It is well known that the conventional wisdom on building churches is in disrepute. Even the unwashed masses are revolting against the dictates and iconoclasm of the past fifty years. Yet, there is still some bathwater that needs to be emptied. Not only did the modernist project break with two thousand years of sacred architecture, it also rejected the traditional city amongst which the temple stood a witness. The resulting churches turn their back on the street or sit like a doctor’s office in the middle of a sea of asphalt. One of the most insidious strictures of the conventional wisdom mandates that any new church needs twenty acres. This twenty acre rule reminds me of the sixty-five foot restriction in the middle of a sea of asphalt. One of the most insidious strictures of the conventional wisdom mandates that any new church needs twenty acres. This twenty acre rule reminds me of the sixty-five foot rule that necessitates building theatre churches according to some liturgists. Where to find twenty acres at an economical price? Why, the cornfield, of course. The reasons given for the necessity of a large tract of land are playing fields, convenient parking, and future growth. Yet these factors should not be seen as the primary goals in building a house of God, but should be balanced with the rich history of churches built in the midst of our towns and cities.

To put the twenty acre rule into context, consider that a traditional parish church in a small town with 800 seats, a grade-school, a playground, a rectory, and on and off street parking typically takes up three to six acres. Surprisingly, one of the most well known and largest of American cathedrals, Saint Patrick’s, sits on a block in Manhattan of only two acres. The reality is that twenty acres is the equivalent of a small college campus – for instance, “God Quad” at Notre Dame includes the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, the Golden Dome, and seven other buildings. In fact, the greatest church in all of Christendom, Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome, sits on only nine acres while its piazza takes up an additional nine acres. Twenty acres are huge, but what are the reasons for not building in the cornfield?

First, by placing the church out in the cornfield the parish gives up its role in the public square. In historic cities and towns, a church is a beacon of hope and a place of conversion. In locating outside of town the church inadvertently becomes a privatized institution like a country club. This is the architectural equivalent of hiding its light under a bushel. The parish also gives up its physical role as haven in a neighborhood. The awareness of the needy and the ability to serve the poor and the unchurched on a daily basis dissipates in proportion to the distance from the center of town. Alternatively, the presence of a church improves the safety and the harmony of its neighborhood.

Second, if an existing parish decides to move out of town it abandons holy ground. Our churches are the sacred places in which generations of the faithful have been baptized, married, and buried. This schism between past and present is often accompanied by a physical splitting up of the parish. For instance, often times the school remains in the village while worship moves to the fringe. This is particularly disruptive to the interaction between church and school that makes for a vibrant parish. After all, the school may not move out to the new land for decades.

Third, building out in a cornfield normally costs more than building in town. Start with the cost of the land. Then add the cost of providing water, sewer, storm-water retention, streets, and parking. The additional expense of building on virgin farmland can quickly cost as much as a million dollars (plus the cost of the land) more than building in town where utilities and drainage already exist—not to mention the sustainability issues inherent in paving local agriculture.

So, if you have an existing parish and the experts tell you that you need to buy a cornfield, buck the conventional wisdom and consider the benefits – communal, spiritual, and monetary – of staying in town. Alternatively, if you are founding a new parish, consider being part of a village, even locating in a new urbanist community (which often have favorable land and parking costs), or at least try to create a spiritual place within suburbia by being integrated with the community. More than parking and playing fields, your parish should be a light to the nations and a city on a hill.

Duncan Stroik
October 2010

Cover: Interior of Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary, Denton, Nebraska. Photo by Thomas D. Stroka

DEUS FUNDAVIT CIVITATEM IN AETERNUM

“Dear friends, today’s feast celebrates a mystery that is always relevant: God’s desire to build a spiritual temple in the world, a community that worships him in spirit and truth. But this observance also reminds us of the importance of the material buildings in which the community gathers to celebrate the praises of God. Every community therefore has the duty to take special care of its own sacred buildings, which are a precious religious and historical patrimony. For this we call upon the intercession of Mary Most Holy, that she help us to become, like her, the ‘house of God,’ living temple of his love.”

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Sacred Architecture News

On July 14, for one night, four tapestries designed by Raphael in 1519 returned to their original home in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel—a sight not seen since 1983, the 500th anniversary of Raphael's birth. These tapestries from the Vatican Museums were also displayed at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London alongside the original drawings by Raphael. The exhibit opened on September 8 during Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Great Britain to celebrate the beatification of John Henry Cardinal Newman, and closed October 17. Commissioned by Pope Leo X Medici in 1515, Raphael illustrated the lives of Saints Peter and Paul on paper as large as the finished product—eleven by seventeen feet—and Peter van Aelst, the greatest weaver of the age, executed the tapestries in Belgium.

Mary Our Queen Parish of Norcross, GA, plans to buy Saint Gerard’s of Buffalo, NY. The plan has been endorsed by the Catholic archdiocese of Atlanta, the diocese of Buffalo and Saint Gerard’s former parishioners. According to the proposed scheme, the church will be taken apart, stone by stone, cataloged, trucked south, and rebuilt. The majority of Saint Gerard’s will be reused: the exterior limestone, oak pews, stained glass, stations of the cross, confessionals, and the granite columns. The new church will look almost exactly like Saint Gerard’s but have a steel skeleton, a new foundation, floor, roof, HVAC systems, and a bigger choir loft. The plaster ceiling, including a beautiful Coronation of Mary fresco, will be destroyed in the demolition. The project will take two years once it begins. The cost is estimated at $15 million, including a payment to the diocese. The parish has $3 million and plans to raise and borrow the rest.

Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque Roman Catholic Parish celebrated the Rite of Dedication of their new church in Harrisburg, PA designed by SGS Architects. The church seats 844. The $5.2 million dollar “Romanesque” style church sits on almost twenty acres of land. Total project cost, including land, is approximately $7.1 million.

Madrid Youth Day will feature the 500 year old, nine feet tall, Arfe Monstrance, designed by Enrique de Arfe from 1517-1524. The gold and silver covered monstrance is used annually in the Corpus Christi procession through the streets of Toledo. Francisco Portela, professor of art history at Madrid’s Complutense University, describes it as “the best example of Spanish silversmith craft of all times.” The monstrance will be used in Eucharistic adoration during the World Youth Day vigil on Saturday night, Aug. 20, 2011. The Youth Day organizers hope that this time of Eucharistic adoration will “allow multitudes of young people to contemplate and to admire a unique work of art in the world, used according to the purpose of its creators, and thus to rediscover the value of art in the liturgy.”

Holy Trinity Catholic Church of Westminster, CO completed an addition designed by Integration Design Group.
The medieval glaziers who created gold-painted stained glass windows inadvertently developed a solar-powered nanotech air-purification system. According to Dr. Zhu Huai Yong of the Queensland University of Technology in Australia, the gold paint employed in Gothic stained glass windows purified the air when heated by sunlight. “For centuries people appreciated only the beautiful works of art, and long life of the colors, but little did they realize that these works of art are also, in modern language, photocatalytic air purifier with nanostructured gold catalyst,” said Zhu in a statement. Zhu said that tiny gold particles found in medieval gold paint react with sunlight to destroy air-borne pollutants like volatile organic chemicals/compounds (VOCs).

Gianni Alemanno, the mayor of Rome announced plans to build fifty-one new Catholic parishes to serve the suburbs of the city. These parishes, such as Saint Mary Queen of Peace in the suburb Tor Vergata, have been waiting almost eight years to find a permanent home. Now its parishioners will finally have one. These churches would “not only be centers of worship, but also social and cultural centers for the city’s suburbs.” As Mayor Alemanno said, “We are well aware that parishes are often places of meeting and identity in city neighborhoods.” Alemanno has been one of modern Rome’s most pro-Church mayors. A reformed fascist, he has been consistent in his support for the Church, not only in practical matters but also in her battles with radical secularism.

On July 5, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI inaugurated the Saint Joseph Fountain, the 100th fountain in the Vatican gardens. In his speech he said that, “it is a motive of great joy to me to inaugurate this fountain in the Vatican Gardens, in a natural context of singular beauty. It is a work that is going to enhance the artistic patrimony of this enchanting green space of Vatican City, rich in historic-artistic testimonies of various periods.” The fountain exhibits six bronze panels that display important moments in the life of St. Joseph.

Pope Benedict XVI recently inaugurated the 100th fountain in the Vatican Gardens.

Sacred Architecture Issue 18 2010
The architect who designed Oakland’s infamously modernistic $190 million Christ the Light Cathedral has been selected to come up with plans for a cathedral complex in Santa Ana, as the Diocese of Orange hired Craig W. Hartman, FAIA, of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP (SOM) as lead designer for the initial phase of this project.

Hartman designed the Oakland cathedral that was consecrated in 2008. The Oakland cathedral breaks with the tradition of Catholic sacred architecture; a break with tradition appears to be what Bishop Brown hopes for in the hiring of Hartman. The diocesan press release says that the bishop has: “no interest in copying the past and will make every effort to develop a structure that respects the environment as much as it will its people.”

In May, Bishop Brown reportedly asked the Vatican to allow him to serve five years beyond the mandatory canonical retirement age of seventy-five. Bishop Brown turns seventy-five on Nov. 11, 2011, but reportedly wants to stay on in order to see the cathedral complex completed.

Normally it can take as many as thirty years and a signature from the president to get a new church built in Egypt. That’s why Coptic Catholics are happy to be benefiting from a new development policy that will bring them a church more quickly. “It will be very easy for this church to be built because the government follows the line that in every new urban area there should be a church,” explained Bishop Antonios Aziz Mina of Guizeh.

On June 19, 2010 the great English recusant Chapel of All Saints of Wardour Castle opened for the day. The exhibition included the display of historic vestments and a concert of the eighteenth century organ.

Wardour Castle’s recusant chapel

Egypt’s antiquities chief announced the completion of an almost decade-long, $14.5 million restoration of the world’s oldest Christian monastery—Saint Anthony’s Monastery at the foot of the desert mountains near Egypt’s Red Sea coast. Touting it as a sign of Christian-Muslim coexistence, the director made the announcement regarding the fifth century monastery a month after Egypt’s worst incident of anti-Christian violence in over a decade, when a bloody shooting at a church on Christmas Eve killed seven people.

The responsibilities of a bishop regarding the opening or closing of a parish are covered in Canon 515, which was cited in a recent series of decrees issued by a panel of the Supreme Court of the Apostolic Signature, the church’s highest court, in deciding the appeals of 10 closed parishes in the Archdiocese of Boston. The Court’s ad hoc Panel is made up five cardinals and archbishops serving on the bench. This recent ruling decided that Cardinal O’Malley of Boston followed correct procedure and that in the future a bishop need only to consult the presbyteral council before he acts.

Restoration was recently completed on the Monastery of Saint Anthony, Egypt, the world’s oldest Christian monastery.
On April 30 through May 1 the University of Notre Dame’s and The Catholic University of America’s Schools of Architecture cosponsored a Symposium on the Campus of CUA entitled, “A Living Presence: Extending and Transforming the Tradition of Catholic Sacred Architecture.” Justin Cardinal Rigali delivered the Keynote Address. The other principal speakers included: Duncan Stroik, Notre Dame School of Architecture, Craig Hartman, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, Denis McNamara, The Liturgical Institute, Leo Nestor, The Institute of Sacred Music and the CUA school of Music, Anthony Visco, Atelier for the Sacred Arts.

Debate centered on several recurring questions: Is there an appropriate architectural language for liturgy? Does the modernistic abstraction and limitation of art in churches focus or emaciate the liturgy? Can traditional church architecture adapt to modern liturgical needs and contemporary building practices? Are modern and post-modern architecture based on anti-Catholic world-views? These questions, as addressed in lectures and discussions, helped to highlight the fundamental differences between modernist and traditional sacred architecture.

The greenest building in the United States is a monastery, according to the U.S. Green Building Council. They recently awarded the Benedictine Women of Madison’s Holy Wisdom Monastery (no longer affiliated with the Catholic Church) a Platinum LEED rating with sixty-three out sixty-nine possible points—the most points of any certified building in the country; “almost 100 percent of the 60,000-square-foot old Benedictine House was also recycled or reused in the building process.” The sisters do carbon fasting for Lent, saying, “When the scripture writers described fasting, they never envisioned carbon fasting actions. In 2010, however, given our awareness of reducing our production of climate change pollution…

As Chile continues to rebuild after a Feb. 27 earthquake, tents have been sent to be used as chapels for the parishes that had been forced to hold services on the street. The 8.8-magnitude quake affected two million people in eight of Chile’s twenty-seven dioceses. Over 800 people were killed in the disaster and some 500,000 more were displaced. Aid to the Church in Need reported today that it is sending thirty-nine tent chapels to that region to house the church services that are still being held on the streets. Some 80 percent of the churches in the quake-stricken areas were devastated to the point of being unusable. The tents, which were designed for easy assembly, cover an area of over 1,990 square feet, with a capacity to seat one hundred.

The Parish of Saint Anne in Sherman TX, designed by Fisher and Heck of Dallas was recently completed. The church seats 750.

There is continued progress in the construction of the Abbey of New Clairvaux in Vina, CA as the masons are beginning the cross-vaulted stone ceiling of the chapter house this year.

Charleston’s Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist finally received a spire after a 103 years.

The Most Reverend Robert E. Guglielmone, Bishop of Charleston, blessed the new spire for the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist on March 8, 2010. The present Cathedral was completed in 1907, but without a spire for lack of funds. The spire and gilded cross bring the height of St. John’s to 167 feet.

Tent chapels are being employed in Chile after the earthquake destroyed many churches.
It is a perilous thing to ask the saints for design advice. The apostle Thomas earned his patronage of the architectural profession by giving away most of his construction budget to the poor and was nearly martyred for his trouble. And while legend says the former doubter was hired by the Indian king Gundoferus on account of his knowledge of ornate Roman classicism, St. Bernard, that great micro-manager of monasteries, had very little time for the fancies of Romanesque ornamentation, railing against its distractingly frivolous capitals and grotesques. Ultimately, each church building is not about the earthly taste of its titular but a reflection of the glorious entirety of the heavenly Jerusalem. Yet the gulf between St. Pio of Pietrelcina, thaumaturge, stigmatist, and occasional flying friar, and the new shrine recently raised over his tomb by his countryman, world-famous Italian architect Renzo Piano, is a chasm difficult to cross, even by a saint occasionally known to levitate.

Piano describes the new pilgrimage church in Padre Pio’s Puglian hometown of San Giovanni Rotondo as a “portrait” of the saint. His conception of the saint’s simplicity led him to reject the traditional basilican model of church-planning as smacking too much of “power” and “grandiloquence,” opting for a centralized plan executed in simple wood and local stone. Architectural critic Edwin Heathcote, in a glowing Financial Times article on the new building, describes the shrine’s interior as an “embracing shell like a slightly squashed armadillo.”

Until recently, Padre Pio’s mortal remains rested in the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, a large but plain basilican-style church in a lightly-modernized Romanesque style, sparingly ornamented with touches of marble and mosaic. This more conventional structure was built during the saint’s lifetime to accommodate pilgrims visiting the famous wonderworker.

The Padre Pio Pilgrimage Shrine seats 8,000, with room for 30,000 standing on the parvis outside. It has been described as the second-largest in the world after St. Peter’s. Dedicated in 2004 after more than a decade of planning and with a budget of $51 million, the shrine returned to the media spotlight after Pope Benedict XVI officially opened the church’s crypt, a golden-walled underground chamber housing the saint’s silver sarcophagus. The Architectural Record describes the shrine’s interior as an “embracing shell like a slightly squashed armadillo.”

The entrance of the shrine.
as “an attempt to rationalise and dignify this public urge to venerate a remarkable individual.” While referring primarily to the medieval zoo of souvenir-hawkers and pilgrim hotels that now rings San Giovanni Rotondo, journalistic coverage hints at a dissonance at the heart of the project. Most commentators seem more interested in discussing the building’s relationship with the landscape than its status as a religious shrine. Piano has remarked, “I have tried to arrange the vast spaces and surfaces in such a way that the gaze of visitors can be lost between the sky, the sea and the earth.”

Piano expresses his own religious opinions less dramatically than his sweeping design proclivities. In an interview with the Catholic news service Zenit, he describes himself as a “Catholic by formation and conviction,” though he adds, somewhat cryptically, “not bigoted.” Piano sought to enter deeply into Padre Pio’s own religious experience. “I […] became a bit of a Capuchin,” he comments, also studying the history of liturgy and religion in the process. Piano’s tutor in the ways of liturgy was Crispino Valenziano, a professor of liturgical anthropology and spirituality at the St. Anselm Pontifical Liturgical Institute in Rome, and sometime deputy of former papal master of ceremonies Piero Marini.

The building reflects the low, scrubby, rolling terrain all around it, but it does not appear to be nestled in the landscape so much as lie flaccidly upon it. Rather than primitively edenic, the effect is ramshackle and faintly industrial. The shrine’s most obvious feature is its broad, nearly flat roof, an irregular and jagged armor of immense pre-patinated copper plates. Beneath the low, bowed roofline, the structure seems not so much built as assembled, a sagging bricolage of precariously-balanced stone, wood, glass, metal, and stucco. The self-conscious geometric twists feel, at some level, far more ostentatious and alien than the triumphalist ornaments Piano took great pains to avoid. Indeed, lacking the sense of scale brought by ornament and detail, the long, low structure has a lumpen, looming quality.

There are few obvious symbols, save a very large freestanding cross placed off to one side of the church interior. The main entrance consists of two squat bronze doors covered with spare, pseudo-primitive modernistic sculpture set into a façade of green metal slats. The low campanile, built into one of the piazza’s retaining walls, is handsome in a stripped-classical way, although ultimately peripheral to the overall design.

The interior is a greatly-enlarged variation on the same semi-circular plan that has become ubiquitous in suburban parishes ever-
where. Piano’s version is generated by a roughly spiral geometry reminiscent of a nautilus or snail shell. For a shrine dedicated to a priest who lived his vocation of *alter Christus* in the stimata, this departure from a cruciform plan is idiosyncratic in the least. The architect was deeply concerned that the enormous interior retain a focus on the altar while creating within it the smallness and intimacy necessary for prayer and recollection. Piano’s solution was to divide the interior into a collection of smaller spaces, each like a separate church seating around 400, opening onto the altar at the nexus of the nautiloid curve, creating a sense of prayerful privacy in the midst of a low, open space. This is an interesting response to the contemporary trend towards ecclesial giganticism that has led to such buildings as the Los Angeles Cathedral and the new church at Fatima. While intriguing in the abstract, the reality of the plan presents serious physical and metaphysical difficulties. The building’s skeleton of twenty-one spoke-like stone arches radiates, in two roughly concentric rings, from a funnel-like central hub placed above the saint’s crypt-level tomb. The altar, set atop a lofty, if narrow, open sanctuary, stands directly in front of this nexus. Piano explains the arches were an attempt to create “the modern equivalent of a Gothic [sic] cathedral, but to make the arches fly within the space.”10 However, the effect is impersonal and uncomfortably vast, while between the arches it feels more than a little claustrophobic. The predominant note is earthbound, linked not with the upward movement of man towards God, or God towards man, but toward the unseen body of the holy man in the basement, who is treated more like Merlin than a Christian saint.

There is little ornament and less sacred art. A fabric screen depicting scenes from the Apocalypse by Robert Rauschenberg covers the interior of the front façade’s broad parabolic window. Faintly cartoonish, it is loosely traditional in its composition and adds a bit of welcome color to the interior, as does a gradated splash of faded blue on the vault over the altar.11 For all Piano’s conscientious pursuit of the Franciscan spirit, one is glad that Giotto did not respond to the same impulse at Assisi when St. Francis was still within the reach of living memory. Despite Piano’s concerns about Franciscan simplicity, his conception of humility might seem myopic to Padre Pio himself, who wore the simple robes of a Capuchin in daily life but at the altar obediently clothed himself in the colorful silk vestments of a priest of Jesus Christ. It is not a coincidence that the first notable act of St. Francis after his conversion was to restore a little church, San Damiano, to its former glory. Just as splendor does not automatically entail waste, conversely—as any architect knows—plainness can be surprisingly expensive and may suggest not humility but elite faddishness.

Reinforcing this impression, the small sanctuary platform is almost crushed by the low curve of the vault overhead. On the other hand, the altar cross by Arnaldo Pomodoro is certainly futuristic, a chunky block of metal hanging perilously over the altar and resembling a mass of burnished, half-melted machine parts. It also lacks the figure of Christ.

Nestled cleverly in one of the outer curves of the nautiloid, the Blessed Sacrament Chapel is one of the more intriguing and truly intimate portions of the interior. Unlike the centralized arrangement of the main church, it is oriented longitudinally on a trapezoidal plan. The chapel walls narrow subtly, moving the eye towards the tabernacle shrine, set atop a low octagonal plinth of three steps. The overall effect is minimalist, but the warmth and texture of the mottled beige walls breathe some life back into the space.

Piano commissioned the late Roy Lichtenstein—famous for the deliberately cartoonish painting entitled *Whaam!*
The tabernacle is an imposing and even startling object: a pillar of volcanic Mount Etna stone standing alone at the far end of the chapel beneath a round skylight high above. 3.5 meters in height, it rises smoothly from a square base to a faceted octagonal top. Two rows of silver plates representing Old Testament types of the Eucharist or incidents from the life of Christ flank the sides of the pillar to form a roughly cruciform shape, with the central door in the form of a silver pelican. When opened, the tabernacle doors reveal a pair of beautiful, faintly Asiatic representations of the ichthys sculpted into the interior. The reliefs, while exaggeratedly pseudo-archaic in some details, are for the most part well-executed and compare with some of the more interesting Art Deco work of the Liturgical Movement period. The use of Biblical parallelism and typology also adds an unexpected dose of sophistication to the sequence.

Yet the overall effect is strangely uncommunicative. The faceless black stela of the tabernacle hints at some powerful Presence within, but fails to reveal it. The shiny stone the color of death seems a peculiarly inapt color for a tabernacle. There are no other furnishings save the squat, geometric pews in light-colored wood. Unrelieved by the gleam of hammered silver presence lamps (or even a pop art Last Supper), it remains alien and even sinister. Admittedly, it is not without a sense of otherworldly power, but at best it is an altar to the Unknown God, incongruous with the Gospels’ revelation. As St. Paul once said, “Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you.”12

Passing from the upper church into the crypt—which holds, somewhat illogically, high-traffic areas like the shrine and the confessionals—one enters a shiny, glittery realm of recognizable iconography and haloed saints. Marko Ivan Rupnik, the Jesuit artist responsible for the Redemptoris Mater Chapel in the Vatican, contributed 2,000 square meters of mosaics showing eighteen scenes from the life of Christ, eighteen from the life of St. Francis and a final eighteen from Padre Pio’s life. The comprehensive quality and parallelism of such a cycle is worthy of much applause. Rupnik’s use of color is refreshing, with rich golds, reds, and intense chemical blues predominating. After the beige upper church, this wealth of gold, serpentine, jade, and rose quartz comes as a distinct relief.

The mosaics are not without their own shortcomings. The recent opening of the church’s lower level has unleashed an outcry in some quarters, with accusations that the lavishly decorated crypt is wasteful glitter.13 However, the real problem here lies not in the opulence of its materials—*Said Judas to Mary now what will you do/With your ointment so rich and so rare?*—but the content and shape of its ornamentation and iconography. One is reminded of the caviar-filled ice swan in *Brideshead Revisited*—the problem is not the caviar, but the shape.

While ultimately Byzantine in inspiration and straightforward in its use of traditional symbolism, Rupnik’s signature style lacks the sense of detail and scale necessary for such large compositions. The effect is somewhat superficial in its recollection of the traditions of the East, and the figures are too self-consciously abstracted. The mosaicist might have made a good miniaturist with his economical sense of form, but here everything looks like quick studies inflated to poster-size. And while the glitter is somewhat of a welcome change from above, the mass
of gold in this low, over-lit space, can seem oppressively unvarying.

The saint’s tomb itself is precious in its materials yet rather unprepossessing in shape and setting. The tomb is scarcely above eye-level, more an elaborate item on display than an object of veneration. If the mosaics are excessive yet undeveloped, the tomb is opulent though underwhelming. Even on the saint’s sarcophagus—so often an opportunity for a complex web of personified virtues, patron saints, and scenes of Biblical parallelism—there is nothing but a pattern of abstract forms of a mildly Romanesque nature. And while Padre Pio’s body has been exposed to the faithful in the quite recent past, all images of the shrine have so far shown the sarcophagus closed. While some may find this decry the kitsch that fills the shops of San Giovanni Rotondo like the money-changers in the temple, or scoff at pilgrims who are more entranced by Padre Pio than Christ. Yet for all the desire to create a humble church for this people’s saint, this vast new shrine has been shaped less by folk piety than the by high-profile dictums of a design culture that is not entirely certain what to do with religion. At most the church can attempt a sort of fashionable plainness, not without a degree of appeal from some angles, but which is often more costly and momentarily modish than actual symbolic ornament, and which, being contemporary, will swiftly grow old.

This is not to say that, had it been deemed necessary to forgo the timeless route of the classical (or even the humility of the Romanesque), the architect could not have built a church in a simple but lofty manner. Freed from engineering gimmicks and fashionable nature-worship, it could have been clothed in noble materials and enlivened with dignified, if monastically severe, iconography. Piano’s instincts, moderated by the formative humility of historic precedent, might have led to something truly new.

Even if Piano found a cruciform tomb too much for the cruciform saint of Puglia, he could have raised a rectilinear hypostyle hall, broad but majestic. A fine model could have been the cathedral at Cordova, one of the few fully horizontal buildings where stone arches soar. If it were necessary to keep it airy and transparent so the faith would soar, it seems a regrettable capitulation of historic precedent, might have led to something truly new.

12 Acts 17:23.

One of the more extraordinary miracles attributed to Padre Pio describes a squadron of Allied bombers sighting the mystic floating high in the air, accompanied, in one account, by the Virgin and St. Michael. The flyboys returned to base, muddled and dazed, unable to drop their payload on the town of San Giovanni Rotondo.16 Renzo Piano has said that he hopes the pilgrim’s gaze will be “lost between the sky, the sea and the earth.” In the shrine, it is perhaps Padre Pio’s very physical brand of holiness that is lost; the saint is too potent for an age that prefers its spirituality safely disembodied.


A 2001 article says 7,500. See also Heathcote, 9.


8 “Padre Pio’s Shrine as the Architect Sees It.”

9 Ibid.

10 Heathcote, 8.

11 Ibid, 8. Horowitz himself says it resembles a cartoon.

12 Acts 17:23.


14 Horowitz, 3.


16 There are several conflicting versions of this story, though Padre Pio biographer Bernard Ruffin thinks it likely there is a historical basis to it. See Padre Pio: The True Story (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1991), 253-324.

From our earliest beginnings as a country, we have always reserved the most important and prominent spaces for our civic buildings. The Laws of the Indies, as the first specific set of rules governing the settlement of a new town in the new world by Spanish colonists, decreed that three things must happen before any other: the identification of the highest and best location for the main plaza, the establishment of streets that were to radiate out from the plaza in ordinal directions, and the reservation of the first lots for the establishment of churches (specifically, the Catholic church). Numerous towns in the southeast and southwest United States were established according to these principles including Santa Fe and Albuquerque, NM, Fernandina, FL, and Tucson, AZ.

This high regard for the primacy of public spaces and civic buildings continued throughout much of the early years in American urban development. The New England town square was the Puritan’s form of Spanish plaza and was often flanked by a Protestant church. Cathedrals continued to be constructed in prime locations in views of the waterfronts to greet arriving visitors, or on hilltops so as to be seen by the entire village or city. In urban neighborhoods throughout the country, churches were constructed to serve the various ethnic immigrant populations that would settle in a particular area, becoming a spiritual, social, and through parochial schools—educational anchor. Together with parks or plazas, churches formed the essential public realm of many a neighborhood throughout the county.

The church’s slide from architectural preeminence in neighborhoods and in cities occurred over a long period. Rather than a single cause, it is more likely that a series of gradual shifts—primarily demographic and economic—slowly amassed to conspire against what was once the norm. These shifts impacted the construction of other public buildings as well.

The last consideration of the importance of the public realm came during the "City Beautiful" movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and the parallel "Garden City" movement occurring in Great Britain). Advocates sought to clean up many of the country’s larger cities through the imposition of beautiful landscapes and monuments. While important as a design philosophy, its moral and social goals lacked the spiritual dimension.

As a result, few churches were incorporated into plans, finally ceding their long-standing role as important neighborhood anchors to more humanist structures such as museums, libraries, and government buildings.

After the end of World War II, the explosion of the suburban development pattern and its focus on efficiency and privacy rang the final death knell. Public space and public buildings were no longer a component of development patterns and competed for land left over from private development. Because our suburbs, as the predominate development pattern across the United States (and exported worldwide) have sprawled in this low-density, auto-dependent landform, our civic facilities have been forced to build further away and bigger as a means to attract more students, parishioners, or congregants.

The overall decline in church attendance, coupled with the massive suburban migration that nearly emptied many urban neighborhoods, has left many sacred buildings today with declining or non-existent populations. Older urban areas like Buffalo, Detroit, Cleveland, and Saint Louis have seen urban churches closing down at an alarming rate. Historically Catholic Saint Louis maintains a list of 111 parishes closed in recent history, and Buffalo has closed 77 parish churches and schools since 2005.

Yet while churches are closing in some locations, they continue to grow in others. But unlike their urban, in-town counterparts, these campuses must accommodate exceptionally large facilities, classroom and office buildings, and occasionally a school. Perhaps, most important, these large sites must accommodate the fact that every single person that attends Mass will arrive by automobile, a fact that ensures that a large percentage of every capital dollar must be relegated to the construction of a parking lot rather than on the architecture of its buildings or the ministries that they provide.
New Urbanism and the Neighborhood Church

In October, 1993, approximately 170 designers and developers gathered in Alexandria, VA to discuss the travails of “the placelessness of the modern suburbs, the decline of central cities, the growing separation in communities by race and income, the challenges of raising children in an economy that requires two incomes for every family, and the environmental damage brought on by development that requires us to depend on the automobile for all daily activities.”

Under the leadership of Peter Calthorpe, Andres Duany, Elizabeth Moule, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Stefanos Polyzoides, and Daniel Solomon—all architects—the Congress for the New Urbanism was formed and has quickly risen to the preeminent organization for addressing the “confluence of community, economics, and environment in our cities.”

At its heart, New Urbanism is a movement about reclaiming the public realm—our streets, our parks, and our public buildings—and ordering the remainder of the land to complement these critical amenities. However, it is important to note that New Urbanism recognizes “that physical solutions by themselves will not solve social and economic problems, but neither can economic vitality, community stability, and environmental health be sustained without a coherent and supportive framework.”

New urbanists have long asserted the need to reserve prominent locations within new neighborhoods for the erection of various civic buildings—town halls, fire stations, school, museums, and churches. The challenge until now has been for many to figure out a means by which the vertical infrastructure of the civic building can once again be integrated into the neighborhood after more than a half-century of moving away from it. Will congregations sacrifice the expansive greenfield campus with generous parking lots for a more urban location? And perhaps more importantly, can the re-insertion of the neighborhood church be more than a programmatic alternative to the community clubhouse and truly fulfill the spiritual needs of the neighborhood’s residents?

If You Build It, Will They Come?

Seaside, FL, the traditional neighborhood often considered the epicenter for the New Urbanist movement, reserved a location for a chapel in its earliest plans. While the neighborhood grew up around this site since 1981, it wasn’t until October 20, 2001 that the Seaside Interfaith Chapel was dedicated. Envisioned by developers Robert and Daryl Davis to be “a place for all faiths to worship,” the 50 foot tall, traditionally-designed structure with its 68 foot tall bell tower anchors the northern terminus of Seaside’s central green. The multi-function building has been a home to a wide variety of activities including weddings, lectures, and faith-based services. For a number of years it was used extensively by an evangelical Christian congregation, although they have since moved on to another slightly larger location about a mile away. During the time that congregation was in residence, “the chapel was as alive as it has ever been,” according to Robert Davis. Since that time, the chapel has been shared by a few feeder churches from Birmingham, Atlanta, and elsewhere during the summer months to serve their congregants who vacation in the resort community.

The New Town at Saint Charles in Saint Charles, MO, a suburb of Saint Louis, similarly constructed a chapel to serve as their neighborhood’s centerpiece. Presently, the highly prominent classical structure is the mission of a nearby Lutheran congregation, and shares time with a heavily booked wedding schedule. It is the wedding business that funds the operations and maintenance of the building. The rest of the week, the building sits largely...
vacant and devoid of life.

As Eric Jacobson, a Presbyterian pastor and the author of *Sidewalks in the Kingdom: New Urbanism and the Christian Faith*, noted in an article in New Urban News in April/May 2005, “When economies of scale allow and the developer is interested in including a religious building as an amenity, a multi-faith structure is often less than optimal. A generic religious building doesn’t enliven the space nearly as much as one in which a flesh-and-blood congregation makes a significant investment.” The experiences of the New Town Chapel and Saint Charles Christian Church certainly bear out his statement.

Since early experiments in multi-purpose chapels underperformed the original intentions to help authenticate “community,” a number of developers have now begun to reserve spaces for the purpose-built church by a specific faith community.

Forging a New Congregation

In the I’On neighborhood of Mount Pleasant, SC, developer Vince Graham long hoped to find a congregation to build within the celebrated new urbanist village. After an article in the local paper that noted that the neighborhood had a civic site reserved, members of the Orthodox faith in America approached Vince with a proposal to build a new home for their parish. Enamored with the rich architectural heritage that the Orthodox faith carries with it through each of their buildings, the proposal was quickly accepted.

The land was donated to Holy Ascension Orthodox Church and in May, 2008, the 3,500 square foot, Byzantine structure was dedicated. Interestingly, the parish took up residence in the neighborhood long before the church’s dedication by maintaining a Christian bookstore, Ascension Books, in an adjacent storefront. It was through this early presence in the neighborhood that the parish built a connection with many of the neighbors and merchants. Those “friends of the parish” helped to build the church literally through such tasks as driving the nails into the floor. And the neighborhood continues to support the church through its attendance at various social and cultural gatherings held at the church. Father John Parker, the parish’s first and current pastor, believes that their unique and formal liturgy is as immediately attractive to the general population as a non-denominational format would be. “But,” he adds, “we feel that we are able to evangelize every day through the art and iconography of the building as they walk, bike, and drive by. In this manner we are able to serve their specific needs of an Orthodox faith if they are so inclined but we view our mission simply to invite people to be in the orbit of the church.”

Designed by Andrew Gould, the $1.3 million Holy Ascension Church has become a true neighborhood landmark replete with the onion-domes in the orthodox tradition and, according to Father John Parker, “a perfect orientation of the structure to the east.” The latter of these is a designer’s challenge when given a lot not much larger than a postage stamp in an urban neighborhood. In addition, the size of the lot precluded many of the suburban amenities that are commonplace with most churches, including large parking lots. On-street parking and parking in the nearby town center lots accommodate parishioners’ cars.

Today, everyone who comes into the church, whether as a guest, a patron of the many events that are hosted there, or for The Divine Liturgy, has two reactions upon entering the small building—“wow” and “wow.” While they are not a fast growing parish, Father John rests his faith in God in more subtle ways: “We hope that our building will be a beacon to those who might not otherwise come in for the liturgy… I believe that beauty will save the world.”

Finding a New Home

Saint Alban’s Episcopal Church in Davidson, NC and the Church of the Good Shepherd in Covington, GA found new life amidst the front porches and tree-lined streets of their traditional neighborhoods.

In Covington, the local Episcopal church was already looking to relocate from their current in-town location to a new site that could better accommodate their long-term needs. When they learned that a site had been reserved by the developers of Clark’s Grove approximately one mile from the church’s...
present location, they knew that it was their destiny. Interestingly, there was no civic site available in the second phase of the neighborhood, but because they were still early in the process, the developers tweaked the lots to create a site that accommodated the needs of the church. Today the $2.6 million, 240 seat church and separate administration building sit prominently on the third tallest hill in town.

Unlike Holy Ascension, they have a small parking lot, but they still rely heavily on on-street parking to satisfy their needs. It’s a bit ironic since the primary reason for their initial decision to relocate was the absence of parking. “It’s a different mindset than the suburban megachurch,” observes its rector, Father Tim Graham. “We are much more connected because we are right here in the neighborhood.” A number of parishioners walk to the church today—in fact more than when they were located downtown—and they hope that as the 300 home neighborhood builds out over its over 90 acres that many more will be attracted to the church. Father Tim believes that many people across the country “are longing to know their neighbors. The neighborhood church can offer not only a place to worship but also a social network as well.”

Also unlike the very high-priced homes in I’On, which is relatively isolated from its neighbors, Clark’s Grove is a piece of the larger neighborhood. Frank Turner, who leads the development team, is quick to point out that “not too far from the upper middle class homes of Clark’s Grove are some of the poorest people in the entire country.” Accordingly to Father Tim, “the location in the middle of this diverse neighborhood affords the church the responsibility to reach out to everyone.”

And finally in Davidson, NC an infill neighborhood is home to Saint Alban’s Church, within walking distance of the downtown and Davidson College. What started as a land swap to better orient an entrance became a fabulous partnership between the local church and the developer to create a very prominent landmark. When Doug Boone began planning his “new neighborhood in old Davidson” (he intentionally didn’t name the neighborhood), he and his design team were able to negotiate a mutually beneficial land swap that would increase the church’s property from two acres to seven, and place them at the termination of the main entrance to the neighborhood. From this point on, as the then-rector of the parish, Gary Steber notes, “it was all providential.”

The then-150 person congregation was able to construct the 300 seat, $1.8 million church and bell tower and dedicate it on October 21, 2001; coincidentally a day after the dedication of the Seaside Interfaith Chapel. “Since that time,” says current rector Father David Buck, “the parish has grown to more than 500 regular attendees over two services and more than 1,000 people connected to the church.” Its current location is a fulfillment of the original members’ desire to be seen throughout the community. Formerly worshipping in a house located deep in a neighborhood not too far from their present location, Saint Alban’s is very much a center of activity for the entire community. Today they host a robust schedule of music that is open to the community, which included a recent concert by noted pianist, George Winston. They are also beginning a community garden as a way to further reach out to the surrounding neighborhood and host the neighborhood association meetings. And finally, in a measure that harkens back to the multi-faith chapels noted earlier, they provide use of their facility to Temple Beth Shalom of Lake Norman on a regular basis until its congregation can build a permanent home of their own.

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The Canary in the Coalmine

Efforts to restore the neighborhood church are still more the exception than the norm. New churches in traditional, walkable neighborhoods are few in number compared to the total number of new church buildings. But in some very important ways, these early experiments are the canaries in the coalmine, indicating that the trend may be successful and sustainable. While housing, jobs, and shopping have long since returned, churches have heretofore been much more cautious.

What New Urbanism presents to the church is an opportunity. Very simply, it is an opportunity to override the pattern of auto-dependent, sprawling campuses in the greenfields in favor of returning to the neighborhoods, and once again become important social and spiritual anchors. In doing so, the neighborhood church provides visual beauty, physical prominence, and the restoration of authentic urbanism alongside a physical return of the sacred and the spiritual to our daily lives. Most importantly, the neighborhood church can begin to once again fulfill its role in proclaiming the word of God within walking distance of our front porch.

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1 For Saint Louis, see: http://www.archstl.org/archives/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=784&Itemid=1
3 Ibid., 2.
4 Ibid., v.
Though broadcast live on Catholic television, the March 2010 consecration of the Chapel of Saints Peter and Paul at the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter’s Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary in Denton, NE passed rather quietly in the architectural and ecclesiastical news. Liturgically-oriented blogs covered its four-hour consecration ceremony and Church watchers noted the many illustrious prelates in attendance. While a joyous day for the Fraternity, the chapel also serves as an important signpost marking the coming of age of today’s use of the classical tradition. While neither the first nor the largest of the New Classical churches to be completed in recent years, it proves a significant milestone for its architect, Thomas Gordon Smith, an intellectual powerhouse and pioneering force in the return of classicism to the architectural profession. Smith has drawn from the classical tradition as inspiration for his artistic talent, going beyond the laudable goal of mere competence in the classical language, and rising to what author Richard John has described as “the excitement of the classical canon.”

An accomplished painter, furniture designer, historian, and author, Smith is widely known for refounding the School of Architecture at the University of Notre Dame in 1989, making the school an incubator for a renewal of classical architecture. Notre Dame has since turned out a new generation of young designers who have realistic hopes of building classical buildings. This happy situation comes in stark contrast to that of many of their teachers, who, like Smith, had to run against the grain of the modernist architectural establishment and learn classical architecture largely on their own. Smith, born in 1948, is simultaneously pioneer, elder statesman, and a leading practitioner in the burgeoning field of New Classicism. The Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary chapel displays the compelling fruit of many hard-won and carefully argued discussions begun decades ago.

Rediscovering the Heritage of Classicism

While it may seem to have snuck up on those interested in traditional church design, a burst of traditional churches has been completed or is on the boards from architects like Ethan Anthony, James McCrery, David Meleca, and Duncan Stroik among many others. Almost unthinkable even as little as ten years ago, buildings like Stroik’s Thomas Aquinas College Chapel or Meleca’s Church of Saint Michael the Archangel in Kansas (both completed 2009), seem to have glided rather easily into today’s architectural discussion and even some of the mainstream architectural press. But today’s successes in traditional ecclesiastical design did not come without diligent attention and hard-fought battles. Thomas Gordon Smith has not only been treating classicism as a living discourse for over thirty years, but unlike many other classical architects who tend to focus on secular society’s clients and commissions, has brought his knowledge to both academia and to the Church.

Richard John’s 2001 monograph, Thomas Gordon Smith: The Rebirth of Classical Architecture, aptly portrays Smith’s early years as both a postmodernist and later a true pioneer in the move to serious engagement with classical design. It is easy to forget, especially for today’s under-forty (and perhaps even under-fifty) generation of classical architects and clients, that today’s New Classicism emerged not only from the anti-historical trends of modernism, but was further sifted from postmodernism’s tentative and ironic use of classical forms. Smith’s
invitation to participate in the now famous 1980 Venice Bienniale, an international architectural exhibition entitled “The Presence of the Past,” not only publicized his abilities, but highlighted his departure from the post-modern tendency to see classical forms as witty oddities inserted into new buildings in uncanonical ways. At the exhibition, “Smith was alone in adopting a literate treatment” of classical forms, earning the ire of some, but also the praise of architectural theorist Charles Jencks, who wrote: “Smith is the only architect here to treat the classical tradition as a living discourse.”

Smith’s proposed design, for instance, required the fabrication of spiraled Solomonic columns which the exhibition contractor lacked the knowledge to construct. Rather than change his design, Smith returned to old sources: books on the subject by Vignola, Guarini, and Andrea Pozzo. “Using the same treatises as architects had three centuries earlier,” gave Smith “insight into how the classical tradition had been continually developed in the light of contemporary circumstances and then handed on from generation to generation.”

Almost twenty years later, the Fraternity of St. Peter found in Smith a man who, like the Fraternity itself, had made a specialty of “quietly battling trends,” and could build a seminary “with the irony-free rigor of an ancient.”

Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary

Although the Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary’s chapel was only completed this year, its roots extend back to the late 1990’s, a time when designing a large, classically-inspired building complex seemed by many to be almost as trend-defying as the promotion of what was then called the Tridentine Mass. Though Smith had been using classical design for homes for nearly two decades, the mainstream ecclesiastical culture of the time was far from accepting traditional architecture. The inherent respect for tradition evident in the mission of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter made classical architecture a natural match for their life and liturgical practice. But the bustle of today’s classical revival was just beginning to simmer at the time. The architectural instructions of the new General Instruction of the Roman Missal, which would be released in 2002, had not yet arrived. Several of today’s middle generation of young classical architectural practitioners, many centered at Notre Dame, were just beginning to coalesce an alliance with a similarly pioneering group of liturgical scholars. Most importantly, the profoundly anti-traditional 1978 document on liturgical architecture published by the American Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, Environment and Art in Catholic Worship (EACW), was still dominating the liturgical establishment. Along with some others, Smith wrote and spoke publicly critiquing the document, rightly characterizing it as “outdated in its promotion of bland modernist structures and iconoclastic liturgical settings.” Just as he was beginning the design for the
Smith’s attention to locale further shows that a careful practitioner of New Classicism designs a new building for its time and place. The complex was carefully sited in the landscape, “situated on the spur of a hill with wings nestled into adjacent ravines.” Smith’s goals, he wrote, were “to create a building complex that appears to have always existed in this location,” where the prominent site would be visible from a great distance, and to make the chapel readily identifiable. Smith’s descriptions of his own work indicate that he values clarity of parts and legibility of use. Calling the seminary complex a “microcosmic city for a religious community,” he designed the architecture to convey symbolically the community’s spiritual objectives.

To that end, even a quick overview of the design makes clear the hierarchical priorities of the community. The cruciform basilican chapel, nearly free-standing except for a small connecting corridor, steps forward as the immediate public face of the complex, indicating the public nature of the chapel and the importance of the worship within. The primary entrance to the seminary proper is located in the western wing, delineated by a gabled portal that Smith calls a “frontispiece.” The medieval-inspired Romanesque entry with receding arches on colonnettes sits below a thermal window drawn from ancient Rome, all within a Renaissance-inspired temple front motif indicated by strip pilasters of contrasting color. Here a somewhat reserved and economically built facade draws from several different centuries for inspiration, yet maintains a tranquil unity of design that gives no hint of self-con-

...
An altar at the end of the side aisle

In a continued revelation of use and purpose, this quiet linearity of the facade is suddenly broken as a tower-like section anchors the northwest corner. Its high roofline and large arched windows indicate a room of significant proportions, notably the Aula Magna, or Great Hall, with the seminary library beneath. Functional wings of the complex put on no airs, being indicated simply by rows of repeating windows in blocks of varying brick and different levels of detail. Together the wings form a cloistered courtyard and provide a place of contemplation. Breaking the cloister’s silhouette, however, is the refectory, a barrel-vaulted room of austere simplicity, enriched and organized by two pairs of Doric columns and a carefully composed southern wall with views to the western landscape. Like the building’s entrance, the refectory’s south wall shows Smith’s synthetic creativity, where extremely simple elements form a heroic motif blending the Serliana motif with an extra set of piers to form a thermal window above.

The newly completed Chapel of Saints Peter and Paul predictably receives significant treatment indicating its primary place in the seminary’s hierarchy. One major challenge in building the chapel was an extremely tight budget, so tight in fact that it led to the removal of the proposed campainile. But one of the strengths of classical design in the hands of a master is its ability to be reduced, or “diluted,” without loss of dignity or ontological confusion. Working from the basic Palladian double temple front motif, the facade reveals the chapel’s double height interior and inherent dignity of use. The triple arched entry to a deep porch includes oculus windows that signify the great height of the porch interior, reinforcing the scale and importance of the building. The openings further reveal the thickness of the wall, giving the building a sense of heft which reads as convincingly traditional and adeptly avoids the modernist tendency to make tight-looking walls with the depth of only a single brick.

The use of stone was reduced to an almost absolute minimum on the facade, rightly concentrated instead in the lower entablature. The entablature itself, containing the Latin inscription “Come after me and I will make you fishers of men,” receives a sophisticated treatment which maintains the primacy of the facade while reducing cost. Only a portion of the entablature steps forward, receiving dentils and the articulation of fascia on the architrave, while quieting at the edges. The second story’s three-part blind arcade is further reduced, returning to all brick but maintaining clear articulation of structural units, as in the large arches composed of three rows of bricks which land on implied brick impost blocks. In a subtle move, the bricks take a herringbone pattern within the windows themselves, fictively signifying their nature as implied openings and differentiating them from the wall and arch as primary structural units. Above, a small strip of stone marks the upper architrave, while extremely simplified stone blocks designate the modillions, the figurative ends of horizontal beams extending out beyond the plane of the wall. As economical as it is compellingly sophisticated, the facade proclaims to the world that refined, intellectually rigorous classical design need not be lavish or disproportionately expensive.

Passing through the mahogany doors, the interior continues the building’s austere masculine sophistication. Most of the chapel is composed of unadorned planar surfaces, and all windows appear above eye level, giving the church plentiful light and while maintaining a sense of enclo-
sion of beams to walls. A carefully designed gracefully bracketed easing the transition to detail. Warmth and richness are found largely in the wood of the choir stalls, carefully designed with high rear panels to enclose the choir. Concentrated color is also found in the stone used in the sanctuary and central aisle, using intersecting patterns of green and red tones associated recalling the miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. At the ceiling level another burst of color appears in the form of repeating stencils of vine and flower patterns (painted in part by the seminary’s students) amid richly veined cedar planks.

The marble altar and baldacchino, reclaimed from a closed church in Quebec, were previously acquired by the Fraternity, and Smith subsequently designed the east wall’s apse to receive them. While the altar and baldacchino use fine materials, significant symbolism, and take clear command of the room, it is hard to steer clear of the conclusion that the chapel would have been better served by an altar designed by Smith himself, avoiding the resulting architectural discontinuity between the somewhat dated altar and the dynamic New Classicism of Smith’s chapel architecture.

Despite the chapel’s initial appearance of austerity, however, Smith’s attention to detail abounds. Simple but graceful brackets ease the transition of beams to walls. A carefully designed wrought iron railing, which includes a Greek key pattern, graces a transept balcony. Worked iron strap hinges signify the importance of the front door. Even empty picture frames were designed and put in place for the future when funds allow large paintings to be added to the chapel.

Conclusion

Nearly fifteen years in the making, the Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary signifies more than a traditional building corresponding to the needs of a traditional community. It marks a climactic moment in the renewal of Catholic liturgical architecture. Smith’s intellectual energy and laborious struggles which began in the 1970’s now offer the riches of the Church’s architectural patrimony to architectural professionals and ecclesiastical decision makers. As Smith has duly noted, the “creation of great buildings requires the cooperative effort of many people, from architects to builders and artisans, but it depends most on the courage, dedication, and protection of patrons.” In the Fraternity of St. Peter, Smith found a patron asking for fully-developed classical architecture – not unheard of today in Catholic work – but truly groundbreaking in the late 1990’s. The priests and seminarians of the Seminary of Our Lady of Guadalupe received an architectural complex at once vital, creative, and new, yet as ancient as it is modern. Skillful combinations of brick of differing shapes, sizes, and color create a confidently rendered exterior with structural clarity expressed in subtle and creative ways. Every corner is filled with lessons learned from Smith’s life experience and developed talent. The floors of the seminary’s entry foyer use red and teal terra cotta flooring, while its walls are paneled in travertine marble, combining the high architectural traditions of Rome with the earthly hues of the Patroness of the Americas. Cedar columns in the cloister combine fiscal discipline and classical principles of structural clarity, yet draw from the wooden homes designed by architect Bernard Maybeck that Smith studied as a young man. In its concurrent austerity and richness, the entire project teaches the discipline of both fasting and feasting with the eyes. In sum, it gives the viewer something rare in architecture, something which echoes healthy religious life itself: apostolic simplicity enriched with communal, ecclesial, and celebratory touches in all the right places.

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2 Ibid., 45.
3 Ibid., 45.
Call for Papers

*Logos* seeks a readership that extends beyond the academy and is especially interested in receiving submissions in art, photography, architecture and music. Articles should demonstrate a clear exploration of themes related to the intersection of these subjects and Catholic thought and culture.

[University of St. Thomas](http://www.stthomas.edu)

[www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/logos](http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/logos)
In some modern churches, not only do the faithful struggle to find the physical entrance, but seemingly even Jesus Christ struggles to find a means of entering. Among this number is the church in Foligno, Italy that has garnered international renown for the boldness with which this concrete cube fits into Umbria, one of the most beautiful regions of Italy. It is the land of St. Francis and St. Clare. Not far from here the most figurative expression of the Catholic faith in antiquity, the creche, was invented. But Fuksas did not take this heritage into account as a means of guiding and informing his design. Although his reasons are unclear — whether out of ignorance, hostility, or the belief that tradition is outdated — the church as built is an act of violence. On the one hand the church demonstrates an act of architectural violence against
the Umbrian countryside, on the other an act of spiritual violence against some of the most beautiful pages in the history and tradition of Catholicism.

Indeed, the church does not identify itself as a church except by the monumental aspect of the facade. While this monumental character is typical of Umbrian churches, it is here distorted into a giant that only expresses inadequacy and arrogance. With exposed, raw-looking concrete, it evokes the fleeting structural solidity of hundreds of Italian churches built in the last half century whose now-crumbling facades exhibit the bleeding stains of rusting rebar.

From an architectural point of view the church is criminal, an affront to the scenic area in which it is inserted. But the architect portrays the church—both the building and the institution—as a social crime as well: the crime of faith in a secularized society amid a contemporary relativism that denies the spiritual in favor of a chronic materialism. It almost seems that the architect intends to disparage the church for its awkward presence in the neighborhood fabric so that the parishioners would feel singled out by the rest of the community.

Looking at the structure both from the outside and inside one can imagine how it was conceived as an empty space impossible to fill, with smooth and regular walls, so that no seed of Christian devotion could take root in that building.

The sense of shock in such a strange space masks a spiritual uneasiness; the practice of affection for the neighborhood church and the living presence inside are difficult to develop here during daily devotions: Eucharistic adoration, prayer vigils, and reciting the rosary all need places we can frequent every day with growing affection, and not with a sense of alienation, or worse, of guilt.

In the end it is a place created merely for its oddness, not for a daily confessional life that sustains the needs of faith, within a place where it can be expressed and strengthened. I cannot imagine celebrations enriched by the assembly’s spiritual fervor taking place in that church, nor solemn feast days broken by the cry of a newborn or a little child running around—but I don’t think the designer could imagine them either.

No one knows the real name of this church, or to whom it has been dedicated, but everyone calls it the Fuksas church, as if it was a deconsecrated place or perhaps simply not worthy to be linked to something holy.

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A reflection on sacred architecture must at some point regard the church edifice precisely as it is “sacred”—set apart and consecrated for divine worship. Worship joins human beings to the life of God by knowledge and by love. Yet, in this high affair, what significance should we attribute to the building itself beyond its psychological effect on worshippers? The twelfth century commentary by Hugh of Saint Victor on the rite for the Dedication of a church answers clearly: second to the Incarnation, the church building is theologically fundamental because it represents and interprets a new sacramental cosmos wherein human beings, as members of Christ, are to return to God.1 Hugh’s theology combines three themes: his unique division of sacred history into God’s works of foundation and restoration; his liturgical notion of the soul’s journey to the divine likeness and participation in the divine life; and his use of the ancient ascetical theme of the coordination of the created and uncreated temples.

The work of foundation—The temple liturgies of cosmos, history, and soul

Hugh divides history into two great works of God: the “work of foundation” is the world and all its creatures; the “work of restoration,” beginning at humanity’s fall, is the Incarnation and its sacraments that precede in the Old Law and follow in the New to heal, illuminate, and glorify a humanity marred by sin. Humanity was created to know and to love God, ascending in worship to an intimate life with him in his divine likeness.2 Therefore, God revealed himself by the created work of foundation: “Like a book written by the finger of God,” the world’s natural resemblances, or simulacra, express the unwritten book who is the Father’s eternally-begotten Son.3 They do so by imitating the harmonious order of a soul conformed to his likeness. That is, the sanctified soul is creation’s exemplar, a microcosmic blueprint of the macrocosm.

To read his “book,” God gave to humankind three “eyes”: the eye of contemplation looked directly on God; the eye of reason beheld his image and likeness in the well-ordered soul; and the eye of the flesh apprehended the corporeal signs for interpretation by the reason. God also gave to humans a comprehensive knowledge of creatures by a “simple and direct [interior] illumination,” along with outward miracles and revelations.4 This foundation taught humanity to live according to wisdom: soul was to be ordered under God in love, body under soul; lastly, humanity was to order the world that it might manifest God’s beauty.

Hugh writes “historia fundamentum est”—history is the foundation—because from “the beginning,” the narrative of cosmic history has taught humanity to become like God. Rational creatures are made at first “unformed in a certain mode…, afterwards to be formed through conversion to its Creator.”5 Accordingly, God created the cosmos initially in a “form of confusion” and then set in full order.6 This conversion is liturgical; one grows in the divine likeness by knowing and loving God most especially in a divine worship that is guided by and prompted by gratitude for his creation. Hugh construes this liturgical life as an initiation into the mystery that Lord disclosed to Isaiah when he revealed himself seated upon his throne with his glory filling the heavenly temple amidst the thunderous triple-cry of sanctus!7 For Hugh, the cosmos is like a corporeal temple replete with God’s glory; the angels and saints are his throne. History is as a temporal temple filled with his works, with eternity his throne. Inasmuch as they manifest God, Hugh likens these temples to the Lord’s body.

By knowledge and love, the soul moves through the corporeal to the spiritual and finally to the very face of God, fashioning an inner temple that joins the angelic worship of heaven.8 Throughout history, soul and cosmos have manifested the uncreated Word so that humanity might coordinate the internal and the cosmic with the heavenly liturgy. Perfected after his likeness, the temples of soul, cosmos, and history were to have been made sacred. However, turning toward sensual gratification, humanity’s first parents abandoned the work of God.
The Fall and the work of restoration—
The liturgy of sacrament and scripture
This fall wrought severe injury. The stabilizing illumination was lost and reason’s eye clouded so that it could not read accurately the inner image or the outer sign. The eye of contemplation was closed. The eye of the flesh, alone unharmed, was left to rove the sensory realm, which now overwhelmed rather than informed the reason.

Immediately, God initiated his work of restoration so that human beings can journey back to God albeit “through a glass” and “darkly.” What humankind once saw directly by contemplation is now possessed indirectly by faith’s belief. This sanctifying foretaste, writes Hugh, is the “sacrament of future contemplation.” We journey “darkly” because, bereft of Adam’s illumination, we misread the signs for selfish satisfaction. Yet, fulfilling Isaiah’s vision, wisdom is manifest in time by the Incarnation, and continues in the sacraments. To those who are members of his body, the Church, all sacraments represent wisdom without and fashion wisdom within, re-forming the microcosmic soul-temple after the likeness of Christ.

Scripture and the sacraments both re-explain the simulacra, but the sacraments also replace them. Unlike the simulacra’s passive “image of nature,” Christ’s sacraments are an “image of grace,” actively dispelling the soul’s darkness.9 The seven sacraments properly visibly represent invisible things by a natural aptitude; are appointed to a salvific function by divine institution; and are sanctified by benediction to contain and communicate divine grace.10 However, the “sacraments of exercise”—today called the “sacramentals”—do not contain grace but instead restore the microcosmic temple to Christiform beauty by exercising its baptismal faith and charity.11 All sacraments—whether by their own grace or by the operation of faith and love—humble the pride, re-form the intellect’s understanding of faith, and enflame the will to a devotion conformed to that understanding.

So doing, the sacraments form and evoke worship in place of the natural signs of old. For in foundation, “that the praise of God might be perfect, the works of God were shown” so that “the rational creature…might understand [and] might rise to render thanks” for what she admired both without and within, rising through the “affection of love” to be perfected in praise.12 So too in restoration: “Certain places were consecrated, churches built, and…times appointed at which the faithful should assemble together in order as a group to be urged to render thanks, offer prayers, fulfill vows….so that in turn the hearts of the faithful are now composed for rest, now excited to devotion.”13 The Christian amidst the sacraments must do what Adam did not do amidst the simulacra: probe the signification of divine-things-by-created-things so that, by a well-formed praise of God, the microcosmic temple of the soul may recover wisdom’s likeness and attain contemplation.

The sanctification of a new cosmos
Now we can connect the sacredness of ecclesiastical architecture to that of the soul. The New Testament speaks of the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (the soul) and of the eschatological temple of the “New Jerusalem” (Christ’s body, with the saints its living stones). The medieval church building served also as a new cosmos wherein the sacramentals re-form humankind by perfected worship. As Umberto Eco wrote, the Gothic cathedral was “a surrogate for nature, a veritable liber et pictura...[which] actualised a synthetic vision of man, of his history, of his relation to the universe.”14 Specifically, Hugh aligned his exegeses of the creation narrative and the rite of Dedication for a church—for both narratives form the soul as a sacred temple.

As a sacrament of “preparation,” the rite of Dedication operates on its participants, to impress its meaning sacramentally as an “invisible truth in the faithful soul.”15 Hugh positions Dedication in his De Sacramentis according to its position in Christian life. He discusses it in the context of Book II, concerning the “Incarnation... and the fulfillment of God’s grace, from the sacraments of the New Testament to the end and consummation of all.”16 This “fulfillment” is the Church, Head and members, united by grace. After describing holy orders, Hugh declares that Dedication must be described before all else because in the dedicated church “all other sacraments are celebrated.”17 Hugh implies an analogy of church and sacraments to cosmos and signs: Foundation’s temple was the cosmos filled with the signs of God’s glory; the church building with
its sacramentals declares visibly the new cosmos and temple of restoration—Christ’s body—wherein the new history of restoration is fulfilled by the celebration of the other sacraments, bringing post-lapsarian humanity from disorder to harmony. What of the Dedication rite itself? As a “sacrament of preparation,” it propaedeutically frames the other sacraments, just as creation and its narrative physically and didactically frame Adam’s establishment and advancement. Dedication does not accomplish in the soul a baptismal illumination or a nourishing eucharistic transformation; rather, these are properly received or lived-out by a soul-temple formed in accord with what Dedication teaches; such a soul may pass through the sacraments to Christ. In this way Dedication “prepares” for, although it does not always precede the other sacraments. As Hugh writes, “a house to be dedicated is a soul to be sanctified.”

The form of this sacrament and the sanctification of the temple

The narratives of creation and Dedication become true worship when actualized in the souls of those who receive it through the operation of faith and devotion. The rite thus has four steps which parallel the journey of the soul in faith. First, twelve candles are lit within the church and the bishop circles its exterior walls thrice, sprinkling them to signify “the threefold immersion of purifying through water;” he enters the church to pray because “those…not yet sanctified…should pray for themselves.” The abecedarium—the Greek and Latin alphabets written with the crosier in a chi of ash upon the floor—“is the simple teaching of faith” in “the form of the cross which is impressed upon the minds of the people by the faith of the evangelical preaching” in Scripture. This itinerary suggests the illumination and ordering of the intellect for discernment by piety’s belief and discretion’s ability to judge, formed by faith’s teaching (the cross), advanced by preaching, Scripture, and communion with God through prayer. Since baptism was signified at the beginning, we take the future “sanctification” to be the contemplative rest and praise of the microcosmic temple in this life, which is a foretaste of eschatological rest in the beatific vision.

Secondly, the pontiff “ascends to…the altar” where “he invokes God to his assistance” without saying Alleluia. He signifies those who, with “a knowledge of faith, gird themselves for good works and for struggle against invisible enemies,” humbly “ask[ing]…divine assistance” without presuming “on their own strength.” They struggle “amidst sighs,” without Alleluia. We see faith’s second stage, when discretion makes firm its judgment and approves faith’s truth, putting forth an effort of strength to order the will and the desires according to the informed intellect.

Thirdly, the pontiff blesses water, salt, and ashes, adding wine, signifying that “the people are sanctified by faith’s teaching and by the memory of Christ’s passion, united with their head, God and man.” The bishop “makes a cross over the four corners of the altar” before sprinkling it and the church thrice and pouring out the excess water “as if committing to God what is above his strength.” The altar is “Christ upon whom we offer to the Father the gift of our devotion.” It is “wiped with linen cloths” to show “his flesh, brought by the Passion’s beatings to the whiteness of incorruption.” The bishop “offers incense” upon the altar, showing “the prayers of the saints.”

The oil that anoints crosses on the altar and the church’s walls “demonstrates the grace of the Holy Spirit.” Hence we have moved from initial illumination, through struggle, to the full conversion of devotion. Once the soul prayed only for itself; now she can pray for others, having been conformed to Christ’s passion and sealed with the Holy Spirit’s grace. Now all desires are turned to the God known through devotion’s affection. The soul becomes both temple...
and offering when her praise unites her fully to her “Head” as a member of Christ’s body.

Fourthly, the conclusion: “Finally when the consecration has been completed the altar is covered by its white veils.” “The white covering…designates the glory of incorruption with which Jesus’ humanity was clothed after the Passion, mortality having been swallowed up.” The Dedication does not signify arrival at the beatific vision because, as it began by signifying baptism into his body, it ends by signifying the incorruptible glory of Christ’s resurrected flesh, which Christians receive from the consecrated altar and through which they become an offering of perfect praise. To become sacred, we must seek Christ in a contemplation of love opened most fully by the Mass celebrated in the dedicated church building, when the saints cry sanctorum and receive him.

The theological significance of sacred architecture

Hugh discovers in the liturgical rite the saving history of faith which, from Scripture, he knows to be the subject of the sacraments that replace the darkened simulacra. His orderly exegesis subserves the recovery of the likeness within the soul that devoutly prays the liturgy with this narrative in mind. Like God’s deliberately temporarily-extended liturgical work of creation which taught Adam how to live in the world, the Dedication rite is a preparative instrument that shows what we ought to pursue as members of Christ.23 When Hugh enumerates the things that must be “excited to mind,” he wishes to make the soul sacred.

The liturgy for sanctifying a church building charts and subserves the life of soul, cosmos, and Church, uniting pedagogy. Like the concrete signs and events of salvation history, sacred architecture and liturgy are never merely supplemental. They are more necessary than ever now that Christ has come because they show us our way within him. The sacred architecture of the church building, signifying both the soul of the saint and the new cosmos of the body of Christ, is the symbolic foundation of the new historia that proceeds, through God’s work of restoration, to a seraphic praise that makes sacred the temples of soul, cosmos, and Church, uniting them in Christ.

The church building is more than a human-fashioned aid that could be discarded without loss; Hugh contends that it is a providentially-inspired and integral element of a divine and sanctifying pedagogy. Like the concrete signs and events of salvation history, sacred architecture and liturgy are never merely supplemental. They are more necessary than ever now that Christ has come because they show us our way within him. The sacred architecture of the church building, signifying both the soul of the saint and the new cosmos of the body of Christ, is the symbolic foundation of the new historia that proceeds, through God’s work of restoration, to a seraphic praise that makes sacred the temples of soul, cosmos, and Church, uniting them in Christ.

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1 Hugh was born ca. A.D. 1078 (or 1096) and died in 1141. For further information, see Boyd Taylor Coolman, The Theology of Hugh of St Victor: An Interpretation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
3 De Sacramentis III, xx; De Tribus Diebus 4 (PL 176 col. 814).
4 Ibid., Sacramentis I:VI, xii. 102.
5 De Sacramentis I:VI, v. 97.
6 De Sacramentis II, i, 9.
8 Zinn, 112.
11 Ibid., I:IX, viii: 164 and II:IX, 315–321.
12 Ibid., I:VI, z. 97, I:II, iii, 9.
13 Ibid., I:IX, iii, 158.
15 De Sacramentis I:VI, I: 279.
16 Ibid., I:II, 215.
17 Ibid., I:VI, I: 279.
19 De Sacramentis I:VI, I: 279. This discussion quotes extensively and without citation from Hugh’s exposition (De Sacramentis I:VI, ii: 278–85) and exegesis of the rite (I:VI, iii: 281–2).
20 De Sacramentis I:VI, iii: 281–2.
21 De Sacramentis I:VI, iii: 282.
22 Ibid., I:IV, iii: 282.
23 De Sacramentis I:VI, iii: 8–9.
The mystery which we gather to reflect upon today is at once timely and timeless. Timely, because as Aimé-Georges Martimort has noted, “In our day the faithful have greater difficulty in achieving prayerful recollection and a sense of God’s presence.” The mystery which we gather to reflect upon today is at once timely and timeless. Timely because as At the root of this difficulty is a crisis, a contemporary crisis that surrounds the sacred.

Our topic is also timeless because God never ceases to call man to himself. As God intervenes in human history, he both conceals and reveals himself. He veils and unveil the signs of his presence that we might respond and offer pure worship to his greater glory.

In the revelation of the divine economy of salvation, God never neglects time and space. As the eternal, invisible, and infinite God, whose dwelling place is in Heaven, reveals himself, he allows and encourages mortal, visible, and finite human beings to call upon his name. As he makes known the hidden purpose of his will, he summons us to a sacred space in an acceptable time.

There are three practical and grounded guiding principles I would like to reflect upon concerning the vocation and mission of the architect and artist in the life of the Church.

First, from the very beginning, Sacred Scripture testifies that architecture and art are linked to the very nature of the plan of God. We can therefore never reduce the service of architects and artists to a mere function. Their important work is not simply an added enhancement to our relationship with God, but it actually serves to express our response to God. From the opening pages of Sacred Scripture, the gift and skill of the architect and artist occupy a recurrent and climactic place in the plan of God.

Second, we are reminded by the Second Vatican Council and the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI that the work of architecture and art takes place in and through dialogue with the Church.

Third, the mission of the architect and artist, which is based in Sacred Scripture and conducted in dialogue with the Church, authentically develops only along the path of true beauty.

First Principle.
Sacred Scripture testifies that the role and mission of architects and artists arise from the very nature of the plan of God. From the very beginning, the talents of artists and architects have been formed and, we could even say, forged by a unique relation to the plan of God. As we know from Sacred Scripture, God is the divine architect. God’s first act after creating man was to establish a suitable place for man to dwell. The book of Genesis tells us, “Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and he placed there the man whom he had formed.” God creates the sacred place where the inner state of man, his original innocence, is signified by his external surroundings, the garden of Eden. St. Thomas Aquinas explains that the east is the right hand of heaven.

When man disobeyed and sinned against God, man lost original innocence and was driven from this beautiful place, this sacred location. God banishes man from the garden, and settles him in a different place, “east of the garden of Eden.” God places man in a penitential space outside of the garden. The call of God always reflects his loving design. Under the effects of sin, in the penitential place outside of paradise, the impulse for shelter arises from the human being’s basic instinctive need for safety and refuge from the elements. More wonderfully still, however, the human person moves beyond the mere impulse of instinct to the light of intuition. And here we detect the tremendous value of the work of the artists and architects for the Church: artists and architects open themselves to the light of sacred intuition, and they direct its beam upward to construct and refine the instincts of man so as to prepare a dwelling place that may become a fitting sanctuary.

Classical theology has always emphasized that reason makes the continuous and ongoing effort to grasp what is held by faith so that we might be led to intellectual admiration of the mystery of God and thus be more prepared to offer adoration to God. The light of faith inspires the intuition of affection for a sacred place. Thus, while the work of architects and artists is both a science and an art, it is first and foremost an exalted mission. In the mystery of God’s presence, man’s intuition is always to claim a sacred space, a sanctuary from which he worships God for the glory which God has revealed.

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, “Sacred art is true and beautiful when its form corresponds to its particular vocation: evoking and glorifying, in faith and adoration, the transcendent mystery of God—the surpassing invisible beauty of truth and love visible in Christ, who ‘reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature,’ in whom ‘the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.’” The learning, dedication, skill, and work of the architect and the artist serve to direct us deeper still to the One in whom we find shelter, the One who is our refuge and who sanctifies us: the living and eternal God.

Throughout the Old Testament, God makes use of natural locations and events to signify his presence: God appears on the mountain top, in the clouds, and in the storm. He also sanctifies those places made by human hands, the hands of architects: the tent, the ark of the covenant, the tabernacle, the temple, and the Holy of Holies. At these sacred locations, on the occasion of specific feasts, time and place enter a holy alliance to dispose the people of God to offer fitting worship and sacrifice. Noah plans and constructs the ark in faithful obedience to the design...
and measure given by God himself.\textsuperscript{13} Immediately on stepping forth from the ark, Noah sets forth on another building project: he constructs an altar.\textsuperscript{14} In fact, throughout salvation history, the people of God mark the central places of their relationship with God by the building of an altar.

Abraham builds an altar at Shechem and there he calls “the Lord by name.”\textsuperscript{15} After crossing the ford of the Jabbock and remaining there alone, Jacob wrestles with a messenger of the Lord until daybreak. Having persevered in the struggle, Jacob purchases the ground and establishes a memorial stone on the sight.\textsuperscript{16} At Bethel, Jacob dreams of a stairway which reaches from earth to heaven and encounters God who promises to give him the land on which he sleeps.\textsuperscript{17} Jacob awakens and exclaims, “Truly the Lord is in this spot although I did not know it!” In solemn wonder he cries out: ‘How awesome is this shrine! This is nothing else but an abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven!’\textsuperscript{18} Jacob then consecrates the stone he was lying on as a memorial stone and he makes a vow of faithfulness to God.\textsuperscript{19}

All that is foretold and foreshadowed in the Old Covenant is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, whose first dwelling among us was the womb of the Virgin Mary.\textsuperscript{20} He who has no place to lay his head purified the temple, declared that he would rebuild the temple, and suffered, died, and rose again for our salvation.

The Acts of the Apostles says of the early Christians in Jerusalem: “Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes.”\textsuperscript{21} The early Christians gathered frequently in house-churches to break bread, receive instruction, and offer prayers. When St. Peter was in prison, “many people gathered in prayer” at the “house of Mary, the mother of John who is called Mark.”\textsuperscript{22} Upon their release from prison, we are told that St. Paul and Silas go to the house of Lydia to “encourage the brothers.”\textsuperscript{23} In Troas, St. Paul gathers in an “upstairs room” with the brethren “on the first day of the week … to break bread.”\textsuperscript{24} Again, we hear in the First Letter to the Corinthians that St. Paul writes of the church that is in the house of Priscilla and Aquila.\textsuperscript{25}

When God created man he placed him in a sacred location. When God saves man, he again places man in a sacred location and provides the design by which salvation is accomplished and celebrated.

As we consider this first principle, we come upon a clear truth: the people whom God called, the patriarchs and prophets, the apostles and disciples, were also architects and artists. Not in addition to their call, but on account of their call. They established the places and built the early altars from which God received worship.

Second Principle

The Second Vatican Council and the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI affirm that the work of architecture and art takes place in and through dialogue with the Church. As the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum teaches, “After speaking in many and varied ways through the prophets, ‘now at last in these days God has spoken to us in his Son’”\textsuperscript{26} And his Son speaks to us through his Church. The Church has long engaged in dialogue and sought specialized and strategic collaboration with artists and architects.

As the Second Vatican Council emphasized, “Very rightly the fine arts are considered to rank among the noblest activities of man’s genius, and this applies especially to religious art and to its highest achievement, which is sacred art.”\textsuperscript{27} The Council Fathers continue, “the Church has therefore always been the friend of the fine arts and has ever sought their noble help, with the special aim that all things set apart for use in divine worship should be truly worthy, becoming, and beautiful, signs and symbols of the supernatural world, and for this purpose she has trained artists.”\textsuperscript{28}

The Holy Father points out that this dialogue has taken place throughout the ages, and is found in the luminous beauty of the great works of art. He emphasizes that the Christian faith gave a beginning to masterpieces of theological literature, thought, and faith, but also to inspired artistic creations, the most elevated of a whole civilization: the cathedrals which were a renewal, a rebirth of religious architecture, an upward surge and an invitation to prayer. In Pope Benedict XVI’s words, the Christian faith “inspired one of the loftiest expressions of universal civilization: the cathedral, the true glory of the Christian Middle Ages.”\textsuperscript{29} The Holy Father explains that, “All the great works of art, cathedrals — the Gothic cathedrals and the splendid Baroque churches — they are all a luminous sign of God and therefore truly a manifestation, an epiphany of God.”\textsuperscript{30} The Venerable Servant of God Pope John Paul II also spoke of this when he said, “The cathedrals, the humble country churches, the religious music, architecture, sculpture, and painting all radiate the mystery of the verum Corpus, natum de Maria Virgine, towards which everything converges in a moment of wonder.”\textsuperscript{31}

The architect develops, coordinates, and contours the natural elements of the visible physical world so that man may be directed to a fundamental awareness of the grace-filled action of God. The ultimate meaning and purpose of sacred architecture is to
convey an experience of the mystery of grace and salvation in Jesus Christ.

The revelation of God’s mysterious and awe-inspiring presence always evokes a response from man. This response takes place in and through the Church. The Second Vatican Council teaches that “the sacred liturgy is above all things the worship of the divine Majesty.” The Council makes clear that in considering anything to do with the sacred liturgy, we must always return to this foundation: that within the sacred liturgy we offer worship to the divine Majesty. This is both the premise and the objective of the rich dialogue which continues to take place between the Church and artists.

Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes the two central characteristics of the Gothic architecture of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: “a soaring upward movement and luminosity.” He refers to this as “a synthesis of faith and art harmoniously expressed in the fascinating universal language of beauty which still elicits wonder today.” He continues, “By the introduction of vaults with pointed arches supported by robust pillars, it was possible to increase their height considerably. The upward thrust was intended as an invitation to prayer and at the same time was itself a prayer. Thus the Gothic cathedral intended to express in its architectural lines the soul’s longing for God.” The Holy Father is equally attentive to the furnishings of the sanctuary: “Certainly an important element of sacred art is church architecture, which should highlight the unity of the furnishings of the sanctuary, such as the altar, the crucifix, the tabernacle, the ambo, and the celebrant’s chair. Here it is important to remember that the purpose of sacred architecture is to offer the Church a fitting space for the celebration of the mysteries of faith, especially the Eucharist.”

The teaching of the Holy Father leads us to understand that the mission of the architect and the vocation of the artist bear a direct relationship to authentic liturgical theology founded upon the classical Trinitarian, Christological, pneumatological, ecclesial, and sacramental themes. Formation, education, and study for service in the architectural or artistic disciplines arise from and coalesce around a robust encounter with the authentic teaching of the Church. The Council highlighted the important role of bishops in the dialogue with artists and architects: “Bishops should have a special concern for artists, so as to imbue them with the spirit of sacred art and of the sacred liturgy.” The Second Vatican Council called for every diocese, as far as possible, to have a commission for sacred art, and to have dialogue and appeal to others who share this expertise. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reiterates, “For this reason bishops, personally or through delegates, should see to the promotion of sacred art, old and new, in all its forms and, with the same religious care, remove from the liturgy and from places of worship everything which is not in conformity with the truth of faith and the authentic beauty of sacred art.” Priests, as principal collaborators with the bishop, likewise have a special responsibility to have a vibrant awareness of the gifts which artists and architects bring to the Church. Pope Benedict XVI affirms that “it is essential that the education of seminarians and priests include the study of art history, with special reference to sacred buildings and the corresponding liturgical norms.”

Beauty, in its inextricable connection to the true and the good, is the center of gravity of all the liturgical sciences. And this is because the liturgy is foremost the work of the Most Holy Trinity, in which we participate. Beauty changes us. It disposes us to the transforming action of God and thus is one
of the principal protagonists of advancing the universal call to holiness.\textsuperscript{45} Fascination with the sacred frees us from fixation on the secular. Expressions founded upon purely secularist influence do not refresh us. They exhaust us and fragment our perception. The static and abstract expression of merely functional facades simply does not capture or articulate the brilliant and resplendent mystery of God. Architectural form is never incidental or expendable. Utilitarian styles fail to inspire and so often leave a space barren and bland. We simply cannot tolerate indifference to the healthy traditions. The separation of artists and architects from dialogue with the Church leads to a fragmentation and subsequent breakdown of authentic liturgical renewal. Our starting point in advancing the liturgical renewal is always dialogue, not polemics.

All effective dialogue in the Church continues in the spirit of what Pope Benedict referred to in his \textit{Christmas Address to the Roman Curia} in 2005 as “the ‘hermeneutic of reform’, of renewal in the continuity of the one subject-Church which the Lord has given to us.”\textsuperscript{44} The Holy Father continues, “[The Church] is a subject which increases in time and develops, yet always remaining the same, the one subject of the journeying People of God.”\textsuperscript{45}

Two architectural experts recently gave an example of fruitful and effective dialogue with the Church. The Italian architect Paolo Portoghesi, in an article which appeared in \textit{L’Osservatore Romano}, emphasized that “legitimate progress” must always flow from and not be indifferent to the “sound tradition” of the Church.\textsuperscript{46} Professor Portoghesi maintains correctly that we must assess the design and model of church buildings so as to preserve and restore architecture which is based on the authentic tradition of the Church, so that the sacred liturgy is celebrated in a fitting manner. The authentic tradition is our guide when we are faced with diverse interpretations of legitimate progress associated with liturgical renewal.

Professor Portoghesi emphasizes, “In recent years the fashion of so-called minimalism has revived a kind of iconoclasm, to exclude the cross and sacred images and to strip the image, outside of any residual analogy with the traditional churches.”\textsuperscript{47} A style that lacks consistency with the central mysteries of the faith necessarily puzzles us and drains us of our expectancy.

Maria Antonietta Crippa, Professor of History of Architecture at the Politecnico of Milan, has noted that, because of the significant cultural changes in the years since the Second Vatican Council, society has seen fluctuations between outcomes of radical secularism and the recovery of lively religious sense.”\textsuperscript{48}

Third Principle
The mission of the architect and artist which is based in Sacred Scripture, and conducted in dialogue with the Church authentically develops only along the path of true beauty. Beauty is not simply one path among others. Pope Benedict XVI teaches, “Everything related to the Eucharist should be marked by beauty.”\textsuperscript{49}

The Holy Father spoke of a “\textit{via pulchritudinis}, a path of beauty which is at the same time an artistic and aesthetic journey, a journey of faith, of theological enquiry.”\textsuperscript{50} During the celebration of the 500\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary of the Vatican Museums, Pope Benedict pointed out that the artistic treasures of the Church “stand as a perennial witness to the Church’s unchanging faith in the triune God who, in the memorable phrase of St. Augustine, is himself ‘Beauty ever ancient, ever new.’”\textsuperscript{51}

In his Apostolic Exhortation \textit{Sacramentum Caritatis}, Pope Benedict XVI emphasized that “the profound connection between beauty and the liturgy should make us attentive to every work of art placed at the service of the celebration.”\textsuperscript{52} Those whose senses are trained for the via pulchritudinis can discern a stirring within the continuous sacred stream of history, an unceasing movement of sublime splendor arising from ancient foundations and inherited in the detail of noble themes down through the ages.

In his Address to Artists last fall, the Holy Father stated, “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.”\textsuperscript{53}

The Holy Father continued, “Authentic beauty ... 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.”\textsuperscript{54}

Contemporary society believes at times that beauty can come from a product one buys in a store, or can be won in a contest. Authentic beauty is immune to age, it is always young, and it can never be contained by a mere title. Beauty attracts us as it charismatically aligns itself in symmetry and proportion, congruent with its primary characteristics of authentic truth and goodness. The durability and permanence of the structures which mark our solemn celebrations draw the eye to hope and lead the heart to reflection. In 2004, then-Monsignor Bruno Forte, Professor of Systematic Theology at the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Naples, Italy, and consultant to the Pontifical Council for Culture was called upon by Pope John Paul II to offer the annual retreat and spiritual exercises to him and members of the Curia. In the midst of
and regions are all part of the rich heritage of sacred art and architecture. As Duncan Stroik has noted, “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.”

Beauty has an immediate and direct relation to culture. As the Council explained, “The Church has not adopted any particular style of art as her own; she has admitted styles from every period according to the natural talents and circumstances of peoples, and the needs of the various rites. Thus, in the course of the centuries, she has brought into being a treasury of art which must be very carefully preserved.”

The creative intelligence of artists continually seeks to draw forth vibrant forms from the material structures which surround us. Prayerful reflection, study of classical motifs, knowledge of the various schools of design, meditative architectural planning, extensive and specific development of a systematic understanding of the importance and role of architecture nourishes faith. The thoughtful design and strategic placement of sculpture, painting, decoration along structural elements of the body of the interior facade and exterior face are meant to point us deeper into the mystery of Jesus so that we contemplate the words of St. John with renewed awareness: “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”

Conclusion

In preparation for the Great Jubilee Year 2000, Pope John Paul II wrote a Letter to Artists. Ten years later, Pope Benedict XVI met with artists in the solemn setting of the Sistine Chapel on November 21, 2009. The Holy Father took that opportunity “to express and renew the Church’s friendship with the world of art,” noting that “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.” Today we fulfill in some measure the Holy Father’s invitation to “friendship, dialogue and cooperation” between the Church and artists. Our conversation today serves, in the words of Pope Paul VI, to render “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, colors, forms — making them accessible.” Together we seek to cultivate a sense of wonder and anticipation and to pursue a strategy of recovery and renewal.

Artists and architects are composers who play a unique and irreplaceable role as the narrative of salvation history unfolds. Their talents usher the senses into an experience of the mystery of God. Through maximizing extraordinary gifts of their God-given genius, artists and architects are called to construct and restore an avenue into the luminous depth of God’s revelation and convey the continuing presence of the sacred in buildings meant for worship. The Church values deeply your specialized education gained from the periods of apprenticeship and the long years of professional service in the expertise of your various disciplines.

We come together today from our various vocations and specialties of skill for fruitful and effective dialogue: architects, theologians, faculty of the various schools, artists, liturgical consultants, engineers, students—clergy, religious and laity. As we gather to consider the role and mission of those who serve the formation of sacred architecture, we ask the same question that St. Peter and St. John asked the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of St. Luke, “Where do you want us to make the preparations?” And we gather to listen to the answer of Jesus: “When you go into the city, a man will meet you carrying a jar of water. Follow him into the house that he enters and say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says to you, ‘Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large upper room that is furnished. Make the preparations there.’”

Jesus sends us in the same life-giving direction, to the place that is furnished by the Holy Spirit and prepared by the Church to receive the Word made flesh who dwells among us. Not only do the beautiful creations
of artists and architects lead us to contemplate the mysteries of the faith, but the very manner in which these men and women pursue their most practical and sublime science of architecture and art casts a more distinctive radiance on our path—the path of the Church, and leads us to the One who has emptied himself for our salvation and has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us. St. Paul tells us in the First Letter to the Corinthians, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God, which you are, is holy.”63 St. Paul also tells us, “So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”64

As we await and prepare for that eternal moment in which the divine Architect will invite us to meet Him, may we, in the words of St. Peter, become “like living stones...[and] be built into a spiritual house to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”65

His Eminence Justin Cardinal Rigali gave this keynote address April 30, 2010 at the Symposium, “A Living Presence: Extending and Transforming the Tradition of Catholic Sacred Architecture” at the Catholic University of America.
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Reviewed by Chris Burgwald

In Fyodor Dostoevsky’s novel the Idiot, protagonist Prince Myshkin states, “I believe the world will be saved by beauty.” In the Beauty of Faith, Jem Sullivan makes a similar proposal, arguing that it is imperative that we employ the beauty of Christian art to spread the good news of Jesus Christ and his Church.

Sullivan begins by reminding the reader of the true nature of Christian art: historically, it was not created to be displayed in museums, but rather to serve a concrete catechetical purpose in a liturgical context. Christian art was created not merely to be admired, but even more to evangelize and catechize according to what Sullivan describes as “an intuitive and holistic pedagogy” in which the entire person is engaged.

One would think that a culture like ours—so heavily dominated by the visual and the sensory—would embrace such an approach. As Sullivan notes in the first chapter, however, this is curiously not the case. While the larger culture is saturated and inundated by the sensory, Catholic modes of evangelization and catechesis are deficient in their employment of Christian art to spread the Gospel. Sullivan aptly describes this as a “sensory dissonance” in which there is an inverse relationship between how popular culture employs the sensory and the visual in contrast to how Catholic evangelization and catechesis employ Christian art.

Sullivan addresses this problem in two ways: first, by proposing an adaptation of lectio divina to facilitate more profound and prayerful encounters with Christian art, and second by noting the theological, anthropological, cultural and historical bases for employing Christian art as a visual Gospel to evangelize and catechize in our day and age.

To examine her points in reverse order, Sullivan treats the evangelical nature of beauty in chapters three, four and five. She notes that the theological basis for Christian art is grounded in the central truths of our faith: the Trinity and the Incarnation. Sullivan demonstrates how the reality of the Incarnation—the invisible God made visible—both allows for and in fact demands a visual and sensory portrayal of the truths of the faith. Particularly fascinating is her discussion of Christian art as what John Paul II called a “pre-sacrament” that prepares and enables the faithful to participate more fully in the Church’s liturgies.

Sullivan also explains how Christian art corresponds to the nature of the human person. Drawing upon a diverse company such as St. Augustine, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, poet Dana Goia, Pope Benedict and others, Sullivan convincingly demonstrates the degree to which Christian art and the contemplation thereof deeply penetrates the human heart and corresponds to its needs and desires.

In the light of history, Sullivan makes the point that, as Catholics, we have a vast heritage to draw upon, and that in the past Christian art has demonstrated a profound ability to evangelize and catechize. With regard to culture, Sullivan develops her prior point on the degree to which our culture is visual and sensory, arguing that an effective evangelization and catechesis demands that we employ Christian art as a visual Gospel.

The most compelling aspect of Sullivan’s work, however, is her proposal to adapt lectio divina for the purposes of Christian art. In the second chapter of the book she first explains what lectio divina is: a prayerful engagement with Sacred Scripture, characterized by the four stages of reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation. Sullivan’s explanation and summary of lectio divina is itself fascinating, but what is even more compelling is her proposal for adapting that method to more deeply engage Christian art.

Sullivan proposes that we appropriately demonstrate the method of lectio divina to more fruitfully engage Christian art in order to achieve the end for which it was created: to lead us to greater union with God.

In her adaptation, we begin by examining a piece of Christian art at the basic level: what it depicts, what the style employed reveals, and so on; in effect, we “read” the piece (lectio). Then, together with a reading of the relevant Scripture passage, we move from the “what” of the piece to the “why,” pondering the deeper theological significance of the work (meditatio). This pondering then raises our minds to God and worship of Him, particularly in the theme of the piece (oratio), before bringing us to a resting in the mysteries which the piece portrays (contemplatio).

While the first step of this method—the reading of a piece of Christian art—will require significant work since most Catholics are illiterate about basic religious symbolism, this method does have considerable potential for achieving the important end which Sullivan sets out to address in her book: to rediscover Christian art as a visual Gospel in our time. May her book find a broad reading.

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Just like our most revered religious practices, our best buildings are imbued with a deep sense of history and tradition. Any historic building, however, needs to be periodically updated in order to remain useful and relevant, which leads to the fundamental question of how to do so in a manner that is both meaningful today and respectful of its past. Author Steven W. Semes, a practicing architect, educator, and former architect for the National Park Service, addresses this question in his thoughtful and thought-provoking treatise, The Future of the Past. Organized loosely into three general areas of consideration, each of the book’s twelve chapters builds upon each other to champion the idea of continuing traditional design principles when working within the context of our historic buildings, and putting much needed emphasis on creating new work that is “of its place,” instead of the more commonly considered “of its time.”

Semes introduces the book by exploring the issues faced in the integration of new and old architecture, such as our attitudes toward the past, the definition of progress, the meaning of conservation / preservation, and the role that past and present building cultures play in how we approach historic buildings. He then explains the seven principles that unite all classical and traditional design, and how they work together to create elements, buildings, neighborhoods, and cities. These are contrasted against modernist attitudes toward these principles, showing how these approaches typically are diametrically opposed to those of traditional design.

Having laid this groundwork, Semes moves from design to preservation philosophy. He provides a concise primer on the history of the preservation movement and how the standards that are used today came to be. He offers a very sage and key observation that whereas the traditional architect views the past as part of a living continuum into the present and as a guide for the future, the preservationist and modernist architect tend to see a building of the past as a piece of historical record which must be preserved as an artifact of an earlier time and contrasted against today’s designs. As Semes explains, it is this historicist attitude, the belief that there is an “architecture of our time,” that emphasizes differentiation and creates the underlying conflict with the more traditional and time-tested approach to design that is contextually sensitive.

How contemporary and past architects have addressed this balance of differentiation and compatibility is the focus of the final third of the book. Semes explores four distinct approaches to this issue, which he identifies as: Literal Replication, Invention Within a Style, Abstract Reference, and Intentional Opposition. He provides both well-known and more obscure examples for each of these, very consciously pulling them from a wide sampling of eras. Religious architecture plays an important role in these and other sections by using churches that have been built in campaigns that have lasted generations, had facades added centuries after the rest of the church was built, or been rebuilt for a variety of reasons to illustrate his points. For example, the façade of Santa Maria Novella, completed by Leon Battista Alberti three centuries after being started, demonstrates how a design can be innovative while being entirely compatible with its historic context. The seamlessness with which this transition between the two eras is made runs counter to modern preservation practice, and was made possible because Alberti understood, respected, and upheld the intentions of the original designer.

Semes’ concluding chapter brings all of these ideas, and others, together...
A Reexamination of Planning History


Reviewed by Timothy Hook

Nigel Yates left both a considerable legacy and a void in the field of ecclesiastical history when he died last year. In his final work, he researched and catalogued the planning histories and liturgical practices of many hundreds of parish churches in the United Kingdom and western Europe. Yates’ aim was that, armed with his observations, those entrusted with both planning and liturgical care of churches would gain a bit of historical perspective. Clearly, this work is intended to improve the quality of the architectural and liturgical debate through an injection of historic validity.

Yates chronologically arranges examples of common planning trends with parallel traditions and juxtaposes these with current beliefs. Without overturning conventional history, Yates has highlighted where adjustments in thinking need to be made. Along these lines, he defends the Protestant idea that the reformation was less a theological rebellion than an attempt to return to the early church and purify a corrupt hierarchy. Yates asserts that Protestant churches have increasingly returned to an instinctive desire for the sacramental, whether liturgical, hierarchical, or architectural. Further, Yates points to how the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches have increasingly embraced ecumenism and now share more common ground than they have done since the sixteenth century schisms.

Yates’ rendering of these histories gives a positive note to the book, but leaves one to wonder about his message. He implies that by understanding the history of a region, one may critique new church work simply as cultural artifacts. Yet some of Yates’ conclusions may demand an additional level of scholarship that employs the same rigor that Yates showed in his primary research.

With respect to Yates’, one has the impression that he was an admirer of the architectural writer Pevsner. Firstly, Yates shared Pevsner’s passion for documenting the relative historical “significance” of particular buildings. Secondly, although Yates was not strictly an historian of art, at certain moments his criticism derives from zeitgeist determinism.

Although one should not exaggerate any flaw in Yates’ information, by itself, his framework leaves one critically impoverished and lacking in direction toward issues such as validity, meaning, symbolism, and beauty. Had Yates’ extensive reading list suggested some initial purpose, it is likely that his recommendations would have been more compelling. Instead, Yates’ moments of judgment in this book must be considered perfunctory and potentially misleading.

Considered simply as a book to bolster one’s historical appreciation of liturgical planning history, Yates must be commended for an invaluable contribution. The difficulty begins, however, if it is considered to be much more.

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Sacred Architecture Issue 18 2010
This densely written and well-researched book is unlikely to adorn the shelves of most practicing professionals. This is unfortunate, as Politics of the Piazza offers a unique analysis of a subject that should be a matter of concern to all practitioners—the purpose and origins of the piazza, a component of urbanism that, although particularly significant in Italy, remains recognizable throughout the western urban tradition.

Canniffe surveys the history of Italian urban space and public architecture primarily as an intellectual history framed through four epochs. He begins with the collapse of the Roman Empire and the early middle-ages, moves to the Renaissance, then the Enlightenment, and concludes with our current period of relative architectural confusion.

Canniffe contends that the principles of Roman urbanism prevail throughout Italy due to the nation’s shared remembrance of ancient Rome. The Roman forum was designed for a political purpose and its form persists in the piazza throughout Italian history and in all iterations of political life. But for Canniffe, the piazza is not, and cannot be seen as independent from a wider architectural program. Indeed, it is both the piazza as an adaptation of the Roman forum and the concurrent use of Roman imagery that have shaped the piazza as an urban expression in Italian history.

Canniffe’s account begins with an analysis of the ancient forum, followed by an account of the rise of Christianity. The dominance of the church structure in piazzas signified the political power of the Church, which represented the sole source of sacred and secular stability in an otherwise politically fractured Europe. Aesthetic theories of order derived from platonic idealism began to emerge in recognition of the piazza’s role as a place of social stability. Notably, public art programs mingled iconographic cycles with idealized urban landscapes that controlled the perspective of the viewer.

During the Renaissance, architects came to understand that the urban landscape could be ordered in a similar manner. Buildings began to be designed in relation to the piazza, simultaneously controlling the perspective of the citizenry through architecture and elevating the grandeur of these spaces. Later, piazzas became momentary nodes along the vast urban vistas of the Baroque period, shifting urban expression from isolated places toward the larger city. This shift placed a greater emphasis on individual freedom and public movement over the singular experience of the spaces themselves, a move that anticipated the Enlightenment as a precursor to contemporary city planning.

The transition to modernity proved particularly tumultuous in Italy. While the currents of industrialization and nationalism desired a pragmatic urban expression for a newly unified nation, Italians were also wrestling with a rising global interest in monumental archaeological programs. These two competing views—one toward the future of the new Italian state and the other toward the achievements of the Roman past—persisted through a succession of rapidly changing governments. Despite the ephemeral nature of the various governments in the nascent Italian nation the piazza remained an enduring urban form.

Canniffe finishes with appraisals of recent work by architects including Aldo Rossi and Carla Scarpa, before arriving at a series of concluding remarks on the contemporary Italian piazza. Though delivered as passing remarks, the author shows little love for Cesar Pelli’s Città della Moda proposal, skewering a contemporary architect in a way seldom seen in serious academic works. Canniffe also criticizes the remnants of postmodernism.

In his conclusion, the author notes that his studies were bookended by two Achille Occhetto speeches delivered in Italian piazzas. While each speech possessed the spontaneity and immediacy of a traditional political rally, they were nonetheless well-choreographed events irrevocably tied to our contemporary multimedia culture. So, having endured another shift in human history, piazzas remained the staging ground. Canniffe ends with a few brief musings on the state of the piazza in a world of technological gadgetry and virtual landscapes that are increasingly personalized and transient; and with that, Canniffe asks us to consider whether the human experience may finally move in a direction that outstrips the need for the piazza. Given the trajectory of Canniffe’s book, one expects him to answer these questions in the negative.

This book, the first of the Ashgate Studies in Architecture series, successfully merges architecture with urbanism into a serious and refreshing academic reflection worthy of review by all professionals engaged in the creation of public space.

Reviewed by John W. Stamper

Books on ancient architecture are typically focused on a specific region or culture, whether it is Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman or pre-Columbian. They are written by specialists in a particular field and published for specific audiences. G. J. Wightman’s Sacred Spaces, in contrast, covers virtually every geographic region, time period and culture from the ancient world. In each case, Wightman effectively identifies the qualities that made religious buildings sacred to their respective cultures and communities while outlining the particular societal and religious qualities that made them possible. To do so he takes 1155 pages, with 318 figures and 184 plates; the total weighing an impressive eight pounds.

The book is divided into five parts: 1. the early civilizations of Europe and western Asia; 2. the Greco-Roman world; 3. central and east Asia; 4. the Americas; 5. a concluding section on themes and issues. It is perhaps best to begin with this final section, as it is here that he describes the types of societies that built the temple structures that remain as archaeological records for us today. Specifically, he identifies societies that were ruled by a small, centralized elite in which religion was hierarchical, with numerous deities, demons and spirits with specialized functions, who were envisioned in more or less anthropomorphic terms. Most were ruled over by a supreme deity with whom the worldly ruler often had a special relationship.

As Wightman states, temples were the primary loci of interaction between humankind and the gods, and many of these served as a place involving sacrificial ceremonies, processions and celebratory banquets. Most ancient temple structures had elements or objects related to rituals: benches, altars, basins and wells, eating and drinking vessels, and stands for light and incense.

The principal interior spaces were often the private domain of priests and rulers, although it was common to think of a temple as a house owned and occupied by a deity. The earliest temples had a close resemblance to houses; however, as time went on, they came to be more and more set apart from the rest of the city. They were not necessarily a god’s permanent home, rather, they were a space dedicated to a divine power who resided elsewhere. They were managed by humans but the deity visited on prescribed occasions.

There were other functions too. Temples could be a place where the living could honor natural phenomena and forces that affected their daily lives. They could be a place for asylum or a place where the living could commune with their ancestors to honor and reaffirm lineage. They could be a sacred mountain, symbolizing strength, permanence, and protection, a place that formed a bond between heaven and earth. In some cases the temple was related to a primeval earth mound or disk which emerged from the waters at creation and provided the foundation for earthly civilization.

In many cultures, religious practice invested temples and sanctuaries with a sense of spatial and temporal unity that was fundamental to the maintenance of social and cosmic order. The temples of numerous cultures were oriented on an east-west axis to reflect the solar path, especially those of the Egyptians and the Greeks. Curiously, those of the Mesopotamians and the Romans did not. In many Sumerian temple complexes, the principal organizing axis was oriented at about 45 degrees to the cardinal points; whereas later temples, such as those at Babylon or Nimrud, were oriented to the cardinal axes, which also corresponded to their surrounding urban fabrics. In Rome, the orientation of temples varied according to topography or location of principle streets and fora. Wightman analyzes in detail whether visual or metaphysical relationships extended outwards from the temples or were focused towards them, that is, whether the divine power looked out along the axis to experience a direct visual relation with a distant focal object, or whether there was some type of natural force flowing towards the temple and the divine being inside.

In most chapters, Wightman discusses buildings in the conventional way of describing their plan, exterior appearance, and function. In some chapters, however, especially on those ancient Roman temples, he analyzes them first in plan—what he calls the horizontal dimension—then he discusses them in elevation, which includes podia, stairs, columns, walls, entablatures, roofing and iconography. Wightman addresses each of these topics while citing numerous examples from Rome’s many temple structures and drawing comparisons.

In general, Sacred Spaces is an extremely informative, well-written and well-illustrated book. Most remarkable is the evident depth of Wightman’s expertise about every culture and every-out-of-the-way site, whether it is western European, Buddhist, Hindu or pre-Columbian. The book has a seemingly endless supply of information, as each temple complex is described in great detail, always revealing some new and interesting insight into ancient building methods or concepts of sacred space.

John Stamper Ph.D is an architect and architectural historian in the University of Notre Dame School of Architecture and the author of several books including The Architecture of Roman Temples: The Republic to the Middle Empire and Chicago’s North Michigan Avenue: Planning and Development 1900-1930.

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 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.

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.


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.


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 the shift in building styles and the historical, 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.
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