reconstituted and the furniture was replaced. The sanctuary steps and the base of the walls were resurfaced in granite, and an audio system and new lighting were also installed. After the recent earthquake, the funeral of Archbishop Joseph Serge Miot and Vicar General Monsignor Charles Benoit, who were two of the over 217,000 victims of the earthquake, was held on January 23, 2010, on the site of the cathedral.
Sacred architecture

If the event is of a devotional kind all the onlookers direct their eyes with various expressions of devotion towards the event, as when the Host is displayed at the Sacrifice of the Mass.¹

An altarpiece is a framed artistic representation of a sacred subject or combination of subjects typically situated behind and above an altar. Though its invention came about in the Middle Ages, the altarpiece is rooted in the ancient Church tradition of employing sacred imagery to enhance the liturgy with visual aids (adiaphora) for the instruction of the faithful; a tradition definitively upheld by the Second Council of Nicaea in the eighth century and by Trent some seven hundred years later. Yet, unlike the altar crucifix or candlesticks, which are appointments prescribed by the Church’s liturgical rubrics, the provision of an altarpiece has never been canonically obligatory.² Rather, the altarpiece came into existence as a result of particular customs of liturgical and devotional practice; its formal development was shaped by vernacular traditions in Christian sacred art. Hence, as a highlighted survey of its emergence ought to illustrate, the altarpiece is an artistic device derived from earlier conventions of sacred imagery employed to visually reinforce the Catholic understanding of and devotion to the Eucharist and the communion of saints.

Early Forms of Sacred Imagery at the Altar

The Imperial church-building program ushered in by Constantine employed fixed freestanding altars and sacred imagery, which can be traced from the palimpsest of patristic artifacts and decoration, as well as from contemporary textual accounts, such as the Liber Pontificalis. The organization of sacred imagery around the altar was greatly affected by the position of the altar relative to the presbyterium, the part of the church reserved for the bishop and his clergy. Since altars in early Western churches often stood in front of the presbyterium, this position would have likely precluded the possibility of situating any large-scale works of art that would have eclipsed the bishop’s cathedra or faldstool. However, the triumphal arch and semi-dome of the apse typically featured extensive decorative programs depicting Christ as the accompanied by a retinue of holy figures including the titular saint of the church, the Apostles, and the Evangelists, as exemplified by the oldest parts of the apse mosaic in Santa Pudentiana in Rome. Yet, sacred symbols and figures also came to be incorporated into the ciborium, the monumental fixed canopy that sheltered the altar, and in the antependium, the ornamental appendage affixed to the vertical supports of the altar. Antependia were designed to extend across the entire altar front, from the underside of the table top (mensa) to the altar step (predella), and were sometimes applied to the back and side faces of the altar as well. Comprised of precious metals, ivory, wood, or rich brocades, and usually bejewed, the principal subject of early medieval antependia was Christ in Majesty, often flanked by angels, the Evangelists, and the Apostles. In the ninth and tenth centuries, the repertory grew to include the Virgin and Child, as well as titular saints.³ Episodic narratives from the life of Christ or the titular saint were then often disposed symmetrically on either side of the principal subject. The lavish and analogous sacred imagery of early medieval Gospel covers with that of antependia is striking, and, as a note of observation, it would seem that these largely parallel decorative formats were intended to stress the liturgical relationship between Christ’s presence in the Word and the Eucharist.

Engaged Altars, Reliquaries, and
Gradines

The engaged altar emerged from the introduction of the private Mass. The separate oratories that had been established in proximity to Western churches for the celebration of private Masses by individual canons or monks began to be subsumed into the bodies of those churches at least as early as the sixth century, and led to the gradual proliferation of chapels and side altars. Side altars were the first to be set against the walls of the church, a gesture in deference to the principal or high altar, which generally remained freestanding well into the Middle Ages. Without a ciborium above or a richly decorated apse beyond, the wall to which the side altar was engaged became the spatial and visual terminus, so that its decoration would seem a natural consequence.

The trend of building engaged side altars for private Masses was notably promoted in the early ninth-century plan of the Abbey of Saint Gall and was accompanied by an ever-growing use of reliquaries during the liturgy. Majesty images, made of precious materials and outwardly depicting the holy figures whose relics they contained, were popular throughout the West, particularly north of the Alps. One of the oldest and best surviving examples of a majesty image is the golden likeness of Saint Fides in Conques-en-Rouergue (France). Majesty images usually were placed behind and above an altar dedicated to the portrayed saint in a niche or on a low ledge known as a gradine, but never directly on the altar during the Mass, and were removed after its conclusion. However, by the eleventh century, it was not uncommon for a reliquary or holy image to remain exposed on a gradine outside of liturgical celebrations for popular devotion. The fixed-in-place reliquary that developed out of this custom assumed an increasingly architectonic form richly decorated with multiple figures and epiphanic narratives, epitomized by the Shrine of the Three Kings begun by the twelfth-century goldsmith, Nicholas of Verdun, for Cologne Cathedral.

Emergence of the Altarpiece

The altarpiece is a broad category that includes both fixed and portable works of art, as well as painted or sculptured works. In the English-speaking world, an altarpiece may be referred to as a retable, a generic term derived from the Latin retro tablum, meaning behind the (altar) table, or as a reredos, a term with a similar Latin etymology, but used primarily by Anglophones to connote the fixed, screen-like type into which the altar itself was engaged. Retables, like reliquaries, were usually set in place on a gradine behind the altar, whereas reredoses with integral gradines were often freestanding or attached to a wall. Though a base, body, and frame typically comprised the fundamental structure of a retable or reredos, the form, media, and content of altarpieces varied culturally according to local traditions of religious devotion and artistic convention. Dating the precise origination of the altarpiece is somewhat elusive due to the fragmentary evidence that survives, but remaining examples indicate a natural progression from decorated gradines beginning around the twelfth century. The customary employment of veils at the back and sides of votive and high altars alike persisted into the sixteenth century in some locales, like Italy, and may explain why surfaces separate from building walls were specifically devised for altar decoration, as may the progressive dematerialization of wall mass that characterized Gothic architecture in northern Europe. One of the most famous and earliest surviving altarpieces, the Pala d’Oro, was constructed in the twelfth century from an earlier antependium of Byzantine provenance depicting episodes from the Life of Christ and that of Saint Mark, and was placed behind the high altar of the Venetian ducal chapel, San Marco.

Some of the earliest experimentation with painted altarpieces occurred in the prosperous Italian cities of Siena, Florence, and Venice at the cusp of the fourteenth century. The employment of monumental painted crucifixes at high altars, whether behind them or in front of them as part of rood screens, already had become widespread by the thirteenth century, and seems to have preceded the appearance of the first tavole d’altare. These representations sometimes incorporated flanking images of the Virgin and Apostles in addition to Christ’s corpus, such as the one by Cimabue in Santa Croce in Florence. Yet, the devotional icon with its attendant Byzantine artistic conventions and techniques bore an even greater impact on the nascent development of the altarpiece on the Italian peninsula from both formal and representationally standpoint. The Italian tradition of painted devotional images of the Madonna and Child extends at least as far back as the early Middle Ages with the importation or replication of ‘miraculous’ images from the East, such as the Salus Populi Romani in Rome, and was reinforced by the influx of artists from Constantinople during the Iconoclasm Controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries. Like icons, early Italian altarpieces were painted using tempera (egg yolk), which rendered vibrant hues upon their brilliant gold leaf backgrounds. The immense double-sided Maesta painted by Duccio di Buoninsegna in the early fourteenth century for the freestanding high altar of the Cathedral of Siena was dedicated to the Virgin and inaugurated with an august procession through the city, testifying to its civic role as a visual sign of Mary’s protection. Multi-paneled tavole of the fourteenth and fifteenth century often portrayed the Madonna and Child or narrative events, such as the Annunciation or Adoration of the Magi, in the central panel with titular or patron saints depicted in flanking panels that were united by an architectonic frame. However, the so-called Sacra conversazione (sacred conversation) format became the predominant representational model for late medieval Italian altarpieces, integrating an interactive company of saints, prophets, and even donors with a portrayal of the Madonna and Child. The anachronistic placement of these secondary figures in episodic depictions from the Life of the Virgin also comprised Sacra conversazione images, leaving the story-telling function of sacred art to mural cycles and ceiling frescoes. In the German and Baltic lands, a highly original type of altarpiece appeared in the fourteenth century, in which side panels were attached to the central panel with hinges. Hinged panels themselves had been employed for centuries in the small ivory diptychs and triptychs carved for private devotion. According to some art historians, the winged altarpiece, or polyptych, was invented as a device for detaching images, particularly carved ones, from acts of intimate veneration such as touching or kissing. However, hinged wings would also have afforded the capability of concealing the full extent of carved or painted imagery during Lent or even most of the year while providing opportunities for solemn revelation during the East-
The Maesta by Duccio di Buoninsegna features the adoration of the enthroned Madonna and Child on the front, and episodes from the Life of Christ and the Life of the Virgin on the back. However, it would seem reasonable that the retable could be reversed so that the “back” normally would have faced out towards the celebrant and people except on special Marian feasts like the Assumption in commemoration of the cathedral’s dedication.
hortus conclusus (enclosed garden) with saints and donors and episodes such as the Annunciation, Visitation, or Lamentation featured prominently in the Netherlandish repertoire, but so did the Parousia and Last Judgment. Jan and Hubert van Eyck’s immense fifteenth-century painted polyptych of The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb made for a chantry chapel in the present-day Cathedral of Saint Bavo in Ghent (Belgium) is considered by many art historians to be the greatest accomplishment of the early Netherlandish School, and a singular encapsulation of the Church Triumphant. When closed, its outer wings depict the Annunciation with prophets and sibyls, above, and, below, grisaille portrayals of Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist with the chromatic figures of the patron and his wife. When opened, the polyptych reveals in a majestic orchestration of vivid colors, meticulous details, and gallant figures the fulfillment of the promise foretold to the Virgin by the Archangel on the exterior panels. Here, the Deesis presides over the unified earthly and celestial worship of the triune Godhead,
manifest in the tiered disposition of the enthroned Father, crowned by the Triregnum and resembling Christ, the radiant dove of the Holy Spirit, and the pierced Paschal Lamb. In the outermost panels at the top, a nude Adam and Eve gaze towards the Lamb upon the altar, signifying the Eucharistic sacrifice as the source of the heavenly banquet through which all mortals, beginning with the parents of mankind, might share in Christ’s triumph over death.

The development of the Spanish retable is fascinating for its radical departure from the two-dimensional mural tradition that had previously prevailed in the Iberian Peninsula in favor of a highly sculptural, architectonic paradigm. Whereas the first Spanish retables tended to be modest in size, later ones grew to be as tall as the church interior itself and were frequently engaged to the apse wall. The quintessential Spanish retable, standardized by the mid-fourteenth century, consisted of three symmetrically disposed parts based on contemporary Italian models: the banco, or base; the body; and the narrow frame around the body called the guadapolvos, which doubled as a dust guard. Within the retable body, a series of paintings were arrayed in vertical panes called posts or calles. The central post, which was wider and taller than the others, depicted the saint to whom the altarpiece was dedicated and served as the principal focus. Sometimes the central post was sculpted, but more often, it was painted like the flanking subordinate posts that depicted episodes from the Life of Christ or that of the titular saint. The topmost post, located above the effigy of the saint, was usually reserved for a representation of Christ crucified. A small retable may have as few as one narrative post, while larger versions may have three or more posts on either side. The banco was occupied typically by the Eucharistic image of the entombed Christ and scenes from the Passion, by images of saints, or by additional episodes from the life of the titular saint. Large retables often featured a sotabanco, which was a narrow strip below the banco that was decorated with roundels portraying the prophets. The guardapolvos was made up of slightly tilted, decoratively painted strips of wood that framed the body of the retable. Each painting in a post was outlined by a molding of gilded tracery and the whole retable often culminated in an intricately carved lantern-like canopy over the principal post, thereby helping to unify the complex organization into one monumental, glittering entity.14

In England, the pre-Reformation reredos could range in scale from a modest retable in a small church or side chapel to a massive partition in the lengthy chancel of a cathedral or abbey. The grander versions of the reredos sometimes doubled as screens separating the chancel from the retro-choir where relic shrines, chantry chapels, and tombs were often located. This was the case with the celebrated fourteenth-century Neville Screen at the high altar of Durham Cathedral that enclosed the former Shrine of Saint Cuthbert and supported painted images of the Virgin, Saint Cuthbert, and Saint Oswald, as well as a multitude of canopied statues.

Artistic Innovation and Counter-Reformation

As the preceding survey illustrates, the liturgical role of the altarpiece was not necessarily referential to the Sacrifice of the Mass in a direct or overt way with a presentation of the Crucifixion or the Last Supper as we might expect. Oftentimes, these subjects were...
more likely to be found in hospital chapels or refectories than in church altarpieces. Though minimal information exists on the topic, even subjects pertaining to the titular dedication of a church, chapel, or altar do not seem to have been mandated. Rather, the complexities of dedication arising from the location of the altarpiece and its commissioning donors were subsumed into the burgeoning Sacra conversazione model. Another type of altarpiece that first appeared in Italy during the fifteenth century was the freestanding sculptural group. The most famous example is Michelangelo’s Pieta, which was carved around 1500 for an altar in the former church of Santa Petronilla in Rome. Statues placed on winged gradines or within retable niches, so as not to visually overpower the altar, became increasingly common during the sixteenth century. In general, the century witnessed a trend towards the increasing prescription of altarpiece format and content, which was rooted in the harmonics and geometric clarity established by Masaccio and Brunelleschi for the church building and its component parts as exemplified by Santo Spirito in Florence. The fornix motif was used to frame both painted and bas-relief retables with Titian’s Assumption at the high altar in the Franciscan church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice serving as an excellent example of this type. The uniformity of the side altar retables in Palladio’s two great Venetian churches, San Giorgio Maggiore and Il Redentore, demonstrate the fulfillment of the Brunelleschian ideal.

Altarpieces generally came under fierce attack by Protestants out of their misunderstanding of Catholic tradition. While the Council of Trent called for the return to clearer forms of artistic expression, it did not set forth any particular regulations for altarpieces. Nevertheless, Carlo Borromeo, the saintly archbishop of Milan, did issue a comprehensive set of guidelines to the clergy of his archdiocese regarding the design of churches and their liturgical appointments; his insistence upon the reservation of the Sacrament in permanent tabernacles on the high altars of parish churches subordinated the visual prominence of altarpieces. Post-Tridentine patrons and theorists following in Borromeo’s footsteps stressed the dignifying and didactic roles of altarpieces by distin-

![Image](https://example.com/image.jpg)

**The Assumption by Titian is the crowned by statues of the Risen Christ, Saint Francis of Assisi, and Saint Anthony of Padua.**
small Roman church of Santa Maria in Vittoria. And in Sant’Andrea al Quirinale, Bernini integrated architecture, sculpture, and painting in a twotiered concetto that seems to literally peel back the veil of mundane reality for a glimpse of the eternal. A framed painting of the martyrdom of Saint Andrew hanging above the high altar tabernacle is lit by means of a vaulted oculus, from which a cascade of gilded angels join in the celebration of both the sacred liturgy and the particular sacrifice through which Andrew imitated the superlative one of Christ. Then, in the pediment over the entrance to the apse, Bernini placed the stone effigy of the Saint being lifted into the Glory of Heaven, represented by the coffered dome and lantern that surmount the elliptical nave. Engaging the intellect and the heart, the concetto enjoins the worshipper to enter into the rapturous mystery of the Mass by offering oneself wholly to the Eucharistic Lord with the confidence of the Martyr. Thus, in its liturgical and devotional roles, the altarpiece can be both a window and a mirror, simultaneously permitting a glimpse of heavenly realities while reflecting the countenance of Christ in His saints and martyrs who united their sacrifices to His.

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2 Ibid.
6 O’Connell, 181-182.
8 Berg-Sobre, 3.
9 Kemp, 7.
10 Ibid.
11 Humphrey & Kemp, 142.
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14 Berg-Sobre, 3-11.
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16 Burkhardt & Humphrey, 36-37.
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19 Wright, 245-250.
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Architecture of the Maronite Church

The holy building is a sign that leads us to the Master of the creation, the Holy One, who came and dwelt among us to lead us to the Kingdom, the true promised land in heaven. The church of stone was considered the sign of the heavenly altar and the true temple in the presence of God. This holy building reflects the relationship that exists between the two worlds: the earthly and the heavenly. One reason being that the Church thinks it is necessary to give a margin of liberty for creativity and innovation in the architecture and building of the church, while preserving the essential elements of the Church tradition and heritage.

When the space became holy through the Lord’s incarnation, death, and resurrection the whole world became “a Holy House of God” where we worship Him in “truth and spirit” (John 4:23). In addition, the Church, mystical Body of Christ, will choose a place where she gathers her members to worship and praise God. Where the community of believers meets, there the Church will be. This place will take its name after the community that meets in it. Therefore, the church ought to be the new temple built with stones in the image of the community of believers that built it: a house of God expressing the faith of the Maronite Church and her ancient tradition and her Syro-Antiochene liturgy.

The altar is the explicit expression of the worship bound to the new sacrifice on Golgotha. Through it we thank God for the gifts we have received. The Last Supper of the Lord is renewed in implementation of his command: “Do this in memory of me, until I come again.” The altar is a perfect representation of the tomb of the Lord and of the glory of his resurrection; it is the source of each sacramental grace and the icon of the heavenly altar where the angels celebrate the eternal liturgy of the “Sanctus,” and where the Church on earth offers the sacrifice with the Son to the Father. On the altar, the Church gives the truest expression of the apparition of God and of His presence in her midst; for this reason, the altar must be oriented toward the east in the internal architecture of the church, to be in accordance with the theological meaning and with the common Eastern tradition.

The Liturgical Vestments

The liturgical vestment is an important element of the liturgical celebration. For this reason, the holy Patriarchal Synod recommends that the vestments to be used should be neat, beautiful, and of a noble simplicity without any excess, inspired by the authentic liturgical vestment of the Syro-Antiochene rite, and compatible with the ritual function of the liturgical celebration.

Moreover, the Synod orders that the liturgical vestment be unified in such a way that it will be the same used in all rituals and liturgical celebrations. The bishop has his proper vestment, the priest celebrant has his, the assistant priest has his own liturgical vestment, the deacon, subdeacon, the reader, and cantor should each wear the liturgical vestment proper to him. Consequently, the synod enjoins everyone to observe the directives issued by the patriarchal commission for liturgical matters approved by the Synod of Bishops headed by the Patriarch.

Icons

The holy icon has a great value because it reminds the believers of the marvels of God and of what he has accomplished through his saints, and because it “actualizes” the different moments of the economy of redemption. The icon makes present and represents at the same time the absolute newness of “what no eye has seen and ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man” (1 Cor 2:9). It does this through special ways and forms inspired by the special cultural heritage and through methods compatible with the holy images, reflecting the faith of the faithful in the heavenly truths.

The Holy Synod therefore recommends that this ancient heritage be brought back to our Church, eliminating from our Maronite tradition all the influences that are foreign to it. It also orders that action must be taken to make the faithful aware of the importance of the veneration of the holy icons, exhibiting them, in an orderly fashion that accords with Maronite Church spirituality, in a special place in the church, and in a manner that befits the liturgical celebrations in which they should appear.
Sacred Art

Sacred art is considered the most sublime endeavor of the human mind. It aims at expressing the infinite divine beauty, at praising God, and directing the faithful to praise and thank Him. Holy art occupied an important place in the Maronite Church, particularly in past centuries. From the beginning the Maronite Church was familiar with religious art. The miniature designs on the Maronite Gospels and frescoes on the walls of the churches and in the caves of the Maronite hermits are clear proof of the concern of the Maronite Church with artistic matters and with its theological and anthropological dimensions.

Therefore, the holy Patriarchal Synod recommends that the Commission of the Sacred Art, which is a subcommittee of the Patriarchal Commission for Liturgical Affairs, be rendered more effective on the episcopal level, along with other subcommittees of the liturgical commission. The commission of sacred art is in charge of insuring that the projects of building new churches, cathedrals, or basilicas, decorating their interiors and restoring old ones are compatible with the criteria of the ancient Maronite liturgical tradition and its meaning. This commission will endeavor to preserve the heritage of Maronite sacred art and develop it through painting icons and creating workshops for this purpose that are tied to the eparchies and monasteries.9

The above selection is an excerpt from one of seven articles on the Maronite liturgy available on the website of the Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and All the East: www.bkerkelb.org. Based in Bkerke, Lebanon, the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East is the head of the Maronite Catholic Church.
"The old Christian art should rise up again to renewed life: in its spirit, not in its form."
—Peter Lenz, The Aesthetics of Beuron

Is there a future for ecclesiastical art that continues in the traditions of the past, without being merely imitative: recycling past styles and models? I would like to suggest that there is, but that only by rediscovering the principles upon which the art of the past was based will artists have the necessary understanding to create art for the future. Western architecture is of course founded on geometric and physical principles that have been known since antiquity. For this reason architects who wish to continue in the Gothic or classical tradition are able to do so creatively, without being reduced to simply copying existing buildings. By contrast, decorative art is in a state of crisis. The arbiters of artistic fashion have deliberately withheld from art students the principles of Western aesthetics, in much the same way that many children of the 1960s were never taught to spell or punctuate. Unless artists in the West re-learn classical aesthetic principles, we will be left staring at the great white void of minimalism, as exemplified by the ‘renovated’ monastery of Nový Dvůr in the Czech Republic, bequeathed to posterity by John Pawson.

Aesthetics and Sacramental Symbolism in the Fathers of the Church
But to create ecclesiastical art, knowledge of aesthetic and compositional principles is not enough. For in the context of theology, and thus liturgy, aesthetics is not as an isolated subject. Like the Pythagoreans and Platonists of antiquity, the fathers of the Church regarded aesthetics as a keystone of the entire doctrinal and symbolic structure of theology—not to be separated, for example, from moral and sacramental theology, or the symbolism of the liturgy. For this reason forming an ecclesiastical art for the future is only in part a matter of teaching artists classical compositional principles. More fundamentally it involves an understanding, on the part of everyone involved in decisions about church decoration, of the sacramental and liturgical theology of which Christian aesthetics is but a part. A vitally important part of what the fathers have to teach us grew out of the first great iconoclastic controversy in the eighth and ninth centuries. Though the crisis itself mainly affected the churches of the East, it led to the development of the aesthetic theology surrounding the Seventh Ecumenical Council, and it is therefore a good starting point.

The Doctrinal Importance of Imagery
The fundamental iconographic principle deriving from the events surrounding the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787) is that imagery in Christian churches is not only permissible, it is necessary. By creating images of Christ and his saints, we affirm the unity of the Person of Christ and the full reality of his Incarnate human nature. This important principle surely needs restating urgently today. Indeed, the chapel of the monastery at Nový Dvůr would have met with the complete approval of the iconoclast emperors of the eighth century, who held that the only material things that have any sacramental character are the Eucharistic elements, and that the only permissible Christian symbol is the cross. The only sacred things in this chapel are indeed the reserved Host in the tabernacle and the cross on the altar. The doctrinal necessity of depictions of Christ and the saints in churches is part of Christian orthodoxy, and it is on this basis that we must build.

The Essential Unity of Architecture, Art, and Liturgy
Another important principle to arise from the Eastern iconoclast crisis was that there should be an essential unity between the church building, its interior art, and the sacramental symbolism of the rite they enshrine. In Orthodox churches this unity is represented in part by each image occupying a determined place in the entire schema of a church’s interior, just as each saint and heavenly being occupies a particular
on the basis of a given church’s architectural type. The content of that imagery is open to a wide field of choice and will inevitably be informed by a church’s dedication. The point is that all the images should cohere in a unified symbolism suggestive of one or other (if not both) of these two symbolic narratives: that of the life of Christ (and his saints) and that of salvation history as a whole. If these principles are adopted, the only thing that is prescriptive is that, in either narrative, the altar symbolizes the Passion. Wherever the eye has started its journey, when it arrives at the altar it has arrived at the Passion, whether in the story of Christ’s life or in the entire history of salvation. Images of the Resurrection, Ascension, Christ enthroned in glory, the eschatological banquet, etc., would therefore be most appropriate wherever the eye naturally goes next: the east wall or the ceiling (if not both).

**The Form and Style of Artistic Depiction**

Deriving from the need both to have art integrated with architecture and to do equal justice to the divine and human natures of Christ, we can then ask: What form or style of architectural and artistic representation is appropriate for a given church? Moving on from the principle of symbolic integrity, I would like to derive a principle of stylistic complementarity. Having affirmed the unity of the divine and human natures of Christ in the symbolism of the organizational schema of the imagery, we need to create liturgical spaces in which we can worship God as entirely integrated people, that is, with both our faculties of reason and intuition, or thoughts and feelings. Just as we affirm the integrity of Christ as one Person, human and divine, so, in order to be conformed to his image, we need to approach God as integrated human beings, whose thoughts are informed by our feelings and whose feelings are reasonable. Here we can draw on the teaching of the fifth-century Church father, Diadochos of Photike. He believed that as a result of the Fall of Adam and Eve, our feelings became disconnected from our reasoning; and that only the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ make it possible for human beings to regain their integrity. This seems to me to be very close to the thinking of Benedict XVI on the necessary integrity of thinking and feeling. To worship God with our minds alone would be to reduce ourselves to the state of the iconoclasts, to split ourselves in two, and at the same time to deny the unity of Christ’s divine and human natures. On the other hand, to rely only on our emotions could lead us anywhere, since we would not be able to make critical judgements about the innate goodness or evil of what our feelings were drawing us towards.

The architectural form of the building, therefore, together with the schema and type of its imagery, should, as a
symbolic unity, draw us as whole, integrated people to complete attention to what is happening in the liturgy.

I think that when viewed in this way, the architectural and artistic style of a church should strive to be complementary rather than identical, helping to unite our rational and intuitive natures in an integrated attentiveness to God as whole people. One way of doing this might be to combine realistic, emotive art with architecture that is ordered and symmetrical, and in that sense "rational". Neoclassical architecture combined with highly representational art, as found in many churches of the High Renaissance, is an example of this.

Gothic architecture on the other hand has always been intended to elevate the imagination and spirit into realms of contemplation inaccessible to verbal reasoning. On the principle of complementarity I would therefore argue that in Neo-Gothic churches the most appropriate art is that which is figural but not representational, such as the idealized, abstract art of the middle ages.

But are we simply to be left with the option of replicating mediaeval and Renaissance styles? It is precisely by having an understanding of the principles of integrity and complementarity that the designer can be liberated to explore a wide variety of artistic idioms to create appropriate liturgical space: one that incorporates symbolism of the life of Christ and salvation history, and integrates representational art that can be applied to austere, symmetrical architecture to achieve this. The more pressing problem is knowing how to create modern idealized art to complement emotively uplifting architecture. What we need is western art that enshrines the same principles as those found in eastern iconography, while remaining in the western tradition of art. I am therefore not suggesting the slavish adoption of the compositional principles of Orthodox iconography. This iconography—literally "icon writing"—needs to be read by those nurtured in the Orthodox tradition. It cannot simply be lifted out of its context and put into another ecclesiological culture (particularly since it has a sacramental significance in Orthodoxy that art does not have in the West).

The use of single perspective composition, for example, is characteristi-
ean and Platonic geometric writings into Latin, the Greek word for “area” had been mistranslated to read “line.” The rediscovery of root rectangles revealed the compositional principles of both Egyptian and Greek schemata. But while Hambidge was to continue his researches to incorporate principles of phyllotaxis, and came to concentrate on the dynamic symmetry of both root rectangles and the logarithmic spiral, Lenz was overpowered by the proportions present in drawings he found of Egyptian art. His reaction was so strong that it constituted for him an artistic conversion. He rejected the naturalistic art of the Renaissance and was convinced that he had found the universal canon of proportion and arrangement that had been present in early Christian art but had been lost in subsequent generations. At the same time he remained committed to medieval aesthetics that incorporate both Gothic architecture and “flat” art. The artistic result of Lenz’s thinking can be seen in his own work and in the School of Beuron art generally. His geometric principles are to be found in his unfinished *The Aesthetics of Beuron.* Lenz was in many ways a visionary, akin to William Blake, and his canon is so esoteric that it is difficult to understand its principles. But the presence in his art of root rectangles (particularly \(\sqrt{5}\), also important to Hambidge because of its special relationship to the golden ratio, together with symmetrical composition and simplified abstract representation, is obvious. On these, if not on the entirety of Lenz’s canon, our future Platonic art can be based.

It is significant that, just as Pythagoras discovered the 1:0.618 ratio first by noting the relationship between the relative length of strings on a musical instrument and their musical pitch, so Lenz became absorbed in the relationship between these ratios by experimenting musically with an instrument known as a monochord. He was indeed first drawn to the Benedictine monastery of Beuron through the book *Choral Music and Liturgy* by Benedikt Sauter, who had spent time at Solesmes, and was convinced that there were inherent principles of harmonic unity that represent universal numeric relationships. This is a given of Platonism, and through his extensive reading of Platonists both pagan and Christian (particularly Saint Augustine), Lenz became convinced that the universals expressed in the chant of Solesmes and Beuron were the very ones he was seeking to embody in his art. For Plato and those in the Platonic tradition, the purest art is that which conforms most fully to the great underlying fundamental geometric principles: not the precise observation and representation of natural objects that was sought in Renaissance art. What both Sauter and Lenz were doing was in fact rediscovering the Pythagorean Platonic belief that, given that there are geometric principles that are inherent in all things, the characteristics of form have in and of themselves an effect that is moral.8 Indeed the ancient Greek “modes” (scales) of music, upon which the “tones” (scales) of Orthodox chant are based, were thought to have a moral influence when played to people, a belief accepted by many Church fathers.9

The link between Platonic (Beuron) art, Platonic (Solesmes) Gregorian chant, and the Benedictine order is thus not only close, but intrinsic.10 Through his study of Gregorian chant Lenz came to emphasize the simple numbers closest to unity, namely 1–6. From the “hexachord” of Gregorian chant he developed his “senarium,” in which each number was represented by a different shape, with 6 (thought by both Vitruvius and Augustine to be the perfect number) expressed as a six-pointed star, the key component of Lenz’s canon.

**Albert Gleizes and Platonic Art in the Twentieth Century**

Lenz’s theoretical legacy reached a wider audience as a result of the translation of *The Aesthetics of Beuron* into French by the artist Paul Sérusier, a pupil of Paul Gaugin. Sérusier also gave a more practical explanation of Lenz’s rather esoteric writings in his
The Future of Ecclesiastical Art in the West

So how do we go about creating Platonic art “for today”? The very question is mistaken and derives...
A Response to Ottokar Uhl's Church Building as Process

Heidemarie Seblatnig

Editor's Note

Ottokar Uhl, born in 1931, is a retired Austrian architect who lives in Vienna. He studied modernist architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, where he received his degree in 1953. The influence of industrialization on building and constructive possibilities was particularly interesting to Uhl over the course of his career. He taught architecture at the University of Karlsruhe beginning in 1973 and designed several church projects across Austria. Some of his built works include the Student Chapel Peter Jordan Strasse, the Siemens Street Church and the Saint Catherine of Siena Catholic Church in Vienna. In 1994 Uhl served as professor of Liturgical Studies at the University of Vienna. In response to the Second Vatican Council, Uhl wrote the controversial essay “Church Building as Process,” which was part of a book called Building Churches for the Future compiled by Günther Rombold in 1969. This article, by art historian Heidemarie Seblatnig of Vienna, is a response to quotations from Uhl's original essay in the form of a debate:

Uhl: The church building cannot be considered a sacred object. The need for built churches arises first from the necessity of having a place where the community can assemble for the Lord’s Supper. For Christianity, the difference between “sacred” and “profane” is fundamentally transcended (“aufgehoben”). Thus, there can be no prescriptions for a “sacred” architecture.

Seblatnig: The transcending of the difference between the sacred and the profane is worked exclusively by the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, all that was profane transcended to the level of the sacred. This “transcending” of the profane needs to express itself in the life of the Christian and in any and all of the works that he is called to bring to completion: should it be deemed sufficient for a sacred building to be incomplete and profane, it would contradict this transcending of the profane by reintroducing the latter into the Christian world.

Uhl: The atmospheric and even sentimental requirements made of “sacred” spaces, inherited from tradition, result from a problematic attitude. Why should people want to be enveloped by an atmospheric space during the Eucharistic celebration? Is private “devotion” more important than active participation in the activity of the community?

Seblatnig: The active participation of the faithful in the liturgy is possible only by entering into the presence of God within the silence of the heart, that is, in prayer. It is in prayer that the individual truly becomes himself, because there he is member of the Body of God. Only when a person has been formed by the experience and by the regular practice of prayer and true communion beyond “private devotion” and the “activity of the community” can he or she be able to create a space that makes this experience accessible for others, and that leads them toward it. The requirements of sacred space are thus in no way “sentimental,” nor do they

The interior of the Student Chapel Peter Jordan Strasse in Vienna by Ottokar Uhl, 1963.
come from “tradition,” but they are the logical consequence of prayer. This is why the monks of Mount Athos must demonstrate, not just the necessary talent and formation before they can become active as iconographers, but they must also put their vocation to the test in the spiritual life and in prayer and through long years of ascetic exercises.

By analogy, before the construction of a Catholic church building can be realized, the architect planning it must discern his or her vocation to the realization of the given plan. If this does not happen, the work at hand remains a vain human effort and can never become sacred architecture. Thus, without prayer and a lived faith, no Christian sacred architecture come into existence, but only hapless caricatures, not motivated by the love of God but by bloated vanity. If an architect is not willing to accept this, he has to be consistent enough to spare the church from having to bear his exaggerated ego (which threatens to eclipse even God).

Ottokar Uhl himself contradicted his own thesis in 1991, in wanting to create a “very introverted space” in his construction of the chapel on the first floor of the Catholic theological faculty at the University of Vienna. With his confidence in technology, he wanted “different moods to be created by light effects and picture projections” within the sacred space—just as if prayer were a “mood.” His multipurpose idea, however, seems to have curbed the realization of a truly “introverted space.”

Uhl: Nor does theology require specific methods in planning community buildings.

Seblatnig: The “buildings of the community” may generally resemble public housing, as corresponds to their function: but the building erected for God also needs to resemble a house of God, otherwise it is divorced from its purpose. Church buildings are called churches—and not community buildings—because they represent the mystical body of the Holy Church. Just as the communion of the faithful is not a simple crowd, but a body, the place of their encounter with the incarnate God cannot be a simple building: it must necessarily have a lot of “specific” elements to it if it is to realize its unique vocation.

Uhl: A dominant placing of the church building within the city is not a desirable image of social position in our time.

Seblatnig: A hidden and unrecognizable church building, on the other hand, is not a desirable image of the ecclesial situation.

Uhl: Church buildings do not need to be symbolic. Christianity has defied all myths and continues to do so. In this sense, secularization is a Christian process.

Seblatnig: Following Judaism, Christianity has since the very beginning been fighting the superstitious pagan myths that make symbols—animals, objects, stars, dreams, etc.—into gods and submit to them. The Christian effort consists in assigning the symbols, i.e., the “gods” of the heathens, their true place: indicating the one true God. Their true significance resides only in their being “road signs” toward God. For God is not intellect, and Christianity is not an intellectual mind game, but God is love (1 John 4:16), and love does not express itself in technocratic clauses, but in symbols and signs. To get to know God, we need to treasure in our heart all the little signs that point toward Him in this world: with cold reason alone, one does not become a Christian, but an ideologue. In the
words of Pope Benedict XVI: “The profound fertility, the forces that truly form and transform history, can only come from what has ripened a long time, from what has deep roots, from what is proven and reflected, what has been assimilated by experience and suffering” (homily, Donauwörth, 2005).

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1 Friedrich Kurrent, Kathedrale unserer Zeit (Salzburg-Munich, 1997), p.12. In 1919 Otto Bartning published a small book, About New Church Architecture, in which he describes the experiences he made building his first church in Peggau, north of Graz, in 1906. He talks about his night-long discussions with the responsible Protestant pastor; about his experiences in building the sixteen “away-from-Rome-churches” he worked on as a young architect before the outbreak of the First World War in the Austro-Hungarian territories in Styria, Carnitia, Lower Austria, Bohemia, Silesia, and Romania; about the thoughts that led him to the “radical construction program of the Protestant Church.” “In short,” says Bartning, “the church is an assembly place. The size of the church is determined by the size of the community.” 2 Steger, p.148 f.
The history of architecture is, on the whole, a history of revivals and imitations. Each epoch has admired past principles and reworked older ideas. Long before any concept of conscious stylistic revival, the early Christians looked to pagan art for inspiration and, centuries later, as Christianity matured, Romanesque architects reused the vocabulary of ancient Rome in their own way, just as the Romans had appropriated the architecture and art of Greece. History attests to the validity of stylistic spoliation as an expression of identity.

With the recent reaction against modernist design, which appeared in the Roman Church in the 1930s and culminated in the reordering of hundreds of churches after the Second Vatican Council, comes a strong drive to imitate the past in an academic manner. This new desire for purity of form is laudable as a temporarily successful answer to the problem of designing for the contemporary age. However, as was the case with all conscious revivals, there exists the danger of stylistic dogmatism and, with it, the danger of creating dull churches—academic exercises rather than living buildings. To advocate designing in only one style or to look on one age as the height of Christian art runs the risk of creating yet another passing revival. The pendulum swing of changing fashion will once again sweep away the work of diligent, concerned men and replace it with mediocrity. Let history bear witness—it has happened before.

This constant stylistic flux can be prevented, or slowed, by one idea: Catholicity. The key to creating a lasting revival of good, solid Christian architecture and Christian art in all its forms is to explore and embrace all that the past has presented to us as beautiful and profitable. The late Gothic revivalist Sir Ninian Comper lights the way in his church of Saint Mary the Virgin, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, England. In it, liturgically minded planning and beauty drawn from centuries of Christian experience combine to create a building that reflects not only the glory of worship but the timeless nature of the Church Catholic.

Begun in 1906 and gradually constructed over several decades, Saint Mary the Virgin has been called “one of the most beautiful churches the twentieth century has produced.” Even Nikolaus Pevsner, who often criticized Comper’s work, observed that “it glitters and reveals and conceals to one’s heart’s delight.” It is easy to lavish praise on the building for its beauty, but if that is all we do, we have missed Comper’s point and, with it, the point of all church architecture. Churches do not exist as monuments to the glory of the Church or even to the glory of God; churches exist to provide a place in which Heaven and earth can meet together. The purpose of a church is to provide a place where the liturgy may be performed through which we enter the courts of Heaven with the saints and all who have gone before us in Christ. In worship, the Christian community on earth enters consciously into the stream of redemptive history bringing our prayers and praises into the very throne room of the Most High, where is assembled the great multitude, which no man can number. This knowledge is what makes Comper’s Saint Mary the Virgin so wonderful; it is a place for leitourgia, our public service to God.

While it is undoubtedly the decorations that first grip the visitor’s imagination, it soon becomes apparent that Comper’s ideas went far beyond collecting various motifs and combining them in novel ways. The sequence of spaces, the arrangement of screens and galleries, and the overriding sense of purpose in the design makes it clear that Saint Mary the Virgin is a functional building above all else. For Comper, the liturgy was always the primary concern. In his 1947 pamphlet Of the Atmosphere of a Church, he emphasized two points: first, that the church’s purpose is to house an altar; and secondly, that it must “move to worship, to bring a man to his knees, to refresh his soul in a weary land.” His first point informs the implementation of the second. All thought about church building revolves around beauty; form and function are inextricably linked.
and beauty is itself inherently functional, not something added later to a purpose-built object. Beauty is part of purpose: “The plan, the ‘layout,’ of the church must first be in accord with the requirements of the liturgy and the particular needs of those who worship within it, and the imagery must express the balanced measure of the Faith; and for guidance in both we must look to tradition. There is no need to apologise for doing so in architecture, any more than in music, unless we need apologise for the guidance of tradition in the interpretation of the New Testament and the creeds of the Church.”

Looking to Saint Mary the Virgin with Comper’s ideas in mind, we find the example for future building within the Roman Church and within any congregation of Christians who would be consistent in their claim to the faith once delivered to the saints. The building is perfectly suited to the proper performance of Christian liturgy in the form of the Mass as well as other liturgies that are derived from it. Saint Mary’s is as much suited to worship according to the Book of Common Prayer as it is to the Tridentine Rite.

The building is entered through a western tower and, had the intended bell-ringers’ platform been constructed, the opening out of the nave would have been even more dramatic than it is today. Still, motion is impeded slightly by a large font with tall canopy; once passed, the expansion of space from the entrance toward the east end is remarkable. The aisled nave stretches forward, an arcade of fluted columns supporting a low clerestory. The glass is all clear but for the east windows, which shimmer in the distance, beyond a gilded and painted rood screen, like some jeweled vision. Overhead, great pendants hang down from a fan vault covered with bosses like carved snowflakes. The rood screen projects far into the nave and the entire sanctuary is surrounded by screens, some painted and gilded wood, others of iron crested with angels and shields and sacred monograms. The altar stands beneath a gilded ciborium placed just before the east window and there is a statue of Our Lady beneath a canopy to the north. The spaciousness of the sanctuary is notable; there are returned stalls for clergy; above, the screen provides a place for a small choir. Beyond the north aisle lies the Jesus Chancel edged by parclose screens and having a roof of carved and painted angels. And, beyond the south aisle, the little chapel of Saint John the Evangelist provides a more intimate space now used for daily offices.

The multiplicity of spaces for the performance of liturgy on various scales shows that Comper was concerned with fitting the building to the needs of a full congregation and the private individual. In this way the design is highly relational. The luxurious amount of space allotted to the sanctuary gives the high altar dignity and allows the Mass to breathe and the aisles are suited to the largest processions. Saint Mary the Virgin could be used effectively on the highest of holy days ornamented with the most elaborate of ceremonial as well as ordinary days where ceremonial is limited. There is no waste in the church, however, for its decoration shows great consider-
Comper viewed the Church as Catholic in the best sense: as universal, traversing boundaries of space and, most importantly, time. This Catholicity applied specifically to architectural style is what engenders enjoyment of Comper’s masterpiece. There are few who would enter and immediately perceive the thoroughness of its planning, but many would note the atmosphere created through light, proportion, and painted and gilded decoration. In Of the Atmosphere of a Church, Comper argued that Christian tradition was accretive as the Church crossed new boundaries of nationality and cultural context. The Church, in order to be truly Catholic, must absorb all good things from all times and places and make these her own. Comper admitted that “the religion of Christ knows no moment of perfection here on earth” yet urged that it “retain all perfections to which man has attained and reject all imperfections of barbaric or evil days.”

In this spirit, the nave columns, while drawn from English precedent seen at Northleach and Chipping Campden, have Greek entasis. Their capitals are decorated with entwined vines that terminate in lilies in the nave and Tudor roses in the Jesus Chancel. Iron screens, inspired by Spanish rejas at cathedrals such as Seville, edge the sanctuary, while the quire is surrounded by Tuscan columns set atop Renaissance paneling. The pulpit, set outside the sanctuary, is Jacobean. The remainder of the church’s screens are Gothic in style; those of the Jesus Chancel being particularly fine examples in the manner of G. F. Bodley. The ciborium above the high altar is, in conception, early Christian but is composed of a unique type of Corinthian column possessing praying angels on each of their four faces. All down the sides of the columns are painted garlands of flowers. The wealth of motifs is astonishing. It should not be surprising, however, for Comper was keen to convey a sense of heritage informed by a uniquely Christian view of time and of the world: time in which the Church, within the world but not of it, steadily attained greater perfections even as the world itself writhed in the grip of sin. “A church built with hands,” said Comper, “is the outward expression here on earth of that spiritual Church built of living stones, the Bride of Christ, Urbs Beata Jerusalem, which stretches back to the foundation of the world and onwards to all eternity. With her Lord she lays claim to the whole of His Creation and to every philosophy and creed and work of man which his Holy Spirit has inspired. And so the temple here on earth, in different lands and in different shapes, in the East and in the West, has developed or added to itself fresh forms of beauty and … has never broken with the past: it has never renounced its claim to continuity.”

Continuity is what made the churches of the past so marvelous. They were all glorious within, filled with the offerings of faithful hearts. They were Catholic, representing the Church in her many robes of beauty. It is not for us to recreate the social environment that made these wonders possible; we cannot repristinate the past. We can, however, focus our own hearts on those worthy things which are above and strive to bring them ever closer to us and ourselves closer to the perfections of Christ. Saint Mary the Virgin is not just an ideal space for liturgy, not merely a beautiful building; it is...
an example of a manner of thinking to which we must attain. Comper’s masterpiece confronts us in our selfishness and our attachment to the dust of the earth. To give ourselves fully to God in worship means more than offering our thoughts and emotions; it means offering our abilities and our actions. Leitourgia means giving time and effort to worship. Our Lord deserves nothing less than our collective best; He deserves our finest poetry in liturgical texts, the best music we can bring to ornament each holy day, the most beautiful architecture, sculpture, and painting. If we take our Christianity seriously, we will look to the Church of the past for guidance.

Catholicity is easy to dream up when the budget is unlimited and the craftsmen readily available, yet even Saint Mary’s, which was a result of the generosity of three very wealthy sisters, remains incomplete. Comper’s original plans for the building had to be revised and downsized and, though still a masterpiece, it is not as he intended. How then is the ordinary parish to take hold of stylistic Catholicity and make it a reality?

The answer lies with Comper and a host of other sensible architects from various periods who, despite their more spectacular achievements, were not out of tune with simpler expressions of beauty. “A lesson might be taken from the simplest of our medieval churches,” wrote Comper, “whose fabrics were little more than a barn … but which became glorious by beautiful workmanship within.” Beauty need not mean extravagance. This is the first step toward recovering the spirit that compelled men to create Chartres, Gloucester, and Segovia. They were able to build these wondrous temples because they were not limited by the belief that every work had to be complete at its inception. Their offering of such beauty came from humility to realize that what they strove to build was greater than themselves, and so they joined their offerings together, slowly rearing the spires and filling windows with sparkling glass. The cathedral enshrines the simple man with simple dreams, a longing to be part of some great host gathered before God’s throne of splendor. The average parish may begin with a small, simple structure, but over time it may grow and become filled with beautiful work showing forth the devotion of generations.

The first step is to build a solid, well-proportioned structure in continuity with one of the old styles, be it Romanesque, Gothic or some variety of classical. It must not be modernist for modernism is jealous by nature and brooks no rivals. Attempts at correcting churches built in this style have been largely awkward and unsuccessful. The only essential in this first step is that the beginning be of quality, designed by someone steeped in the past, who has absorbed its principles and can intuitively create harmonious geometry.

It may seem outrageous at this juncture to consider in detail the various options for designing a functional church, but Comper’s ideal of Catholicity allows for such variety of design that I would be remiss not to share some possibilities. The Mass and the various liturgies derived from it by the Protestant Reformers possess the same fundamental requirements for their proper celebration. Though Comper himself might not see it as the logical conclusion of his thoughts, stylistic Catholicity generates a climate in which the intelligent architect can design a church for a Roman congregation that will function perfectly for an Anglican one. With some slight modifications, a design produced with the Mass in mind will clothe the communion of Lutherans or Presbyterians in majesty.

Comper’s work at Saint Mary’s brought the altar toward the people
and, though the placement of the altar so as to be surrounded by worshippers was effected at his little church of Saint Philip, Cosham, he was careful never to allow it to become common in its appearance or undignified in its setting. Whether spatially very close to the people or not, it is best that the altar be freestanding, allowing both ad orientem and versus populum celebration in a dignified and orderly fashion. If the church is designed to accommodate the most complex liturgies it will naturally be suited to the less complex. If Pope Benedict XVI has been interpreted correctly, the current trend lies toward the Tridentine Rite. Churches of the Roman school would do well to provide for coming changes while maintaining their current manner with proper decorum. A benefit to freestanding altars, aside from their inherent dignity if designed after Comper’s principles, is their ecumenism. It could only be a good thing if the Church’s elder and younger daughters were more comfortable in each others’ places of worship.

The sanctuary ought to be spacious, affording the ministers breadth of action. The sanctuary at Saint Mary’s is wide in comparison with its depth, and the quire is set one step lower than the nave floor, making the secondary ministers less of a distraction from the movements at the high altar. This is an unusual but successful arrangement, because it permits the altar to retain visual supremacy. Also successful is the placement of singers in galleries above the chancel. The music can be heard but the singers need not distract the other worshippers by their movement. The nineteenth-century trend of collegiate style seating for singers may be followed in some cases, and this plan often adds a tremendous sense of dignity to the liturgy. However it is generally best that this arrangement be used only in larger churches where the chancel can be quite deep. In this case the altar remains distant from the people and, though this need not mean that the congregation feel isolated from the ministration of the priests at the altar, it is perhaps a less ideal plan than one that places the choir elsewhere. In smaller churches, placing the choir in a rear balcony is a more effective use of space as well as fostering an increased feeling of grandeur in the sanctuary. Larger churches might follow the balcony model or the Spanish custom of placing the choir at floor level toward the rear of the nave, separated from the congregation by a screened enclosure.

Next to the altar, the font is the other liturgical center that must be considered. At Saint Mary’s, Comper placed the font at the west end, one bay forward from the tower. This arrangement was common during the nineteenth century and is a reasonable placement both practically and symbolically. Just as the rite of baptism marks the entrance of the baptized into the life of the Church, so the placement of the font at the entrance of the church reminds the churchgoers of their membership in the community at every service. From a purely practical standpoint, placing the font at the west end allows the entire congregation to view the baptism ceremony. If private baptism is desired, the placement of the font in an unencumbered space at the entrance of the church allows for large baptismal parties to participate comfortably.

The pulpit too must be dignified. At Saint Mary’s, Comper designed a pulpit that, though significant and attractive, does not detract from the central unity of the building around the altar. Allowing for only one focus is wise; too many visual centers in a church creates disharmony. The elevation of the pulpit above floor level is significant for, when the minister speaks to the congregation, he has the duty of speaking to them the unencumbered Word of God. This high office must be reflected in the placement of the Word over the people, symbolically calling them to remember their place as both subjects and children of the Lord.

Having posited the ideal, it is necessary to address one of the central criticisms raised in relation to the implementation of stylistic Catholicity.
The most common, and most easily rebutted, is that churches of the kind described are expensive and money should be spent on service to the poor or foreign missions. The great American architect Ralph Adams Cram observed that good proportions cost no more than bad ones and what makes a church beautiful is its consistency and effects of light and color. Comper would undoubtedly agree; Saint Mary the Virgin is not a particularly complex building in terms of its basic structure or plan. It is essentially a series of rectangular volumes massed together in a traditional fashion and pierced through with openings in the form of arches. When distilled into simple geometries, the vast majority of churches through history are uncomplicated forms. Their ornament often causes them to appear complicated, but, with the exception of some of the more adventurous Baroque examples, churches have remained rectangular in shape with the occasional circle or triangle coming into play. It may offend the architect brought up with modern ideas of individual genius, but the reality is that good design has nothing to do with genius and everything to do with careful observance of the past and the studied combination of straightforward geometric forms. Let questions of expense be put to rest and let not false humility eat away at the Church’s central function—the worship of Almighty God in space, in time, in a given place.

Ornament has the potential to be expensive. This is largely due to a lack of talented craftspeople and the codification of the architectural establishment that has worked to eliminate the artist and craftsman. Still, there is a resurgence of artists today whose works are beginning to equal those of earlier generations. It is no easy task to reconstruct a discipline so thoroughly corrupted by modern thinking, but there is the hope of a future renaissance of Christian art to equal the Renaissances of the twelfth century in Rome and the fourteenth century in Florence. Their works may be costly, but it is their calling to offer in the service of the Most High the gifts He has bestowed upon them. Let us not prevent them from exercising their gifts by parsimony and a false sense of superiority.

The most deep-rooted problem faced today in the realm of the church-building arts concerns the philosophy of novelty that has taken over. It is often felt that every church must be an entirely unique product. It is the hubris of architects trained to believe that the only way to be progressive is to be futuristic that has brought about this thinking. Comper encountered this sort of thinking and overcame it in his many wonderful works. In response to those who claimed that architecture should reflect its time, he replied, “Is there such a supremacy of goodness, beauty and truth in the present age as to mark it as distinct from the past, and demand that we invent a new expression of it?” Comper may not have fully understood the implications of his thoughts but it is clear that his belief in lack of originality is what made his churches so original. This has been the case for centuries; through designing with the past in mind, churches have been built that are of their time but remain within the stream of a growing, developing tradition and are always suited to the performance of the liturgy no matter its varied form. Originality is a result of designing with a view to the past. If an architect says, “I’m only doing what has been done before; I’m using old bits and pieces,” his heart at least is right. If he says, “Look and see, I have made something new, a unique product of this age,” he is not to be trusted with the design of the house of God. If his designs are, as Peter Anson called Saint Mary the Virgin, “brilliant pastiche” they are worthy of construction.

Saint Mary the Virgin is a truly Catholic building, taking beauty from many places and times, drawing together disparate strands of human thought and work, uniting them all in a glorious tapestry. Like the Mother Church that bore her, she stands as a memorial to a living faith, a tradition, sometimes dulled but never broken, that stretches back into the misty beginning of the earth when Adam and Eve first walked in the garden in their innocence. With the imago Dei impressed upon us, we must go forward in that tradition, bearing our best and highest
The campus of Ave Maria University has been carved out of the tomato fields and drained Everglades of rural southwestern Florida. The college and town of Ave Maria are found after a forty-five minute drive northeast of Naples, four miles outside the nearest community of Immokalee. It is unmistakably the vision of Domino’s Pizza founder and Frank Lloyd Wright devotee Thomas Monaghan, who has focused clearly on a plan to “get to heaven, and bring as many as possible with me.” In light of this goal, Monaghan has centered his endeavors on Catholic education here, from the earliest years through college and graduate programs. The university was originally to be housed in Ann Arbor on the grounds and in the Frank Lloyd Wright-style buildings of Domino Farms. Local opposition to the expansion and variance requests for this site eventually led to the decision to move the plan to Florida.

This was my first visit to the town of Ave Maria. It was obvious to me that the buildings were new and reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright. The property includes a golf course, residential housing, public services, and the many divisions of the university. The parish deacon calls the impressive experience of travelling the three mile journey from the side road through the well-cultivated grounds: “the road into the Emerald City with a sacred bent.” Driving onto the campus I noticed the oratory façade from over a mile away. It indeed stood out as a central theme for the buildings surrounding it.

Growth in the town, hampered by the suffering American economy, had recently been limited to one family per week, and as of January 2010 the population is 1,100. The university student enrollment is currently 725, with plans to build that number up to 5,500. In the light of Monaghan’s Roman Catholic vision and the importance of faith in support and direction of education, the chapel of Ave Maria has been designed to be the centerpiece of the university and the town planned for an eventual 20,000 residents. “Center” is the appropriate word to describe it. The location of what has been now called the “oratory” is an obvious visual focus. The massive chapel, to date the largest concrete pour in Florida, stands out and calls out to the students and residents as they gather in the piazza and shop at the stores that surround it. The project is the architectural design of Harry L. Warren, AIA, of Cannon Design, Grand Island, NY. Original plans called for a 185-foot-tall building with 3,300 seats. Due to rising costs the structure was reduced to 104 feet with 1,100 seats and an overall size of 25,755 square feet.

The university chose the canonical term “oratory,” as the edifice is a place of prayer set apart for devotion. It is primarily a university chapel, yet it also serves the town of Ave Maria. The local bishop has dedicated the church and assigned one of his own priests to administer the liturgical life there. As such, the oratory is called a “quasi-parish” and will remain so until future growth causes that status to change. For official parish status, a church must be owned here by the Diocese of Venice, and not by the university. Father Robert Tatman, the parish administrator, spoke to me about his...
vision concerning the architecture of the chapel and how that architecture assists in his ministry there. “The architecture,” he said, “should direct us to focus on what is happening ahead, without distraction.” He therefore referred to the beauty that needs to be found in the sanctuary, overcoming any other architectural feature or flaw.

The architectural firm of Andrea Clark Brown of Naples is already on board with modified plans and models that will set a new mood, express the intentions of the university, and better respect a connection with church history. Mrs. Brown will design either life-size statues or reliefs of the Twelve Apostles shown in positions where they seem to be in movement. She plans to use stone in the altar, the ambo, the altar rail, and the stand for the central tabernacle. She will use the same stone with wood accents for the seating. The new sanctuary is so critical to the overall design that no final comment may be made about the architectural effectiveness until this element is completed.

Mr. Monaghan spoke to me about the chapel as “the Golden Dome of Ave Maria” that he hopes will become a symbol like Notre Dame’s dome. He reflected upon a work in progress over the next five years that would hopefully and eventually include a freestanding bell tower and the largest outdoor cross in America—sixty-five feet high with a thirty-foot corpus. Monaghan foresees covered walkways that will assist worshippers as they travel to the chapel from the adjacent buildings. A four manual virtual pipe organ, Opus 5, has already been installed by Marshall & Ogletree of Boston. A rose window sixteen feet across will eventually be set over the front doors. A Carrara marble relief of the Annunciation embraced to the left and right by archangel side panels is to be found below the window. The work of Hungarian sculptor Marton Varo, the relief will share its name with “Annunciation Circle,” the piazza facing the church.

The architecture of Ave Maria Oratory has not been without sharp criticism. Called “a design based on a suspicion of architecture” by Denis McNamara (Sacred Architecture 9), his words are reinforced by others who observe that glass and exposed steel are fundamentally a modernist approach to design. McNamara points to the irony in this style as a showpiece for a new era of traditional renewal. He notes that there is a return in many places across the United States to a genuine use of traditional design methods. Though this is thought to be evidenced by high ceilings, a long nave, permanent pews, symbols, and iconography, McNamara has argued that the architecture itself plays a sacramental role that the designers of the Oratory may not have considered.

While expressing his praise for Monaghan’s generosity and his gift to the Church, Dr. McNamara related to me his concern that many ques-

The steel structure is exposed on the exterior and inside the chapel. The iconographic program for the sanctuary remains unfinished.
tions may not have been asked in the discussions of how the design should proceed. Important for McNamara is that church planners ask themselves: “How will this building become a sacrament of the heavenly Jerusalem, God and man reunited at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb?” Further questions emerge. Should sacramental theology be emphasized more than a tribute to Frank Lloyd Wright? Is the design overly concerned with creating a logo for the university? In the light of Monaghan’s respect for Catholic tradition, have architects and consultants been hired who have a proven record of a modernist approach to church architecture rather than a sacramental approach? May the design be accused of being flawed by choosing the modernist insistence on the expression of industrially produced I-beams? Is the created visual effect one of instability as many of the interior beams are attached by flanges rather than landing securely on the vertical posts of the nave? Traditional architecture always clarifies and beautifies structure. “The exterior of tall buildings tries to express their own structural logic and stability,” McNamara recalls, “and spreads their mass over a greater surface area at the bottom.” This façade gives the building a bowed, top-heavy appearance. The Church’s vision of a building as “the radiant order of the heavenly Jerusalem, the Bride before her Bridegroom” has been lost in what he thinks have been many decisions resulting in disorder and mistaken proportions.

The current interior effect of this structure creates a rather “Klingon-like” environment. It is an austere architecture, that could be accused of utilitarianism in human terms. However, I would prefer to mitigate some of the criticism by noting that this chapel and even the skeleton structure are by no means finished. For example, there has been some discussion of muting the cold steel with color by the addition of wood accents. This would have a softening effect on the current bare and strikingly dark impression of the architecture.

There is indeed more to the chapel than its large skeleton inner structure. Some would say the effect is overpowering and is reinforced by the large central crucifix. Light coming from louvers behind the skeleton and the circle of light above the sanctuary is currently inadequate to provide enough illumination for the entire church. The lamps in their placement hanging from the inner-most skeleton arch are ineffective to light the nave and had to be augmented by spotlights hidden behind the steel. Florescent lighting shining up on the fine Stations of the Cross that were obtained from a church in Detroit, ironically provide too much light shining upward. The required lighting for worshippers and the best illuminative effect to highlight the design may not blend well if turned on at the same time. The original plans for the chapel included the use of more glass, but the location in the Everglades and the building restrictions to protect structures from possible hurricanes, necessitated that the first design be changed. This deeply affects the lighting in the building and its illumination becomes more of an issue. The external lighting placed around the outside of the chapel, however, succeeds in its plan to present each evening the building and the piazza as a lit beacon for the surrounding area.

Even though the use of glass has been minimized, the structure already suffers from leaks and one may find pails in the choir loft that catch falling rain in the wet season. This is a tremendously disappointing flaw in a new building. Wind and rain from the west are particularly strong at this location. The steel beams that continue outside take on the heat of the day. They expand and contract and leaks can and do develop when afternoon rains are added to the mix. There seems to be some agreement that the stark skeleton structure, which even escapes to the outside walls in a spider-like fashion, may need to be muted in some way. The concern over a machine-like quality, as opposed to promoting church buildings as heavenly icon, could be partially resolved in the soft colors and professional carving of Marton Varo. Further, twelve golden statues of the Apostles placed over the doors have begun to address this point. Critics remain skeptical in the face of that hope. Meanwhile, the Everglade Oratory will take many more years to complete.

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1 As quoted in America’s First Cathedral, p.44
3 As quoted in America’s First Cathedral, p.86
Dear Cardinals, Brother Bishops and Priests, Distinguished Artists, Ladies and Gentlemen,

With great joy I welcome you to this solemn place, so rich in art and in history. I cordially greet each and every one of you and I thank you for accepting my invitation. At this gathering I wish to express and renew the Church’s friendship with the world of art, a friendship that has been strengthened over time; indeed Christianity from its earliest days has recognized the value of the arts and has made wise use of their varied language to express her unvarying message of salvation. This friendship must be continually promoted and supported so that it may be authentic and fruitful, adapted to different historical periods and attentive to social and cultural variations. Indeed, this is the reason for our meeting here today.

I am deeply grateful to Archbishop Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture and of the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Patrimony of the Church, and likewise to his officials, for promoting and organizing this meeting, and I thank him for the words he has just addressed to me. I greet the Cardinals, the Bishops, the priests and the various distinguished personalities present. I also thank the Sistine Chapel Choir for their contribution to this gathering.

Today’s event is focused on you, dear and illustrious artists, from different countries, cultures and religions, some of you perhaps remote from the practice of religion, but interested nevertheless in maintaining communication with the Catholic Church, in not reducing the horizons of existence to mere material realities, to a reductive and trivializing vision. You represent the varied world of the arts and so, through you, I would like to convey to all artists my invitation to friendship, dialogue and cooperation.

Some significant anniversaries occur around this time. It is ten years since the Letter to Artists by my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Pope John Paul II. For the first time, on the eve of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the Pope, who was an artist himself, wrote a letter to artists, combining the solemnity of a pontifical document with the friendly tone of a conversation among all who, as we read in the initial salutation, “are passionately dedicated to the search for new ‘epiphanies’ of beauty”. Twenty-five years ago the same Pope proclaimed Blessed Fra Angelico the patron of artists, presenting him as a model of perfect harmony between faith and art. I also recall how on 7 May 1964, forty-five years ago, in this very place, an historic event took place, at the express wish of Pope Paul VI, to confirm the friendship between the Church and the arts. The words that he spoke on that occasion resound once more today under the vault of the Sistine Chapel and touch our hearts and our minds. “We need you,” he said. “We need your collaboration in order to carry out our ministry, which consists, as you know, in preaching and rendering accessible and comprehensible to the minds and hearts of our people the things of the spirit, the invisible, the ineffable, the things of God himself. And in this activity … you are masters. It is your task, your mission, and your art consists in grasping treasures from the heavenly realm of the spirit and clothing them in words, colours, forms – making them accessible.” So great was Paul VI’s esteem for artists that he was moved to use daring expressions. “And if we were deprived of your assistance,” he added, “our ministry would become faltering and uncertain, and a special effort would be needed, one might say, to make it artistic, even prophetic. In order to scale the heights of lyrical expression of intuitive beauty, priesthood would have to coincide with art.” On that occasion Paul VI made a commitment to “re-establish the friendship between the Church and artists”, and he invited artists to make a similar, shared commitment, analyzing seriously and objectively the factors that disturbed this relationship, and assuming individual responsibility, courageously and passionately, for a newer and deeper journey in mutual acquaintance and dialogue in order to arrive at an authentic “renaissance” of art in the context of a new humanism.

That historic encounter, as I mentioned, took place here in this sanctuary of faith and human creativity. So it is not by chance that we come together in this place, esteemed for its architecture and its symbolism, and above all for the frescoes that make it unique, from the masterpieces of Pe-
rugino and Botticelli, Ghirlandaio and Cosimo Rosselli, Luca Signorelli and others, to the Genesis scenes and the Last Judgement of Michelangelo Buonarroti, who has given us here one of the most extraordinary creations in the entire history of art. The universal language of music has often been heard here, thanks to the genius of great musicians who have placed their art at the service of the liturgy, assisting the spirit in its ascent towards God. At the same time, the Sistine Chapel is remarkably vibrant with history, since it is the solemn and austere setting of events that mark the history of the Church and of mankind. Here as you know, the College of Cardinals elects the Pope; here it was that I myself, with trepidation but also with absolute trust in the Lord, experienced the privileged moment of my election as Successor of the Apostle Peter.

Dear friends, let us allow these frescoes to speak to us today, drawing us towards the ultimate goal of human history. The Last Judgement, which you see behind me, reminds us that human history is movement and ascent, a continuing tension towards fullness, towards human happiness, towards a horizon that always transcends the present moment even as the two coincide. Yet the dramatic scene portrayed in this fresco also places before our eyes the risk of man’s definitive fall, a risk that threatens to engulf him whenever he allows himself to be led astray by the forces of evil. So the fresco issues a strong prophetic cry against evil, against every form of injustice. For believers, though, the Risen Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life. For his faithful followers, he is the Door through which we are brought to that “face-to-face” vision of God from which limitless, full and definitive happiness flows. Thus Michelangelo presents to our gaze the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End of history, and he invites us to walk the path of life with joy, courage and hope. The dramatic beauty of Michelangelo’s painting, its colours and forms, becomes a proclamation of hope, an invitation to raise our gaze to the ultimate horizon. The profound bond between beauty and hope was the essential content of the evocative Message that Paul VI addressed to artists at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council on 8 December 1965: “To all of you,” he proclaimed solemnly, “the Church of the Council declares through our lips: if you are friends of true art, you are our friends!” And he added: “This world in which we live needs beauty in order not to sink into despair. Beauty, like truth, brings joy to the human heart, and is that precious fruit which resists the erosion of time, which unites generations and enables them to be one in admiration. And all this through the work of your hands ... Remember that you are the custodians of beauty in the world.”

Unfortunately, the present time is marked, not only by negative elements in the social and economic sphere, but also by a weakening of hope, by a certain lack of confidence in human relationships, which gives rise to increasing signs of resignation, aggression and despair. The world in which we live runs the risk of being altered beyond recognition because of unwise human actions which, instead of cultivating its beauty, unscrupulously exploit its resources for the advantage of a few and not infrequently disfigure the marvels of nature. What is capable of restoring enthusiasm and confidence, what can encourage the human spirit to rediscover its path, to raise its eyes to the horizon, to dream of a life worthy of its vocation – if not beauty? Dear friends, as artists you know well that the experience of beauty, beauty that is authentic, not merely transient or artificial, is by no means a supplementary or secondary factor in our search for meaning and happiness; the experience of beauty does not remove us from reality, on the contrary, it leads to a direct encounter with the daily reality of our lives, liberating it from darkness, transfiguring it, making it radiant and beautiful.

Indeed, an essential function of genuine beauty, as emphasized by Plato, is that it gives man a healthy “shock”, it draws him out of himself, wrenches him away from resignation and from being content with the humdrum – it even makes him suffer, piercing him like a dart, but in so doing it “reawakens” him, opening afresh the eyes of his heart and mind, giving him wings, carrying him aloft. Dostoevsky’s words that I am about to quote are bold and paradoxical, but they invite reflection. He says this: “Man can live without science, he can live without bread, but without beauty he could no longer live, because there would no longer be anything to do to the world. The whole secret is here, the whole of history is here.” The painter Georges Braque echoes this sentiment: “Art is meant to disturb, science reassures.” Beauty pulls us up short, but in so doing it reminds us of our final destiny, it sets us back on our path, fills us with new hope, gives us the courage to live to the full the unique gift of life. The quest for beauty that I am describing here is clearly not about escaping into the irrational or into mere aestheticism.

Too often, though, the beauty that is thrust upon us is illusory and deceitful, superficial and blinding, leaving the onlooker dazed; instead of bringing him out of himself and opening him up to horizons of true freedom as it draws him aloft, it imprisons him within himself and further enslaves him, depriving him of hope and joy. It is a seductive but hypocritical beauty that rekindles desire, the will to power, to possess, and to dominate others, it is a beauty which soon turns into its opposite, taking on the guise of indecency, transgression or gratuitous provocation. Authentic beauty, however, unlocks the yearning of the human heart, the profound desire to know, to love, to go towards the Other, to reach for the Beyond. If we acknowledge that beauty touches us intimately, that it wounds us, that it opens our eyes, then we rediscover the joy of seeing, of being able to grasp the profound meaning of our existence, the Mystery of which we are part; from this Mystery we can draw fullness, happiness, the passion to engage with it every day. In this regard, Pope John Paul II, in his Letter to Artists, quotes the following verse from a Polish poet, Cyprian Norwid: “Beauty is to enthuse us for work, and work is to raise us up” (no. 3). And later he adds: “In so far as it seeks the beautiful, fruit of an imagination which rises above the everyday, art is by its nature a kind of appeal to the mystery. Even when they explore the darkest depths of the soul or the most unsettling aspects of evil, the artist gives voice in a way to the universal desire for redemption” (no. 10). And in conclusion he states: “Beauty is a key to the mystery and a call to transcendence” (no. 16).

These ideas impel us to take a further step in our reflection. Beauty, whether that of the natural universe or that expressed in art, precisely because it
and authentic sentiment of beauty, there, truly, is the presence of God. There is a kind of incarnation of God in the world, of which beauty is the sign. Beauty is the experimental proof that incarnation is possible. For this reason all art of the first order is, by its nature, religious.” Hermann Hesse makes the point even more graphically: “Art means: revealing God in everything that exists.” Echoing the words of Pope Paul VI, the Servant of God Pope John Paul II restated the Church’s desire to renew dialogue and cooperation with artists: “In order to communicate the message entrusted to her by Christ, the Church needs art” (no. 12); but he immediately went on to ask: “Does art need the Church?” – thereby inviting artists to rediscover a source of fresh and well-founded inspiration in religious experience, in Christian revelation and in the “great codex” that is the Bible.

Dear artists, as I draw to a conclusion, I too would like to make a cordial, friendly and impassioned appeal to you, as did my Predecessor. You are the custodians of beauty: thanks to your talent, you have the opportunity to speak to the heart of humanity, to touch individual and collective sensibilities, to call forth dreams and hopes, to broaden the horizons of knowledge and of human engagement. Be grateful, then, for the gifts you have received and be fully conscious of your great responsibility to communicate beauty, to communicate in and through beauty! Through your art, you yourselves are to be heralds and witnesses of hope for humanity! And do not be afraid to approach the first and last source of beauty, to enter into dialogue with believers, with those who, like yourselves, consider that they are pilgrims in this world and in history towards infinite Beauty! Faith takes nothing away from your genius or your art: on the contrary, it exalts them and nourishes them, it encourages them to cross the threshold and to contemplate with fascination and emotion the ultimate and definitive goal, the sun that does not set, the sun that illuminates this present moment and makes it beautiful.

Saint Augustine, who fell in love with beauty and sang its praises, wrote these words as he reflected on man’s ultimate destiny, commenting almost ante litteram on the Judgement scene before your eyes today: “Therefore we are to see a certain vision, my brethren, that no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived: a vision surpassing all earthly beauty, whether it be that of gold and silver, woods and fields, sea and sky, sun and moon, or stars and angels. The reason is this: it is open up and broadens the horizons of human awareness, pointing us beyond ourselves, bringing us face to face with the abyss of Infinity, can become a path towards the transcendent, towards the ultimate Mystery, towards God. Art, in all its forms, at the point where it encounters the great questions of our existence, the fundamental themes that give life its meaning, can take on a religious quality, thereby turning into a path of profound inner reflection and spirituality. This close proximity, this harmony between the journey of faith and the artist’s path is attested by countless artworks that are based upon the personalities, the stories, the symbols of that immense deposit of “figures” – in the broad sense – namely symbols of that immense deposit of the finite, God in the history of humanism. Saint Augustine, who fell in love with beauty and sang its praises, wrote these words as he reflected on man’s ultimate destiny, commenting almost ante litteram on the Judgement scene before your eyes today: “Therefore we are to see a certain vision, my brethren, that no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived: a vision surpassing all earthly beauty, whether it be that of gold and silver, woods and fields, sea and sky, sun and moon, or stars and angels. The reason is this: it is
ARTISTS INVITED TO THE MEETING WITH THE POPE

Painting/Sculpture:
Gustavo Aceves
Roberto Almagno
Getulio Alviani
Tito Amodei
Kengo Azuma
Marco Bagnoli
Caspar Berger
Venancio Blanco
Cecce Bonanotte
John Martin Borg
Christoph Brech
Amedeo Brogli
Carlo Busiri Vici
Angelo Canevari
Antonella Cappuccio
Nicola Carrino
Bruno Ceccobelli
Sandro Chia
Alfredo Chiappori
Roberto Ciaccio
Max Cole
Celia Cortemigia
Ugo Cortesi
Nicola De Maria
Lucio Del Pezzo
Giuseppe Ducrot
Gioetta Fioroni
Giuseppe Gallo
Gino Giannetti
Christoph Brech
John Martin Borg
Cecco Bonanotte
Venancio Blanco
Caspar Berger
Marco Bagnoli
Sandro Chia
Alfredo Chiappori
Roberto Ciaccio
Max Cole
Celia Cortemigia
Ugo Cortesi
Nicola De Maria
Lucio Del Pezzo
Giuseppe Ducrot
Gioetta Fioroni
Giuseppe Gallo
Gino Giannetti

Architecture:
Eugenio Abbruzzini
Sandro Benedetti
Mario Botta
Bruno Bozzini
Saverio Busiri Vici
Santiago Calatrava
David Chipperfield
Vittorio Gregotti
Natalie Greenon
Zaha Hadid
Daniel Liebeskind
Pier Paolo Maggiora
Lucio Passarelli
Antonio Piva
Paolo Portoghesi
Pietro Sartogo
Tommaso Scalaesse
Oswald Mathias Ungers

Literature/Poetry:
Eraldo Affinati
Edoardo Albinati
Alberto Arbasino
Alberto Bevilacqua
Elena Bonò
Laura Bosio
Ferdinando Camon
Piero Citati
Giuseppe Conte

Music/Voice:
Vadim Ananiev
Claudio Baglioni
Martin Baker
Mite Balduzzi
Domenico Bartolucci
Andrea Bocelli
Bruno Cagni
Michele Campanella
Robert Canzian
Riccardo Cocciante
Flavio Colusso
Daniela Dessi
Marco Frisina
Robert Gatto
Gianluigi Gelmetti
Adriano Guarini
I Pooj
Andela Hewitt
Jean-Paul Lecot
Monica Leone
Giuseppe Liberto
Alma Manera
Valentin Miserachs
Grau
Ennio Morricone
Carsten Nicolai
Marcello Panni
Arvo Part
Vincent Paulet

Andrea Bocelli with his wife and sons.
Virna Lisi
Carlo Lizzani
Francesca Lo Schiavo
Samuel Maoz
Citto Maselli
David L. Miller
Mario Monicelli
Giuliano Montaldo
Laura Morante
Nanni Moretti
Lucilla Morlacchi
Franco Nerio
Salvatore Nocita
Garin Nugroho
Gabriella Pescucci
Marco Pontecorvo
Giacomo Poretti
Anna Proclermer
Gianni Quaranta
Massimo Ranieri
Luca Ronconi
Giuseppe Rotunno
Maurizio Scaparro
Giacomo Scarpelli
Furio Scarpelli
Ettore Scola
Ballaké Sissoko
Aleksander N. Sokurov
Ferruccio Soleri
Paolo Sorrentino
Marinello Stefanucescu
Peter Stein
Andrej Tarkovskij Jr.
Paolo Taviani
Stephen Verona
Pamela Villoresi
Bob Wilson
Krzysztof Zanussi
Franco Zeffirelli

Issue 17 2010
Sacred Architecture
Exceptioning scholarly articles and occasional references in monographic studies of Cass Gilbert, texts addressing the architecture of Minnesota classicist Emmanuel Masqueray are typically hard to come by. Educated at Paris’s École des Beaux-Arts and groomed in the office of New York’s Carrère and Hastings, Masqueray served as architect of the St. Louis and Louisiana Purchase Exhibitions before establishing a private practice in Saint Paul, Minnesota. As a private practitioner, Masqueray is noteworthy for having produced three cathedrals, Minneapolis’s Basilica of Saint Mary, and numerous other projects, mostly for the Archdiocese of Minneapolis-Saint Paul.

In 1990 an historian without a formal education in architecture, Eric C. Hansen, wrote *The Cathedral of St. Paul: An Architectural Biography*. This book has long been the sole readily available reference on Masqueray and his architecture. Hansen cast an academic gaze on the primary source documents of the cathedral archives, focusing considerable attention on the materials and manufacturers that gave form to the edifice. In his appendices Hansen references the “inexplicable” loss of Masqueray’s personal papers, and it is conceivable further scholarly works of this nature are now impossible for that reason. Unless these materials have been returned, future works on Masqueray seem bound to consider matters divorced from most—if not all—the primary source documentation.

Dia Boyle, a freelance writer and parishioner in the Twin Cities area, consciously conceived of her book in light of Hansen’s earlier work. Released in commemoration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the laying of the cathedral’s cornerstone, Boyle intends for her book to complement Hansen’s earlier work, focusing on the iconographic and symbolic significance of the cathedral rather than its technical construction. In the words of the cathedral’s rector, Reverend Joseph R. Johnson, “The story of the building of the cathedral—when, where, and how—has already been told. It is the ‘why’ that now concerns us.”

The two projects are thus different in scope: Hansen’s text is heavily researched with a true academic bent; conversely, Boyle’s text is more interpretive and follows what might be called a formalist inquiry. This should not be understood as a criticism, nor should it imply Boyle’s commentary is subjective. The cathedral possesses a clear meaning. And the authors of these artworks intended for that meaning to be readily comprehensible. In Boyle’s own words, it is clear that “Archbishop John Ireland and architect Emmanuel Masqueray, and all the many others responsible for the construction and decoration of this edifice, planned and executed their designs in an effort to communicate a message.” As such, this book effectively addresses the matter in question.

Boyle concludes by commenting on the nave, transepts, and dome, and altar before engaging in a rather in-depth consideration of the windows and bronze cycles in the Shrine of the Nations, the name applied to the six radiating chapels of the apse ambulatory. This area receives the most consideration, and nearly a third of the book is devoted to the statuary and windows comprising the Shrine of the Nations. Boyle’s writing style is clear and engaging, and devoid of any hackneyed art criticisms. The result is a sincere and engaging text that will be cherished by both Minnesota’s Catholics and Masqueray’s admirers.

Reviewed by Carroll William Westfall

This book sparkles with erudition and clarity worthy of its title. It reveals how South Carolina colonists made manifest in their religious buildings the beauty of holiness mentioned in Psalms (29:2; 90:9), I Chronicles (16:29), and II Chronicles (20:21) of their Bible and in their Book of Common Prayer. “The aesthetics of the Anglican church became both an agent of and evidence of the sacred in the lives of the congregation. Beauty was a Christian virtue, especially in a world so clearly ravaged by sin” (220). The beauty resided principally in “regularity, uniformity, and proportion” in the liturgy, the architecture, and the music, and it could reshape the moral sense as British moral thought of the period taught.

The book’s evidence, reaching beyond all of the colony’s churches and chapels into the West Indies and England, range from gravestone to belfry, from the exterior architectural orders to the Eucharistic plate, and through the smells, the sounds, and the feel of holiness.

The colony’s cultural basin lay in the West Indies and London more than with other American colonies. London was the ultimate source, and the colonial builders of churches, usually a group of vestrymen, religious and secular officials and commissioners, and builders, knew the latest thought and practice there through books and personal contacts; the role of the architect remained undefined throughout the colonial period.

While the rural churches and chapels provide the background, the book’s stars are the three, and later four, great Charleston churches. Saint Philip’s (1715-23) amalgamated recent discussions in London about the ancient Temple of Jerusalem and the new London churches, especially Nicholas Hawksmore’s, responding to Queen Anne’s 1711 edict. Saint Michael’s (1751-62) hews closer to James Gibbs’s example of Saint Martin in the Fields and used an innovative long-span truss to obviate interior columnar vault supports. With Prince William’s Parish Church (1751-53; burned 1779), possibly the first ancient temple descendent in the English-speaking world since Saint Paul’s Covent Garden, the colonists were “at the cusp of English church design practice” (53). Like others in the colony these churches were designed more as auditory than as liturgical spaces. They lacked important chancels and found convenient rather than liturgical locations for unremarkable baptism fonts and pulpits. The Eucharistic meal was offered with fine silver from a humble table, but taking it was rare.

The Word had displaced the Cross and was prominent in tablets, books, and pulpit. Anglicans found sacramental significance in the building and its fittings, seeing barrel vaults, often with painted cherubs, as the orb of heaven above the quadratic earth of box pews and nave. The scent of cedar, the sound of bells, and the Temple-veil chalice napkin stressed continuity between the old Church and the new.

The beauty was in the universe Ptolemy had described, and over the course of the eighteenth century, Descartes’s and Newton’s description would displace his as reason began to dispel the commingling of heaven and earth. Meanwhile, by mid century Anglicans accounted for only 40 percent of the colony’s white population, while Dissenters became increasingly prominent and enthusiastic. With the Anglican hegemony being eroded, links with London were strengthened, and construction of Saint Michael’s and the new Statehouse on Charleston’s central square was authorized on the same day. It and other new Anglican parish churches now enhanced their “regularity, uniformity, and proportion.” Box pews were made more uniform and were assigned according to the size of the family’s pew subscription, with the entire family using it without the gender segregation prevailing in Virginia. This made visible the movement of the colony’s affairs into the hands of a wealthy class and out of those of the less numerous planters. The lesser orders, including slaves in calm years, occupied aisle seats or benches at the back, in galleries, or in the vestibule.

The Revolution replaced the Anglican Church, established since 1706, with the disestablished Episcopal Church. War-ravished rural churches were rebuilt and improved. In 1803 the Charlestonian Robert Mills produced designs for a church (unbuilt) that provided “a brilliant look forward” to the classical American temple church. Inside the Episcopal churches equality was embraced as an ideal, but the continued selling of prominent pews belied it. Charleston’s third and largest major church, Saint Luke and Saint Paul, begun in 1811 as a quotation of St. Michaels, was built to stand out in size and finish among the now more visible dissenters’ churches that quoted Episcopal churches, finally reasserting the former role of the Anglican Church. By 1820 the Episcopal Church was visibly “a thriving institution.”

Louis Nelson, chairman of the Department of Architectural History at the University of Virginia, pulls off an impressive alchemical act of transforming vast and detailed information into an account of how buildings responded to the needs and desires of those who built and used them.

Carroll William Westfall is the Frank Montana Professor at the University of Notre Dame’s School of Architecture. He has written extensively on the history of the city and architecture. Email: Westfall.2@nd.edu.
For those who have borne witness to the architectural and liturgical vandalism that has occurred over the last half century, there will be comfort in this groundbreaking work. It is a testament to a turning of the tide, a counter-revolution in liturgical and architectural thought, which has been held captive and scorned at by a "spirit of reform" that is foreign to both Catholic theology and pious customs for the last two millennia. Modernism, both liturgical and architectural (as well as in all the allied arts), has roots dating back to the nineteenth century. Influenced by "Enlightenment" thinking, liturgical and architectural modernisms formed a natural partnership that rendered ontology subservient to epistemology and consequently provided the framework for a worldview counter to Catholic social teachings, as acknowledged in the writings of the holy pontiffs throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. The architectural destruction wrought upon the faithful since Vatican Council II was documented powerfully in Michael Rose's Ugly as Sin, but Denis McNamara has gone a step farther, establishing a connection between that destruction and a "theology" that has rendered the sacred liturgy and its architectural settings inadequate for expressing the dogmas of proper Catholic worship as confirmed by the writings of Pope Benedict XVI, both as cardinal and pope.

This work is especially significant as it reconnects both the philosophical and theological principles underpinning both liturgical architecture and the liturgy. The book is based on a refreshingly Thomistic pattern, clear in its distinctions and completely accessible to the average reader. One is guided through a discourse regarding ontological categories and laying out the basis and final goal of any artistic endeavor, that is, truth, goodness, and beauty. The discussion on beauty should be a prerequisite for anyone even remotely interested in the arts. Understanding the theological implications of beauty is crucial in any discussion regarding the appropriateness of liturgical architecture, as beauty is the manifestation of the "splendor of truth": one has to know what a thing is in its deepest sense to know how it should be made. Beautiful things are formative as they move the will toward the good, and this can also be described as an act of love. Simply said, things should look like what they are. This is a straightforward concept, but one that unfortunately escapes many practicing architects and liturgical consultants today.

Another noteworthy contribution of this book is the chapter dealing with the scriptural foundations of the Temple as the typological precursor of the Church and the image of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Studying and acknowledging the Temple as a model for our churches presents an opportunity to recapture our understanding of sacrifice. McNamara explains in detail the Temple theology and its architectural forms and traces the roots of Catholic theology back to the Temple of Jerusalem. The symbolism of the Temple as the Gate of Heaven and the Temple ritual as a precursor to the Catholic liturgy is one of the most profound concepts of liturgical architecture, but one that has been lost to modern Catholics. Studying these Biblical typologies assists in our understanding of the very essence of the Mass. In turn, it is the Mass that unveils the mystery of the Temple and the theology of liturgical architecture.

McNamara continues his analysis by illustrating the principles behind classical and Temple architecture and explaining why the classical language is still appropriate for contemporary liturgical architecture. The chapters on ornament, decoration, and iconography are particularly insightful and follow the Western architectural traditions as understood through the writings of Vitruvius until the present day. By using patterns in nature established by its Creator, these elements are absolutely necessary, not mere whimsical additions, in revealing and understanding a building’s purpose as well as its structural clarity.

Every architectural choice is the result of a theological premise, hence all architectural arguments are ultimately theological. If we view church architecture as the built form of theology, then the architectural forms (as are the rubrical forms in the rites of worship) ought to be used as didactic and functional mediums to communicate the realities of the liturgy. One may infer that the clearer the rite of worship, the clearer the liturgy, thus rendering a further clarity to a certain theology or system of belief. Therefore, in Catholic worship, liturgical art and architecture must be subordinate to the proper understanding of the liturgy in order to reveal the divine nature of the Mass. A church’s legibility also depends upon conventions acquired from an inherited architectural tradition. If the architect departs from those recognizable conventions he fails to convey the intended meaning of a structure. A building’s beauty is reduced if its external expression does not correspond with its ontological reality. Therefore, a church must look like a church, or at the very least possess the quality of “church-ness.” The discussion on the inappropriateness of domestic architecture as a paradigm for modern Church structures is clearly demonstrated through scriptural and historical references. It is a textbook defence against the “archeological enthusiasm” and “pastoral pragmatism” so often touted by liturgical consultants and those advocating the virtues of social justice while neglecting the...
dignity of worship that is due to our Creator. So by its very nature, liturgical architecture not only demands legibility but this legibility must be accompanied by architectural decorum that insists on church architecture possessing a higher dignity than that of secular buildings.

The arguments in favor of traditional architecture is not so much a set of architectural forms but a philosophy on the nature of things. It values that which is enduring and, through poetic allusion, represents what is "true." This poetry of structure strives for a "timeless" art, which ultimately occurs when noble, universal, and enduring ideas are finely rendered as witnessed by some of the great cathedrals of Europe throughout the Church’s history. The classical worldview is ultimately connected to a sacramental theology. It accepts and propagates the view that truth exists and is knowable through divine revelation and intellectual inquiry. Architectural forms, like language, are composed of recognizable conventions that not only promote a culture’s artistic traditions but a community’s collective memory. Classical architecture, as an art, is a bearer of that continuity, offering a clear structure that conveys meaning. It is opposed to the modernist definition of art, where absolute artistic license is sacrosanct and where novelty and creativity reign supreme. It seems the artist, having departed far beyond recognizable artistic conventions, has risked becoming unable to convey meaning to his audience. It is this ambiguity, this chaos, that is diametrically opposed to a God who so ordered the cosmos in “number, measure, and weight.” The ordering of things with “wholeness, harmony, and clarity” is the hallmark of creation, which echoes the divine will. Classical architecture has developed an articulate and sophisticated language through the use of recognizable forms acquiring a level of legibility that impresses knowledge of itself on the mind of the perceiver. We see this ordering of things in classical buildings as the forces of nature are placed in balance (i.e., heavy things hold up lighter things). These conventional forms also have the benefit of communicating and clarifying hierarchical relationships, which would otherwise be invisible, within a culture’s political system and between buildings themselves, representing the importance and purpose of the institutions they house. This simply cannot be reinvented or replaced by fiat.

Although some readers may not share McNamara’s enthusiasm for the necessity of reform, his acknowledgment of the disastrous outcomes of the last forty years are uncontestable. There may be some legitimate points of dispute on his historical assessment of the Liturgical Movement and what constitutes a true liturgical reform as one seeks to identify the true “spirit” within the texts of the Vatican II. But these discussions are fruitful, for they are in line with the Holy Father’s request for honest inquiry and further reflection on the “reforms” implemented since the council. Liturgies are not fabricated but grow from the heart of the Church through millennia of organic growth and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our attitude should not be to approach the liturgy with a “spirit of rupture” or a “spirit of reform” but with a “spirit of paradox,” the handing-on of tradition. The Holy Father asks us not to fall into the error of “archeological enthusiasm” or “pastoral pragmatism” but once again to understand and recapture the principles that underlie the Church’s liturgical and artistic traditions, principles that have inspired the faithful in living out the Gospel throughout the Church’s two-thousand-year history.

The value of Dr. McNamara’s scholarly yet accessible work resides in its application of architectural principles in light of the proper understanding of the mysteries of the Catholic liturgy. He is not trying to invent new concepts or a new philosophy with regards to liturgy or traditional architecture but rather reestablish the proper framework of what was once common knowledge or a common sensibility toward the sacred. He is reintroducing a classical worldview lost to the fury of reform and has contributed to the immense task of defending a classical vision that seeks to recover the sense of the sacred, particularly within the liturgical act and the physical form in which it takes place. This work will be pivotal in the re-catechesis of the faithful (a "mystagogical catechesis" according to the Holy Father) who have completely lost their understanding of the liturgy and the dignified settings appropriate for its celebration. We must remember that communication is not just a matter of language but of signs and symbols that impart a deeper metaphysical reality. "Full, active and conscious participation” can occur on a deeper contemplative level, not just physical. Saint Pius X recognized this when he pleaded to the faithful that we not just “pray at Mass” but “pray the Mass.” What the faithful desperately require is guidance in the sacred mysteries "making [them] more sensitive to the language of signs" through a liturgy that takes them beyond their ordinary everyday experiences. Our churches should offer a foretaste of Heaven, as “bearers of divinity revealing the nature of things as they appear in a restored, perfected and redeemed world.” The Holy Father has confirmed that architecture, as well as music and all the allied arts, must play a seminal role in that catechesis, and McNamara’s Catholic Church Architecture and the Spirit of the Liturgy will undoubtedly accomplish this task. It will prove to be a valuable resource for professionals, pastors, or building committees who are thinking of undertaking a restoration of a church to bring it in line with proper liturgical worship. This book ought to be required reading and should adorn the bookshelves of all those who are toiling in the vineyard, working toward "restoring all things in Christ." Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, pray for us!

Riccardo S. Vicenzino is an architect in New York City.

1 Temple and Liturgy, Margaret Barker, Lambeth Palace 2009.
2 The Organic Development of the Liturgy, Alcuin Reid, O.S.B., Foreword by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, 11
3 Sacramentum Caritatis, 64
4 The Spirit of the Liturgy, by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, 209
5 Sacramentum Caritatis, 64
6 Ibid.
Unrestrained Innovation


Reviewed by Thomas D. Stroka

Unlike any other building, a church is “an accessible public space amid an increasingly, and occasionally frighteningly commercial and privatized world.” Edwin Heathcote and Laura Moffatt highlight the role of church architecture in the modern world in Contemporary Church Architecture, which follows ten years after Heathcote and Iona Spens published Church Builders. In the new book, the authors document recent advances in church architecture, first with a historical narrative of progressive churches of the twentieth century and then a compilation of twenty-eight contemporary projects.

Heathcote and Moffatt’s chronological history of church architecture assumes an evolution from the “historicism” of the nineteenth century to the seamless, industrial architecture of the modern age. The authors adequately cover projects throughout Europe, aided by drawings and small black and white photos of the more momentous projects. Each innovation is praised as a positive advancement of the building tradition, and the authors perpetuate the call for every church commission to be “of its time.” Instead of addressing the purpose of the church in the community, the authors fuse each architect’s work with broader political and cultural movements. For example, Josef Plecník’s work in Vienna and Slovenia is considered a felicitous response to the nationalist period in which he was engulfed, while modernist projects in Britain are derided because they lack innovation and too closely imitate the works of Oscar Niemeyer and Le Corbusier. In the text, the authors exalt the role of the architect rather than the patron and praise the church buildings most expressive of their time rather than those that are the most noble houses of God.

Contemporary Church Architecture follows the work of the Expressionists in Germany during the 1920s, including architects Otto Bartning and Dominikus Böhm. Böhm conceived of a perfectly circular church, the first modern Catholic church “unrestrained by the rectangular plan.” The authors give the project specific praise for its innovation for innovation’s sake. The Liturgical Movement in Belgium and Germany and its implication in sacred architecture is mentioned, but the text does not include an in-depth exploration of the meaning of architecture for Christian worship. For example, architect Rudolf Schwarz’s desolate church designs were generated by the liturgy in a so-called “Sacred Objectivity” that responds to the demands of the rites.

The contemporary church projects exhibited in the book are mostly small chapels, but they vary in their materiality and use of glazing. Some of the chapels simply consist of poured concrete walls and ceilings. Many of the projects, including a chapel for the Chancery of the Archdiocese of Berlin, bear no Christian symbols on the exterior or interior. In every project exhibited in the book, there are no hierarchical distinctions between the church buildings and their neighbors in the city. Regarding the interiors, many of the chapels fail to properly distinguish the sanctuary from the body of the church, often forming one space without a clear focal point for distracted worshipers. Other projects featured are disorienting in their structural logic and seem to disregard the community they are meant to serve. The authors suggest that the minimalist aesthetic commonly found in contemporary churches is rooted in the Cistercian tradition, but also admit that a global cultural exchange has introduced the sparsity of the Zen tradition into Christian architecture.

Heathcote and Moffatt allude to the uncertain future of church building in a radically secularized world and are realistic in their assessment of the drop in church attendance and its implication for the number of contemporary projects. The text can be humorous at times, especially in its criticism of architectural clichés: “architects approaching church design become obsessed with light. Light is controversial, unlike say art or even form ... it appeals to atheists as much, if not more than to Christians.” Despite the authors’ argument that churches are an important bastion of the public realm, Heathcote and Moffatt fail to include contemporary church buildings that incorporate the rich Christian tradition of art and architecture. They fail to convey that a noble and transcendent place for worship should be ordered and enriched by the timeless forms and symbols of sacred architecture. As a whole, the photographic documentation in the book is generous. Small black-and-white images and drawings accompany the historical essays in the first seventy pages, while full-page color photographs and line drawings illustrate the contemporary projects in the latter half of the book.

Christ Church, Donau City, Vienna, by Heinz Tesar, 2000.

Harajyuku Church, Tokyo, by Ciel Rouge Création, 2005.

Thomas D. Stroka is an architectural designer in Indiana.
This is a richly researched and beautifully produced book, welcome among the studies on Beauvais. Stephen Murray’s Beauvais Cathedral: Architecture of Transcendence (1989) gave us a close architectural analysis. Meredith Lillich’s work profiled stained glass of this period in a broad way. In The Armor of Light: Stained Glass in Western France 1250-1325 (1993), she noted many of the trends at Beauvais, especially the mingling of uncolored glass (grisaille) and color. Cothren’s book expands on these studies.

The author examines four successive campaigns: first the three windows of the axial chapel, second, the original glazing of the choir, third the glazing of the upper windows after the collapse of the vaults in 1284, and finally restorations and new windows in the 1340s. It is frustrating that he presents little speculation on what might have been in the other chapels, a total of sixteen windows. Might it have been grisaille, similar to the axial chapel of Auxerre? Precedents are found at Saint-Germain-des-Prés, roughly contemporary with Beauvais. The more complex the architecture, apparently, the more intense the impulse to bring in greater light with uncolored glass.


Reviewed by Virginia C. Raguin
In America’s First Cathedral, Mary-Cabrini Durkin presents a beautifully illustrated history of the Baltimore diocese’s cathedral from Latrobe’s original designs through its rise as a national symbol of American Catholicism, culminating in years of restoration that have only recently been completed.

The first half of America’s First Cathedral places the cathedral in its historical context, providing a succinct survey of the primary figures involved in its creation, moving from Latrobe and Archbishop John Carroll through James Cardinal Gibbons and Blessed Teresa of Calcutta. Durkin admirably interweaves the architectural history—including marvelous detail about the construction process—with the histories of the men who played such a profound role in the building and development of the cathedral. As an architectural touchstone for the changing population of American Catholicism, the history of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore, MD, illuminates the history of the Catholic Church in America over the past two hundred years. Its historic associations include acting as the site of the Second Provincial Council to establish boundaries for the new and fluid dioceses of the United States and its archbishop, James Cardinal Gibbons, playing an instrumental role in the election of Saint Pius X to the chair of St. Peter. Illustrating the church’s physical and spiritual dimensions, Durkin quotes George Weigel:

“The living stones of this building—the stones which make up its luminous fabric, and the “living stones” that are the countless lives transformed here by God’s grace—are a great ... expression, in a cathedral church, of America’s noblest aspiration: to be a people who freely choose what is true and good and beautiful; to be a people who bind themselves to the true, the good, and the beautiful in acts of worship.”

Durkin explains the progression of these efforts to restore Latrobe’s original design, including how the preservation architect uncovered on the drum surface original pieces of artwork depicting the four evangelists, covered by a previous renovation.

Through detailed photographs of the undercroft chapel, the exterior and the dome restoration, this section provides clear insight into the process by which the architects and preservationists worked to uncover the original intent of Latrobe’s design. Ultimately, the images of the basilica interior with its before and after images, its delicate coloring and light-filled rotunda, rightfully steal the show in this book, a valuable tribute to the first home of American Catholicism.

Philip Nielsen is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame School of Architecture. He has written on aesthetics for various journals, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute and Ignatius Press.

1 As quoted in America’s First Cathedral, p.44
3 As quoted in America’s First Cathedral, p.86
Beverley Minster, one of England's greatest churches, is the creation of craftsmen and women over more than seven centuries. Who were they? How did they work? How was the Minster built and maintained? Analysis of tell-tale marks on wood and stone and of written sources is beginning to provide the answers. This book, which will be of interest to all those interested in Beverley Minster and in how great churches were built, explains what has been discovered so far. It reveals different kinds of evidence — masons' marks, carpenters' marks and documents — that tell the story of the church's construction and the background of its builders. The book provides a new interpretation of the way in which the 14th century nave was built, explains how the Minster was maintained after the Reformation and daringly rescued from collapse in the eighteenth century, and how it has been restored and maintained ever since.


The design of sacred spaces presents architects with a particular challenge. In few other design tasks is the need to achieve the right balance between function and atmosphere of such importance: which ritual requirements have to be incorporated, which pragmatic needs have to be met for a service? Which specific concerns and traditions of a particular religion must be considered? Which shapes of plan, what type of volume and which lighting and acoustic concepts contribute to the sacred atmosphere of a space? The publication provides a survey of conceptual principles of designing sacred buildings for Christianity, Judaism and Islam. It explains technical and planning guidelines for this building type. Some seventy case studies from Europe, America and Asia—churches, synagogues, mosques and crematoria—spanning the last four decades give answers to this most singular design task.
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.


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 Saint John the Divine, New York. Of equal impact were his exhibition designs, and his influential teaching at the Royal College of Art, at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, and at the Vittoria Street School for Silversmiths and Jewellers in Birmingham.


Father Leo Larrivee, pastor of Our Lady of the Angels Parish at Charles-
town, Maryland, writes the history of the chapel built in 1913 as part of the new Saint Charles Seminary. Adorned with intricate mosaics, Carrara marble, and breathtaking stained-glass windows, the chapel is rich in detail and Christian artwork. Our Lady of the Angels has served as both sanctuary and inspiration to the seminarians of Saint Charles College, the thousands of residents of Charlestown, and the visitors who come to experience the beauty of the chapel firsthand. The newly published book consists mostly of color photographs of the architecture, stained glass and artwork that fills the stunning chapel.


This book explores the cultural significance of contemporary architect Tadao Ando’s works in reference to the Buddhist idea of nothingness, expounded by Kitaro Nishida, the father of the Kyoto Philosophical School. The interview text with Ando elucidates his conception and embodiment of sacred space as it pertains to nothingness, the relationship between his residential architecture and Christian architecture, and his design approach.
This new facsimile edition of the Portfolio of the 13th-century Picard artist Villard de Honnecourt is the first ever to be published in color. The thirty-three leaves are reproduced at actual size from high-quality color transparencies to ensure the best possible color reproduction of the drawings. One can now see variations in inks and quill strokes, traces of preliminary drawings, and corrections made by the artist. The author analyses the tools and inks used, Villard’s drawing technique and style, and evaluates Villard as an artist-draftsman. The body of the book is devoted to detailed analyses of the leaves, one by one, and their drawings and inscriptions. These analyses are of interest to those concerned with medieval technology and theology as well as to those interested in medieval art and architecture. Also included is a new biography of Villard that separates obvious fiction from possible fact. An extensive bibliography of Villard studies and a glossary of Villard’s technical and artistic terms complete this important new study.

David Stancliffe goes beyond the technical possibilities and liturgical functions to explore how, in the words of the eighth-century bishop Germanus, even the humblest chapel was a bit of ‘heaven on earth.’ Beginning with a discussion of sacred space and the influence of environment on human experience, he traces the evolution of church architecture from biblical times to the present day, covering early Roman house churches, through the development of the Eastern church, to the architectural shifts of the Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and beyond. Later chapters focus on the radical changes that resulted from the Reformation and the invention of printing, and explore the journey to contemporary understandings of church architecture. Each chapter addresses not only the shift in building styles but also the historical, theological and liturgical contexts that frame it. Stancliffe draws on his expertise in the fields of architecture, liturgy and worship and on his extensive travels to churches around the world to bring a unique perspective to this fascinating subject.

The history of the Catholic Church in St. Louis is dominated by strong personalities and architectural grandeur. In Catholic St. Louis, rich text and photography capture the people and places that have defined Catholicism in a historic, and historically Catholic, city. Renowned historian William Barnaby Faherty, S.J., delivers concise historical sketches of the integral people and the landmark houses of worship; and photographer Mark Scott Abeln captures nearly forty different area churches in majestic fashion. From the eighteenth century Holy Family Catholic Church in Cahokia to the overwhelming Cathedral Basilica to the modern St. Anselm in Creve Coeur, St. Louis’s churches are significant, not to mention spectacular. This book truly presents Catholic St. Louis in all its splendor.
Donations of $50 or more to SACRED ARCHITECTURE will receive the new monograph on Benjamin Latrobe’s Baltimore Cathedral, America’s First Cathedral.

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