Welcome to the inaugural issue of Sacred Architecture, a journal committed to the promotion of the cultural heritage of the Church. Approaching the brink of the new millennium we are witnessing a great outburst of construction of Catholic churches and other structures. Numerous parishes have told me of their plans to renovate, or build anew in honor of the Great Jubilee. I would say that this is a most appropriate response. You are doubtless aware of the great wellspring of popular support for perpetual adoration in our parishes which is resulting in the construction of many new chapels. Perhaps the most positive sign is the general revival of interest in sacred architecture by architects, clergy and the laity, a topic once thought to be the sole domain of liturgical consultants and finance committees. Why are the faithful so interested in this subject? In part because there is an awareness that what we have been praying in, for the past few decades, has not measured up. There is a recognition, even a demand, on the part of the faithful that a house dedicated to God should have a sense of the sacred. As Monsignor Guardini noted in Meditations on the Mass, “the Church sets aside a place that has been severed from all other connections and purposes in order to belong to Him in a very special way. Here man is meant to become aware of something different both from nature and from human works: of the holy.”

The Sacred Architecture journal was conceived in response to the many phonecalls and letters I have received from pastors and laity requesting literature to read or architects to hire. The people of God have expressed a great desire for an architectural publication which will draw on the riches of the Catholic patrimony and articulate the principles for a sacramental architecture. Not long ago a respected cleric pointed out to me that while we have drama, music and art critics in our major journals there is little serious criticism of contemporary church architecture. Thus the intention of this journal is to sponsor substantive debate about this crucial subject. Catesby Leigh and Duncan McRoberts have provided us with thoughtful and incisive analyses of the John Paul II Center in Washington and the Chapel of St. Ignatius in Seattle, projects which have received only uncritical promotion thus far. The interview with Daniel Lee offers a view of architecture grounded in Scripture which Protestants and Catholics will find equally compelling.

In publishing a variety of articles and news items, Sacred Architecture sees its mission as keeping you up to date on how bricks and mortar are being used to build up the City of God. We are pleased to feature an address of His Excellency, Archbishop Marchisano of the Vatican’s Beni Cultural, given to the Notre Dame seminar on Sacred Architecture this summer. It will also be of interest to read about the renovations of Pope John Paul II’s Redemptoris Mater chapel, the cleaning of the facade of St. Peter’s basilica, and the preservation area around St. Peter’s tomb. This is to say that this first issue, as all publications on Roman Catholic architecture should be in part, is dedicated to the architecture of the city of Jubilee, the Eternal City. I hope you find Sacred Architecture of great benefit, that you will send us your comments and, if you have not already done so, that you will subscribe today.

Tertio Millennio Adveniente!

Duncan Stroik
Notre Dame, Indiana
Fall 1998
# Sacred Architecture

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**Journal of the Institute for Sacred Architecture**

The Institute for Sacred Architecture is a non-profit organization (pending) made up of architects, clergy, educators and others interested in the reporting, analysis and review of significant issues related to contemporary Catholic architecture. Sacred Architecture is published three times a year for $12.95 a year. Address subscriptions, manuscripts and letters to the Editor.

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MANAGING EDITOR: John Stroik, 1638 Wainwright Dr., Reston, VA 20190-3431  ©1998 The Institute for Sacred Architecture
CATHEDRAL building has been no easy task for Los Angeles archbishop Roger Cardinal Mahony. Three years ago, His Eminence proposed to build a new cathedral for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles on the site of then current cathedral, St. Vibiana's. Claiming that the damage sustained by St. Vibiana's during the 1994 Northridge earthquake forbade any realistic hopes of saving the old cathedral, the archdiocese proposed razing the structure at Second and Main in downtown Los Angeles and, in its place, building a new “cathedral complex” that would include, among with the new cathedral, a conference hall, rectory, and plaza. The cost of the proposed project was estimated at $50 million. The Los Angeles Conservancy, an historical preservationist group that seeks to preserve what is left of Los Angeles’ significant architecture (including, on one occasion, a 1950s car wash), hearing of St. Vibiana’s imminent demise, sought a court injunction to stop the demolition of the cathedral. Since it was erected in 1876, St. Vibiana’s was protected as a state historical monument. Thus, argued the Conservancy, the cathedral structure could not be demolished without a six months environmental impact study. The Conservancy further argued that retrofitting the cathedral would cost a mere $5 million, as opposed to the archdiocese’s estimate of $20 million. The difference lay in that the archdiocese’s estimate was projected on the cost of an interior retrofitting of the cathedral, whereas the Conservancy claimed that an exterior bracing system would be sufficient.

On June 1, 1996, the archdiocese commenced the demolition of St. Vibiana’s, but was halted by a Los Angeles city inspector who claimed the archdiocese had not obtained the necessary demolition permit. On June 19, Superior Court Judge Robert O’Brien ruled in favor of the Los Angeles Conservancy, and ordered an environmental study be conducted before demolition.

Not wishing to delay his cathedral project, which he wished completed by the year 2000, Cardinal Mahony decided to sell the land at Second and Main and buy property elsewhere in the city. His Eminence settled on a 5.8 acre plot at the corner of Temple and Grand Avenues, downtown, over-looking an icon of Los Angeles life—a freeway. The September 21, 1997 groundbreaking was greeted by protesters who, from the beginning had opposed the project. One group, the Los Angeles Catholic Worker, opposed spending $50 million for a new cathedral, since the money could better be invested in the needs of the poor.

On June 19, 1996, five Catholic Workers with an Episcopal priestess had scaled the walls of St. Vibiana’s Cathedral and from the bell tower hung a banner, which read: “We Reclaim the Church for the Poor.”

The second group who opposed the cardinal’s project were Catholic traditionalists who protested the cardinal’s choice of the architect, Rafaél Moneo, 59, of Madrid, Spain. Traditional Catholics also feared that the new cathedral would reflect, architecturally, the principles for liturgical renewal Mahony laid out in his September 1997 pastoral letter, “Gather Faithfully Together.”

A third protest group, however, was new to the scene—the Gabrielino Indian tribe. Vera Rocha, chief of the Gabrielino tribe, claimed that the cardinal’s cathedral site was an ancient burial ground of her people. This was based on the discovery, in 1957, of the fragments of an “ancient human skull” on the site when it was excavated for a parking lot.

Rocha demanded that archaeological tests be done before construction on the cathedral complex would begin. In April 1998, the Gabrielino tribe along with the Spirit of the Sage Council filed a lawsuit against the Los Angeles archdiocese, the Community Redevelopment Agency and the City of Los Angeles for alleged violations of the California Environmental Quality Act and of land use. Rocha wanted an injunction placed on the cathedral construction. The Gabrielinos, however, did not fare as well as the Los Angeles Conservancy. On June 5, Superior Court Judge Robert O’Brien ruled against the injunction.

As many had predicted, the price of the cathedral complex did not remain at $50 million. Claiming that the original estimate applied to the Second and Main property, and not the Temple and Grand site, the archdiocese announced on March 20, 1998 that the cathedral project would cost $163.2 million. As with the first estimate of $50 million, the archdiocese stated that the $163.2 million would come only from private donors. According to the archdiocese, $110.5 million had, by March, already been contributed. The Dan Murphy and the Thomas and Dorothy Leavey Foundations together contributed $35 million, with the remaining monies coming from the Walt Disney Corporation, Peter O’Malley (former owner and current chairman of the Los Angeles Dodgers), comedian Bob Hope, Los Angeles mayor Richard Riordan, Betsy Bloomingdale (of Bloomingdale’s department store fame), and Roy and Patty Disney.

Christopher Zehnder is a journalist and the Editor of the L.A. CATHOLIC MISSION

DESIGN OF CONFESSIONALS

Under most circumstances, priests have the right to insist on hearing confessions only through a screen, the Vatican said. The Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts said that even if a penitent requests a face-to-face confession, the final decision is up to the priest. The council’s decision was published in the July 13-14 issue of L’Osservatore Romano, the Vatican newspaper, with the approval of Pope John Paul II. “For a just reason and excluding cases of necessity, the minister of the sacrament can legitimately decide, even in the event that the penitent asks otherwise, that sacramental confession be received in a confessional equipped with a fixed grill,” the council said.

Vatican City (CNS) Today’s Catholic, August 2, 1998

SAVING ST. PETER’S TOMB

Discovered and unearthed in the 1940s, the tomb of St. Peter has been archaeologically surveyed, visited by popes, documented, enshrined, and opened to the public. Now it is about to acquire a late 20th-century badge of distinction: a corporate sponsor.

The Italian electric company, known by its acronym ENEL, is chipping in about $1.7 million to restore and relight the tomb of the first pope and other graves in the ancient underground cemetery beneath St. Peter’s Basilica.

One big problem, according to ENEL experts, is the heat generated by the present lighting system and by the bodies of some 200 people who take guided tours of the site each day. The warmth draws out moisture from the walls of the tombs, generating mold, mildew, salt deposits, and general decay. The complex will be closed during the initial phase of the work, expected to be finished by the year 2000; after a pause for the Holy Year, the restoration will resume and continue for an indefinite period.

Vatican City (CNS) National Catholic Register, June 28-July 4, 1998
The University of Notre Dame School of Architecture sponsored an intensive seminar entitled "Sacred Architecture in Italy: Rome and Florence" during a two-week period in the summer of 1998. Participants, including architects, artists, graduate students, two Carmelite friars, a university president and people otherwise interested in sacred architecture, were led by architect and professor Duncan Stroik. These Italian cities served as classrooms for this diverse group of students, brought together by their love of the Church and their understanding of the important role which architecture plays in her liturgy and symbolic presence in the larger world.

Thirteen days each began at seven a.m. and ended near eleven p.m., with an organized schedule of church visits, daily Mass, discussion, and wonderful Italian cuisine in the "outdoor rooms" which form the streets of Florence and Rome. Beginning with the earliest architectural remains of ancient Rome, the seminar included visits and discussion of the Roman Forum and early Christian basilicas and catacombs. Each day presented new architectural, historical, and theological discussion as the chronological trip through centuries of Christian architecture enlightened many eyes to the concurrent unity and diversity of Catholic architecture. Guest lectures by historians John Alexander and John Stamper, liturgist Cassian Folsom, O.S.B., and a closed-to-the-public archaeological tour of San Clemente by Paul Lawlor, O.P. added to the intellectual content. Many of the participants, experts in their own right, presented guided tours of some churches on the itinerary. One particular highlight of the trip was a two-hour visit with Archbishop Marchisano of the "Pontifical Commission for the Conservation of the Artistic and Sacred Patrimony," who spoke eloquently of the Vatican's plans for preserving the Church's artistic patrimony, and who listened patiently and attentively to the participants' concerns and questions concerning the state of architecture in the Church.

Visits to the great Renaissance and Baroque designs of St. Peter's Basilica, the Gesù, the Chiesa Nuova, and San Andrea al Quirinale were followed by stops at the twentieth-century classical churches of some of Rome's newer neighborhoods. This juxtaposition of classicism old and new led to the inevitable discussion concerning the place of traditional architecture in the modern world. Florence's Duomo, as well as its great mendicant churches, provided evidence of the contrast and continuity within Catholic architecture. Visits offered ample time for individual exploration of each building. Several participants noted how part of the difficulty in rounding up the group to visit its next site was gathering people off of their knees from their devotions at chapels and shrines.

Professor Stroik's diligence and guidance to Rome's best restaurants as well as its best churches provided relaxing forums for discussion of each day's lessons. No spare moments went unfilled with intellectual discussion, good wine, solidarity in shared core beliefs, and occasional debates about religious and artistic topics. By the end of the first week there was talk of a "reunion" of the participants. Though educational in nature, the tour provided an opportunity for an intellectual and faithful pilgrimage rather than a mere sight-seeing trip. From the treasury of ecclesiastical art and architecture the Church offered, participants gathered knowledge of the things eternal which they will continue to present in their individual service to the Church.

Denis McNamara is a graduate of Yale University and is presently working on a dissertation in Architectural History at the University of Virginia.
**U.S. Cathedral Study**

The typical U.S. Catholic cathedral was dedicated in 1930, was last renovated in 1966 and seats 800 people, says a new study by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

The study found that 82 percent of the cathedrals also serve as regular parish churches—typically with more than 2,000 parishioners and some 1,500 worshipers attending weekend Masses.

Most have at least five weekend Masses and two or more daily Masses as well. They get an average of around 50 worshippers per weekday Mass.

The study found that nearly two-thirds of the Catholic cathedrals in the country have completed their most recent renovation since 1980. Most of the rest underwent their last renovation in the 1960s or ’70s.

Ten percent of the cathedrals were built before 1850; 27 percent between 1851 and 1900; 42 percent between 1901 and 1950; and 21 percent since 1950.

Only 43 percent of the cathedrals were originally built as cathedrals. The rest were originally built as parish churches.

In architectural design, about 13 percent are modern, 7 percent Spanish or mission style, 1 percent Byzantine, 35 percent Classical or Romanesque and 44 percent Gothic or neo-Gothic.

The “National Cathedral Profile Summary Report” is available for $15 from CARA, Georgetown University, Washington, DC 20057. Telephone 202-687-8080.

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**Pope Perplexed by Church Architecture**

Pope John Paul II is often “thoroughly perplexed” by contemporary church architecture, according to his vicar for Rome, Cardinal Camillo Ruini. “There is little sense of the sacred in the new churches,” lamented the cardinal, during an international conference on liturgical arts. He asked the other participants in the discussion to explain why renowned artists, who seem to have command over their craft, cannot penetrate more deeply into the riches of the Christian cultural heritage, and design churches that appeal to the sense of the sacred.

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**Vatican Upgrade**

While Pope John Paul II has emphasized a spiritual cleansing in preparation for the Holy Year 2000, both the city of Rome and the Vatican have been moving dirt—with pressurized hoses and bulldozers.

Many of the major churches and monuments pilgrims will visit in the Holy Year currently are under scaffolding, including the facade of St. Peter’s Basilica. Jets of treated water are being used to wash away the grime of time and air pollution.

For example, “The Activity of the Holy See: 1997” reports that construction of the new Year 2000 entrance to the Vatican Museums involved first removing 1.4 million cubic feet of dirt from the side of the hill which will host the new entrance hall.

The other big dig within the Vatican walls is the hole on the hill above the back of St. Peter’s Basilica. It will become a three-level underground parking garage with spaces for 250 cars driven to work by Vatican employees.

The project is in addition to the large public parking complex the Vatican and the city of Rome are building on Vatican Hill. The Vatican also had to do some demolition on the site, tearing down the walls of St. Peter’s Basilica. It will become a three-level underground parking garage with spaces for 250 cars driven to work by Vatican employees.

The project is in addition to the large public parking complex the Vatican and the city of Rome are building on Vatican-owned property on the nearby Janiculum Hill. The Vatican also had to do some demolition on the site, tearing down the building which once housed the Vatican Mosaic Studio. The structure, completed in the 1930s was judged to be of “modest monumental and historical relevance,” according to “The Activity of the Holy See.”

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**Redemptoris Mater Chapel in the Vatican**

In what is likely to be the most important artistic work done under the patronage of Pope John Paul II, a Russian Orthodox artist is covering the walls and ceiling of a chapel with mosaics.

Aleksandr Kornoukhov, a 50-year-old, internationally-recognized artist, began working November 1996 in the chapel of the Apostolic Palace.

The Pope said the work “once again unites us: Rome, Moscow, Constantinople, West and East...the one church of Christ.”

Already in the studio Kornoukhov shares with Orthodox and Catholic artists from Eastern Europe, temporarily framed sections of mosaic were assembled. Each section portrayed three saints common to Catholicism and Orthodoxy.

A drawing of the design for the wall, depicting the New Jerusalem, was taped above Kornoukhov’s work bench.

“The work, executed by a Russian artist, envisages a decoration with mosaics in the Eastern style and will remain as a gift of the College of Cardinals in memory of the (1996) 50th anniversary of the priestly ordination of Pope John Paul II,” the book said. No other details were given. When Pope John Paul first ordered the redecoration of the chapel — known as the Matilde Chapel since the time of Pope Gregory XIII in the late 1500s—he named it after his 1987 encyclical, “Redemptoris Mater,” (“Mother of the Redeemer”).

The 1988 work on the chapel was relatively minor; two huge Gobelin tapestries, which were a gift in 1805 from Napoleon I to Pope Pius VII, were removed from the walls; 14 Stations of the Cross in bronze were put up; a new altar built on the base of an ancient column was installed; and a bronze crucifix by the artist who sculpted the stations was hung above the altar.

Kornoukhov’s work reflects more closely the new name of the chapel and the contents of the papal encyclical it commemorates.

The first detailed descriptions of Kornoukhov’s work in the chapel and the first public photographs of it were published in mid-April in the popular Italian weekly magazine Oggi. In the Oggi article, labeled a “WORLD-WIDE EXCLUSIVE,” the magazine reported, “Halfway between the pontiff’s apartment and the Sistine Chapel, for two years, a great Russian mosaic artist has been working secretly on the end-of-the-millennium masterpiece of religious art.” Oggi said the new chapel will be completed by the year 2000.
Sacred Architecture Fall 1998

All told, artists, as a class, are not known to be the most promising material for canonization, which is why so many people were caught off guard when Ricardo Cardinal Carles of Barcelona recently endorsed a local (Barcelona) campaign to beatify Antoni Gaudi, widely considered to be Spain’s greatest architect, and one of modernism’s most original and eccentric masters.

A coalition of scholars and clerics, backed by the bishops of Catalonia—the region of northeastern Spain of which Barcelona is the capital—has been advocating Gaudi’s cause for canonization since 1994.

Gaudi is the creator of Barcelona’s most identifiable landmark, the Church of the Holy Family, or Sagrada Familia. The church is a modern Gothic fantasy-scape with sand-castle spires and honeycomb towers—a virtual emblem of the artist’s deep faith, his Catalan roots and his profound hatred for the straight line. Gaudi left the work unfinished when he died in 1926.

Cardinal Carles gave the architect’s beatification campaign his approval in an essay published in the August 23 issue of the diocesan newsletter, writing that while the Catalan architect’s achievement was widely acknowledged, “there are also some lesser known aspects”—namely, “Gaudi’s intimate spiritual life.” The prelate extolled the artist’s “great spiritually” and affirmed that Gaudi “conducted [his] life on the highest levels of mysticism.”

Postulators of the architect’s cause say that devotees are already reporting medical cures and spiritual consolations attributed to Gaudi’s intercession, and that his example has inspired conversions to Catholicism—notably that of the Japanese architect Etsuro Sottoo, a Shinto Buddhist until his studies of Gaudi persuaded him to enter the Church seven years ago.

By the early 1890s, Barcelona’s Catholic artists, Gaudi foremost among them, found themselves increasingly at odds with the morals as well as the ideals of their secular counterparts. The result was the formation of the Artistic Circle of St. Luke, a group of poets, painters, sculptors, and architects who worked under the direct patronage of the Church.

Gaudi constructed his 1904 Casa Batllo apartment complex to be a poem to St. George’s victory over the dragon. More impressively still, his famous 1906 Casa Mila, or Pedrera building was armed with a roof-top full of Darth Vader-like devils meant in his original (unfinished) design, to be overcome by a giant 40-foot-tall colossus of the Blessed Virgin.

The 1860s were seen by contemporaries as a time of unmitigated disaster for the Church. The papal states had been lost to liberal, anticlerical forces under the leadership of Garibaldi, leaving the Pope a “prisoner of the Vatican.” In Spain, liberal forces had driven Isabel II from the throne, and civil war had broken out. Lay Catholic associations in Catalonia began to propagate special devotion to St. Joseph and the Holy Family as a way to secure the triumph of the Church amid these perils.

In 1866, this association bought land in an unfashionable part of Barcelona in order to build a church where people could pray and do penance against the evils of the age — hence, the church’s name: The Expiatory Church of the Holy Family.

Construction did not begin until 1882, and by 1884 the association had hired Gaudi to complete the church. Upon recovering from an attack of undulant fever in 1911, Gaudi abandoned all other work and devoted himself entirely to the project.

With periodic work stoppages due to lack of funds, Gaudi finished the church’s east transept devoted to the Nativity in 1893, but construction on the west transept dedicated to the Passion wasn’t started until 1954—decades after the architect’s death — on designs Gaudi had drawn up in 1917.

Work continues on the structure to this day, although hampered by the destruction of Gaudi’s plans and drawings during the Spanish Civil War.

A life-long bachelor, Gaudi lived with his ailing father and sister in a modest house in Guell Park, devoted to his work and to long hours spent in prayer. On the street, he had often been a colorful, if respected figure, shuffling along in an ill-fitting suit, munching an orange or a dry crust of bread, absorbed in thought.

Is Gaudi a saint? Some of his fellow Barcelonans have little difficulty imagining it.

“What a wonderful thing that would be,” a local devotee said in a recent interview on Gaudi’s prospects. “If Don Antoni were canonized, then everyone would want to be an architect!”

CONFERENCES & SEMINARS

“Liturgy and Culture” conference was held at Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago September 24-27, 1998. Addresses by Francis Cardinal George, Geoffrey Wainwright, Rev. Michael Morris, O.P. and others. Sponsored by the Society for Catholic Liturgy. The proceedings will be published in the 1999 issue of Antiphon.

“Seminar on Sacred Architecture in Italy” to be held at the University of Notre Dame Rome Studies Center in the historic center of Rome, June 4-17, 1999. The seminar will study and visit some of the most significant places of Christian worship from the catacombs to the baroque. The seminar is designed for pastors, architects and educated laity. Sponsored by the University of Notre Dame School of Architecture. For further information please call Bernadette Stein at 219/631-3096.

“International Congress on Liturgical Architecture” to be held in Rome, Italy October 12-15, 1999. The Congress will be divided into three parts: 1) a presentation of the theological-liturgical tradition, 2) a description and evaluation of the present situation, and 3) proposals for the future. The Congress is being sponsored by Pontifical Liturgical Institute of San Anselmo in Rome, Rev. Cassian Folsom, O.S.B., Director.
The Pontifical Commission was instituted by John Paul II back in 1988, so that an entire Decastery of the Curia could look after the area of the cultural heritage of the Church, which includes, by our definition, Church monuments and sites; artistic collections and Church or diocesan museums; historical collections and Church archives; and Church libraries. Previously, these same headquarters housed an office for the Sacred Art in Italy. Now the new Pontifical Commission’s task is to serve the Catholic Church in all nations of the world. In lay terms, you could equate the Pontifical Commission to a government Ministry for the Cultural Heritage (or the equivalent in the United States of the National Endowment for the Arts — with the difference that they have money to give, and we don’t).

Its mandate is to supervise, aid, encourage, and stimulate initiatives in the conservation and promotion of the Church’s Cultural Heritage within each Particular Church (a term we use for the Catholic Church in every nation).

It therefore operates on two main levels: on a “national” level through the Episcopal Conference set up in each country where the Catholic Church is present; and on the “diocesan” level through the individual Bishops and those individuals appointed by him to work in this area. Often both the Episcopal Conference and the individual dioceses have established a specific Commission or Committee in order to facilitate the management and planning of projects which makes the coordination of activities, and contacts, even easier.

Before I give you a run-down of some of the major projects conducted by our Commission over these past years, you might ask yourself why has the Church focused on the cultural heritage throughout her history as part of her pastoral mission? Theologically speaking, the reason lies in the essential Mystery of the Incarnation. Our Lord has wanted to make himself visible to us, to incarnate Himself within the confines of humanity, to become part of its history, to be perceived by our senses as a material reality thus to leave us His memory and His image (as most probably in the case of the Holy Shroud).

Speaking in pastoral terms, historic and artistic heritage means for the Church much more than a simple gathering of precious objects with property rights. For the Church it represents a necessary and vital instrument for exercising Her evangelizing and pastoral mission, since Christ’s presence through the church has reached just about all corners of the earth, so the primary role of the Church remains basically a missionary one. The artworks located in a place of worship are envisioned from their conception with a particular function which goes beyond the mere purposes of embellishment, but is inherent to the religious cult itself. We are dealing, in the case of Sacred Art, with a particular process of what we may call “osmosis” between artistic expression and the religious feeling imbedded in the sacred space of worship. In the light of this tradition, Sacred Art flourished with three major aims:

- first, to play an active role in the rite of worship;
- second, to provide a didactic means to pass on the Gospel message and Christian doctrine;
- third, to witness to the exercise of charity and charitable works, as the considerable artistic tradition associated with religious confraternities, hospices, and hospitals has testified through the ages.

These works then, constitute the historic memory of the birth and development of a local community of faith, but often they also become precious visual testimonies of the growth and development of the local society in general.

For a lack of time I cannot recall all the extraordinary efforts made by the Church hierarchy as well as the community of faithful in both the areas of preservation and restoration of cultural heritage, as well as the promotion of all forms of human creativity produced in the society of every age. But besides the well-known tradition of the Church commissions in this respect, you might be slightly less familiar with...
some of the initiatives carried out by numerous Church authorities in the area of restoration and re-ordering of Church monuments and sites, already beginning as early as the 1st century AD. Let me just mention a few which are rather interesting:

- Pope Zefirin who by the end of the 2nd century had appointed a deacon for the care and protection of the Christian burial grounds;
- Pope Calisto the First who became known for his administrative and management capacities regarding these same monuments;
- Pope Damaso 1st who by the 4th century had launched a major restoration campaign which included a didactic program, as dedicatory inscriptions were placed in order to identify the martyrs buried in the existing basilicas and cemeteries;
- the initiative of issuing Apostolic Constitutions back in 400 A.D. regarding the construction of churches;
- much later the efforts of Pope Martin V (in the Quattrocento) to include in the Apostolic Constitution an entire section on the reconstruction of major monuments and buildings;
- during the same period, the extraordinary deeds of Pope Sixtus IV who became known as the Urbis Restaurator, which also included decrees which foresaw severe sanctions for anyone who touched or altered the interior decoration or the stone structure of Churches and sacred buildings;
- the splendid intuitive and wise decisions of Pope Julius II (in the Cinquecento) who recommended not only a policy of conservation but also sponsored a campaign for the restoration and repair of buildings, which would take into consideration the original foundations of the old structures.

This extraordinarily rich legacy of experiences and efforts made by our forefathers in the faith, must be kept alive through a deeper awareness of our responsibility to keep our commitment towards an active use of the cultural heritage as a valid and primary vehicle of our pastoral activity. And I must say that this in fact has been a real striving concern in our Post-War era. One just needs to remember the stimulating reminders made by Pope Paul VI on so many occasions, especially in his famous address delivered in the Sistine Chapel, and the comment that our current Pontiff has told me personally on several occasions: “If I was able to do some good to those far away from the Church when I was Archbishop of Cracow, it was because I always began with the cultural heritage, which has a language everyone knows and everyone accepts and using this language I was able to start a dialogue which would not have been possible otherwise.”

The work of our Pontifical Commission, abiding to our mandate and in tune with the essential approach set by Second Vatican Council, has focused on strengthening coordination and participation of all the particular Churches — the Catholic Church in every nation — through a series of activities. The latter have been concentrated so far on three major areas: information, awareness-raising, and training.

As I look upon each of you before me here today, I cannot but hope that your professional activity will foresee an important contribution to the preservation and promotion of the Church’s cultural heritage, through sound and model projects which can speak to the community of faithful of the intrinsic values of the cultural heritage of the Church in the past while offering an innovative artistic language which can be understood and can captivate that “noble beauty and harmony” fit for architecture which soars to give praise to Our Creator.

Can I just make a final remark in this regard which I hope will be thought-provoking someday somehow in your own work — I refer to the Gospel passage “the rejected stone has become the corner stone...” I want to express once more my best wishes for the success of your professional careers which should also become a visual means to bring about a better world of peace, brotherhood, mutual respect and understanding.
1. The Second Vatican Council requires us to reject traditional church architecture and design new churches in a Modernist style.

This myth is based more on what Roman Catholics have built during the past thirty years than on what the Church has taught. Even by professional accounts, the church architecture of the past decades has been an unmitigated disaster. However, actions often speak louder than words, and the faithful have been led to believe that the Church requires buildings to be functional abstractions, because that is what we have been building. Nothing could be farther from the intentions of the Council fathers who clearly intended the historic expression of church architecture to continue. It is important to keep in mind that “there must be no innovations unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires them, and care must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing.” (Sancrosanctum Concilium)

Just as to do Catholic theology means to learn from the past, so to design Catholic architecture is to be inspired and even quote from the traditions and the time-tested expressions of church architecture. The Second Vatican Council makes this clear in stating that “...The Church has not adopted any particular style of art as her own. She has admitted styles from every period, in keeping with the natural characteristics and conditions of peoples and the needs of the various rites. Thus in the course of the centuries she has brought into existence a treasury of art which must be preserved with every care. The art of our own times from every race and country shall also be given free scope in the Church, provided it bring to the task the reverence and honor due to the sacred buildings and rites. Thus it is enabled to join its voice to that wonderful chorus of praise in honor of the Catholic faith sung by great men in past ages.” (Sacrosanctum Concilium)

2. New churches must be designed in accordance with the document Environment and Art in Catholic Worship, published by the Bishop’s Committee on Liturgy in 1977.

Due to the lack of any alternative, this pamphlet has become the veritable bible for many new and renovated churches. This document, which was never voted on by the American Bishop’s conference and holds no canonical weight, is based more on the principles of Modernist architecture than on Roman Catholic teaching, or her patrimony of sacred architecture. Among its weaknesses is an overemphasis on a congregational view of the Church, an antagonism towards history and tradition, and a strident iconoclasm. Because of the controversial nature of the document, the Bishop’s Committee on the Liturgy is presently drafting a new and hopefully improved version.

Also to the point, there are any number of churches which have been built over the past two decades which exemplify the principles of durability, convenience and beauty including: San Juan Capistrano in California, 1983; Brentwood Cathedral in England, 1992; the Benedictine Abbey Sainte-Madeleine in France 1986; the Church of the Immaculate Conception in New Jersey, 1996; the Church of Azola in Portugal, 1995; the Church of St. Mary’s in Texas, 1997; the Church of St. Agnes in New York City, 1997; The Pittsburgh Oratory, 1996, etc.

3. It is impossible for us to build beautiful churches today.

This is a bit like saying that it is impossible for us to have saints in the modern age. Of course we can and should build beautiful churches again. We live in an age which has sent men to the moon and large sums of money are spent on museums and sports arenas. We should also be able to construct buildings of the quality of the early Christian basilicas or Gothic cathedrals. In recent secular architecture we are witnessing a great revival of traditional architecture, craftsmanship and construction. There are a growing number of young talented architects who are designing buildings in the classical tradition (many of whom would be delighted to design sacred buildings). Students at the University of Notre Dame, who are all trained in the Classical tradition, are in great demand by architecture firms and clients.

4. We can’t afford to build beautiful churches today. The Church doesn’t have the money it had in the past.

In fact, Roman Catholics are the wealthiest denomination in the country today. We have more CEO’s and civic leaders than any other religious group. We have never been wealthier, yet we have never built such cheap churches. This reflects American giving priorities; from 1968 to 1995 the portion of personal income members gave to the Church dropped 21 percent. The people of God need to be encouraged to generously support the construction of houses of prayer. Bishops and dioceses should be encouraged to promote the highest quality rather than placing a cap on construction costs. The faithful should be willing to spend more on the house of God than on their own houses and build with a quality exceeding other public buildings. One story of great philanthropy concerns Holy Spirit Church in Atlanta which received a generous sum of money from a few of its parishioners enabling them to build a very elegant substantial brick Romanesque church in the early 1990’s. Other parishes, in order to build a worthy and beautiful church, have taken the time to raise substantial budgets or have chosen to build in phases.

5. The money spent on churches is better spent on serving the less fortunate, feeding the hungry and educating the young.

If the church were merely a meeting place this view would be legitimate. However, a beautiful church is also a house for the poor, a place of spiritual feeding, and a catechism in stone. The church is a beacon and a city set on a hill. It can evangelize, by expressing the beauty, permanence, and transcendence of Christianity. Most importantly, the church building is an image of our Lord’s body, and in constructing a place of worship we become like the woman anointing Christ’s body with precious ointment. (Mark 14:3-9).
6. The fan shape, in which everyone can see the assembly and be close to the altar, is the most appropriate form for expressing the full, active and conscious participation of the body of Christ.

This myth comes out of the extreme view that the assembly is the primary symbol of the church. While the fan shape is a wonderful shape for a theater, for lectures, even for representative government — it is not an appropriate shape for the liturgy. Ironically, the reason often stated for using the fan shape is to encourage participation, yet the semicircular shape is derived from a room for entertainment. The fan shape does not derive from the writings of the Second Vatican Council, it derives from the Greek or Roman theater. Up until recently, it was never used as a model for Catholic churches. In fact, the first theater churches were 19th century Protestant auditoriums designed so as to focus on the preacher.

7. The church building should be designed with noble simplicity. Devotional chapels and images of saints distract and take away from the liturgy.

This principle has been used to build and renovate churches in a most iconoclastic manner. The art historian, Winckelmann used “noble simplicity” as early as 1755 to describe the genuine work of art that combined sensual and spiritual elements as well as beauty and moral ideas into one sublime form — which for him was embodied in classical Greek art. Thus “noble simplicity” must not be confused with mere functionalism, abstract minimalism or crude banality. Sacrosanctum Concilium states that sacred art should turn men’s minds devoutly toward God, and “that in encouraging and favoring truly sacred art, they should seek for noble beauty rather than sumptuous display.” The General Instruction on the Roman Missal (GIRM) states that “church decor should aim at noble simplicity rather than at ostentatious magnificence.” The concern over distraction grows out of the Modernist aversion to figurative images and a desire to be didactic rather than symbolic. But the GIRM states that “buildings and appurtenances for divine worship ought to be beautiful and symbolic.” The Second Vatican Council states that “the practice of placing sacred images in churches so that they can be venerated by the faithful is to be maintained.” The GIRM elaborates “from the very earliest days there has been a tradition whereby images of our Lord, his holy Mother and of saints are displayed in churches for the veneration of the faithful.”

8. The Catholic Church should be building the most avant-garde architecture of its day, just as it has throughout history.

For fifteen hundred years, and even up until World War II, the Roman Catholic Church was considered the finest patron of art and architecture. The Church formed Christian artists and architects who in turn influenced the architecture of the secular realm. During the last half century, however, the roles have changed, and the Church has been following the lead of the secular culture and architects who have been formed in a non-Catholic world view.

Whereas previously the development of Catholic architecture was inspired by and in continuity with works from the past, the Modernist concept of the “avant-garde” means progress through a continuous breaking with the past.

The Church documents ask bishops to encourage and favor truly sacred art and to imbue artists “with the spirit of sacred art and of the sacred liturgy.” The present revival of interest in liturgical architecture by the faithful indicates that Holy Mother Church may regain her rightful place as the preeminent patroness. In this role she has “always claimed the right to pass judgment on the arts, deciding which of the works of artists are in accordance with faith, piety, and the laws religiously handed down, and are to be considered suitable for sacred use.” Also, “bishops should be careful to ensure that works of art which are repugnant to faith, morals, and Christian piety, and which offend true religious sense either by depraved forms or through lack of artistic merit or because of mediocrity or pretense, be removed from the house of God and from other sacred places” (Sacrosanctum Concilium).

9. In the past, people saw the church building as the domus Dei or “house of God”, today we have gone back to the early Christian view of the church as domus ecclesia or “house of people of God”.

Catholicism, it has been pointed out, is not a religion of “either/ or” but of “both/ and”. In contrast, it is an antinomial view, derived from the Enlightenment, which claims that a church cannot be both God’s house and the house of his people, who are members of his body. When the church is thought of merely as house of the people of God, it becomes designed as a horizontal living room or an auditorium. These two historic names, domus Dei and domus ecclesia, express two distinct but complementary natures of the church building as the presence of God, and the community called together by God. “These visible churches are not simply gathering places but signify and make visible the Church living in this place, the dwelling of God with men reconciled and united in Christ.” (The Catechism)

10. Since God dwells everywhere, He is just as present in the parking lot as in a church. Therefore, church buildings no longer be seen as sacred places.

This is a very attractive contemporary idea which has more to do with pop theology than with Catholic tradition. From the beginning of time, God has chosen to meet His people in sacred places. The “holy ground” of Mount Sinai became translated into the tent in the wilderness and the Temple in Jerusalem. With the advent of Christianity, believers constructed buildings specifically for the divine liturgy which would reflect the heavenly temple, the upper room and these holy places. In Canon Law “the term church signifies a sacred building destined for divine worship to which the faithful have a right of access for divine worship, especially its public exercise.” As “a place set apart” for reception of the sacraments, the church itself becomes a spiritual haven as its focus the sanctuary, which means a holy place. Just as the ceremonies, elements such as the altar and ambo, and the art are all referred to as “sacred” so are the buildings designed for them. Therefore to seek to remove the distinction of the church as a sacred place for sacred activity is to diminish our reverence of God, which the building should help to engender.

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The John Paul II Cultural Center, Washington DC

Will The Medium Be The Message?

by Catesby Leigh

Strictly speaking, the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center, which soon will be under construction in the nation's capital, does not qualify as sacred architecture. It is conceived, first and foremost, as a high-tech museum of the Catholic faith which will educate and inspire Catholic and non-Catholic visitors alike. It also will serve as a research institute accommodating a dozen scholars from around the world. Both museum and institute will be housed in a 100,000-square-foot building designed by a team of architects from the Washington office of Leo A. Daly, under the direction of Richard Clarke.

The John Paul II Cultural Center Foundation, whose headquarters are in Detroit, is financing the $51.8 million project through private donations. The foundation’s president is Adam Cardinal Maida, the archbishop of Detroit, whose father immigrated to the United States from Poland. The site for the cultural center is a wooded, 12-acre lot located next to the campus of the Catholic University of America and close to the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Proximity to the shrine, a highly popular tourist destination, is one of the principal advantages of the cultural center’s location. Construction is expected to be completed in the latter part of 2000.

When Cardinal Maida first got the idea for the cultural center a decade ago, he was thinking in terms of an institution similar to our presidential libraries. But his original idea has undergone considerable development. Thus the museum’s permanent exhibition has been designed by Edwin Schlossberg Incorporated of New York City as a multimedia vision of the Church’s past, present, and future — and of how they relate to the history of the world, and to modern scientific interpretations of the cosmos. This exhibition is intended to emphasize basic themes or ideals such as the unity of Christians and the unity of the world; Pope John Paul II’s “prophetic humanism;” human dignity; the Church as defender of human rights; and John Paul II as “a pope of the [Second Vatican] Council, a pope for the ages.”

The cultural center also will offer temporary exhibits drawing mainly on the Vatican’s collections, along with conveniences such as gift shops, a café, and even an “Earth Play Area” for children seven and under.

The cultural center may not qualify under the heading of sacred architecture, but it is hardly a secular institution. It is intended to propagate the faith, while perpetuating the incumbent pontiff’s legacy. And its design raises interesting questions about the way in which the sponsoring foundation is seeking to carry out this mission. “The cathedrals of the Middle Ages told a story in stained glass,” Cardinal Maida was quoted as saying in the Washington Times last year. “This museum will tell a story with technology and scholarship.” Modernist design is also part of the formula.

The cultural center will be set well back in its lot, facing a generous expanse of greensward to the east. Perched on a terrace of black-and-white Polish granite, the building will be an architectural synthesis, in limestone and glass, of a number of familiar themes from the œuvre of the pioneer French modernist Le Corbusier.

Towards its north end, a large cylindrical volume projects from the model’s main rectilinear mass and serves as an entrance “rotunda.” On the terrace, a reflecting pool runs along the length of this mass, and is interrupted near its southern end by a chapel wing which juts out from the building at a perpendicular angle. The chapel itself is a little box housed within an odd sculptural arrangement consisting of two perpendicular wall-planes which read, in plan, as an asymmetrical cross. Rectilinear openings are punched out of these planes, however, and it is very unlikely that many visitors will appreciate this distorted reference to the principal symbol of Christianity, whose formal inspiration would appear to lie in the supremely abstract realm of constructivist art.

The copper-sheathed chevron form suspended over the main building mass, for its part, has been likened to angel’s wings. But the roof metaphor, too, is compromised, if not negated, by the chevron’s asymmetrical configuration. The roof rests on a row of large, vertical, tapering reinforced-concrete beams which rise through the building from its foundation. Second-
ary support is provided by metal struts on the building's east side. At the north end of the building, the roof cuts an ugly V-shaped indentation into a large limestone-sheathed service block, housing stairs, elevators, bathrooms, and mechanical functions, which receives distinct articulation in the design. At the chapel end, in turn, the roof is pierced by a cross.

On the other side of the cultural center from the entrance cylinder, a secondary, western facade faces a granite terrace which serves as a disembarkation point for bus passengers, and, beyond the terrace, a parking lot. This elevation is dominated by a large expanse of curtain wall of sandblasted glass. But on this side of the building, a couple of expressionistic gestures, in the form of two walls which protrude from the main building mass, offer some contrast with the dominant rationalist geometries.

One of these walls runs alongside the north end of the building at an oblique angle. It boasts the sort of disordered, seemingly random fenestration Le Corbusier employed at his pilgrimage chapel at Ronchamp, France — scattered glazed slot-openings and little square holes rather than what one would normally think of as windows. This massive wall rises for two of the building's three stories, and encloses the atrium of a lobby situated below grade as well as an exit. Pierced by another wall-plane jutting straight out from the building, it bends back toward a sunken court as a roofless segment, sloping inward on its inner side in a manner that recalls the Ronchamp chapel's interior. It is a baffling gesture. On the other side of the glass curtain-wall, another irregular wall protrudes less boldly from the building mass, this one undulating in plan and tapering off toward the building's south end. Endowed with the same sort of picturesque, Ronchamp-style fenestration, this wall encloses the Papal and Polish Heritage Room on the main level, and, above, a gallery for temporary exhibits, as well as the library of the studies center, which occupies the building's third floor. A narrow, glazed curtain wall extends between the undulating wall and a service block sheathed in corrugated copper panels, which anchors the cultural center's south end.

In the chapel, too, the ribbon window running right under the ceiling, and the wall-openings below, with their deep, splayed reveals, take after Ronchamp. The pews are pushed off to one side of the nave, a conventionally asymmetrical Modernist arrangement.

Inside the cultural center, the designers have devoted particular attention to accommodating the circulation of large numbers of people who will respond to the options the museum offers in a variety of ways. They also have sought to impart a sense of spatial openness and transparency in the building through the painstaking manipulation of natural light. Visitors’ interest is to be stimulated not only through the latest in audio-visual and interactive technologies; but also through introducing novel, tactile experiences, such as the touching the positive bronze casts of hands of the pope and other Catholics from around the world. These will be arrayed along the railings of the circulation ramps as “signs of peace.”

The permanent exhibition will be installed on the building's main and lower levels. Visitors will have the option of using the bar-coded cards in the small handbooks they will receive upon paying admission to obtain a particular theme to explore during their visit, as well as to access interactive displays. The spaces harboring this exhibition include, on the main level, a Gallery of Mary, which will offer artifacts and images of the Virgin as she is venerated by different cultures, along with a “world family mural” with life-size black-and-white photographs of Catholics from around the world. The principal feature of this gallery will be six floor-to-ceiling, three-dimensional, audio-visual “doorways” with painted steel frameworks, each one devoted to a particular cult of Mary. On the lower level...
there will be a Gallery of Church and Papal History, a Gallery of Faith, a Gallery of Community, a Gallery of Wonder, and a Gallery of Imagination.

Visitors will be able to retrieve the material they have stored in the museum's information system when they arrive at the Resolution Café, where tables will be equipped with monitors and card-swipes. They will also be able to obtain "certificates" — computer print-outs of their activities at the cultural center — and even purchase videos or CD-ROM's reproducing the interactive displays which engaged their interest. Near the café, moreover, a group of monitors will give visitors a chance to inform themselves about opportunities for fuller participation in the Church, and cultural and charitable activities it supports, where they live.

A final "exit experience" on the main floor involves touching the positive cast of a human hand in order to hear the message "Peace Be With You," and then walking through a light-beam projected down from the ceiling. When the beam is interrupted, the same phrase will be heard in a foreign language. A series of hands and light-beams and foreign tongues will be encountered in this space.

The cultural center's decorative program has yet to be worked out in detail, and will depend largely on donations. An abundance of stained glass is anticipated — for instance, on a large glazed expanse on the entry cylinder — as well as numerous pieces of sculpture outside the building. A statue of the pope is to rise out of the reflecting pool near the main entrance. The artistic treatment of the stained glass and sculpture has yet to be determined and one is left to wonder how the decoration will mesh with the very abstract architecture. Will stained glass that tells a story — beautifully — fit in here? The landscape design, on the other hand, has been capably handled by Michael Vergason of Arlington, Virginia, in collaboration with the architects. Vergason has struck an appropriate balance between the formal arrangement of trees and shrubs along the main road and pedestrian path to the building, on the one hand, and a more romantic, informal approach elsewhere. Flower gardens will be planted near the building, and the café should offer a pleasant view. Our Corbusian machine will be ensconced in an inviting Eden.

The cultural center's architectural design amounts to a thoroughly academic scheme produced by talented people who have managed the practical aspects of a very demanding program, with great intelligence. Ronchamp aside, Le Corbusier's influence is evident in the combination of elementary geometric volumes on the east side of the building, which recalls the City of Refuge the Frenchman built in Paris for the Salvation Army during the Depression. The roof, in turn, evokes his Nestlé Pavilion of 1928 as well as his Youth and Cultural Center at Firminy, which was designed three decades later. The Pope John Paul II Cultural Center model even boasts a typically Corbusian gutter spout shooting out of the roof's valley at the north end. (It has been eliminated from the design.) But in their effort to liven up the planar geometry of the City of Refuge by introducing the expressionism of Ronchamp, perhaps the most celebrated building of the post-war phase of Le Corbusier's career, the architects have inevitably diluted the primitive ferocity of the latter in order to keep their design from dissolving into complete incoherence. The result, unfortunately, is not terribly convincing, and probably would elicit little more than a string of mumbled profanities from Le Corbusier himself.

So what are we to make of the formula, or general concept, behind the cultural center? Well, it confirms that McLuhan was right: the medium is indeed the message. To be sure, the messages imparted by the cultural center's high-tech displays have been carefully adjusted to Church doctrine and the principles John Paul II has emphasized during his papacy. But is it just because I flunked the course that the concept for the "exit experience" inspires unpleasant memories of Psych 101 and the Skinner box? Or has the touchy-feely sensibility gotten a little out of hand here? And once the cultural center's various electronic media are passé — as they inevitably will be not long after it opens — will anybody be interested in the messages? If not, the sponsoring foundation will find itself engaged in an interminable fund-raising campaign in support of technological rather than spiritual renewal.

And though some might regard it as the wave of the future so far as our museums are concerned, one might wonder whether all this electronic gadgetry amounts to a sort of instinctive by-product of, or compensation for, the reductive architectural character of the building. For here, too, the medium is the message. That is, modernist architecture's aesthetic poverty lies precisely in the dogma that the medium — the mechanical facts of construction — is architecture's message. A dogma, by the way, which Michelangelo would rightly have regarded as hopelessly perverse. Next time the architects (or their clients) opt for an academic design, perhaps they should cast their net a little further afield than the last 70 years of architectural history, which, truth be told, have been distinctly inglorious.

Catesby Leigh is a writer and architectural critic residing in Washington D.C.
CHRISTIAN ARCHITECTURE FROM A PROTESTANT PERSPECTIVE

by Daniel Lee

ARCHITECTURE’S ROLE IN CHRISTIANITY

Church architecture serves to frame and enhance our worship in a way that honors the One we worship. Churches are buildings shaped, crafted, and set aside for the very special purpose of our corporate communion with our covenant God. But as works of art, they also speak to the larger culture around them. This is because architecture symbolizes, within the fabric of a community, the social hierarchy and aspiration—or the actual position—of the institution housed within it. It reveals, through artistic means, the relationship between larger transcendent constants and the immanent issues we confront in daily life. And, it provides a meaningful setting for our daily social and spiritual interactions.

In the past, churches were often the most prominent architectural edifices of a community, and Christians gladly served as patrons of church architecture because it proclaimed their faith and affirmed their world view. But today things have changed.

CHRISTIAN ARCHITECTURE TODAY

What I sense and see in my own involvement in the religious community, and in my reading, is that most Christians cannot begin a conversation on architecture. Several years ago I met a highly regarded Christian poet, who, in response to a question I posed, answered, “I really don’t know, architecture is such an esoteric art form.” Her comments surprised me by illustrating well the current state of affairs. The architecture that churches are building today is as confused as the tastes, and faith, of building committee members.

Building committees, or other deciding powers, want inexpensive construction that solves basic functional needs. As they select their architect, they are often most concerned with how many churches he has designed, or whether he is well known. It would be nice if the architect is a believer, but they are looking, first, for a safe choice. They feel inadequate to assess philosophical or artistic aspects inherent in their task and simply hope for the best. The results we are seeing are disappointing, and the church is missing important opportunities to create significant new architecture.

WHY SPEND MONEY ON CHURCHES?

Events surrounding the death of Diana, Princess of Wales illustrate my thoughts on this. To express their grief over her passing, the public spent over $40 million on flowers alone. She was a living symbol of important virtues to many people around the world. Could you ever justify on practical grounds alone such an expense? Of course not. But, this was a spontaneous expression of affection and sorrow from peoples’ hearts toward one they loved. Should not our expressions of love for our Savior be of a much greater kind? Judas Iscariot complained when Mary bathed Christ’s feet, just before his death, in a perfume valued at a year’s wages. As we know, Jesus rebuked Judas for his greed and false economy. We have been commanded to care for the poor and to share the gospel. We have also been commanded to love and honor God with all of our being. Here in the West, we have more than enough resources to do all three.

THE ROLE OF THE ARTS AND SYMBOLISM IN CHURCH BUILDINGS

Arts and symbolism should help us understand life as it really is, our sin, and the gospel. In the book of Numbers we read how God’s people, when leaving Egypt, grew tired of manna, the bread from heaven, and became bitter against God. So God sent deadly serpents among the people and many died. Then the people came to Moses, confessed their sins, and asked him to pray that God would remove the serpents. God responded to Moses’ prayer by instructing him to cast a serpent in bronze and raise it high above the people on a staff. Moses obeyed, and when the people looked upon this work of figurative art, they were healed. It is important to understand that the bronze serpent did not heal them. The bronze serpent served as a potent symbol of their grave sin and God’s powerful work of redemption. Later, Jesus noted that it also represented his own day, when he would be raised up on the cross to redeem his people from their sin for all time.

This was a correct use of a work of art in the life of God’s people. It represented both the law and the gospel and was evangelistic in a most powerful sense. But, generations later the Israelites began worshipping the bronze serpent, offering incense before it, leading King Hezekiah to destroy it. Such use and misuse demonstrates both how valuable as well as how dangerous works of art can be in the life of the church. The Protestant reformers reacted to idolatrous use of art in the church in their day.

I believe we should see the law and the gospel conveyed through works of art in the Church, and on our church buildings. We should have murals depicting the history of God’s people through the ages; we should have stained glass honoring our corporate communion with God through the ages; we should have symbols, provided they are understood. But, generations later the Israelites began worshipping the bronze serpent, offering incense before it, leading King Hezekiah to destroy it. Such use and misuse demonstrates both how valuable as well as how dangerous works of art can be in the life of the church. The Protestant reformers reacted to idolatrous use of art in the church in their day.

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Sacred Architecture  Fall 1998
Our senses are the means by which we receive information. Without them, no information would pass to us; that is to say, there would be no knowledge, intuition or transcendence. It should be noted that in sensation, the corporal emerges as the core of subjective and objective cognition.

In terms of architecture, it is our aesthetic apprehension of the corporal that informs us, through our senses, of the cultural value and content of a building. Buildings invariably are signifiers, they reveal, represent, resemble and express. They cause Modernist architecture, I would submit, lacks a theoretical foundation to create a representational, expressive or metaphorical discourse to signify the well-spring of customs, rituals, sacraments, remembrances, essences, catechisms, symbols, miracles or atmospheres for worship that embody the Catholic faith.

To explain this, it must first be stated that the canon of Orthodox Modernism intends to repudiate history. In order to pursue a negation of truth, the modus operandi of Modernism depends on an aesthetic of representational sterility and tectonic reductionism. So viewed, Modernism's denial of historical meaning then, means that it can only claim to lie within a secularist architectural mode. One of the things which Modernism denies Catholicism, is integral to historical religious content: tectonics. Tectonics in architecture has been defined as the poetics of structure. To reveal a poetics of structure is to give back to reality and the set of programmatic, economic and physical rules it gives us, an art form which is essential. An art form, moreover as narrative, that people need and appreciate.

Modernist architects, in other words, either misunderstand or refuse to use symbolic convention and signification to open communication between existential planes. As an abstraction, it becomes an architecture that forces the Catholic liturgy to occupy an otherwise empty, unknowable place.

As an example, let us consider the new chapel of St. Ignatius, by the well-known architect Steven Holl, located on the campus of Seattle University. As a work of Orthodox Modernism, none of its architectural characteristics transcend an industrial appearance which seems to mean that technology and its gadgetry actually transcend the tectonic of representational sterility and tectonic reductionism.

What and how something is signified, is the most important question for architecture and for any community which builds. When the Catholic Church intends to build a sacred space, and chooses an architect to conceive of a plan and image for that space, the community should take it very seriously. If, for example, a Modernist architect is asked to actualize the what and how of a sacred space — the community should be concerned about how he might articulate their experience of religion and what that experience might be. This is the narrative and character created by tectonic detail alludes to multifaceted measures of meaning and is the link that makes the invisible, visible.

Unfortunately, in Modernist architecture's preference for tectonic abstraction, there are no elements which can act as a symbolic link to the transubstantive and eschatological content of Catholicism.

Marco Frascari, in his essay "The Tell-the-Tale Detail", argues that through tectonic detail one can see the process of signification; the attachment of meaning to man-made objects. The narrative and character created by tectonic detail alludes to multifaceted measures of meaning and is the link that makes the invisible, visible.

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As an example, let us consider the new chapel of St. Ignatius, by the well-known architect Steven Holl, located on the campus of Seattle University. As a work of Orthodox Modernism, none of its architectural characteristics transcend an industrial appearance which seems to mean that technology and its gadgetry actually transcend the aesthetic of representational sterility and tectonic reductionism.
The building's lack of representational possibilities, admits that the technological process of making has become the destination of the building itself, thereby changing the metaphorical province of its program. Holl's chapel thus refuses to respond to its program by means of religious figuration. Aside from some candles, a tabernacle, the baptismal font, a displaced crucifix, the altar and a kneeler, the building itself offers us a sober and positivistic dialogue with the machine. So viewed, a building devoid of figurative elements and thus reduced to cleverly organized production line functionalism or even composed of novel shapes, bears little didactic presence. Thus, upon apprehension of this building from both within and without, our senses respond only to mechanistic metaphors, fundamental to a Modernistic discourse on art, rather than to otherwise religious concepts of transcendence.

To conclude, Seattle University seems to have solicited Holl, as a bold player in a game of novelty-seeking, in order to appear progressive. In fact, this building's appearance seems emblematic of overvaluing the importance of change. For many decades now the Church has chosen the builders of Modernism, which, as Edmund Burke said, "...have no respect for the wisdom of others; but pay it off by a very full measure of confidence in their own. With them it is sufficient motive to destroy an old scheme of things, because it is an old thought, and requires great care in its making. So stated, it is very odd over the past decades that the Catholic Church would forsake the architecture it has grown up with for one which has no articulate theory of universals, ideals or beauty. Perhaps a reconsideration of the tectonic in expressing these ideals will lead us forward to the realization of a chapel as sacred place.

Duncan McRoberts is an architect living and working in Seattle.
In addition, the descriptions are not incomplete or misleading for even the artist or architect pilgrim. Architects will find the dates of building and their architects to be precise and will find the descriptions of facades, volumetric concepts, statues and the like to be straightforward, yet compelling. This leads to a wonderful ability of moving the eyes from page to object and back with ease and excitement. The noting of materials in the descriptions also is particularly admirable for it familiarizes the artist and layman alike with the media in which the Romans worked. Alabaster, porphyry, travertine, volutes and pilasters become familiar by sight rather quickly. For those less familiar with the terminology, Fr. Tylenda has included a glossary at the end. The author obviously has more of an understanding of architecture and art than most travel guide writers, which is an added blessing to what is entitled a “Pilgrim’s Guide.”

And yet, Fr. Tylenda makes no pretense at presenting an architect’s or artist’s guide. “In no way do these plans pretend to be architecturally exact drawings of the edifice...” Although from an architect’s vantage point, the plans presented of each church are accurate enough and, traveling through the various churches, I found them to be abstractly thoughtful. As an architect, I grew to admire this book with no photographs or line drawings of art or architecture. It became clear that the author intended the pilgrim independently to discover each painting, passageway, dome and ray of light and to be surprised by them. This only increases the joy in experiencing each church from the small details to the unifying concepts of the parts. And without the Rome in-your-face language or page layout of secular guidebooks, this pilgrim’s guide can disappear at your side while you quietly pray to one of the great saints of Rome.

Only a few things could make this book better and more complete. A timeline of artists and architects would be helpful for understanding at least where all those mentioned (and there are many) fit into the scheme of things. A small local area map would help the pilgrim to find each church better and place it in at least an abstract setting to get a sense, from a plan view, of the building in relation to the street, other significant buildings or cemeteries and catacombs nearby. But, more importantly, in addition to the wonderful translations the author provides for Latin and Italian writing on some works of art, it would have been helpful to the pilgrim to have translations of the plenary indulgence plaques in various churches and—even more so—to have in the history section of each church, a brief outline of prayers to be said in the individual churches for graces to be granted to the pilgrim, his loved ones or for a good intention. Being a guide to the principle churches, the traditions of prayer in each church should have been outlined for use.

In using the book personally, only one mistake was found in a description and only one disagreement was taken by an archaeologist at the site excavations of one early church regarding the story of an ancient fresco.

In all, the pilgrim must have time and patience—which are demanded of any true pilgrim—to appreciate and use this book effectively. Each church on the journey has more than the last it seems. Fr. Tylenda’s The Pilgrim’s Guide to Rome’s Principle Churches is a useful guide for the pilgrim who wishes to understand the pilgrimage church for what it integrates and represents: architecture, liturgy, history, site of saints and miracles, house of God and catalyst through prayer to the great Source of grace.

William Heyer is an architect and choir director in South Bend, Indiana.
Art and Spirituality in Counter-Reformation Rome: The Sistine and Pauline Chapels in S. Maria Maggiore

by Steven F. Ostrow
Cambridge University Press, 1996
365 pages, illustrated, $90.

Reviewed by Noah A. Waldman

Until very recently, most art historical scholarship on Counter-Reformation Rome focused on the achievements of individual architects, such as Bernini, Borromini and Vignola, rather than on individual basilicas, popes, or the Council of Trent. Of course, we live in the age of the individual, so this focus is not surprising. But it is heart-warming and healthy to discover some recent books which treat Tridentine art and architecture from an ecclesiological perspective, in which the great building projects and renovations at the major basilicas are studied in light of the popes and the Council which inspired them.

Cambridge University Press has instituted a series of books, “Monuments of Papal Rome,” to study the significance of the Tridentine reforms as embodied in art and architecture. A year ago, I reviewed one of these books in this series, The Lateran in 1600, in which author Jack Freiberg focused on the personality of Pope Clement VIII and his brilliant vision in the Lateran transept. Now another book, of equal quality and significance by Steven Ostrow, can be added to this collection of superb books.

Ostrow deals with the two great transept chapels in the basilica of Saint Mary Major in Rome. The first transept chapel (called the Sistine Chapel, because it was built by the great builder pope, Sixtus V during the years 1585 to 1590), is a stunning piece of architecture: a compact Greek cross and dome, with a counterpoint of triumphal arch motifs at various interlocking scales, all surfaces treated with a rich polychrome marble, statuary and frescoes.

But the genius of this chapel is the manner in which the architecture integrates many diverse elements together to form a built expression of the pope’s personal faith, and the universal Catholic faith. Pope Sixtus V, Ostrow points out, was a Franciscan with a special devotion to Eucharistic adoration and to the Nativity, both devotions credited to St. Francis’ invention. The Sistine Chapel conflates both devotions in a vertical juxtaposition, placing the great tabernacle of the Eucharist above the relic of the Holy Manger, while the relics of Saint Jerome, the Holy Innocents, and Popes Sixtus V and Pius V look on. This arrangement is, in fact, an iconic statement of the most powerful moment in the Christmas liturgy, in which the Host, Christ Incarnate, is placed upon the relic of the Holy Manger, at the hands of the Pope. The formal arrangement of the chapel speaks of many mysteries crucial to the Church after the fallout of the Reformation (Eucharist, Incarnation, saints, relics, the Pope as the primary guardian of Christ and the Faith), but it does so under the unifying sentiment of the Christmas liturgy: that the Child Jesus, the Incarnation Himself, is made present once again in the basilica dedicated to Our Lady; the Holy Child is held once again in the bosom of Our Lady.

The second chapel, called Pauline because it was built by Pope Paul V beginning in 1605, is dedicated to housing an ancient and miraculous icon of the Virgin with Child. This chapel, built in a similar form as the Sistine Chapel, also has many simultaneous ideas which it must integrate, and Ostrow makes a convincing argument that the liturgical significance of the chapel was to embody the Queenship of Mary and Her role as Co-Redemptrix. Taken together, both chapels complement each other in formal composition and in their meanings: The Sistine chapel reflects Mary as Mother; the Pauline Chapel represents the Mary as Queen. And as Mary is queen because she is mother, the two chapels taken together are an iconic augmentation of that single great image over the apse of the nave — the Coronation of Our Lady as Queen of Heaven.

Ostrow is to be commended for his insight into understanding the architecture of papal Rome, namely, that it is first and foremost an architecture of Faith — a Faith represented through liturgy, history, and doctrine. Ostrow is not a formalist, nor an ideologue, and he sees the art and architecture of the Church with the eyes and mind of the Church. The refreshing undercurrent of Ostrow’s book is what it reveals about the Council of Trent. Despite the common perception that Trent imposed constraints on artistic expression, Ostrow reveals the great freedom of expression which was given to the architects and artists of that time, so that they could present the Faith in a manner simultaneously old and new.

Today’s architects should know from experience that dogmas and certainties are good for the soul and good for the art, since they provide a framework for invention. Is it not the truth that sets one free?

Noah Waldman is an architect practicing in Washington, DC.
Pope Sixtus V had a vision for Rome that has affected our perception of civilized city planning ever since. Of course, the genius of the Pope was inspired and matched by the creators of the great church buildings existing at the time. History is a profound teacher, especially when one is able to see, walk, hear and feel the physical remains of past years. Rome is a perfect embodiment of history preserved, destroyed, exploited, ignored and enjoyed—a city so full of life that one cannot help but revel in its “dolce vita”.

We cannot help but be uplifted by the great church buildings as we walk through the city, but, before these churches existed and before the earliest was built during the 4th century A.D., the city’s Christian congregations met in make-do buildings and rooms; some were ex-synagogues, others were ex-residences, others perhaps were ex-pagan temples. This changed dramatically after Constantine started the great church building boom that lasted for more than thirteen centuries, resulting in constructing, remodeling and reconstructing over 200 churches. Completed just before he died, Pierre Grimal, the eminent Latinist from the Sorbonne in Paris, selected over thirty representative churches to illustrate his concise treatise on Rome as the capital of Christianity.

Grimal explains, in his introductory remarks, his method of relating the church’s birth, development, heresies, schisms, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation as a collection of memories. Including the period starting with the great basilica buildings by Constantine in the 4th century A.D. up to the end of the 17th century A.D. culminating in the great Counter-Reformation, the churches are made our witnesses and guides.

Although Constantine moved to Constantinople, thereby weakening the role of Rome as capitol of Christendom, the Church was firmly established by the end of the 4th century A.D. Constantine, however, started construction in Rome of basilica churches that have served to be models for all future churches in one way or another. San Giovanni in Laterano, Saint Peter in the Vatican, Santa Croce, and other smaller churches were originally built by Constantine.

The dominance of the basilica church in Rome is explained as a natural confluence of functional need, secular models and apparent sacred appropriateness. The Church was the mystical image of the heavenly abode, separate from terrestrial life. The Constantinian basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican, for example, adapted the secular basilicas and was entered through a qua-
drangular peristyle courtyard, but in the center of which was a large fountain decorated with peacocks, symbols of the Resurrection. The basilica of Maxentius had a semicircular apse at the western end housing a statue of the emperor whose majesty was thereby glorified. After Constantine defeated Maxentius, this royal basilica, made sacred by pagan religious ceremony, equipped with an axial apse housing a sacred image, was transformed as a model to become the sacred repository for the divine mystery with the altar in front of the apse which housed the seat of the bishop. Over time, the basilica plan evolved with a transept added to the nave, configured into a Latin cross. Atrium, baptistry, baldachino/ciborium, triumphal arch, pergola, and dome were added over time, ... “as religious phenomenon that translated a precise ideology through the polarization and sacralization of a sacred place, became a complex microcosm imbued with the divine spirit.”

Grimal proceeds to expound on the relation of the physical church buildings to church history, dogma and faith. Continuing with topics including: Meditation, the Virgin, Transfiguration, Iconoclasts, the Cupola, the Facade, the Centralized Plan, and the Church Triumphant, Grimal is able to provide a profound, yet concise exposition (total pages of text is 34).

With the aid of the exquisite photographs, each topic essay connects historic Church accomplishments to the consequent church building details. For example, the Counter-Reformation and the Council of Trent encouraged new churches to receive large assemblies with great central naves, domes with open cupolas to admit an unreal diffuse light; images on all available surfaces (the triumph of Jesus is optimistically portrayed), “...In the Gesu there is hardly room any more for fear and trembling. The Church is triumphant. It is enough to follow its teaching to attain eternal glory.” The Church gave primacy to preaching and spreading doctrine resulting in new decorations and architecture that banished the “temptations of austerity”. This was the time of Pope Sixtus V who connected all the basilica churches and shrines with great boulevards thereby giving material form to the victory of the Church over the secular world. “The very soil of city is sacred. Here divine power is manifest. From the first days of its foundation, Rome had been attentive to the divine. It was ready to hear the message of revelation and to welcome it. Two of its major virtues, pietas and fides, are translated into stone in its buildings.”

Churches of Rome is a coffee table book with a difference. That difference is the artistry of both Pierre Grimal and Caroline Rose. Although the book has no index, inadequate bibliography, and poor or non-existent floor plans, it provides the experienced reader with a fulsome and satisfying time of civilized enjoyment. The photographs are particularly outstanding in clarity, color and composition.

Originally published in Paris 1997 by the Imprimerie Nationale, as Églises de Rome, the English edition is also printed by Imprimerie Nationale who can take credit for the fine quality of reproduction.

John Stroik is the Managing Editor of SACRED ARCHITECTURE and an architect practicing in Reston, Virginia.

Columns of the Basilica of Santa Sabina (AD 425) and arcades decorated in imitation of imperial palaces. (Photo from CHURCHES OF ROME The Vendome Press)
The British architect, Quinlan Terry's beautiful invocation of the old myth of the divine origin of the Classical orders, certainly expresses the most profound truth. The truth about dependence and grounding of the classical tradition in the Absolute, in God. This grounding must of necessity be even more important in the case of Sacred architecture.

Without the permanence of God, the change becomes all-important. By rejecting the spiritual dimension of reality, man submerged himself in materiality which is ruled by change. Change that in due course became deified in the idea of Progress.

However, change is a divine creation. Our way of salvation depends on change, not least in ourselves. The quick survey of the history of Sacred architecture shows types in evolution, in change. After all, the new St. Peter's is different from the old.

But, not everything changes. The Classical Orders, for instance, do not change, and neither do beautiful proportions. These unchanging elements remind us of Eternity. That is what Mr. Terry's story catches in a nutshell. Orders with their elements and proportions are, we believe, reflection of the divine aesthetic will, not unlike the laws of ethics and logic. After all, the ultimate proportional reference is the human body, created in the image of God.

So, it is not the change itself that is antagonistic to Eternity and Permanence, it is rather the modernist aberration which decrees that since it is only change that matters, the architect's prime duty is pursuit of Novelty. The rest of us have to bear in mind that although we are submerged in change and we shape our world and destiny through it, we are not of it. To be a constant reminder of this fact is the sacred task of architecture.

Piotr Choynowski is an architect practicing in Oslo, Norway.

Drawings, by architect Quinlan Terry, of the derivation of Classical Orders from the Temple of Solomon.
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