And then with the Triduum, we do
not just fast but we also strip the altar
in preparation for the Crucifixion; and
on Good Friday we come to church,
but there is no Mass. All of this makes
the Easter Vigil more spectacular:
the Easter fire in darkness and then a
single candle leading to a church full
of candlelight and the reappearance
of the saints, beautiful flowers, and
iconography of the Resurrection.

Yet what about the parishes that have
nothing to cover up? No mysteries to
veil, their churches and iconography
have already been pared down to the
minimum. We know the iconoclastic
movement in the East in the seventh
century and in the West in the six-
teenth century, which sought not to
cover up images for Passiontide, but
to remove them completely. But the
iconoclasm of the twentieth century
has been even more surprising, since it
was done by some within the Church.
Instead of protecting icons, the monks
destroyed them. What resulted was
churches that are always Passiontide
and never Easter; think of that!

Duncan Stroik
Notre Dame, Spring 2017

Above: Santissima Trinità dei Pellegrini, Rome
Credit: New Liturgical Movement
Cover: Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence
Credit: flickr.com/Anelia Jeliazkova

“Always winter and never Christmas; think of that!”
—The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe by C. S. Lewis
Sacred Architecture

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Sacred Architecture News

In January 2017, Mundelein Seminary completed a project for a Campus Visitors Center and Bookstore, which is only the second major construction project on campus since its completion in the 1930s. The primary function of the project is to welcome visiting members of the public. The program for the facility includes larger restrooms in the dining hall, a new campus bookstore, a staffed information desk for visitors, a gallery to showcase Mundelein’s history and art, and a multiuse space for students and faculty to gather. The $5 million building was designed by architect Thomas Norman Rajkovich with Bureau AD.

Emil Frei & Associates of Saint Louis, Missouri recently designed new stained-glass windows for the parish of Saint Eugene in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The church itself was dedicated in 2012, and the thirty-five stained-glass windows were completed in 2016.

On February 26, 2017, a restoration and renovation project was completed on Saint Paul’s Catholic Church in Richmond, Virginia. Dixon Studio completed the $800,000 project on the 1950s church. A new altar and reredos are included in the improvements.

The Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse, Wisconsin now celebrates all Masses ad orientem in response to Cardinal Sarah’s request for churches to do so starting with the 2016 Advent season. His Eminence, Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke, announced that the shrine would be participating in this practice beginning last December, and explained how the tradition is an ancient practice of the Church and was never specifically discouraged by the Second Vatican Council. Individual priests on pilgrimage to the shrine may still celebrate the Mass versus populum if they desire.
Construction continues on Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey near Hulbert, Oklahoma. Currently the upper walls and chevet are under construction.

On November 19, 2016, the new Saint Olav Cathedral was consecrated in Trondheim, Norway, by Cormac Cardinal Murphy-O’Connor of England. Europe’s first cathedral to be consecrated in a decade, the church was built to serve a growing Catholic population in Trondheim, attributed to rising immigration from Catholic countries such as Poland and the Philippines. Norway has about 125,000 registered members of the Catholic Church, making it the largest Catholic community in Scandinavia. In comparison there are about 3.8 million members of the Lutheran Church in Norway. The cathedral was also built to make more visible the Catholic presence in Trondheim, the birthplace of Norwegian Catholicism. Designed by the Norwegian firm Eggen Architects, the project cost $11.7 million and seats 450 people, twice the capacity of the old cathedral.

The daughter of Saint Gianna Beretta Molla is undertaking a project to restore the saint’s home and nearby parish church in Ponte Nuovo di Magenta, near Milan, Italy. After the restoration, it will be converted into an international center for prayer, spiritual retreats, and study, called the Saint Gianna Beretta Molla International Center.

Two new high school chapels in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend have recently been completed. On September 20, 2016, the Queen of All Saints Chapel at Bishop Dwenger High School in Fort Wayne was blessed by Bishop Kevin Rhoades. The freestanding chapel greatly increased the former chapel’s seating capacity, from 70 to 284 people. The renovation is part of a larger $7.25 million project for the school that also includes updating the gymnasium and renovating thirty-six classrooms.

Bishop Luers High School in Fort Wayne built a new Chapel of Saint Francis of Assisi, which was blessed by Bishop Rhoades on November 10, 2016. The chapel increased seating from 45 to 180, and was part of a larger $3.1 million renovation plan for the school.

The new Catholic cathedral in Trondheim is “a symbol of the reawakening of the Church in the Scandinavian countries,” stated the Bishop of Oslo, The Most Rev. Bernt Eidsvig.
Architect Henry Hardinge Menzies passed away on February 28, 2017, at the age of eighty-eight. Menzies, a 1958 graduate of the School of Design at North Carolina State University, designed many traditional new churches and renovations in his long career, and he was an early writer on the need to restore the sacred in ecclesiastical architecture. A renovation of the Cathedral of Saint Augustine in Bridgeport, Connecticut, a renovation of Saint Aloysius Church in New Canaan, Connecticut, and numerous chapels in Opus Dei conference centers and seminaries were among his projects.

The Cathedral of Saint Augustine before and after a $4 million renovation by Henry Hardinge Menzies completed in 2004.

There is a new installation in the Vatican of a statue titled Homeless Jesus located at the entrance to the Papal Charities building. The statue, by Canadian artist Timothy Schmalz, depicts a homeless man sleeping on a park bench and wrapped in a rough blanket. His face is obscured, but Jesus’s nail wounds are visible in his feet. It is a bronze cast of a statue in Toronto, and other copies of the statue have spread to cities around the world, from Madrid to Chicago. Pope Francis blessed the statue during the Jubilee of Mercy.

On January 31, 2017, a statue of Mary was removed from a public park in Publier, France.

The town of Publier in eastern France was told to remove a statue of Mary that was standing in a public park. Opponents said that the statue was in direct contradiction with France’s strict rules ordering the separation of church and state, which ban displaying religious symbols on public property. The statue was the subject of controversy for being installed in 2011 with €30,000 of municipal funds. However, within forty-eight hours Mayor Gaston Lacroix had reimbursed the municipality with donations from around the world. The city had three months after the November 24, 2016, ruling to remove the statue, after which they would be fined €100 a day. On January 31, 2017, the statue was dug up and removed from the park.

Artist Timothy Schmalz’s statue Homeless Jesus is now installed in the Vatican.

William Henry Cardinal Keeler, Archbishop Emeritus of Baltimore, passed away on March 23, 2017. Keeler served as Baltimore’s fourteenth archbishop from 1989 to 2007. During that time he oversaw the $32 million restoration of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (the first Catholic cathedral in the United States), which was completed in 2006.

In December 2016 a new Russian Orthodox church in Paris, Trinity Cathedral, was consecrated by Patriarch Kirill. The cathedral is near the Eiffel Tower and sits along the banks of the Seine on a plot of land bought by the Russian government for $175 million. The cathedral itself cost $106 million and was designed by French architects Wilmotte & Associates. In addition to a church, the spiritual and cultural center includes a parish center, a French-Russian primary school, a bookstore, exhibition spaces, and a cafe. The cathedral was constructed as a permanent place of worship for the Russian Orthodox community in Paris, as well as a symbol of friendship between Russia and France.

The new Russian Orthodox church in Paris, France

Pope Francis’s book My Idea of Art is now a film of a guided tour of Saint Peter’s Basilica and the Vatican Museums.

William Henry Cardinal Keeler served as Archbishop of Baltimore for 18 years.

Pope Francis’s book My Idea of Art is now a film of a guided tour of Saint Peter’s Basilica and the Vatican Museums.
A new Saint Pius X Church was dedicated in Granger, Indiana, on March 25, 2017. The $15 million, 1,300-seat church was designed by Alliance Architects of South Bend, Indiana. Interior paintings and mosaics in the Romanesque church were done by EverGreene Architectural Arts of New York. The organ for the new church combines pipes from the old organ with pipes from the organ of the basilica at the University of Notre Dame. In his homily at the dedication, Bishop Kevin Rhoades of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend called the new church “a true dwelling place of the Lord.”

Saint Anthony of Padua Church in King George County, Virginia, is building a new parish hall. They are currently fundraising the $1.6 million necessary for the project, designed by Grenfell Architecture of Washington, D.C.

In October 2016, Saint Bartholomew’s Episcopal Church in New York City was designated a National Historic Landmark along with nine other newly designated national landmarks across the country. The church was completed in 1930 by architect Bertram Goodhue, costing over $5.4 million (the equivalent of around $74 million in 2016). Saint Bartholomew’s is an excellent example of the Byzantine Revival style and was first designated a landmark by the New York Landmarks Preservation Commission in 1967.

The historic church of Notre Dame des Canadiens in Worcester, Massachusetts, was sold to City Square II Development for $875,000 in 2010, and now it is in danger of demolition. The church used to be the heart of the French Canadian community in the city, and it is the only remaining church of five that used to sit on the Worcester Common. In April 2016 the development company filed for demolition of the building. The Historical Commission ordered a year’s delay in order to explore alternatives for the church. City Square wishes to use the space for luxury apartments and retail, but a group called Preservation Worcester is fighting to save the church. The delay waiver on the church’s demolition expires in April 2017, and in the meantime a petition is being circulated to request City Square to repurpose the church instead of tearing it down.

The apartment complex Holy Name Heights, formerly Holy Name Seminary, shares a building with the diocesan headquarters of Madison, Wisconsin.
Barbara Jatta, first woman director of the Vatican Museums

On January 1, 2017, Barbara Jatta began her role as the director of the Vatican Museums, the first woman ever to fill that position, and the highest-ranking female administrator in the Vatican. She replaced seventy-seven-year-old Antonio Paolucci, who had been director since 2007. An Italian art historian and graphic arts expert, she has been working for the Vatican since 1996 when she was hired to head the Vatican Library’s department of prints. In 2010 she became curator of the artwork in the department of prints, and most recently she served as the museum’s deputy director.

The Coalition to Save the Shrine in Chicago is hiring an independent journalist to investigate the sale of Saint Adalbert’s Church to the Chicago Academy of Music. The church was designed in 1914 by Henry Schlacks, and was closed in 2016. The unbiased journalist is investigating the sale because the Chicago Academy of Music’s ability to fund repairs and intended use for the church remains unclear.

The Saint Paul University Catholic Center in Madison, Wisconsin, has torn down its old chapel and is replacing it with a new chapel and Catholic center. The new facilities will replace the 1970s concrete building with a traditional design that is more congruous with the surrounding buildings. The new $29 million chapel and facilities are designed by RDG Design and Planning and Matthew Alderman Studios. The initial design proposed a mixed-use high rise of fourteen stories, but because of concerns about mass and height it was reduced to a five-story building. The center has been under construction since February 2016 and projected completion is October 2017.
Construction finished last fall on the new Sacred Heart Cathedral in Kericho, Kenya, near Nairobi. The $3 million project was designed by John McAslan + Partners of London, UK, and was funded by a sole foreign donor who remains anonymous. The new, larger cathedral was much needed by the Diocese of Kericho, which had outgrown its old cathedral.

British artist Ian Knowles has opened a center for traditional icon painting in Bethlehem, in an effort to revive the nearly lost art. The center relies heavily on donations from the UK to continue its operations, and free courses in icon painting are offered to Palestinian Christians. Knowles hopes that the classes can help young Palestinians connect to their roots, looking beyond the current difficult political situation to their Palestinian heritage.

Jesus’s tomb inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem, has been reopened after a year of extensive renovations. A nineteenth-century pilgrimage shrine built around the site of the tomb had been falling into disrepair, and the marble slabs that make up the shrine had been weakened by constant pilgrim activity. The shrine was carefully dismantled and rebuilt, and the marble slabs were cleaned. National Geographic documented the work, completed by a group of Greek specialists from the National Technical University of Athens. The restoration project was funded by the three main Christian denominations in the Holy Sepulchre—the Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Roman Catholic—as well as by public and private donations. The project was completed in March 2017.

Speaking at a gathering of the pontifical academies at the Vatican on December 7, 2016, Pope Francis said that “sacred buildings should be... an oasis of beauty, of peace, of welcome.” He continued to speak on the importance of beauty and on the “important and necessary task of artists, in particular believers and those enlightened by the beauty of the Gospel of Christ, to create works of art which, precisely through the language of beauty, bear a sign, a spark of hope and confidence where people seem to yield to indifference and ugliness.”

A nearby metro line and high underground water table have long been deteriorating Saint James at the Kashmere Gate, the oldest church in Delhi. The Greek-cross church with an octagonal dome was designed by Colonel James Skinner and completed in 1836. The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage began an eight-year project to stabilize the structure of the church and preserve its artwork, including original stained-glass windows and a painting of the Prodigal Son attributed to Italian painter Pompeo Batani.

The oldest church in Delhi, India, is in need of preservation efforts to stop deterioration from a high underground water table.
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keeping the church beautiful
Is there a place for
the beauty of the
liturgy in what Pope
Francis calls "a Church
which is poor and for
the poor"? It would
seem there is not. God
through Isaiah
declares His "hatred" for
"feasts" and
"solemn assemblies," for
"the melody of
harps" and "incense," in
a world in which
the rich oppress the
poor. Instead of all this
cultic extravagance,
says Amos, "let justice
roll down like waters,
and righteousness
like an ever-flowing
stream. . . . Cease to do
evil, learn to do good;
seek justice, correct
oppression; defend the
fatherless, plead for the
widow" (Is 1:13f,
15–17; Am 5:21, 23f).
Twelve hundred
years later, Saint John Chrysostom
presents a similar challenge to the
people of Antioch: "What is the use of loading
Christ’s table with vessels of gold, if
He Himself [in His members] is dying
of hunger?" If we accept, then, these
admonitions of the saints, preoccupation
with the externals of religion would
seem to be a distraction from the essence
of religion: "Religion pure and undefiled
before God the Father is this [says Saint
James]: to give aid to orphans and
widows in their tribulation, and to keep
oneself unspotted from this world" (Jas
1:27).

The case against the sacred beauty
of the liturgical arts appears to be over-
whelming until we recall a dinner long
ago in Bethany. In our mind we see
the tears of a penitent woman as she pours
sweet-smelling ointment over feet soon
to be pierced by nails, and we hear the
protest of a man who is a thief and a
traitor: "Why this waste? The ointment
might have been sold for a large sum,
and given to the poor." And as we think
about this meeting of humble love with
hypocritical indignation, the words of
the eternal Word incarnate resound in
our conscience with new force: "She
has done a beautiful thing for me. . . . The
poor you have always with you, but
me you have not always" (Mt 26:10f).
The Heart of Jesus enfolds the poor
with the charity of truth and justice.
He wants them always to be loved for
His sake. He will not allow them to be
used as an ideological plaything, as
Judas uses them, to denigrate the de-
votion of a contrite heart. The Divine
Saviour insists, "She has done a beautiful
thing for me," and by His Holy Spirit,
throughout the centuries, He inspires
the Church, His Bride, to see herself in
the person of Mary of Bethany and to
do beautiful things for Him, to lavish the
loveliness of her love upon Him in the
liturgical arts of chant and ceremonial,
iconography and architecture. Saint
John Paul speaks for the whole Trad-
tion when he says:

The Church is not afraid of being
"wasteful," and devotes the best
of her resources to expressing her
wonder and adoration before the
unsurpassable gift of the Eucharist. No
less than the first disciples charged
with preparing the "large upper
room," she has felt the need, down
the centuries and in her encounters
with different
cultures, to celebrate
the Eucharist in a
setting worthy of so
great a mystery. . . .

In what follows, I want first to con-
sider what it means to say that the
Church is “poor and for the poor,”
and secondly to argue that it is pre-
cisely because the Church is in a certain
way “poor and for the poor” that she
must worship God by means of sacred
beauty. The poverty of her life and the
beauty of her liturgy have the same
source and the same goal in Christ, the
divine Head and Bridegroom of the
Church, Priest and Victim of the Eu-
charistic Sacrifice. For His sake, and by
His sanctifying influence upon her, the
Bride of Christ is herself Lady Poverty
and the Mother of Fairest Love. The
Church is poor, and for that very reason
she has the power to bring forth the
beauty of holiness in our souls and the
holiness of beauty in our sanctuaries.

1. The Church That Is Poor

The Poverty and Beauty of Dependence

The Church is poor, first of all, in her
dependence upon Christ, for without
Him she has nothing, can do nothing,
and is nothing (cf. Jn 15:5). “What do
you have that you did not receive?”
asks Saint Paul of the Corinthians (1
Cor 4:7). The Church’s riches come entirely from the Trinitarian Godhead through the humanity of the Son, and are all of the spiritual order: Christ’s revealed truth in her teaching and His sanctifying grace in the sacraments, with all that accompanies sanctifying grace in the lives of the sanctified—the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, bearing fruits and bringing Beatitudes. Now, the truth of Christ that the poor Church proclaims to the nations is beautiful, as is His grace in the sacraments. Indeed, all that is true is beautiful, as it is also good. Now, the poverty of the Church is her receptivity to this beauty of the truth and grace of her Head; what Hopkins said of Holy Mother Mary applies also to Holy Mother Church: she “lets all God’s glory through.” And since her children on earth are creatures made up of flesh and spirit, with senses as well as intellect, the Church honours the invisible beauty of Christ’s truth and grace—the beauty of Christ Himself hidden under the sacramental species—with the outward and sensible splendour of the liturgical arts.

The Poverty and Beauty of Imitation

Secondly, the Church is poor because she imitates the life lived by Jesus, her Head and Bridegroom, in this world. She does not seek the world’s glittering prizes any more than He did. Her goal is the glory of the Triune God and the salvation of mankind. The ninth-century monastic theologian Rabanus Maurus says that in her poverty, “re-nouncing the world and its delights, [the Church] daily serves God and struggles for the Kingdom of Heaven.” She asks her pastors to employ temporal possessions in a prudent and temperate way for that spiritual end, and condemns simony, clerical avarice, and all abuse of ecclesiastical office for the sake of personal enrichment.

Now, the beauty of the Church’s liturgy, like the poverty of her life in imitation of Christ, is a support of her preaching; indeed, it is itself a kind of preaching. To quote Pope Francis: “The Church evangelizes and is herself evangelized through the beauty of the liturgy, which is both a celebration of the task of evangelization and the source of her renewed self-giving.” The holy images defended by the Second Council of Nicaea and the Council of Trent against the heresy of iconoclasm are a “Bible for the poor”: they convey to the mind through the eyes the whole content of scripture.

In the last question of the last complete treatise of the Summa theologiae, placing himself in the great tradition of liturgical exegesis, Saint Thomas argues that the ceremonial actions of the celebrant of Mass are not “ridiculous gesticulations”: they are done for the sake of reverence, and they “represent something,” that is, they teach a lesson. For example, the censing at high Mass is done in a particular order: first the altar, then the priest and sacred ministers, and then the people, to signify that grace comes from Christ the Head (symbolized by the altar) through the priest to the people. The architecture of the Dominican friars who designed Santa Maria Novella in Florence and Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome was a kind of preaching, as was the painting of the Dominican blessed, John of Fiesole (Fra Angelico). In her new and groundbreaking book Religious Poverty and Visual Riches, Joanna Cannon of the Courtauld Institute in London shows how the Dominicans of central Italy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries produced iconography of immense beauty, not in contradiction of their life of poverty and preaching, but as one of its chief fruits. Professor Cannon argues that in early Dominican church design and decoration, the chief principles were “moderation and humility, not abnegation and humiliation”: neither in their lives nor in their convents did religious poverty mean squalor or the neglect of liturgical beauty. There was no extravagance of expenditure on sacred art: friar-artists would often use Mass stipends and stole fees to buy their materials, and secular masters, such as Andrea Bonaiuti in Florence, were sometimes paid in kind by being given free bed and board, even for life.

The same coincidence of “religious poverty and visual riches” can be observed in the Franciscan Order. For the love of Jesus, Saint Francis of Assisi imitated His poverty, and for love of

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unlawfully housed and neglected, let it be removed from that place and deposited and locked in a precious location.\textsuperscript{50}

The poverty of Saint Francis's holy life inspired new forms of beauty in Christian art. Through Cimabue and Giotto, he brought the gift of tears into Western painting. In the \textit{laudi} of his spiritual son Jacopone da Todi, and in his own \textit{Canticle of the Sun}, with which vernacular literature in Italy begins, he purified and surrendered to the Blessed Trinity the \textit{joie de vivre} of the troubadours. As the poet Francis Thompson said, “Sworn to Poverty [Saint Francis] forsook not Beauty, but discerned through the lamp Beauty the Light God. . . . Poetry clung round the cowls of his Order.”\textsuperscript{11}

The Beauty of Evangelical Poverty

Thirdly, the Church is poor because she commends to her children the vow of evangelical poverty. In fidelity to Christ she distinguishes between commandment and counsel. The commandments remove from our lives what is incompatible with charity (mortal sin, including the sins of envy, avarice, theft, and obsession with material things).\textsuperscript{12} The counsels, embraced by religious under vow, remove from our lives what can hinder perfection in charity (such as the personal ownership of material things). In commending evangelical poverty, the Church follows the straight path of wisdom and rejects the extremism of those who, like the Fraticelli, despised worldly goods almost in the manner of the Manichees, as if they were intrinsically evil.

The poverty of the Church’s religious, undertaken in imitation of Christ and for the sake of more intimate union with Him in charity, has been a fruitful source of the sacred beauty of the liturgical arts. Freed from the desire to possess and exploit, consecrated religious have had the peace to contemplate the natural beauty of God’s creation and the supernatural beauty of His work of re-creation. Liturgical chant in both East and West was preserved, developed, and most honoured in monasteries, communities of men and women who follow the poor Christ in poverty. The iconography of the Byzantine East, to which Western art in the Middle Ages never ceased in some measure to be indebted, was likewise chiefly the work of monks. True, most iconographers and architects in the West have been laymen and sometimes wealthy men, but many of the greatest of them—once again we think of Fra Angelico or of the anonymous artists who produced the Lindisfarne Gospels or the Book of Kells—were religious with “affections withdrawn from worldly things.”

The Beauty of Poverty of Spirit

Fourthly, the Church is poor because she is holy and therefore has poverty of spirit, for whoever is holy has poverty of spirit. She has compassion for those who suffer material poverty in the sense of being deprived of the food, clothing, and shelter needed for life and health (miseria, misère); but realist that she is, she knows that, while such a state of need may help a man to be humble and trust in God, it may have the opposite effect, making him bitter and eaten up with envy. She commends the vow of poverty, but she knows, as Saint Paul says, that “if I distribute all my goods to feed the poor . . . and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (1 Cor 13:3). And the Church also recognizes, in the words of Pope Saint Leo the Great, that “very many rich people use their wealth for works of charity rather than as a means to puff up their pride.”\textsuperscript{13} What the Church prizes above all, what she herself possesses, what she enables her children to possess, is the beatitude of poverty of spirit: “Poverty is blessed,” says Saint Leo, “when it is not beguiled by a longing for earthly goods, and does not seek increase of the world’s riches, but desires to be enriched with heavenly blessings.”
“Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Beautiful is poverty of spirit, for there is nothing more grotesque than its opposite: the bloating of the soul of the man who “seeks greatness in honours and riches,” who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. Such a man is in danger of falling into sensualism and intemperance—of all sins, says Saint Thomas, the most spiritually ugly: “It is repugnant to [man’s] brightness and beauty, for indulgence in the pleasures of intemperance dulls the light of intelligence, in which all loveliness of virtues shines.” Now, the beauty of poverty of spirit in the saints has inspired the Church’s iconographers throughout the ages. Consider Saint Dominic in the works of Fra Angelico and El Greco: here is a man who seeks to know nothing but Christ, and Him crucified. Or Saint Francis as Cimabue represents him in the lower basilica in Assisi, the glorious little pauper, radiating humility and the love of Christ, with the mark of the nails in his hands and of the lance in his side. Consider above all the portraits of the all-holy Mother of God, from the icons of Saint Catherine’s Monastery on Mount Sinai to the Madonnas of Botticelli, Perugino, and Raphael. If there is beauty anywhere on earth in the works of men, it is here, in these depictions of an immaculate heart whose only treasure is Jesus.

2. The Church That Is “For the Poor”

The Church is “for the poor,” and for that very reason she is “for sacred beauty.” She is for the poor because her divine Head, even though He is glorified in Himself at the Father’s right hand, on earth is hungry and thirsty, naked and imprisoned, in His members: “Amen I say to you, as long as you did it [or did not do it] to one of these my least brethren, you did it [or did not do it] to me” (Mt 25:40, 45). She is for the poor because her Head and Bridegroom is for the poor. In the words of Pope Francis, “God shows the poor ‘His first mercy.’” The Holy Father says that the poor “have much to teach us. . . . In their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them.”

Now, if we “listen” to the poor, if we let ourselves be “evangelized” by them, then we shall find that they themselves love and long for sacred beauty, for a visible expression of the invisible beauty of the risen Christ, in the manner in which the liturgy is celebrated and in the buildings in which the celebration takes place. The beauty of the liturgy is first of all for God’s greater glory, but it is also—and for that very reason—good news for the poor. In her classic work The Humiliated Christ in Modern Russian Thought, Nadezhda Gorodetsky quotes the nineteenth-century Russian Orthodox Bishop Ignaty: “The people are pressed like ants in their poor huts, but they would build a high and beautiful temple of God. . . . They walk almost in rags, but they long to see the church shining with gold and silver.” The hovels in which they live are, in Gorodetsky’s words, “but a night lodging of a pilgrim;” but they see the church shining with its gilded icons and blazing candles as “the reflection of eternal life and bliss.” If we listen to the poor, if we let ourselves be evangelized by them, then we shall hear them reminding us that their first needs may be material in the order of time (a starving man must be fed before he can be catechized), but are spiritual in the order of eternal salvation. We owe the poor the corporal works of mercy, but we must not fail to give them the spiritual works of mercy, helping them and ourselves by sacred beauty to (in the words of the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom) “lay aside all earthly cares” and “sing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity.”

The Church is poor and for the poor, and is therefore beautiful and for sacred beauty. We can make the con-
verse argument: it is because she is for sacred beauty that the Church is “for the poor.” The argument runs as follows: Saint Thomas distinguishes in the sacraments between what was instituted by Christ and what was instituted by the Church. The incarnate Son of God Himself determined the substance of each of the sacraments, while His Church, in all the diversity of times and places, has adorned the celebration of the sacraments with the accidents of sacred beauty: ceremonies; music; sacred vessels and vestments; the ordering, furnishing, and decorating of the church building; and the holy images of Christ and His saints. These forms of beauty, chosen and made by men, according to Saint Thomas are “not essential to the Sacrament, but belong to the solemnity that is added to the Sacraments in order to arouse devotion and reverence in the recipients.” By arousing our devotion and reverence for Christ really present in the Eucharist, the forms of sacred beauty enable us with greater love to unite ourselves to His self-offering to the Father, and to receive Him—His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity—when He comes to us in Holy Communion. The Eucharist is indeed the sacramentum caritatis, the loving gift of the Heart of Jesus and the chief source of the charity of the whole Church and of her members. It is therefore from the Eucharistic Heart of Christ that the saints, moved to devotion and reverence by the sacred beauty of the liturgy, have drawn the power to love and serve the poor for the sake of Jesus. As Pope Benedict says in Deus caritas est, “The saints—consider the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta—constantly renewed their capacity for love of neighbour from their encounter with the Eucharistic Lord, and conversely this encounter acquired its realism and depth in their service to others.”

To the words of Joseph Ratzinger we may add this remark: to support the devotion of “their encounter with the Eucharistic Lord,” the saints ensured that the celebration of the Eucharist was made beautiful with all the resources at their disposal.

3. Iconoclasm: The Heresy That Is Against the Poor

The spirit of Judas the thief has never died. Without fear of refutation, we can say that, throughout the Church’s history, the destroyers of sacred beauty have been oppressors of the poor, or at least have indulged themselves with worldly goods to the point of doing injustice to the poor. For example, the Iconoclastic clergy of the eighth century were notorious for wearing expensive clothes. The men who smashed icons and white-washed frescoes smeared themselves with scent and wrapped themselves in purple. That is why the sixteenth canon of the Second Council of Nicaea (787), which defended the holy icons against the Iconoclasts, ruled that “it does not become those in holy orders to be clad in costly apparel.”

In his History of the Protestant Reformation, William Cobbett—farmer, soldier, political agitator, and journalist of the early nineteenth century—shows how the English Reformation not only destroyed the sacred beauty of a thousand years of Catholic Christianity, but wrecked the countryside, ruined agriculture, and impoverished the common people. It was, he said, “engendered in lust, brought forth in hypocrisy and perfidy, and cherished and fed by plunder, devastation, and by rivers of innocent English and Irish blood.”

The land worked by the monks for the common good of local communities was seized by the coming men of the court of Henry VIII for their own enrichment, as were the treasures of a thousand sanctuaries. Inspired in part by Cobbett, Augustus Welby Pugin, the great architect of the Gothic Revival, in his book Contrasts presents drawings to illustrate the differences between the Middle Ages and modern times, not only in building styles but also in social philosophy. At the bottom of one page, we see the poor finding hospitality in a Benedictine abbey, where the monks have the obligation to welcome guests as if they were Christ. By contrast, at the top of the page, Pugin shows us the “scientific” way of housing the poor in early Victorian England: incarcerating them in the “Panopticon,” the model jail invented by Jeremy Bentham, the founding father of Utilitarianism. In the mind of Pugin and Cobbett, the abilishers of the Mass and the sacraments—the destroyers of the old faith and its heritage of beauty—were also guilty of a crime that cries to heaven for vengeance: grinding the faces of the poor. Were Pugin and Cobbett succumbing to anti-Protestant bigotry? Well, Pugin was a convert to the Catholic faith from Protestantism, and by temperament a zealot; but Cobbett, to whose writings Pugin was indebted, was born and died a Protestant, and was a down-to-earth countryman. He assures his readers that his only motive in writing his History, the most violent denunciation of the Protestant Reformation ever published, was “a disinterested love of truth and justice.”

4. Poverty and Beauty: Resolving the Difficulties

Like the Angelic Doctor in the articles of the Summa, let us return to the objections to beauty with which we began. First, there is the prophets’ denunciation of feasts and incense. To understand the message of Isaiah and Amos, we need to remember that in the sacrifices of the Old Covenant what was pleasing to God was not the thing offered (the blood of animals), but the righteous disposition of the person who made the offering. When that disposition was absent, as it was
when the priest or layman was culpably indifferent to the poor, then, as Isaiah and Amos teach us, the sacrifices were odious to God. Now, in the Sacrifice of the New and Everlasting Covenant in the Mass, which is the representation of the Sacrifice once offered by Christ on the Cross, what is offered is infinitely pleasing to God because it is the Body and Blood of His only-begotten Son, the slain Lamb of God; and the principal offerer, too, has a disposition, a Heart, of the purest reverence and self-giving love, for that principal offerer is the same Jesus, the Eternal High Priest. What may be deficient is the heart of the ordained priest at the altar and of the laity in the pews. Even a priest whose soul is black in mortal sin can validly consecrate and offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and from the objective power of that Sacrifice a profusion of blessings are poured out upon the living and the dead, though the priest, by saying Mass without repenting, has added sacrilege to his already existing offences.

Saint John Chrysostom, in the passage I quoted at the beginning, is likewise condemning not liturgical beauty as such. After all he is the greatest liturgist among the Greek Fathers, and his anaphora, celebrated almost daily in the Churches of the Byzantine rite, remains one of the jewels of Tradition. Saint John is not forcing us to choose between charity towards the poor and beauty in the liturgy, but simply challenging us to make sure that, in striving for the latter, we do not neglect the former. He says, “I am not saying this to criticize the use of such ornaments. We must attend to both, but to Christ [in the poor] first.”

**Conclusion: Maria, tota pulchra, Mater paupercula**

Saint Francis of Assisi loved to call the Mother of God the *Virgo paupercula*, the poor little Virgin. I said earlier that the Church herself is the one Francis called Lady Poverty, but first of all Lady Poverty is our Lady Mary. She is the Church’s supreme member, the Church’s most perfect model of union with Christ, and the Church’s devoted Mother, the mediatrix of all the graces that flow from Christ the Head into His members. Mary, Virgin Mother of Christ, is thus the living personification of the Church, Virgin Mother of Christ’s faithful. She is also therefore the personification of the Church “that is poor and for the poor.” Our blessed Lady is poor in her utter dependence on Christ, in her poverty of spirit, in her immaculate humility, in her virginity which looks for no source of fruitfulness other than the direct action of God. Her *Magnificat* is testament to her poverty. No one is more conscious of her nothingness as a creature than the mother of the Creator, His lowly handmaid. She recognizes that whatever she has or does, whatever she is, is His gift to her. “He that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is His name” (Lk 1:49). She is the answer to the prayers of the fathers, Abraham and his seed. She is the queen of the poor and faithful remnant of the Lord.

And Mary, *Virgo paupercula*, is also “all fair,” *tota pulchra*: beautiful by the sanctifying grace of her Son from the first moment of her conception, beautiful by the risen glory of her Son from her Assumption, body and soul, into heaven. She is beautiful in all the virtues, in the gifts and fruits and Beatitudes of the Holy Spirit, her Spouse. Her divine Son’s beautification of the whole created order, the new heaven and earth, is inaugurated in her, the Mother of Fairest Love. Heaven’s queen is paradise in perfection. Dante sings in the person of Saint Bernard: “Virgin Mother, daughter of your Son, / humbler and loftier past creation’s...”
measure, / the fulcrum of the everlasting plan. . . . In you is mercy, in you is piety, / in you magnificence, in you the sum / of excellence in all things that come to be."26 In our Lady we see everything that in Christianity, by the grace of Jesus, is compassion and humility, everything that is most purely and perfectly beautiful. Is there a place for liturgical beauty in the Church that is poor and for the poor? There is. The name of that place is the Immaculate Heart of Mary.


Endnotes
1. Evangelii gaudium, n. 198.
2. Homilia 50 in Matthaeum, no. 3; PG 58.508.
3. Ecclesia de Eucharistia, n. 48.
5. Commentarius in Ecclesiasticum libri decem, lib. 9, cap. 1; PL 109.1054D.
7. Summa theologiae 3a q. 85, a. 5, ad 5. The translation is by Thomas Gilby OP.
9. In the eighteenth century, in his encyclical Annus qui hunc, Pope Benedict XIV recognizes that not every church will have great resources to spend on the liturgical arts, but a certain minimum of beauty is of obligation: "We wish to stress that we are not speaking of the sumptuousness and magnificence of the Sacred Temples, or of the preciousness of the sacred furnishings, we knowing as well that they cannot be had everywhere. We have spoken of decency and cleanliness which it is not licit for anyone to neglect, decency and cleanliness being compatible with poverty" (cited by the Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff, The Noble Simplicity of Liturgical Vestments, November 14, 2010).
10. Ibid., 16.
11. A Letter to the Clergy, nn. 4–11.
13. Sermo 95, 2.
14. Summa theologiae 2a2ae q. 145, a. 2.
15. Evangelii gaudium, n. 198.
16. Ibid.
17. The Humiliated Christ in Modern Russian Thought, 96.
18. Summa theologiae 3a q. 64, a. 2, ad 1.
19. Ibid.
20. Deus caritas est, n. 18.
21. Thedern Balasemon et al., In cannones SS. Apostolorum, conciliorum et in epistolas canonicas SS. Patrum commentaria; PG 137. 968C-972C.
23. Contrasts: Or, a Parallel Between the Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages and Corresponding Buildings of the Present Day, Shewing the Present Decay of Taste, Accompanied by Anecdote and Appropriate Text (London: Charles Dolman, 1841) no page number.
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Ontoluminescence: Bright God and Brilliant Creatures in Thomas Aquinas

Rev. Francis J. Caponi, O.S.A.

“The discussion of the beautiful occupies a marginal place in Thomas’s work.”

Such a premonishment is very nearly de rigueur for essays on the theme of beauty in the works of Thomas Aquinas. The reader is warned that no treatise, question, or article is devoted to the beautiful. The undeniable implication is that expectations should be adjusted accordingly (e.g., all hope of encountering “the aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas” must be abandoned). But like the playing of the national anthem before a Cubs game, this caveat is largely a formality preceding chaos. Students of Aquinas’s aesthetic marginalia have displayed a preternatural ability to compose multiple theories of beauty “according to Saint Thomas.” One of the most noteworthy aspects of these accounts is their nearly complete incompatibility.

Francis Kovach reckons that Saint Thomas make some mention of beauty in 665 places. When minor references, quotations from other authors, and loci where Thomas is commenting on a text are deducted, only 130 texts on beauty remain, with few of these more than a handful of lines. Denied the sustained treatments given the other (quasi) transcendental properties of esse, “beauty,” like Purple of Tyre, must be laboriously harvested from these many small sources. Further, Saint Thomas offers no musings on the fine arts or religious artwork. The author of Adoro te devote and Pange lingua gloriosi passes over the liturgical role of beauty in silence. Impressively written introductions to Saint Thomas’s masterpiece never include beauty among “die großen Themen der Summa theologiae.”

Yet, the most extravagant encomia have been raised by those who descry in the Angelic Doctor’s happenstance reflections the key to his most profound ideas. Despite a number of attempts to produce one, there is no rounded and reasonably complete account of beauty per se, much less a theory of aesthetics, to be had in Saint Thomas. The modest intent of this essay is to offer some reflections on an “aesthetic analogy”; viz., the Son is to the Trinity as bright color is to a creature. The comparison is found in Summa Theologiae, I.39.8, resp. “For beauty includes three conditions, integrity or perfection, since those things which are impaired are by the very fact ugly; due proportion or harmony; and lastly, brightness or clarity, whence things are called beautiful which have a bright color.” As Brendan Sammon observes, almost every scholar who draws upon this passage isolates it from its broader context, treating it as a philosophical definition of the beautiful. This is a doubtful enterprise on at least three counts: First, Thomas provides no explanation of how these three qualities relate to one another, though all are grounded in creaturely form (see below). Second, these three terms never again appear together in Aquinas’s remarks on the “objective principles” of beauty. And third, these remarks are part of Thomas’s defense of the appropriation of names within Trinitarian theology. Thomas argues that beauty in each of its dimensions has a likeness to the property of the Son: integritas, “inasmuch as He as Son has in
tion to the generation of the Son. 24 “In its primary meaning [light] signifies that which makes manifest to the sense of sight; afterwards it was extended to that which makes manifest to cognition of any kind. If, then, the word is taken in its strict and primary meaning, it is to be understood metaphorically when applied to spiritual things. . . . But if taken in its common and extended use, as applied to manifestation of every kind, it may properly be applied to spiritual things.” 25 And so, in addition to physical light, 26 Saint Thomas speaks of “the light that makes beauty known” (lumen manifestans), 27 “the spiritual clarity of reason” (spiritualem rationis claritatem), 28 the “lightsomeness of glory” (claritas gloriae), 29 a good reputation (excellentia vel claritas), 30 and the lustre (decor) and light (lumen) of grace. 31 In his commentary on John’s Gospel, Saint Thomas writes:

Sense perceptible light, however, is a certain image of spiritual light. . . . Just as particular light has an effect on the thing seen, inasmuch as it makes colors actually visible, as well as on the one seeing, because through it the eye is conditioned for seeing, so intellectual light makes the intellect to know because whatever light is in the rational creature is all derived from that supreme light “which enlightens every man coming into the world.” Furthermore, it makes all things to be actually intelligible inasmuch as all forms are derived from it, forms which give things the capability of being known, just as all the forms of artifacts are derived from the art and reason on the artisan.” 32

The keys here are form and intelligibility. Aquinas sees form as the measure of every creature’s participation in the divina claritas. 33 God is light because He does not share in—but is—beauty. He is unlimited act, 34 ipsum esse per se subsistens — “not abstract being, but being that is fully determinate in itself and subsistent, and from which all other things derive their being.” 35 Created things are in a variety of ways, and what a thing is determines how its beauty arises. 36 For our purposes, we can say that every thing possesses a form which, as a stained-glass window gives color and coherence to the greater light of the sun, shapes the gift of being,
In this sense, clariitas is “ontoluminescence,” the infinitely varied brightness of the ways of participating in the divine Light. Form is the fluorescence by which things declare themselves to intellect.

This prodigal distribution of beauty can be an aid to Christian theology and prayer. Christian perspectives have often provoked extremes in regards to the beautiful: Clairvaux and Suger, the Beeldenstorm and the Baroque, the stripping of altars and their ghastly “renovation.” Scripture sings the cosmos aesthetic, commending the wonder of God’s handiwork to the faithful (Psalm 104), but is hardly sentimental about the natural world and is very wary of the cunning alchemy of the human heart which transmutes calvses into gold, reveling in the worthless products of human art made by the “ancient hand” of idolatry (Wis 13:10), the self-made “snares for the souls of men” who are “distracted by what they see, because the things seen are fair” (Wis 13:7). Yet, Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:3-4), who reveals the Father (Jn 1:18) to human sight, hearing, and touch (1 Jn 1:1-2), valorizing the visible as the vehicle of divine self-expression, yet possessing “no stately bearing to make us look at him, nor appearance that would attract us to him” (Is 53:2). Is not beauty too appealing to the rebel imagination, too coarse in its elevation of sensory delight over the discipline of reason, as Plato warned?37

Further, the connection between the cultivation of beauty and the wanton ease of the privileged (Am 6:1-7), the Gospel’s focus on the king of shreds and patches who made His habitation with the unlovely of the world, and the need to proclaim the Gospel amidst the world bested by the hydra-like problems of global hunger and disease combine to suggest that discerning the face of the Crucified in human suffering must take precedence over any diletantish swooning about wild flowers or the relics of slave cultures, much less the fussy elevation of aesthetic standards and vision over “practical considerations” in the matters of church design, construction, and ornamentation. Is not beauty too hopelessly trivial and effete to be granted full membership in the counsels of proclamation, prayer, and theology?

To return to the analogy: bright color is a delightful, domestic analogate. It may be, as Monroe Beardsley observes, that Thomas’s “casual reference to ‘bright color’ does not perhaps invite a very fancy reading.”38 But this may be part of its value. Anyone who has flipped through the massive swatch books available in the paints section of even the most modest hardware store, or endured the recherché nomenclature of a tony florist (citrine, opalescent, sea glass, cameo, cerulean, etc.), has seen how nearly undetectable gradations of color lend themselves to a sort of visual wine tasting, centered on self-flattering and very profitable discriminations (e.g., Hamlinigo blue). But Aquinas has something much simpler in mind. As Umberto Eco observes, “The Middle Ages was a time of bright hues. It was a period that identified beauty with light and color (as well as with proportion), and this color was always elementary, a symphony of reds, blues, gold, silver, white, and green, without subtleties and half tones. . . . In medieval poetry this sense of radiant color is always present: the grass is green, blood is red, milk pure white, and a pretty woman, in the words of Guido Guinizzi, ‘has a face of snow colored in carmine.’”39

In one sense, the language of beauty—“The Word is to the Father as red is to freshly washed cherries; like a cobalt dinner plate, or a clean copper pot, or butterflies sipping nectar from sunflowers”—is no different from any speech about God, in that it attempts to approach the divine by means of the sensible. Since “the beautiful is something pleasant to apprehend,”40 bright color may be an especially “eye-catching” way to depict the Word. But Saint Thomas licenses us to say something more when he writes that “the senses are given to man, not only for the purpose of procuring the necessities of life, for which they are bestowed on other animals, but also for the purpose of knowledge. Hence, whereas the other animals take delight in the objects of the senses only as ordered to food and sex, man alone takes pleasure in the beauty of sensible objects for its own sake.”41 And indeed, there is something about bright color that catches, fixes, and absorbs the gaze. If we find ourselves staring at the deep copper hue of a desert sunrise, or the blue of the Virgin’s gown in a van Eyck reproduction, or the primary greens and yellows of a mobile hung above a crib, we are not surprised by their appeal; more often, like the new notice to bright colors (likely due in no small degree to our overexposure to them, a situation which did not often confront humanity for most of its existence).

The use of so basic an analogy as bright color suggests that created ontoluminescence is, at least initially, an engagement with simplicities both quotidian and exceptional. Aquinas specifies this experience as the pleasurable contemplation of the real. Claritas is one of the fundamental ways we recog-
nize difference. Black cow, white cow; blue sky, red sky; green shirt, purple dress—bright color is the initial and abiding herald of the deeper intelligibilities that surround us, because it is in part the “radiance of distinction,” the light which allows what is to be grasped by the intellect. Such simple radiance offers fulfillment to our minds. Aquinas defines the ratio of beauty as “that which calms the desire by being seen or known. . . . It is evident that beauty adds to goodness a relation to the cognitive faculty: so that ‘good’ means that which simply pleases the appetite; while the ‘beautiful’ is something pleasant to apprehend.” Again, the “something” involved here is not exclusively or even primarily great works of art or mighty natural formations, though they are included. It is first a matter of simple knowing—that is a desk, this is falling water, those are bright wings—in which color plays a key role.

Of course, color never stands on its own. We always encounter something which is colored, something upon which and from which claritas flows, just as we always experience proportioned things and never proportion in the abstract. Along with the organic and intellectual specificities of the beholder, the concrete embeddedness of sensible color presides over the particulars of its contemplation. Consider Kitty Fane’s experience of the chapel of the Catholic sisters ministering to the cholera victims of Mei tan fu, in W. Somerset Maugham’s The Painted Veil. The mother superior invites Kitty to see a life-size statue of the Blessed Virgin, a gift recently arrived from France.

The chapel was no more than a long low room with whitewashed walls and rows of deal benches; at the end was the altar on which stood the image; it was in plaster of Paris painted in crude colours; it was very bright and new and garish. Behind it was a picture in oils of the Crucifixion with the two Maries at the foot of the Cross in extravagant attitudes of grief. The drawing was bad and the dark pigments were put on with an eye that knew nothing of the beauty of colour. Around the walls were the Stations of the Cross painted by the same unfortunate hand. The chapel was hideous and vulgar.

To this point, everything that Kitty has learned about the mother superior indicates that it is highly unlikely she is given to sentimental blindness as regards poorly executed art. She is of an ancient French family, possesses a simple and unaffected dignity which inspires awe and makes it unthinkable that anyone one would fail to show her respect, and has “the authority of one who has never known that it is possible to be disobeyed. She had the condescension of a great lady and the humility of a saint. There was in her strong, handsome, and ravaged face an austerity that was passionate; and at the same time she had a solicitude and a gentleness which permitted those little children to cluster, noisy and unafraid, in the assurance of her deep affection.” But Kitty understands the superior’s aesthetic judgments no better than she grasps what it means to the sisters to have the consolation of the reserved Eucharist. She experiences the colors in a shallow way, and so misses the meaning so evident to the mother superior. Only tears, emptiness, and self-recomposition over her shabby treatment of her husband allows her to see things more deeply. “But once within the convent it had seemed to her that she was transported into another world situated strangely neither in space nor time. Those bare rooms and the white corridors, austere and simple, seemed to possess the spirit of something remote and mystical. The little chapel, so ugly and vulgar, in its very crudeness was pathetic; it had something which was wanting in the greatness of a cathedral, with its stained glass and its pictures: it was very humble; and the faith which had adorned it, the affection which cherished it, had endured it with a delicate beauty of the soul.”

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The Annunciation by Jan Van Eyck

“The altarpiece and the Stations of the Cross were painted by one of our Sisters, Soeur St Anselme.” The Mother Superior crossed herself. “She was a real artist. Unfortunately, she fell a victim to the epidemic. Do you not think that they are very beautiful?”

Kitty faltered an affirmative. On the altar were bunches of paper flowers and the candlesticks were distractingly ornate.

“We have the privilege of keeping here the Blessed Sacrament.”

“Yes?” said Kitty, not understanding.

“It has been a great comfort to us during this time of so terrible trouble.”
The brilliance of gold, the brightness of the red in the Coca-Cola logo, and the varied greens of Edward Hopper’s Road in Maine can all furnish contemplative pleasure to an eye which is untrained but attentive. Such colors draw into relief the vast diversity of forms. Just so does Jesus of Nazareth shine light upon Deus in se, revealing Him to be from all eternity not just clartas, but Light from Light, True God from True God, presented to us now in scripture and sacrament, in fire and water, that our eyes might become slowly prepared for eternal residence in the New Jerusalem, which has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God will give it light, and the Lamb will be its lamp (Rv 21:23).

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[23] Sacred Architecture Issue 31 2017

Endnotes
6. Comment on Saint Paul’s declaration that God “dwell in unapproachable light” (1 Timothy 6:16). Aquinas writes: “Light in sensible things is the principle of seeing, whence it is called light, because by which something is known in whatever way. However each thing is known through its own form, and according as it is in act. Whence, as much as it has form and act, so much does it have light. Therefore, things which are of a certain act, but are not pure act, are illumined, but not light. But the divine essence, which is pure act, is itself light.” Commentaries on St. Paul’s Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, trans. Chrisyostom Baer, O. Praem. (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2007), cap. V, p. 10.
7. “Artists obscure the enlightening power of thought and skill by aiming at plausibility rather than truth. Art delights in unsavoury trivia and in the endless proliferation of senseless skill by aiming at plausibility rather than truth. Art delights in unsavoury trivia and in the endless proliferation of senseless

A R T I C L E S
A Magnificent Witness: Our Lady of the Angels Mission, Chicago

Denis McNamara

As unlikely as it seems, a mystical vision experienced by Saint Francis of Assisi eight centuries ago recently found a parallel in a twentieth-century Chicago church associated for decades with anxiety and terror. While praying at the abandoned church of San Damiano, Francis famously heard the Lord’s voice ring out: “Rebuild my church.” Immediately, he began a lifelong path of simplicity and service, beginning by rebuilding the church with his own hands. But commentators have rightly noted that “rebuilding the church” has a double meaning. Because the church building signifies the Christian community joined mystically to Christ its Head,1 the renovation of a church building is the fruit of a renewed Christian community and in turn brings new life to the community itself. In a kind of divine economy, when a worshipping community is dispirited and departs, the buildings which signify Christ’s presence decay and crumble. When the community returns and is reedified—spiritchually “rebuilt”—church buildings again provide the visible sign of the Holy Spirit building up the temple of Christ’s body. It is then that a church building flowers and stands as a queen amidst the city’s surrounding buildings.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the renewal of the former Our Lady of the Angels Church in the West Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago, where a once-thriving parish became an aching gash on the face of Chicago after a devastating school fire left ninety-two children and three sisters dead in an eighteen-hour ordeal that sent shockwaves across the world. But new life has come to the neighborhood and its church, beginning with a small community of men and women inspired by Saint Francis himself.

Noble Simplicity, Noble Beauty

The story of Our Lady of the Angels Church in Chicago, now called the Our Lady of the Angels Mission, in many ways follows the familiar path of many of Chicago’s immigrant-driven neighborhood churches. Irish immigrants outgrowing their old neighborhood in the 1890s moved west past Humboldt Park, and their pastor named the parish after a personal interest: he had studied at Our Lady of the Angels Seminary in Niagara, New York.2 Worship began in a storefront, sisters were found to begin a school, and a temporary church was built. Decades later, despite the dark days of the Depression and war, the parish built a modest but still grand Italian Romanesque church from plans drawn by architect Gerald A. Barry. Samuel Cardinal Stritch dedicated the church in 1941.

Gerald Barry, a busy Chicago architect, would eventually design several dozen buildings in the Archdiocese of Chicago, and his son, also named Gerald, would later form a firm called Barry and Kay, and design churches which pushed the envelope of modern expression. The elder Barry’s work, however, revealed a stylistic versatility common to the best architects of the early twentieth century. His 1936 Saint Bartholomew Church in Chicago and 1953 Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Glenview, Illinois, each used a sophisticated Colonial mode. His Saint Nicholas of Tolentine Church in Glenview showed his versatility with modernized English Gothic, and his Saint Priscilla Church showed a facility with ‘50s high modern which nonetheless retained a strong ecclesiastical character.

At Our Lady of the Angels, Barry’s choice of “modernized Italian Romanesque” was not uncommon for the tight budgets of the 1930s. Pastors had become wary of “cathedral-like structures” that “had been overtaken by the depression with a huge burden of debt.”3 Unlike the dreamy English Gothic churches of the Roaring Twenties with their complexities of cut stone, the Italian Romanesque provided a credible historical style closely associated with the Catholic tradition which nonetheless required only small areas of stone detail and allowed for broad, unornamented expanses of brick. At Our Lady of the Angels, Barry gave the façade an appearance of simplicity which contains, nonetheless, significant architectural detail. The front façade displays a rich ecclesiology fitting to a church building as an image of Christ’s hierarchically arranged Mystical Body. Above one entry door is displayed the coat of arms of Pope Pius XII, while the other reveals the arms of Cardinal Mundelein, both reigning when the church was built. Moving from the earthly church to the heavenly community, carvings under the triumphal arch entry symbolize the Persons of the Trinity, most notably the center arch with the crowned hand of God coming down into the new garden of the glorified earth shown by glorified vines and peacocks, the birds of eternity.

The interior, too, continues its theological richness amidst an immediate sense of simplicity. Theologically considered, every church is an image of God and humanity reconciled, where the new heaven and the new earth of the Book of Revelation are shown in perfect order (Rv 21:1). Rows of Byzantine-inspired columns, literally the “pillars of the church” (Gal 2:9), support the roof just as individual people support its mission. Even the roof trusses are treated in a polychromatic iconographic scheme indicating vines, peacocks, and symbols of the Virgin and Christ. The sanctuary, ringed by columns of colorful marbles akin to the jeweled walls of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Rv 4), also display the architect’s understanding of the newer trends inspired by the early Liturgical Movement. Every seat has a clear view of the altar, which itself takes inspiration from Early Christian sources, combining swirling vines, peacocks, and
the chi-rho in a wreath, the symbol of the victory of Christ. Above, a large bronze crucifix that could be seen by the people in the pews hangs from a carefully designed tester, revealing the period’s new interest in observance of liturgical law and in the participation of the people in the action at the altar.

Tragedy and Decline

For the first seventeen years of its life, Our Lady of the Angels Church operated like many thriving urban parishes. Tragedy struck on December 1, 1958, however, when a raging fire believed to have begun in the basement of the elementary school engulfed much of the building, trapping students and teachers alike. As horrified parents looked on, students, some with their hair and clothes on fire, jumped out of second-story windows, and television coverage showed the limp bodies of children being carried down fireman’s ladders. Three nuns and ninety-two students died, making headlines across the nation and the world. Photos of small coffins lined up for the funeral Mass remained burned in the collective consciousness of the city. Eventually a new Our Lady of the Angels school was built with the most modern fire protection standards, and throughout the country, school boards reviewed their fire safety provisions in light of the tragedy. Nonetheless, the gaping wound caused by the fire remained, and many families moved away from the neighborhood to avoid the painful memories of the day’s events.

Soon after, in an urban phenomenon common in the 1960s and ’70s, many traditionally Catholic ethnic groups left the cities for the suburbs, and the West Humboldt Park neighborhood faced increasing pressure from the phenomenon of “blockbusting.” In what is sometimes called “panic peddling,” unscrupulous real estate agents developed intentional programs to frighten white residents into selling their homes by stimulating fears of declines in property values because of an influx of African Americans. In some cases, agents “hired African American sub-agents and other individuals to walk or drive through changing areas soliciting business and otherwise behaving in such a manner as to provoke and exaggerate white fears.”

Even though the parish formed the “Our Lady of the Angels Committee Against Panic Peddling” in 1969, the Catholic population in the area continued to decline. Despite enlarging the parish boundaries several times and consolidation with other Catholic schools in the area, the parish church closed in 1990, and the school closed in 1999. The West Humboldt Park neighborhood became known for gang violence, drug trafficking, and poverty; and as of 2011 it remained one of the poorest in Chicago, with a 42% unemployment rate, a 67% high school dropout rate, and one of the highest juvenile arrest rates in the state.

New Hope and a New Mission

In 2005, Francis Cardinal George invited Father Bob Lombardo, C.F.R., a founding member of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, to begin a mission on the site with three aims: serve the neediest people in the city, bring a Catholic presence to the area, and provide a life of prayer at the location of the 1958 fire. The Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, founded by eight Capuchin Friars in 1987, are committed to serving the poorest of the poor in a “hands on” manner, and their missions provide for both the material needs of the poor and evangelization through the preaching of the Gospel. Father Lombardo had already served as a missionary in Honduras and Bolivia, and had directed the Padre Pio Shelter for the Homeless in the Bronx.

For the Friars of the Renewal, as for Saint Francis, building up the Mystical Body of Christ tends to be inextricably linked with buildings and construction. When he arrived in Chicago, Father Lombardo was faced with a church campus that had been neglected for decades. He noted that the kitchen floor of the 1940s-era rectory, which had been empty for fifteen years, looked like it had been “roto-tilled.” With many donations of money, time, materials, and expertise, the rectory’s plumbing and electrical systems were updated, plaster was repaired and painted, a chapel was created, and landscaping freshened up the property, making a colorful oasis in the blighted neighborhood. The rectory now serves as the home of a newly founded and growing religious community, the Franciscans of the Eucharist, whose primary apostolate is working with the local poor. Similarly, a thirty-seven-room convent built in 1955 required extensive repair and now serves as a place for retreats, for housing volunteers, and for storing donations. A gymnasium and social center named Kelly Hall, built by the parish in 1968, reopened after receiving significant repair and cleaning. It now serves the neighborhood and the mission in conjunction with the Chicago Metro YMCA and the Greater Chicago Food Depository, feeding seven hundred families every month.

Perhaps the most splendid part of the rebuilding was the renovation and reopening of the church itself. Though it was rented to a Baptist congregation for almost twenty years, the church was only partly usable because of a significantly leaky roof, including a section of the ceiling the community somewhat affectionately called “the hole.” The estimated price tag for the required church renovations totaled over $2 million, including a new roof, tuck pointing, complete electrical rewiring, window and plumbing repairs, and an overhaul of the basement kitchen and hall seating five hundred people.

The church’s original altar, which had been moved out onto a wooden platform with a shag carpet decades earlier, was reconstructed and relocated back to the original sanctuary. The marble floors and wall panels were cleaned, the original exterior doors were recreated and installed, the pews were restored, the entire interior was repainted, devotional shrines were restored, and the infamous hole in the roof was repaired. An ambo comprised of four rectangular-shaped images of the four evangelists was crafted out of pieces of the church’s original altar rail. And surprisingly, the first-ever outdoor memorial to the children who died in the fire was erected on the church grounds.

Sister Stephanie Baliga, one of the members of the Franciscans of the Eucharist, served as the de facto general contractor for the project and, together with Father Lombardo and the other
sisters, organized groups of volunteers, donors, and construction workers. Fundraising took all forms, including several sisters asking sponsors to support them in running the Chicago Marathon. Several of Chicago’s unions—including pipe fitters, plumbers, electricians, and carpenters—donated their time, using the church as a hands-on training center where apprentices could perfect their skills in the field.

In many cases, the sisters described the appearance of contractors and supplies as “miraculous.” Precisely when they pondered how they would afford the renovation of the church basement and kitchen, a man whose sister had died in a fire unrelated to the school tragedy agreed to provide the materials and labor. After Sister Stephanie spent the summer with volunteers sanding the pews, she picked up a phone book looking for furniture refinishers and, without knowing it, providentially called a man whose family members had been involved in the school fire. He came over fifteen minutes later. One man donated all of the electrical work, and one electrician frequently spent overnights in the church pulling wire. In many cases, Sister Stephanie reported, people who had little or no faith had remarkable awakenings while working on the project. Others who had traumatic childhood memories of the 1958 tragedy returned to the parish, donating time and labor, thereby finding healing by letting positive memories replace the old ones. “It was a reminder,” Sister Stephanie says, “that the Mystical Body of Christ who are the People of God still come together today, not only in the past.”

Aedificavit Sibi Domum

In December of 2012, Francis Cardinal George presided at the Mass celebrating the church’s reopening, joined by school alumni, former parishioners, and current residents of the neighborhood. Though not operating as a parish, the church has become a beacon of beauty for the neighborhood. Although very few of the residents in the area are Catholic, many see it as their own. In the same parish where burning children once jumped out of windows, today’s neighborhood children have spoken of being moved to prayer after looking at the stained-glass windows, which are lit at night from the inside as a jewel-like beacon. Right now, the Franciscans are focused mostly on meeting the immense material needs of the area’s residents, but prayer in the church forms an important part of the mission. When groups visit on special occasions, the church is opened for prayer, and several times a month, the Franciscans offer the neighborhood residents a community dinner that begins with prayer in the upper church and ends with a meal in the hall below.

In a 2011 interview, Cardinal George called the church “the most gracious building, the most impressive building in the neighborhood.” He noted that before the renovation, the “place didn’t lift the spirit very much,” but he hoped that “a dispirited people might find a new spirit because the Holy Spirit is working there.” This indeed is the modern restatement of God’s call to Saint Francis in the thirteenth century. At the Our Lady of the Angels Mission, hundreds of generous people have acted and continue to act as the face and hands of Christ, asking nothing in return. And the result is renewed hope signified to every passerby, evident in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, but also in a silent but magnificent witness composed of brick, stone, and glass.

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Endnotes

1. See Introduction, Order of Laying a Foundation Stone or the Commencement of Work on the Building of a Church, paragraph 1: “The structure built of stones will be a visible sign of the living Church, God’s building, which they themselves constitute.”
“The Beauty of all things in the world as well of architecture lay in proportion, the origin of which may be said is divine; for it derives from the body of Adam who was not only made by the divine hands of God, but shaped in His image and likeness.”

These profound words were spoken on the second of June 1665 by the great sculptor of the counter-reform, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, and they ring true in our own time. The human figure has always had an inseparable role in art and reached its highest summit in the light of the Incarnation. With our rich Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian heritage, handed down to us through the will and piety of great generations past, it is hard to imagine an ancient temple without a crystalline marble deity, or a church without the face of a saint reflecting the light of God. Though, in our current utilitarian hubris we find ourselves in an epoch of confusion where tradition has been abandoned, and the role of the human figure is in dire need of artistic revitalization.

The fall of figurative art and rise of modern secularism, stemming from a loss of moral objectivity, has deep origins; the floodgates of relativism were opened with the Protestant Reformation, and the iconoclasm of Martin Luther and John Calvin toward works of sacred art has had a lasting impact on the subsequent centuries of tributary denominations. The vibrancy of what we now refer to as the Baroque was in part the light of truth in response to heresy, and the radiant language of classical beauty in the service of the Church is as valid today as it was then.

In The Spirit of the Liturgy, Cardinal Ratzinger eloquently stated, “The theology of the liturgy is in a special way a ‘symbolic theology,’ a theology of symbols, which connects us to what is present but hidden.” Having myself converted from a Pentecostal denomination, I was struck by this truth in the Chigi Chapel of Siena by Bernini. Upon entering this intimate space, one stands before an ancient icon of La Madonna del Voto being supported by angels above the altar. Turning laterally one discovers an effigy of Mary Magdalene and Saint Jerome, oriented toward the altar together with the viewer. In the presence of these masterpieces the humble intention of the artist shines forth: more than just skillful figures of beauty, they are in fact a living representation of the saints in adoration of Christ and Our Lady, whom they point us toward and make present. It could therefore be said that these carved figures are a sort of hinge between the militant and triumphant Church, a material vehicle that effects greater union with Christ by “connecting us with what is present but hidden.”

Our ecclesial artistic tradition is intrinsically bound to us in our unity of faith, and no one can deny that true works of beauty will always resonate with bold immediacy and relevancy. In time God has revealed to us many mysteries of our faith, and while the Church’s understanding has developed, the actual mysteries have not changed. Is it not then urgent to seek a conveyance of transcendent beauty, as elevation from the mundane and ephemeral world in preparation for the heavenly Jerusalem? Glenn Gould offers a congruent observation of the music of Richard Strauss, which could be considered an inspiration to modern ecclesial artists:

The great thing about the music of Richard Strauss is that it presents and substantiates an argument which transcends . . . all questions of style and tastes and idiom—all frivolous, effete preoccupations of the chronologist. It presents to us an example of the man who makes richer his own time by not being of it; who speaks for all generations by being of none.

This pursuit, of course, runs entirely contrary to the philosophy of our mainstream academic “taste makers” and their oppressive rules. Originality has become a cardinal virtue, and the systematic destruction of our heritage is symptomatic of inordinate obsession with progression. In his “Choruses from The Rock,” T.S. Eliot confronts this phenomenon of “new,” born of personal autonomy, with a poetic and revelatory response:

But it seems that something has happened that has never happened before: though we know not when, or why, or how, or where. Men have left God not for other gods, they say, but for no god; and this has never happened before.

This new atheistic development may
be the foremost reason for the decline of occidental figurative art. If man says he is not created in the image and likeness of God, and the figure no longer has an essential role in the worship of our Creator, it is inevitable that artistic manifestations will become slowly deformed and unrecognizable.

We have also seen the dehumanized figure used as a vehicle for political propaganda by powerful atheist regimes. These lessons should teach us that when removed from the Church, figurative art will wither and die, just as a branch ripped from the vine of tradition will no longer produce fruit: “We build in vain unless the Lord builds with us.”

Another hypothesis should be presented to help understand the dehumanization of the figure. August Rodin is widely considered one of the last great figurative sculptors in the western tradition; it is a curious fact that in the beginning of the twentieth century, his “friends were astounded at the things he did not know about contemporary culture, like who Charles Darwin was.”

It should come as no surprise that this most illustrious master, whose pulsating figures showed us the innermost expression of the human spirit, had not the slightest interest in the theory of evolution. Looking at the posthumous decline, I am convinced that in following Cartesian doubt, the anticlerical French Revolution, and the Enlightenment proponent Immanuel Kant, the final nail in the coffin for figurative art was driven in by Charles Darwin. No great artist had ever been confused about his origin as a species. And what are the results? Science has become largely a religion of first-world atheists, with a vicious backlash toward those opposing views; their destructive effects on everyday society have been reflected in artistic trends. One need only read these lines from the futurist manifesto of Umberto Boccioni from 1910 to understand their intentional desecration:

Destory the cult of the past, the obsession with the ancients . . .   Elevate all attempts of originality, however daring, however violent . . .  Support and glory in our day-to-day world, a world which is going to be continually and splendidly transformed by victorious Science.

Consequently, the artistic figurative dilemma of the past century was in fact a highly calculated attack by opponents of Christianity. Today this is linked to the current decline in childbirth, the agenda to change the traditional definition of marriage, and gender confusion. These are many of the reasons why secular artistic and social currents cannot be integrated into the life and liturgy of the Church, and Christian artists have a duty to fight this “dictatorship of relativism” with a sword of truth and shield of moral objectivity, firmly rooted in tradition.

We must also ask prudently, what is the forecast? Perhaps Rodin may have given us the answer in 1911 in Rome, as quoted by the Duchess de Choiseul: “[Rodin] had admired Bernini’s work and everything to do with 17th century architecture, then very much out of fashion—but ‘fashions will change,’ he predicted, and the baroque and Jesuit styles will regain their prestige.”

In conclusion, I present these ideas about sacred art:

1. Beauty and truth are synonymous, and beauty cannot possibly exist for its own sake, as everything beautiful originates in God.
2. An artist should avoid an arrogant obsession with originality, for there is nothing more original than the perfect Sacrifice of Christ; He is our originality, and He will always “make things anew.”
3. Christ’s salvation is eternal, and the Church is an immoveable “pillar and foundation of truth.” A true work of art should transform us and transcend fleeting superficiality, speaking to all generations.
4. Art cannot be limited to one canon or based entirely upon the quantitative interpretation of nature. The iconography of the saints should be formed upon their individual charisms (i.e., Saint Teresa of Bernini is idealized, whereas Saint Philip Neri and Saint Ignatius are often depicted naturalistically).
5. One of the essential characteristics of Truth is clarity; artistic and cultural trends born in opposition to Christ, the Church, and Sacred Tradition are entirely incompatible with the life of the faith and should not be introduced to the Church in any way.
6. The observation and interpretation of the natural world should always be accompanied by the study of the great masters in the light of our rich living tradition.
7. Blue jeans do not give a figurative work a modern message. Caravaggio may have used modern dress, though at the time their clothing was beautiful. Just because it worked for Caravaggio does not mean it will work for us. Besides, Bernini said Caravaggio lacked invention.
8. Jesus and the Blessed Virgin should not look like any ordinary individual. Christ is both human and...
divine, and Our Lady was born without original sin. They should be composed ideally based upon centuries of successful interpretation.

9. Avoid sentimentality! Seek harmony in proportion and sincerity of expression.

10. Do not lose hope and do not compromise!

Presentation by Cody Swanson for the workshop Christian Art & the Corporeal at the conclusion of the exhibit In One Flesh at the Opera del Duomo museum in Florence.

Cody Joseph Swanson is an artist and instructor who resides in Florence, Italy with his wife and five children. He holds a Masters in Liturgy, Sacred Art and Architecture from the Pontifical Aernaeum Regina Apostolorum, and is a graduate of the Florence Academy of Art, where he also taught for five years. Swanson’s numerous award-winning works can be found all over the United States and Italy. In addition to his professional vocation as a sculptor he is also a board and faculty member of the Sacred Art School of Florence.

Endnotes
3. Ephesians 3:8-9: “To me, the very least of all the holy ones, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the inercutable riches of Christ, and to bring to light [for all] what is the plan of the mystery hidden from ages past in God who created all things” (New American Bible).
6. Ibid., 106.
10. Revelation 21:5: “The one who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’” Then he said, “Write these words down, for they are trustworthy and true” (New American Bible).
11. Timothy 3:15: “But if I should be delayed, you should know how to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth” (New American Bible).
12. “Nature, because of many accidents, almost never brings its products, and man in particular, to total perfection, or even to a greater degree of beauty than ugliness . . . and I do not know whether all the beauty that a human body can possess has ever been seen all together in one man; but one might well say that we can see one part in this man and another in that other, and that, scattered among many men, we can find it in its entirety.” (Vincenzo Danti, “The Treatise on Perfect Proportions” in Italian Art 1500-1600 [Northwestern University Press, Illinois, 1966], 104.)
13. “Rock” . . . is the expression of elemental passions, and at rock festivals it assumes a cultic character, a form of worship, in fact, in opposition to Christian worship. People are . . . released from themselves by the experience of being part of a crowd and by the emotional shock of rhythm, noise, and special lighting effects. However, in the ecstasy of having all their defenses torn down, the participants sink, as it were, beneath the elemental force of the universe. The music of the Holy Spirit’s sober inebriation seems to have little chance when self has become a prison, the mind is a shackle, and breaking out from both appears as a true promise of redemption that can be tasted at least for a few moments . . . Not every kind of music can have a place in Christian worship. It has its standards, and that standard is the Logos. If we want to know whom we are dealing with, the Holy Spirit or the unholy spirit, we have to remember that it is the Holy Spirit who moves us to say, “Jesus is Lord!” (1 Cor 12:3). (Ratzinger, Spirit of the Liturgy, 147–8), 151.
14. “He gave it as his opinion that the Academy ought to possess casts of all the notable statues, bas-reliefs, and busts of antiquity. These would serve to educate young students; they should be taught to draw after these classical models and in that way form a conception of the beautiful that would serve them all their lives. . . . for if their imagination has nothing but nature to feed on, they will be unable to put forth anything of strength or beauty; for nature itself is devoid of both strength and beauty, and artists who study it should first be skilled in recognizing its faults and correcting them; something that students who lack grounding cannot do.” (Chantelou, Bernini’s Visit to France, 106.)
15. “Collectively his work is called ‘Baroque,’ a term which defines it and yet is defined by it. The truth is more complicated, and deeply involved with classicism, Raphael he admired for his talent in arranging figures and for the purity of his drawing. Painting by the ‘classical’ Annibale Carraci met with his approval, while he brushed off the radically ‘Baroque’ Caravaggio as a painter possessing ‘neither spirit nor invention.’ The contemporary he favored particularly was Guido Reni, another artist who also mingled ‘Classical’ and ‘Baroque.’ But Bernini was not responsive to theory, and like most artists, was indifferent to labels.” (Robert T. Peterson, Bernini and the Excesses of Art [Artout-Maschiettoeditore, Florence, Italy, 2003], pp. 29–30.)
Priest of the Via Pulchritudinis: Father Michael Morris, O.P.

Rev. Peter John Cameron, O.P.

This homily was given at the Funeral Mass for Father Michael Thomas Morris, O.P., on Friday, July 22, 2016, at Saint Albert’s Priory in Oakland, California. Father Morris entered the Order of Preachers in 1971 and was ordained a priest in 1977. He taught at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Berkeley, California, and served as director of the Sante Fe Institute, also known as the Blackfriars Institute for Religion and the Arts. Father Morris was well known for his essays on sacred art in Religion and the Arts. Father Morris was also known as the Blackfriars Institute for Theology in Berkeley, California, and The Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Oakland, California. Father Morris was ordained a priest in 1977. He taught at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Berkeley, California, and served as director of the Sante Fe Institute, also known as the Blackfriars Institute for Religion and the Arts. Father Morris was well known for his essays on sacred art in Religion and the Arts.

W e suffer the loss of Father Michael Thomas Morris of the Order of Preachers, not simply because he was an exceptional son and brother, Dominican friar, priest, and teacher, author, artist, and friend, but because he was onto something that we cannot live without.

I. It is the subject of Pope Saint John Paul II’s 1999 Letter to Artists, which must have been the cause of some euphoria for Father Michael when it was published, since that letter expresses the very substance of his superlative heart.

Saint John Paul wrote: “This world in which we live needs beauty in order not to sink into despair.”

Back in the fifth century BC, the philosopher Plato said that it is beauty that draws our heart out of accommodation with daily routine, and that keeps it from decaying into nothingness.

Beauty possesses the power to overcome our crippling resistance.

Monsignor Luigi Giussani, Servant of God, once remarked: “The motivation for saying ‘yes’ to something that comes into our life, defeating all preconceptions, is beauty.”

II. Even more, there is a direct link between the beauty of art and the human longing for God. In that Letter to Artists, Saint John Paul tells us:

Art remains a kind of bridge to religious experience. Insofar as it seeks the beautiful, . . . art is . . . a kind of appeal to the mystery. . . .

III. But the question is: Where can you find a person who takes the evangelical power of beauty seriously?

That is why God raised up Dominican Father Michael Thomas Morris.

Father Michael was tuned in to a truth well expressed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger:

The Church is to transform, improve, “humanize” the world—but how can she do that if at the same time she turns her back on beauty, which is so closely allied to love? For together, beauty and love form the true consolation in the world, bringing it as near as possible to the world of the Resurrection.

With ominous foreboding, the great twentieth-century theologian Father Hans Urs von Balthasar warned that ‘whoever sneers at [beauty’s] name as if she were the ornament of a bourgeois past . . . can no longer pray and soon will no longer be able to love.”

Ratzinger goes one step further in a statement some may find shocking: “A theologian who does not love art, poetry, music, and nature can be dangerous.”

That is the reason why, for us, Father Michael Morris, true son of Saint Dominic and true brother of Blessed Fra Angelico—twin brother!—was so irresistible.

More than a PhD in art history and professor of religion and the arts, Father Michael was a kind of prophet, in this sense: a prophet is someone who announces the significance of the world and the value of life.

For example, when Father Michael’s cancer doctor delivered his devastating diagnosis of stage 4 colon cancer, Father Michael listened to the news and responded with complete peacefulness—nonplussed, composed, resigned.

The doctor was taken aback by this. Really? No agitation; no anger; not even a slight sign of surprise. Alarmed, the doctor spoke up again, repeating more clearly the terrible news. And, again, Father Michael stayed totally serene—nonchalant even.

This only unnerved the doctor, who
feared Father Michael wasn’t really grasping what he was trying to communicate to him, or that he was in denial. So the doctor said to him directly and rather bluntly, “You’re going to die, you know.” And Father Michael, the picture of tranquility, replied, “Yes, I know. I understand.”

Well, the doctor was utterly undone by this. He told Father Michael that he had never met a patient who ever received such a dire diagnosis so calmly and acceptingly.

He then confessed to Father Michael that he himself was an atheist. And he went on to ask Father Michael this question: “Do you think the reason why you have no fear of death is because you are a Catholic priest?” Father Michael thought about it, and said in answer, “I suppose so.”

In one of his beautiful art commentaries, Father Michael speaks a truth that he himself exemplified, and that very likely he learned from his special patron, Saint Mary Magdalene, whose feast day is today, and in whose parish he was so honored and delighted to live and serve:

The cradle of contemplation begins at the foot of the Cross, in close proximity to the source of all grace. For it is there that one can penetrate the mysteries of salvation and gain true understanding.10

IV. Father Michael showed his prophetic grace in the wondrous way he looked at art and enabled us all to see. The art-historical eye sees all! He held a deep conviction regarding artists: they are not just architects, sculptors, musicians, poets, and painters, but veritable preachers.

When we can see what they say, we receive what we need.

Father Michael had a large, ancient, painted wooden statue of Saint John the Baptist ensconced on a pillar in the corner of his bedroom—an object of his devotion.

In the Gospel, John the Baptist, seeing Jesus walk by, is so struck, so overcome by the beauty of Jesus Christ, that he can’t help himself. Intuiting something that Pope John Paul II would explicitly teach—“The Church needs art [in order to communicate the message entrusted to her by Christ]”11—John the Baptist is moved to point out Jesus to the world by way of a symbol in an artistic image: the Lamb of God.

And he instructs us: “Behold!” (which means a lot more than just “Look at him”). Father Michael’s genius was in the way he understood, practiced, and taught us “beholding”—because the ability to behold is a gift. “Beholding beauty is . . . a method of transformation [by] which we are able to respond to God’s beauty in grace and so be gradually deified [made God-like], becoming more able to see beauty as [we] become more beautiful.”12

This is why we pray those words—“Behold the Lamb of God”—at Mass as a most proper way of preparing ourselves just before we receive Holy Communion.

In all he taught us, in all he preached to us, in all he shared with us, Father Michael so well communicated an insight of Saint John Paul II:

Beauty makes one feel the beginning of . . . fulfillment, and seems to whisper to us: “You will not be unhappy; the desire of your heart will be fulfilled—what is more, it is already being fulfilled.”13

V. Father Michael could not have foreseen the radical evangelical initiative that Pope Francis would launch in his apostolic exhortation Evangelii Gaudium—The Joy of the Gospel.

The pope there calls for “a renewed esteem for beauty [that serves] as a means of touching the human heart.” He says that “each particular Church should encourage the use of the arts in evangelization” and that “we must be bold enough to discover new signs and new symbols . . . [that] prove particularly attractive for others,”14 because “the Church grows by attraction.”15

Pope Francis calls this new initiative the via pulchritudinis—the “way of beauty”—and he declares that “a formation in the via pulchritudinis ought to be part of our effort to pass on the Faith.”

No brag, just fact—who could name a more outstanding patron, formator, and priestly proponent of the via pulchritudinis than Father Michael Morris?

It is not a coincidence that, during these eighteen years of the publication of Magnificat, one remark that is invariably made to me again and again, when I have the chance to travel and meet subscribers to the magazine, is “When my Magnificat arrives in the mail, the first thing I read each month is Father
Michael Morris’s art essay.” The via pulchritudinis in action!

VI. But, of course, as Pope Benedict reminded us, “the truest beauty is the love of God.”

And to be true to this truest beauty, Father Michael was the truest and most generous of friends, who lavished the love of God on others in gracious and extravagant ways.

Just one story: In addition to all his many other astonishing talents, Father Michael was a marvelous cook. He loved food. He loved to talk about food. He referred to delicious food “ambrosia.”

Keep this in mind now as we travel back to one week ago—to last Friday, the day Father Michael died. He was returning from a treatment at the hospital. I was accompanying him. As we walked in the corridor of the rectory that leads to his bedroom, Father Michael became short of breath.

He slumped against the wall. I rushed right behind him. And then I held him as he collapsed to the floor, fighting hard to breathe.

I called 911. I gave Father Michael absolution. Very quickly, the EMTs came. As they were performing CPR, I saw Father Michael’s dear friend of decades, Dominican Father Michael Carey, arrive, across the way from me. I called to him to come around to the other side of the hallway where I was, and to bring the holy oils so that we could anoint Father Michael, administering the Sacrament of the Sick.

Father Carey had just moved to Saint Mary Magdalen and did not yet have the chance to unpack his holy oil stocks. So I asked him to go down to the kitchen and bring up some cooking oil—which he did. Father Carey blessed the oil, crawled on the floor close to his beloved friend of so many years, and then anointed him, giving Father Michael the Last Rites of the Church.

Now I have to tell you this: no one besides Father Michael Morris would have been so delighted by the fact that his ultimate, sacramental entrance into the long-awaited eternity of God’s Paradise was expedited by means of Kirkland Signature Greek Olive Oil.

Extra virgin.

Conclusion

The official, recorded time of Father Michael’s death was 4:15 p.m.—
Recapturing Sacred Art from Secular Bondage


Reviewed by Elizabeth Lev

Art history, which came of age during the secularizing nineteenth century, has spent over a century grappling with the problem of interpreting religious imagery. In our forensic society, the fact that Giotto, Michelangelo, and Leonardo never left explanatory texts to assure the faithful of their artistic intentions has opened a door to a relativist school of interpretation. The history of art often seems submerged in a quagmire of interpretative methodologies from the purely stylistic to the doggedly archival to the mood swings of Marxist, gender, or psychological approaches. The problematic fallout is that the titillating-yet-unsubstantiated explanation of a sacred image can be considered as possessing equal merit as the most well-documented hypotheses.

Dr. Chloë Reddaway brings much-needed order to these proceedings in her book Transformations in Persons and Paint: Visual Theology, Historical Images, and the Modern Viewer, pointing out that a chapel functions as a space for religious activity—prayer, liturgy, the sacrifice of the Mass—and that the formal decisions of the artist in the manipulation of pictorial space, the use of directed light, and the plasticity of the figures are often influenced by the theological content of the subject of the fresco cycle.

Reddaway does this in the most compelling of ways—bringing her reader to visit the most famous chapels in Florence (along with the enchanting convent of San Marco) and offering new and rich insights into these very familiar images.

These “sacred tours” commence with a description of the cycle (accompanied by splendid illustrations). Reddaway then presents the most authoritative interpretations to date by the finest scholars on the subject. Many readers will recognize the names of John Spike, Eve Boorsok, Marilyn Lavin, and Irwin Panofsky, luminaries in the history of art. From scene to scene the reader learns the story, analyzes the work, and hears what sounds like a fulfilling interpretation.

The author then adds a new component to this 20/20 vision of art history: the lens of theological interpretation. These frescoes, viewed through the belief in the Incarnation, the constant need for conversion, and humanity’s ultimate destiny and desire to return to God, reveal the secret of their continued attraction for viewers. Empty space in Santa Croce’s Bardi Chapel becomes an invitation to enter into faith; a few steps away in the Baroncelli Chapel, light not only flaunts the art-historical achievement of a night scene, but describes revealed Truth.

The enhanced vision of these six spaces is part of Reddaway’s larger ambition to create a “methodology for the theological interpretations of images.” Art history has waited a long time for this interpretative key. Michael Baxandall’s Painting and Experience in Renaissance Italy (1988) started considering the devotional use of art, then Pamela Jones analyzed five altarpieces in Altarpieces and Their Viewers in the Churches of Rome from Caravaggio to Guido Reni (2008), blending documentary erudition with careful consideration of the religious sensitivities of the viewers. Reddaway goes a step further, drawing the viewer into each scene, as the artists clearly intended, and indicating the potentially transformative spiritual experience that chapel art was expected to produce both in Renaissance Florence and in Counter-Reformation Rome.

The book makes important strides in Reddaway’s work to construct a methodology to pinpoint specifically Christian elements in art. In ReVisioning: Critical Methods of Seeing Christianity in the History of Art (eds. James Romaine and Linda Stratford, 2013), Dr. Reddaway outlined a critical method that would allow for theological hermeneutics and reception studies to assist traditional art-historical analysis in revealing the eschatological meaning within a work of art. This book road-tests her methodology to great success.

The one drawback in the work is that while the painting of Giotto, Ghirlandiaio, and Fra Angelico mimicked the accessible preaching style of their patrons, and their open spaces or familiar details helped to bring mysteries and miracles into an easy-to-understand context, Reddaway’s writing can be a little pedantic, occasionally to the detriment of the engaging nature of her subject. Sharper editing might have captured the reader right away with the wondrous art, preparing the nonspecialist to follow Reddaway’s methodology with an example in mind. Editing also might have caught a couple of minor errors (i.e., Pope Clement VII as son of Lorenzo de’Medici), which, while unfortunate, do not seriously interfere with the scholarly effort of this book.

Chloë Reddaway offers more than just new insights into old Florentine favorites; she lays down a framework to recapture sacred art from its secular bondage with a critical method that future art historians will hopefully be inspired to employ and develop.

Elizabeth Lev is an art historian who teaches, studies, and writes in Rome with a special focus on Renaissance and Baroque art. She has written several books and regularly writes for Magnificat.
Ecclesiastical Art since 1875

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Best references in USA:
- Cathedral of Saint Patrick - NYC, NY
- Cathedral of St. Petersburg - St. Petersburg, FL
- Church of the Epiphany - Miami, FL
- Church of Saint Williams - Round Rock, TX
- Church of Saint Catherine of Siena - Wake Forest, NC
Book Review

MODERATE AND HUMBLE HOUSES

Reviewed by Duncan Stroik

Ever wondered why religious orders dedicated to poverty would build enormous churches filled with monuments to the wealthy and masterpieces of art? According to this wonderful history by Caroline Bruzelius, these are questions that members of the Franciscan and Dominican orders argued about from the beginning. Though both were mendicant (begging) orders, they had very different foundings. The Franciscans began as a lay movement while the Dominicans were founded as clerical preachers. That led to a greater emphasis on hierarchy, order, and stability among the Ordo Praedicatorum. While often building their churches outside the city center where land was available and there was less competition with secular parishes, the mendicants also took over declining Benedictine monasteries in the city centers. Early on the Dominicans embraced the architecture of the monastic cloister along with the chapter house and the separate monastic choir. The Franciscans followed suit.

Both orders had rules against owning land and buildings or dealing with money, but their rapid success required them to find ways to build. Sometimes planned from the beginning, other times growing organically, large mendicant complexes were constructed in phases. Typically, friars were given a small chapel to use that would be replaced by a larger chapel for the religious community (with little emphasis on the laity). Later, this church would be replaced or added onto with a nave for the laity. Generals of the orders, such as Bonaventure, wrote against size, height, ostentation, stained glass, and lay burials. However, from early on, greater dignity was permitted for the choir and sanctuary areas. This resulted in naves for the laity with simple brick columns and trussed ceilings separated from the nave of the friars, which would have more ornate columns, vaulted ceilings, and side chapels. The allowance for vaulted ceilings gave the apse and choir greater importance as well as better acoustics. The popularity of pilgrimages to Assisi after the death of Saint Francis led to the construction of a unique and beautifully decorated basilica for his tomb. It also inspired the Dominicans to renovate and rename their mother church in Bologna as a pilgrimage site for Saint Dominic.

One of the early distinguishing characteristics of the mendicants, appreciated by popes and reform-minded bishops, was their emphasis on outdoor preaching against heresy. Some communes supported this activity by assisting in the construction of churches and in the clearing of large piazzes for preaching. A good example of this is the piazza nuova in front of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, designated by the city as a site for preaching in perpetuity. Moveable wooden pulpits were employed in the piazza, and in some cases stone pulpits were built onto the church exteriors such as at San Eustorgio in Milan, San Domenico in Bologna (demolished), and San Domenico in Naples. Later, large stone pulpits with sculptural panels were built inside mendicant churches on the laity side of the rood screen.

This is a story of two great religious orders that saw tremendous growth during the Middle Ages. In spite of their founding emphasis on poverty and serving the poor, success necessitated architecture. Generally the mendicants started with simple structures that later had their walls demolished so that apses and naves could be extended and side chapels built onto them. Theirs was an architecture of accretion. But how did all of this get paid for, if the friars were not supposed to own land or employ money? By the laity, both the wealthy and the middle class. The Franciscan and Dominican orders were founded to root out heresy, so naturally they later became the inquisitors, which they often benefited from financially. This and the assistance friars gave in the development of wills and donations for intercessory prayer and burial brought in large sums of money. Bruzelius cites many examples of abuses by the Franciscans and Dominicans that should temper the popular belief that the Gothic period was the golden age of Christianity. However, these great buildings continue to preach the truths of the faith and witness to the devotion inspired by the followers of Saints Francis and Dominic.
This book is the final volume of the letters of Augustus Welby Pugin (1812–1852), the man most responsible for the nineteenth-century Gothic Revival. He designed Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament, six cathedrals, sixty churches, monasteries, convents, homes for retirees and construction workers, and more, as well as everything inside and out of these structures: gargoyles, doors, floor tiles, candelabras (or Pugin’s term “coronas”), crucifixes, altar linen and vestments, chalices, stained-glass windows, umbrella holders—everything.

A self-taught architect, Pugin died at age forty after a working life of only fifteen years. This volume includes his formal letters to editors (e.g., March 9, 1851, to the Tablet and Catholic Standard); 50 letters concerning his March 1851 An Earnest Address on the Establishment of the Hierarchy following the pope’s reestablishment of the hierarchy in 1850 that had resulted in antipapal riots; 25 on his newly published A Treatise on Chancel Screens and Rood Lofts; 225 on the Houses of Parliament with the House of Commons to open in February 1852 (he made over two thousand drawings); and over 100 concerning his stunning marketing success, his “Medieval Court,” filled with examples of his work, at London’s 1851 Great Exhibition, to which came six million people, equivalent to a third of the population of Great Britain. The young (age thirty-two) Queen Victoria visited Pugin’s Medieval Court twice.

Margaret Belcher, the editor of all five volumes, died in November 2016 at the age of eighty. She was a retired senior lecturer in English at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. She authored several articles about Pugin. Her conventions for italicizing or boldfacing the text. If Pugin included a sketch in a letter, she indicates such. If a word is illegible, she indicates this too.

Dr. Belcher succeeded immensely in exhaustive, painstaking work.

Reviewed by James M. Thunder

James M. Thunder’s great-grandfather George Thunder married Pugin’s seventh child, Margaret. A Life Member of the Pugin Society, Ramsgate, UK, he has, for twenty years, made illustrated presentations on Pugin throughout the United States and has authored several articles about Pugin.
In this book, Alcuin Reid discusses challenges in contemporary liturgy, including the presence (or lack) of beauty in liturgy, liturgical leadership, recent liturgical reform, and sacred music and architecture. In particular he addresses a triad of components necessary for sacred architecture: good theology, good intention, and artistic technique and beauty. Reid argues that all three are necessary for beautiful and competent sacred architecture. He describes how the lack of one or more of these has impacted sacred architecture, such as lack of good theology leading to iconoclasm or lack of artistic formation leading to ugliness or kitsch. His arguments present a holistic understanding of the state of contemporary Catholic liturgy and liturgical arts.


Quash, Rosen, and Reddaway present a series of essays concerning the sacred nature of the city of London. By examining different visual arts, they present an analysis of the role that the sacred has played in the city across time. They begin with the Roman colony Londinium and end with contemporary London, providing a brief overview of the entire history of the city. Art and architecture are both examined, whether they have an explicitly sacred nature, such as political cartoons about religious groups. Accompanied by photographs of the art and architecture, these essays argue the central importance of religion in London’s history.


The investment of the Jesuits in art and architecture is heavily documented in this book. Boer, Enenkel, and Melion trace a history from the early Jesuits and their debate about sacred images to their more fully developed concepts about how to design the church space itself. They argue that the root of Jesuit image theory is the idea that external and internal representations—the physical image and mental similitudo—are closely connected. This connection between the external and internal risked accusations of idolatry, but was likely a defense against recent Protestant attacks on sacred images. In addition to examining the emphasis of the Jesuits on images, the Jesuit concept of space is also explored. These concepts examine how Jesuit spaces are related to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, shaping a church as a progressive religious experience or sequenced pilgrimage.


Magness presents an overview of the archaeology of ancient Palestine, from the fall of the kingdom of Judaea and the destruction of Solomon’s temple around 500 BC to the Muslim conquest of Palestine around AD 750. She uses abundant archaeological evidence over this span of time, such as art, architecture, and pottery, to study the dynamics between the various groups inhabiting the region. Emphasis is placed on the archaeology of Jerusalem and the Second Temple period—the time of Herod the Great and Jesus. Magness traces the complicated history of many well-known churches and temples, from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.


This book chronicles the painting, sculpture, and architecture of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Venice and the Veneto. Loren Partridge analyzes the urban designs, civic buildings, churches, palaces, and works of art of this cultural milieu, and discusses themes of function, style, iconography, patronage, and gender. After opening with a brief history of Venice up to 1500, Partridge discusses how fifteenth century art and architecture evolved from Byzantine and Gothic forms and then traces the development of sixteenth century art and architecture through the High and Late Renaissance periods. Each chapter is illustrated with photography, as well as plans, sections, and elevations.
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.

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