The lively discussion of the draft document on architecture, Domus Dei, held by the American bishops last November highlights the growing interest in sacred architecture in the Third Millennium. A significant portion of their remarks dealt with the placement of one of the smallest elements within the church, the tabernacle. Most of the bishops spoke passionately about the tabernacle as the site of the Real Presence of God, and recommended that it return to a prominent and central position in our churches. And in reaffirming the location of the Presence of Christ in the reserved sacrament, we also understand that the building which holds the tabernacle would be called the “house of God.” Certainly, Christians throughout the ages have thought as much, calling their churches by the Latin, Domus Dei. Recently I was reminded of this when I visited the magnificent Cathedral of St. Paul, in the Minnesota city of the same name, built by the great patron of architecture, Archbishop John Ireland, in 1906. Over the north transept doors, he and his architect Masqueray had the inscription placed, “Truly this is none other than the house of God and gate of heaven.” Yet, from early Christian times the church has also been called a house of the Church, or Domus Ecclesia, and from this understanding it derives its vernacular names: eglise, igreja, iglesia, chiesa, kirche, and church. The terms Domus Dei and Domus Ecclesia are time honored and should be seen as complementary descriptions of our church buildings. If we think about it, the house of the Church must be by definition also the house of the Church’s bridegroom and head, Jesus Christ. Perhaps the greatest criticism of recent church architecture is that it usually does not even come close to expressing the idea of domus much less domus Dei or domus Ecclesia.

I believe that understanding the concept of church as domus Dei is fundamental to a reappropriation of Catholic architecture in the new millennium. It is not difficult to imagine the difference in emphasis the architect will give to the building whether he considers it a shelter space or a house. What then of the priorities of the parishioners and the building committee whether they speak of constructing a “worship space” or a “house of God”? “House of God” reminds us for whom we build it, and puts the priority on building a temple worthy of Him who fills the heavens. The house of God is the place where we go to meet Christ, most especially in the Eucharist, but also in the Word of God, in the sacraments and in our brothers and sisters. In a time when we suffer from secularization and commercialization, a well-built and beautiful monument to the saving work of Jesus Christ is truly countercultural.

Conceiving of the church as a domus Dei protects us against the overly functional view of the building as mere shelter or the subjective interpretation by an architect or building committee. If the church is the domus Dei, it will not sacrifice the architecture and iconography in order to have more seating, cry and usher rooms, or maximum square footage. Considering the theology of the church building before starting a design will inspire the parish to seek to use the finest materials they can afford, and gives an incentive for building something as good as other buildings they admire.

What does the name domus Dei imply in architectural terms? The domus Dei is beautiful, spacious and mysterious in imitation of Him who is prophet, priest and king. It will be inviting yet awesome, fit for the King of Kings yet welcoming to the rich and the poor, a house for both saint and sinner. Isn’t it a bit disconcerting to visit churches built in recent years dedicated to “Christ the King” which have all of the character of a gymnasium? A house fit for God does not necessarily mean it should be ornate, but it certainly should be strikingly beautiful. And it will employ the best that we can give. Is it not reasonable to think of house of the Lord as the most beautiful house in town?

How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. Genesis 28:17.

Duncan Stroik
Notre Dame, Indiana
Winter 2000

Cover – View of the exterior of the Basilica of the Assumption, in Baltimore Maryland, the first cathedral in the United States, designed by Benjamin Latrobe in 1805. Photo by J. Stroik.
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Continuity With The Past
Review of the RECONQUERING SACRED SPACE Conference and Exhibition
By David Mayernik, October 1999, Rome, Italy

The Sala Borromini, within the Oratory of San Filippo Neri attached to the Church of Santa Maria in Vallicella in Rome, is in fact the oratory space proper, designed along with the entire complex for the members of the Congregation of San Filippo by Francesco Borromini. The building always maintained—especially in its facade which interacts contrapuntally with that of the church—a difficult balance between a sacred building and a lay building. In fact, it was a mediating ground between the two, and as birthplace of the oratorio form of music, it enriched both the religious and cultural life of Rome and indeed the whole of Europe. This was the richly poetic setting during October, 1999 for the conference and exhibit of ecclesiastical architecture Reconquering Sacred Space, jointly organized by the Agenzia per la Città of Rome and the Institute for Sacred Architecture of Notre Dame, Indiana.

The arts, and especially architecture, are one of the most complex ways the secular and the sacred interact. The internal dynamics of architectural polemics resonate loudest when the debate addresses our deepest spiritual needs. In that sense, the current recovery of traditional architecture provides a welcome opportunity to re-think the last fifty years of often disastrous church building, and think again about reconquering the sacred. The exhibited work, in fact, spanned a fairly wide range of projects under a broad umbrella of an architecture that embraces traditional forms. There were un-built, theoretical projects—as well as under construction and built work—from both Europe and America. The scale of projects ranged from the renovation of chapels from the Vatican to Malaga, to new churches, to remarkable new monastic complexes in Nebraska and Alabama. Indeed, it was these latter that offered the greatest hope for the future of not only churches that truly embody the sacred, but also of an environment or context suffused with the beauty of the sacred. By comparison, the closing discussions at the conference by European urbanists on the role of the church in the city tended to treat the church as an important piece of urban “furniture,” rather than viewing the city as a manifestation of the Civitas Dei.

The most compelling presentations were those that tackled the specifics of what we mean by sacred space in a traditional context, and of how we reapply those principles in new work today. One of the themes stressed by the organizers was that the continuity with the past was not completely broken in this century, as was seen in works around Rome from the 1940s and 50s that drew on the classical language of architecture. The issue of classical architecture and its current renaissance was addressed only indirectly, but it was refreshing to see the discussion about architecture transcend the language itself and begin to address the meaning of what is being said through it.

It was Camilian Demetrescu, ex-modernist historian turned advocate-of-traditional iconography, who provided the telling metaphor for the modern state of affairs in church building specifically, but in art, architecture and urbanism generally. In his excellent discussion of the constants of ecclesiastical form over the centuries until the twentieth, he spoke of “Orientation;” that is, the traditional directionality of church plans, with altar, priest, and congregation facing East (the “Orient”), the “kingdom of the Sun” and all of its attendant references. In this century, he said, we have lost our sense of direction, we have become dis-oriented; that is, we have lost our roots in the traditional forms and symbols of our sacred cultural heritage. As another talk stressed, hope is the virtue necessary to build inspiring places for the spirit. The optimism evidenced by this conference at the foot of the new millennium will go a long way toward re-orienting ourselves toward creating again sacred space invested with beauty, permanence, and meaning.

David Mayernik is an architect and painter who lives and practices in Rome.
The design for an asymmetrical concrete-and-glass church won an international competition sponsored by the Vatican and the City of Rome in 1997 and is being constructed as the "millennium church" for the Eternal City.

But for some liturgical experts meeting at the Vatican in mid-October, U.S. architect Richard Meier's modernistic house of worship illustrates much of what's wrong with church architecture today.

"I think it's an abomination," said U.S. Benedictine Father Cassian Folsom, president of the Pontifical Liturgical Institute.

"It expresses the creative genius of the architect, but it doesn't do anything for the liturgy, the celebration of the Mass, for the ordinary Catholic," he said.

U.S. Msgr. M. Francis Mannion, president of the Society for Catholic Liturgy, said he thought the new Rome church design was "a great mistake."

"It's the architecture of the 1980s and '90s, not the third millennium. It shows very little sense that architecture is moving out of its modernist niche. Ironically, the desire to make a statement about the Church's relevance to modern culture couldn't be more badly made by that building," he said.

Liturgists have a reputation for knowing what they like and what they don't like. Give them church architecture as a conference topic, and you're bound to get strong opinions.

The conference, sponsored by the Pontifical Liturgical Institute and attended by more than 200 liturgists, architects, artists, and theologians, aimed to nail down some new directions in church art and architecture for the coming millennium.

But new directions are not easy when even the experts disagree. At the conference, the clean and simple lines of modern church architecture were strongly defended by some participants.

A Mexican architect, Benedictine Father Gabriel Chavez de la Mora, pointed to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe as an example of where modernism has worked well. But an increasingly vocal movement thinks that church architecture has moved too far away from the traditional needs of the worshipping community.

"To put it simply, some churches built nowadays just don't feel like churches. Why don't they? And why do people build these things? These are questions we're trying to answer," said Father Folsom.

Asked to identify what's wrong with modern church architecture, these experts said many churches are cold, barren and uninteresting. These buildings reflect modern architecture's emphasis on function, but without preserving the sacramental character of churches as found through the centuries. They said the Church can't go back to the pre-Vatican II arrangement, but there is something to be said for priests and people praying in the same direction, as long as the altar and the place of the people are closely coordinated.

Father Folsom said that in faulting the sterile appearance of some modern church architecture, the experts are not urging a return to the busy and over-decorated churches of the past. Simplicity in liturgical architecture is a fine principle, he said, but it should be "sumptuous simplicity," allowing communities a chance to place things of beauty in their worshipping environment.

But he said the time has come to make some judgments about what has worked and what hasn't and to move into a "new era" of church architecture.

Msgr. Mannion also discussed the ongoing debate among liturgists about the orientation of the altar and the priest at Mass. He said the Church can't go back to the pre-Vatican II arrangement, but that there is something to be said for priests and people praying in the same direction, as long as the altar and the place of the people are closely coordinated.

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The problem is, there's a gap between what the Church's architectural experts are saying and what's being built in some local communities and dioceses. Father Folsom said it's less a matter of bad taste than of bad "formation" in church architecture, he said.

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A Separate Eucharistic Chapel Is Unrealistic
The Bishops’ Discussion of the Draft Document Domus Dei
by Bjorn Lundberg

During the National Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (NCCB) 1999 Fall Plenary assembly in Washington, D.C. (November 15-18), the conference met to discuss Domus Dei, a one hundred page draft prepared to replace Environment and Art in Catholic Worship, the 1978 statement of the Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy (BCL).

The BCL Chairman, Archbishop Jerome Hanus (Dubuque), outlined the history preceding the new document. Its four chapters cover theological foundations, spatial demands the rites make on the church building, practical steps and people involved in building and renovating churches, and the role of the arts and artists. The target audience of Domus Dei is expected to be parish and diocesan liturgy committees, building committees, and architects.

The November discussion was intended primarily to solicit bishops’ ideas, gauge their satisfaction with key elements of the text, and encourage suggestions. When the floor opened for discussion thirty-two ordinaries rose to present comments and questions. Bernard Cardinal Law (Boston) spoke first, addressing the question of the timing of the document in light of anticipated revisions to the General Instruction on the Roman Missal (GIRM). These concerns were later echoed by Francis Cardinal George (Chicago). Both proposed that the NCCB document wait to incorporate changes from the revised GIRM. Having reviewed the early drafts of the GIRM, George confirmed that the new GIRM is somewhat different, especially on the recommendation for separate Blessed Sacrament chapels.

Law also presented the position that separate chapels for tabernacles of reservation were “unrealistic given the realities of churches in our country.” As well, he mentioned that in light of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, a preference for separate chapels is no longer maintained, and this point is not adequately expressed by Domus Dei. The majority of bishops who spoke addressed the question of tabernacle location, repeatedly citing the liberty granted to bishops and parishes in choosing between the sanctuary or a separate chapel found in Inaestimabile Donum (1980) and the 1983 Code. Numerous bishops called Domus Dei to emphasize the most recent legislation that calls for tabernacle locations which are “prominent, conspicuous, beautifully decorated and suitable for prayer.” The rather unexpected, repetitive and substantial consensus of requests regarding tabernacle location prompted Anthony Cardinal Bevilaqua (Philadelphia) to state: “The fact that so many bishops are saying it should give a signal.” Roger Cardinal Mahony (Los Angeles) called for three to four special hearings across the country for the broadest possible consultation about Domus Dei with clergy, religious and laity. He also requested that Chapter Three be divided into two chapters to separately address building new churches and renovating existing ones. Bishop William Lori (Auxiliumary, Washington, D.C.) asked for further treatment on the transformative power of faith on culture, rather than on their mere interaction. He also proposed less stress on the functional value, and more on the sign value of the church. Francis Cardinal George (Chicago) pointed to the need for greater handicapped access to ambos and exposition chapels. He also spoke for more adequate sound systems, especially for the Liturgy of the Word.

Archbishop Michael Sheehan (Santa Fe), James Cardinal Hickey (Washington, D.C.), and Bishop Sean O’Malley (Fall River) all addressed the marked decline in U.S. Catholics’ belief in the Real Presence, linking it to changes in church design and renovation. They expressed hope that the document would consider ways to pedagogically reinforce Eucharistic piety through design. Hickey noted, “[W]e should return to a position of the tabernacle that will make it possible for the genuflection to be reinstated, for the people to pray before the Blessed Sacrament before the Mass, and also for them to keep that sense of prayer when they realize that they are in the Eucharistic Presence of the Lord.” “[W]e’ve all experienced in our Church in the last thirty years a lessening of devotion to the Eucharist in many places, a loss of the sense of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist; and the sense of the sacred has suffered. And I can’t help but believe that placing the Eucharist in a separate chapel that often is practically hidden, and sometimes very small, has not been part of why we have a crisis,” said Sheehan. Archbishop Theodore McCarrick (Newark) added, “It seems to me that ninety percent of our people come into church only on Sunday mornings. And if the Blessed Sacrament is nowhere to be seen in the body of the church, they will be missing something very important in their spirituality and in the theology.” Archbishop Charles Chaput (Denver) and Bishop Daniel Walsh (Las Vegas) called for strengthening the discussion of the role of the bishop in the building process. Chaput called for a more fair-handed approach to the patrimony of Western European and American sacred art and architecture, and to present them as a standard by which contemporary endeavors should be judged. Cardinal Bevilaqua called for better clarification of the entrance/exit/transitional role of the narthex, as well as the understanding of the nave as the true “gathering place” for the Body of Christ. Bishop Carl Mengeling (Lansing) requested a better explanation of the interplay between the ambo, baptismal font, and altar. Proposals by other bishops concerned the placement of the presider’s chair, cathedrals, the current disuse of belltowers, questions about cry rooms, and the placement of images of the Blessed Mother and saints within the sanctuary.

The Bishops were asked to send in written comments on the document by early January, 2000. Between January 10-18, the BCL sponsored a series of on-line discussions of Domus Dei. The bishops could vote on a revised version of Domus Dei as early as November 2000.

For a complete transcription of the NCCB discussion of the draft Domus Dei please see the following website “http://www.adoremus.org/1299-100-DomusDei.html” or the Dec. 1999 issue of Adoremus Bulletin, 314/862-6845.
It was an unprecedented event in history when John Paul II opened the Holy Doors of the four Roman patriarchal basilicas. On Christmas Eve, the Pontiff inaugurated the Jubilee by opening the Vatican’s Holy Door. In the afternoon of December 25, he opened the Door of St. John Lateran, the Bishop of Rome’s Official See. On January 1, he opened the Holy Door of St. Mary Major. The Door of St. Paul Outside the Walls was opened January 18, the beginning of the Week of Prayer for the Unity of Christians. In previous Holy Years, the opening of these three patriarchal basilicas was carried out by Cardinal Legates. The first Pope to introduce the ritual of the opening of the Holy Door was the Spaniard, Alexander VI, on Christmas Eve, 1499.

St. Peter’s Façade — “The restoration of the Sistine Chapel was the pictorial restoration of the century; this is the stone restoration of the century,” a Vatican spokesman said, emphasizing two and a half years of labor—and the work of 150 scientists, technicians and restorers—necessary to recover the former splendor of St. Peter’s façade designed by Carlo Maderno at the beginning of the 17th century. The whole endeavor cost about six million dollars and took three years. A complete map of the façade was made with photographs and thousands of fragments from the interior and surface of the stone were analyzed. The “jos” technique was applied — a stream of air, water and carbon dust that removes grime without damaging the stone. The greatest surprise of the restoration was to discover that originally the stone had been painted on the orders of Maderno. In the Vatican archives there is a fresco and a drawing in original colors along with a 1608 receipt for paint to finish a model of the façade.

Archeologists have uncovered a 700-year-old church site believed to be the earliest Roman Catholic Church in Asia. Located in Inner Mongolia, the church’s remaining walls are some sixteen feet tall and consisted of a 1,000-square-foot main hall with two rostrums measuring twelve to fifteen feet high at one end. The body of the church is filled with shattered white tiles similar to those used in ancient Rome. Chinese archeologists had been hesitant to label the church as Catholic until the discovery of a white stone lion, which does not resemble Chinese art so much as the lions found in front of Italian churches.

Assisi’s art and faith treasures are restored since the earthquake that devastated the “City of Peace” in 1997. Following last November’s reopening of the Basilicas of San Francesco and Santa Maria degli Angeli, the restoration of the Cathedral of San Rufino and the Church of Santa Chiara is now almost complete. The Cathedral, where St. Francis and St. Claire were baptized, is dedicated to St. Rufus, the missionary who brought the faith to Assisi and was martyred in the year 238. Santa Chiara, built between 1257 and 1265, has fourteenth century frescoes from the Giotto School, and conserves the painted crucifix from which Jesus spoke to St. Francis, telling him to “rebuild my Church”.

The magnificent frescoes of the immortal painter Cimabue that decorated the vault of the Upper Basilica of San Francesco—and were completely destroyed by the September 26, 1997 earthquake—will soon be enjoyed once again. Tiny video projectors, to be placed on either side of the vault, will project slides of the destroyed frescoes. The Basilica has now been made earthquake-resistant, thanks to almost twenty miles of steel that supports the foundations, walls, roofs and thirty thousand bricks which replaced those that crumbled. The structural restoration of the Basilica entailed three miles of perforations in the walls, columns, and façade to insert steel cables to “tie down” the building. The vaults were reinforced with modern, extremely light resin, and the roof has been totally reconstructed. In the words of Fr. Massimo Reschiglian, Provincial Minister of the Minor Friars, “We have not opened a museum, but a holy place where even today the presence of the divine can be experienced by everyone.”
The Great Cross in Chile — Already completed on the highest mountain of the city of Coquimbo, 300 miles north of Santiago, is a monumental cross overlooking the city, the port and the sea. The 230 foot tall cross is composed of three independent sections joined at the base: a symbol of the Holy Trinity. In the space dedicated to prayer, which is at the base of the monument, there are ten columns from which water flows, and twelve columns representing the Apostles.

A new entrance to the Vatican Museums, inaugurated by John Paul II in February, is characterized by an imposing glass and metal structure similar to the one at the Louvre in Paris. After three years of work, one of the most ambitious architectural projects undertaken by the Vatican for the Jubilee of 2000 is coming to an end. The work was necessary because of the large number of visitors to the Museums, which has literally doubled over the past twenty years: from 1.5 to 3 million. This year the figure is expected to soar.

The Cathedral of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona—the unfinished masterpiece of Catalan architect Antonio Gaudi begun in 1884—will unveil the ceiling of its central nave this Jubilee year.

The controversial Faith Zone in London’s Millennium Dome has been dogged by controversy from the outset. Its architect, Eva Jiricna, a self-confessed agnostic, said that “some people have been very, very abusive” about her decision not to include the Cross because she considered it “the symbol of suffering.” Mass will be celebrated in the Zone at regular times.

Changes to the Lourdes Shrine on the 110th anniversary of the institution of the Virgin of Lourdes. Fr. Ferretti described changes to the Shrine: “We want [the grotto] to return to its original simplicity and message which speaks through the place itself. We shall try to strip this place as much as possible so that it will 'speak.'” On the occasion of the [anniversary of the] proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, 150 years ago, we would like the Rosary Basilica to be restored.

Mexican Cathedral Reopens—After seven years of work and spending over fifty million, using similar technology employed to reinforce the Tower of Pisa, the seventeenth-century Cathedral of Mexico City has had its foundations structurally modified and has been reopened to the public. Over the years, the Cathedral had been sinking at the rate of three inches a year. The Cathedral was built on the foundations of an Aztec pyramid destroyed in 1521.

The construction of a mosque was authorized by the Israeli government in November 1999, a few meters from the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth. It is feared that this will set the foundation for future conflicts and tensions between the religious communities of Christianity and Islam.

Ravenna—In preparing to celebrate the 1450th anniversary of the consecration of the Basilica of St. Apollinaris, John Paul II sent this message: “A city distinguished by a glorious past and by the splendid monuments that adorn it, Ravenna owes its gran-

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**REDEMPTORIS MATER CHAPEL**

On November 14, 1999, John Paul II inaugurated the papal oratory inside the Vatican Apostolic Palace. The oratory’s mosaic decoration began in 1996 and was carried out under the direction of Slovene Jesuit Fr. Marko Ivan Rupnik, artist, theologian and director of the Workshop of Spiritual Art, an institution linked to the Pontifical Oriental Institute. It is a gift from the College of Cardinals to John Paul II on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of his priesthood. The wall behind the altar includes saints from the East and West around Mary, the Mother of God. The wall on the left of the altar depicts scenes from Christ’s life. On the front wall, there is an image of Christ rising to the Father and on the rear wall there is a representation of the “Parousia.” Orthodox theologian Olivier Clement described the chapel as an artistic representation of the road that must be traveled by the ecumenical movement between Christians both East and West. For images see website:


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**FROM THE PUBLISHER**

A NOTE TO OUR READERS

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for all of your support for Sacred Architecture. With this, our third issue, we embark on a third year of publication. The journal has been an exciting endeavor from the start and it has grown in its readership and its influence. In order to keep the quality of the journal up to the highest aesthetic standards, we have decided to switch from publishing three times a year to two times a year and have changed the subscription rate to reflect that. However, you will receive the number of issues to which you originally subscribed. We look forward to hearing your comments on the magazine and recommendations for topics you would like to see featured in upcoming issues.
Ruben N. Santos of Oakland, CA, submitted the winning design in an international competition for a new church for the rural Indiana parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend sponsored the competition in honor of the Jubilee 2000. Construction is planned to begin later this year with a 1.5 million dollar budget.

deur to the ability and skill of its sons and daughters, who were and are meticulous artists and laborers in its civil and economic development.”

The Mexico City Museum of Sacred Art, created by the Archdiocese of Mexico, the Mexico City government, and the association “Friends of the Metropolitan Cathedral,” will permit the preservation of the historic and cultural patrimony of the Church in Mexico.

An ancient shrine in south Wales, St. Mary’s Well at Penrhys, which has attracted pilgrims from all over the world for centuries, many of whom have claimed cures from its waters, is to be restored.

In memory of John Paul II’s visit to Romania, the Romanian Greek-Catholic Diocese of Oradea Mare will construct a new church dedicated to Mary, Star of Evangelization. A parish community that persevered courageously in living the faith during the Communist persecution will finally have a place to worship, made possible by donations from abroad.

On the need to build places of worship — This past December John Paul II received performers and singers who took part in the “Vatican Christmas Concert.” The Pontiff explained that this cultural event had the object of sensitizing public opinion on the need to build places of worship and catechesis in the Diocese of Rome, which hopes to collect sufficient funds to construct fifty churches. The Holy Father spoke of the urgency “to offer parish com- munities, especially those on the outskirts, a pastoral structure.”

COMPETITIONS

The “Frate Sole” Foundation of Pavia has established an International Prize for Sacred Architecture which will offer $190,000 to the “project or artist who has built the best sacred architectural work in the last decade in a Christian environment or who by his works has contributed in a special way to make more significant the sacred character of modern Christian architecture.” The winner of the 1996 prize was Japanese architect Tadao Ando. The closing date for the competition is 31 May 2000. For further information please contact the “Frate Sole” Foundation at 011-39-0382 301413 (fax), or www.fondazionefratesole.org.

CONFERENCES

Sacred Architecture for the Jubilee— The second annual conference on sacred architecture will be held at the Chiesa Nuova in Rome, Italy in October 2000. The conference will include lectures by an international group of architects, theologians, and historians on the contemporary renaissance of Catholic architecture. The conference and accompanying exhibition is being sponsored by the Agenzia per la Città, publisher Il Bosco e la Nave and the Institute for Sacred Architecture. Last year’s conference is covered in this issue of Sacred Architecture. For information please contact dstroik@nd.edu, roscri@flashnet.it, or website: http://vil-lage.flashnet.it/users/roscri.

New Springtime 2000: A Conference on Catholic Art & Culture in the Third Millennium will be held August 24-27, 2000 at St. Edmund’s Retreat in Mystic, Connecticut. Join leading artists, architects, writers and theologians as they gather to discuss the state of Catholic culture, especially in the visual arts and architecture, as well as music and literature. In lectures, panel discussions, and workshops, conference participants will explore and strive to define the role of sacred art and architecture in worship and evangelization.

For information call 860-536-0565, or www.sse.org/enders.
feature

Eucharistic Tabernacles: A Typology

M. Francis Mannion

An examination of the art of Eucharistic tabernacles in Catholic liturgical history yields a considerable variety of operative meanings. In this brief essay, I want to suggest that tabernacle design may be categorized under a five-fold typology: ark, building, treasury, tower, and ambry. Typologies are, of course, abstractions, and for that reason they are rarely verified exclusively in any particular expression. The visual examples accompanying this essay are, accordingly, deliberately abstracted conceptions. In reality, a range of themes and motifs often coexisted historically even in the same work, sometimes with evident logic, sometimes merely conventionally.

The nature of the relationship between altar and tabernacle is immensely complex, and is beyond the scope of this essay. Any examination of tabernacles has, however, to be undergirded by some theologically crucial principles. First, the most important and central element of a Catholic church is the altar; all other elements (including the ambo, baptismal font, and tabernacle) derive their meaning and significance from the altar. Second, nothing may be appropriately said about the tabernacle that may not be said in one way or another about the altar; the tabernacle has no meaning that does not derive from the altar. Third, Eucharistic devotions (benediction, exposition, processions) serve as elaborations of the meaning and significance of the Mass; they arise from the Mass and lead back to it. For our purposes here, it is sufficient to state that the meanings inherent in Eucharistic tabernacles are elaborations of meanings primarily condensed in the altar.

Ark

The first and probably most common tabernacle type draws on the Solomonic temple liturgy. In the Temple of Solomon, the Ark of the Covenant was the exalted dwelling place of God. Dwelling in thick darkness and adored by the motionless cherubim, a pervasive sense of divine presence was generated. The ark had about it the character of awe, reverence and holiness. It remained in darkness and silence, suggesting the impenetrable mystery of God.

The history of Christian Eucharistic reference to the Ark of the Covenant is complex and not without considerable difficulties, but such referencing did occur at a certain moment in liturgical history. Eucharistic tabernacles in the ark model are traditionally veiled or set behind screens suggesting the hiddenness of divine presence. A sanctuary lamp before the place of reservation indicates the permanence of Christ's presence in his church. The appearance of adoring angels around a Eucharistic tabernacle, evoking the Ark of the Covenant, is typical of this type. A canopy suggests God's dwelling invisibly among his people, yet never departing from them. This element of tabernacle symbolism evokes reverence, awe, and silent devotion of the mystery of divine presence in the world.

Charles Journet captures in a simple, expressive way the powerful sense of pervading presence that radiates from the tabernacle in a Catholic church:

A mystery, a presence, fills the poorest Catholic church. It is dwelt in. Its life does not primarily stem from the fact that there is movement within it of the crowds that come and go. Before this, it is itself a source of life and purity for those who cross its threshold. It houses the Real Presence, the presence of Christ's Body; it is the “place” where Love supreme has touched our human nature in order to involve it in an eternal marriage; it is the radiant focal point empowered to illuminate the whole drama of time and our human adventure.

According to Journet, “the Real Presence is the underlying reason for the Church’s permanent quality in space and time until the Parousia.”

The hymn Adoro Te Devote ascribed to Thomas Aquinas is suggestive of this hidden aspect of the Eucharist, hence of the tabernacle for reservation: “God-head here in hiding, whom I do adore, Masked by these bare shadows, shape and nothing...”
more, See, Lord, at thy service/low lies here a heart/Lost, all lost in wonder/at the God Thou art.”

The dwelling of Christ in the tabernacle is not a containment of divine presence, however, but a signification of the process by which the whole material world is consecrated. In Teilhard de Chardin’s *Hymn of the Universe*, the Eucharistic host kept in the tabernacle radiates outwards an energy that incorporates all of creation, signifying the consecration of the world of matter and the re-creation of all natural reality. Accordingly, the world of animals, fruits, and flowers is often drawn into tabernacle design.

The reality to be contemplated and revered in the Eucharistic tabernacle as ark is the immanent presence of God in Christ abiding among his people, taking the form of bread and thereby consecrating material creation. God who is utterly above and beyond us dwells yet among us in silent splendor.

**Building**

Historically, tabernacles have often been formed in the shape of buildings, specifically church buildings, signifying the New Testament conviction that the people of God are spiritual stones of a holy temple of which Christ is the cornerstone and the Apostles the pillars. For Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, not only the Church corporately but Christians personally may themselves be regarded as tabernacles in whom Christ abides.

Tabernacles have taken the shape of great basilicas and churches, sometimes quite literally; more often the shape merely hints at the notion of a building. Some have been inspired by the exterior shapes of the particular buildings they inhabit. Typically, little doors, spires, columns, and gables suggest a place of worship in miniature.

In the Eucharistic theology of Saint Augustine, the Eucharistic sacrament unifies the person of Christ and his living body, the Church:

If you wish then to grasp the body of Christ hear the words of the Apostle to the faithful: “You are the body of Christ and his members” (1 Cor. 12:27). If then you are the body of Christ and his members, it is your sacrament that reposeth on the altar of the Lord. It is your sacrament which you receive. You answer “Amen” to what you yourself are and in answering you are enrolled. You answer “Amen” to the words “The body of Christ.” Be, then, a member of the body of Christ to verify your “Amen.”

Tabernacles of this type call to mind Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians:

You are strangers and aliens no longer. No, you are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God. You form a building which rises on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is fitted together and takes shape as a holy temple in the Lord; in him you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place for God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22).

The truth to be contemplated in this feature of the reserved Eucharist is that as Christ dwells in the Eucharistic tabernacle he dwells in the whole life of the Church and in each of its members. The tabernacle “building” is a model of the living Church, and as such should generate profound respect for the living Body of Christ and of the dignity of all its members given by baptism and participation in the Eucharistic mystery.

**Treasury**

Tabernacles for Eucharistic reservation have taken the evident shape
of ornate chests, boxes, and caskets of precious metal and stone, suggesting the presence within of valuable and precious treasures. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that, “In the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself” (no. 1324) and it speaks of the “inexhaustible richness” of the Eucharistic sacrament (no. 1328). One might turn this around and say: In the Eucharistic presence of Christ is contained all the spiritual goods, all the inexhaustible riches of the Church.

In the Eucharist, Christian believers are brought into the living spiritual world of the Holy Trinity, archangels and angels, the saints, the wisdom of the Old and New Testaments, and the saving power of Christian history. Through Eucharistic communion, believers are accorded communion with the whole Church on earth, in heaven and in purgatory, with our own beloved friends and relatives (living and dead), and with all humankind. The richness of this treasury is expressed in calling the Eucharist the “bread of angels.” The central Catholic reality of the “communion of saints” has an essentially Eucharistic structure.

In the communion of the Mystical Body, according to Paul Claudel, The whole of creation, visible and invisible; all history; all the past, the present and the future; all the treasure of the saints, multiplied by grace—all that is at our disposal as an extension of ourselves, a mighty instrument. All the saints and the angels belong to us. The Christian can use the intelligence of St. Thomas, the right arm of St. Michael, the hearts of Joan of Arc and Catherine of Siena, and all the hidden resources which have only to be touched to be set in action. Everything of the good, the great, and the beautiful, from one end of the earth to the other—everything which begets sanctity (as a doctor says of a patient that he has got a fever)—it is as if all that were our work. The heroism of the missionary, the inspiration of the Doctors of the Church, the generosity of the martyrs, the genius of the artists, the burning prayer of the Poor Clares and Carmelites—it is as if all that were ourselves; it is ourselves. All that is one with us, from the North to the South, from the Alpha to the Omega, from the Orient to the Occident; we clothe ourselves in it, we set it in motion.4

Iconic representations of the Trinity, the Apostles, saints and angels on and around tabernacles underline the vital presence of the living treasures of Eucharistic communion. Tabernacles have often been set into reredoses, portraying in picturesque and iconographic forms the mysteries of salvation and of God’s holy ones. In color, ornament, and design, the diversity of divine creation is unified and harmonized.

The reality to be contemplated and appropriated in this dimension of the reserved Eucharist is that in Christ is made present and available the vast spiritual treasury of divine creation and redemption from which we live and are built up as God’s children. We are inspired to active openness to—and love for—the great treasures of Christian faith and the splendid and inexhaustible riches of grace.

**Tower**

In religious symbolism the tower reaches up to heaven signifying the anticipated union of heaven and earth. The towers and spires of Christian churches signify the truth that the Church’s final goal is to be lifted up to heavenly glory. Accordingly, the tabernacle tower suggests the glory of heaven, the New Jerusalem, the eternal tabernacle, and the gate of heaven. As a material artifact of beauty, it prefigures the final glory of creation. At the end of time, all things will be gathered into the tabernacle of God.

The heaven-oriented character of the Eucharistic tabernacle is signified variously by the emblem of Christ, the Lamb of God in glory, a heavenly throne, images of fire soaring upwards (the Transfiguration), eight-sided shapes and patterns referring to the eternal day, and gates and steps leading up to the heavenly Jerusalem. (As suggested at the outset, these motifs can appear, of course, not only in this tabernacle type but in others.)

Without straining biblical hermeneutics, it is appropriate to refer to those strains of biblical tabernacle theology in which the earthly tabernacle was regarded as prefiguring the heavenly one. In the Acts of the Apostles, the wilderness tabernacle, made according to the one in heaven, is placed in contrast with the Solomonic Temple made by human hands (Acts 7:44-50). The Letter to the Hebrews speaks of the “true” tabernacle of heaven (8:2-5; 9:19-25), while in the Book of Revelation, the only tabernacle is that of heaven itself (21:22-24).

The sense of distance that Catholics have traditionally kept from the Eucharistic tabernacle, often venerating it from afar, is not so much a pagan devotional remnant, but rather a statement that the earthly worshipers remain as yet at some distance from the heavenly tabernacle. The Eucharist will only be received in all its fullness in the eternal banquet of heaven, while on earth the fullness of Eucharistic reality remains literally and spiritually “reserved” for the future. The Christian is at once close to Christ, yet knows that the plenitude of Eu-
charistic communion will be received only at the end of history. In the words of Thomas Aquinas, the Eucharist is “a pledge of future glory.”

Teilhard de Chardin knew this when as a chaplain in World War II he was suddenly struck by the simultaneous experience of possession and incompleteness in relation to the Eucharist. He ascribes these words to a friend: “I suddenly realized just how extraordinary and how disappointing it was to be thus holding so close to oneself the wealth of the world and the very source of life without being able to possess it inwardly, without being able either to penetrate it or to assimilate it. How could Christ be at once so close to my heart and so far from it, so closely united to my body and so remote from my soul?”

The friend continues: “I was separated [from Christ] by the full extent and the density of the years which still remained to me, to be lived and to be divinized.” It seemed, he states, “that in the depths of my being, though the Bread I had just eaten had become flesh of my flesh, nevertheless it remained outside of me.” The Eucharistic gift “was receding from me as it drew me on.”

The presence of Christ in the Eucharistic tabernacle signifies what remains to be encountered in fullness in the tabernacle of heaven. The “reserved” Eucharist signifies the final glory of all things in the new and eternal Jerusalem, in the cosmic tabernacle that will never pass away. The tabernacle tower reaching to heaven properly generates in those who venerate its mystery a deepening of hope in the glorious promises of God, partially received yet partially present as pledge and anticipation. Its inspiring quality opens up also a commitment to the ministry by which the glory and beauty of heaven are given expression in earthly things.

Ambry

The original form of the Eucharistic tabernacle was also the humblest: the ambry, a cupboard or safe set in the wall of the church or sanctuary. Here the Eucharist was reserved for its most practical purpose: to be brought to those who were sick or deterred in one way or another from being present at Mass.

At the end of Mass, Christians today are sent forth to serve the Lord in each other. This mission, carried on in the early times by the baptized and today by clergy and special ministers of the Eucharist, underscores the need to draw all—especially the poor, old, needy, and dying—into the communion of Christ. The Eucharist kept in the ambry and brought to the sick and the dying as “medicine of immortality” and as viaticum (food for the journey through death), signifies the aspect of charity and service that perdures through the whole life and time of the church. Significantly, the tabernacle was often known by the name used for the small container, the “pyx,” used to bring the Eucharist to the sick and dying. Indeed, it is worth recalling here that the oil of the sick was also kept in an ambry before the Middle Ages, often in the same ambry as the Blessed Sacrament.

The reality to be brought to life in this aspect of Eucharistic veneration is the Christian obligation to the hungry, ill, suffering, and dying that arises from the very nature of Eucharistic life. Devotion to the reserved Eucharist has an intrinsic ministerial dimension. This point is set forth well (clearly following a High Church tradition) by Anglican Bishop Frank Weston of the former territory of Zanzibar earlier in the present century:

If you are prepared to fight for the right of adoring Jesus in his Blessed Sacrament, then you have got to come out from before your Tabernacle and walk, with Christ mysteriously present in you, out into the streets of this country, and find the same Jesus in the people of your cities and your villages. You cannot claim to worship Jesus in the Tabernacle, if you do not pity Jesus in the slum. . . . And it is folly—it is madness—to suppose that you can worship Jesus in the Sacraments and Jesus on the throne of glory, when you are sweating him in the souls and bodies of his children. It cannot be done. . . . Go out and look for Jesus in the ragged, in the naked, in the oppressed and sweated, and in those who have lost hope, in those who are struggling to make good. Look for Jesus. And when you see him, gird yourselves with his towel and try to wash their feet.

Devotion to the reserved Eucharist never properly ends in individualism, passivism, or escapism, but in permanent and ongoing charity, service, and justice to our brothers and sisters who depend on us. The sacramental Christ adored in the tabernacle is the Christ waiting to be served in the ambry of the world’s sick, suffering, lonely, and poor.

ENDNOTES

Monsignor M. Francis Mannion is Rector of the Cathedral of the Madeleine, Salt Lake City, Utah, and President of the Society for Catholic Liturgy. Drawings for this essay were done by David Heit.
The draft document of *Domus Dei* was presented to the Catholic Bishops of the United States at their November 1999 meeting. It is intended to be a properly sanctioned replacement for *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*, a 1978 tract that is generally acknowledged to be outdated in its promotion of bland Modernist structures and iconoclastic liturgical settings. The current draft of the more aptly titled *Domus Dei* is an improvement on its predecessor. However, the draft document falls short of its purpose. This is particularly clear in view of the growing body of architects who prefer to speak the Church’s timeless Latin in contemporary ecclesiastical buildings, rather than the trendy vernacular of Modernism.

*Domus Dei* recognizes that many architectural forms have been developed over the past two thousand years. It hints that this Catholic treasure of architectural paradigms might inform new Catholic buildings today. Nevertheless, the document sets up two roadblocks that would be confusing to architects, priests, and building committees. These are the discordant concepts of obligatory multi-culturalism and anti-intellectual fear of history.

It is ironic that a proposed Catholic document would diminish the all-embracing aspect of our faith by proposing cultural sectarianism as an ideal. Second, it is odd that a review of two thousand years of continuity and tradition emanating from Christ—and going back further through Jewish roots—should be ambivalent, even naïve, about the history of buildings that have had a dominant impact on the physical expression of Western culture. Rather than serving as a guide for helping the Church build appropriate structures for the celebration of liturgy, *Domus Dei* creates unnecessary fears about exclusion and expressions of cultural dominance.

As written, *Domus Dei* will not be fully comprehensible to its intended audience. This includes architects, but more importantly, parishioners on a building committee and their pastor. The pastor generally has a layman’s comprehension of architecture and the laity often have a limited understanding of both architecture and liturgy. Therefore, *Domus Dei* must provide guidance for the spiritual, practical, and cultural decision-making required to build a church and to create its artistic embellishment.

Unfortunately, the draft document of *Domus Dei* does not provide clear guidance. Instead, the information is clouded by concern about expressing cultural hegemony through traditional architectural forms. Its pages express fear that a recognizable aesthetic would threaten cultural diversity. We must remember, however, that diverse peoples coming together as one body has been a distinction of the Catholic Church from its foundation by Christ. This characteristic doubt on the importance of Catholic cultural patrimony. Such comments may not be intended to question the use of ideas from earlier buildings as a resource for new structures; however, one is left with a sense of admonition, not encouragement. This section also presents cultural diversity in exclusive, not inclusive, terms. Rather than providing positive direction, these underlying assumptions would cause confusion.

It is obviously not the task of *Domus Dei* to teach the vast history of Catholic construction in six pages. Every year there are scores of popular and scholarly books published on this subject. It is disappointing, however, to find that *Domus Dei*’s necessarily brief treatment of European architecture conveys a dismissive air. In addition, it is heavily laden with atonement for alleged European domination of indigenous cultures rather than acknowledgment of any
benefit to the world through the spread of Catholicism. The text also seems to be oblivious to the invigorating influence of indigenous art forms that from 300 A.D. until 1850 the construction of Catholic churches and institutions has achieved. The backbone of seminal architectural developments in the Mediterranean Basin, Europe, and the Americas. Even accounting for concern about overriding indigenous cultures, Catholic developments, whether Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic, or Renaissance, were stimulated by interaction with indigenous non-Christians. Roman, Islamic, and Meso-American architecture have greatly informed Catholic developments, opposed to being merely subjected to this force.

The Renaissance, which still greatly influences world culture, is dismissed in three lines. Churches are said to have paralleled secular building types. Surely the majority of architectural historians, who are predominantly agnostics, expound the opposite view. Catholic churches and institutional buildings were the prime media through which the three-hundred-year architectural period we call Renaissance and Baroque was initiated and refined. *Domus Dei* insinuates an opposite claim by implying that Renaissance churches were influenced by castles, opera houses, and theaters. Castles were medieval; they were built even before the Gothic. Opera was not invented until one hundred and fifty years after the Renaissance began. Theaters were a rare occurrence even during the late Renaissance. Such trite statements, based on anachronisms, cast doubt on a period that priests and laity know to have been important. It conveys a message that the lessons of the Renaissance are forbidden fruit.

In the section of *Domus Dei* on history there is much space given to an apology for assumed abuses by Eurocentric Catholic conquerors at the expense of indigenous populations. This anxiety is clearly a concern of the writers. The important question is, should it be an overriding problem in the minds of the people that the document is being written to serve? In my experience, this is not a critical issue, certainly not for the Mexican-Americans with whom I have worked. *Domus Dei* is being written specifically for those who would build churches in the United States, not in Africa, Asia, or even Central or South America. This perceived remorse should not be laid upon the United States where Catholics struggled to be independent of a dominant Protestant culture. The challenge we face currently is how to express independence from a dominant secular and commercial culture.

There is plenty of debate over the consequences of the Propaganda Fide phenomenon historically, but *Domus Dei* is being written for the Church today. Its central issue should be how to build beautiful, life-giving churches, schools, rectories, and parish halls for the glory of God. These structures should encourage diverse peoples to come together as one Catholic body.

Thanks to the blessing of continued immigration to the United States, the people of diversity are now the colonizers and they are bringing new life to the American Church. In my experience as an architect, such immigrants do not feel oppressed by the prospect that a new church might emulate a Renaissance model from Rome or a Romanesque paradigm from France. On the contrary, they seem to relish such an idea. Increasingly, they perceive the indigenous group of Anglo-Americans are also excited by the prospect that a new Catholic church might proclaim a recognizable image of a Catholic structure instead of an insipid copy of a corporate building.

*Domus Dei* will be an influential document due to growing opportunities to erect new buildings to support evangelization of the Catholic Church in the United States. It will also bear the stamp of the Catholic Bishops of the United States. I hope that *Domus Dei* will be extensively revised or be begun anew so that it will provide clear and positive guidance to those who build.

The most important criterion in designing churches is the ability to achieve a sacred building. From the outside a church must vividly symbolize its consecration in contrast to adjacent secular buildings. On the interior, it must convey the beauty of a sanctuary that uplifts and challenges spiritual devotion. Although sacredness is inherently intangible, and methods of achieving it vary widely, the Catholic tradition has developed a vast set of cultural references over two millennia. These prompt us to recognize sacred themes when we perceive them. The skillful use of such resources, whether expressed through the abstract language of architecture or the highly specific medium of iconographic imagery in the arts, has the potential to elicit the sense of wholeness and unity worthy of *Domus Dei*.

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THE CONSTANTINIAN EPISCOPAL BASILICA IN OSTIA
A Preliminary Report of the Excavation

Franz Alto Bauer and Michael Heinzelmann

The biography of Pope Sylvester in the Book of Pontiffs contains the following passage (Liber Pontificalis I, 183): “Eodem tempore fecit Constantinus Augustus basilicam in civitate Hostia, iuxta portum Romae, beatorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli et Iohannis Baptistae, ubi et dona obtulit: haec: [...]” It can be translated as: “Then the emperor Constantine built in the city of Ostia close to the Portus Romanus the basilica of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul and of John the Baptist, where he presented the following gifts...”

Until now, all efforts to localize or identify this important imperial foundation among the excavated monuments of Ostia have failed. Most recently, however, a geophysical prospection of the unexcavated areas in Ostia has revealed the remains of a large basilica in the southeastern part of the city. This sensational find led to a first excavation campaign undertaken by the German Archeological Institute in Rome. During this first campaign, six trenches were opened at different parts of the church complex. The most important preliminary results of this campaign can be summarized as follows: Of the huge basilica, which, including the atrium, measured about about 29 meters wide (95 feet) and 80 meters long (262 feet), only a small portion of walls have been preserved above foundation level. Circa two-thirds of the complex have been preserved at foundation level only. Thus, the information gained for the furnishings of the interior of the church is scarce. It can be stated with considerable certainty, however, that the church was a colonnaded basilica mainly built from spolia or spoils from other buildings; even the mosaic floor, which has been found in certain areas of the church, consists of spolia tesserae. It was possible to gain a large quantity of datable material from the trenches in different areas of the church’s foundations. An analysis of the ceramic fragments, largely dating from the late third and early fourth century, confirmed that the complex was in fact built in the time of Constantine. As becomes clear from the excavation, Constantine had the whole site leveled and earlier buildings torn down before the new basilica was built. The church was not hidden by earlier buildings on the same site, as, for example, the cathedral in Portus, but dominated the south of Ostia as a distinctive structure. From the fifth/sixth century on, the church also served as a burial place: raised sarcophagi, which had been lowered into the ground, were found in the western part of the nave and the atrium. The church was in use at least until the seventh century, since its apse (which had probably been destroyed during an earthquake) was rebuilt at that time. The church was reduced in size most probably during the early medieval period. In the forecourt to the atrium, poorly built residential complexes were found. Remains of cooking places were found in the western part of the church. Had the church been reduced to a small part in the east, as can be shown for other places? The church complex was abandoned no later than the Carolingian period. A broad stratum of rubbish with a lot of ceramic fragments of this period was found and the collapsed southern exterior wall covered the already mostly destroyed floor. This information matches with the tradition recorded in the Book of Pontiffs, which states that under Gregory IV (827-844), Ostia Antica was abandoned and the city transferred to the area of the current Borgo.

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When Bishop Bernard J. Flanagan returned to Worcester, Massachusetts after the Second Vatican Council, one of the first ways he sought to implement the “spirit of Vatican II” was by remodeling his cathedral church. No doubt influenced by the spirit of change that swept through Western society during the tumultuous sixties, he oversaw the removal of the sacred furnishings that had come to be universally identified with the Catholic sanctuary. In place of the reredos and high altar, a concrete block wall was erected. A simple free-standing altar table was introduced. The communion rail was removed, and a new, unadorned tabernacle was set upon a pillar in a side alcove.

The parish churches of the Worcester diocese followed suit over the next decade and beyond. Much the same trend occurred throughout the United States and elsewhere. The renovations that immediately followed the Council were arguably the most drastic. Altars, statues, shrines, communion rails, confessional, and kneelers were removed from many churches. Walls and ceilings were whitewashed—murals and frescoes succumbed to the roller. Innumerable works of sacred art were lost while new features such as wall-to-wall carpeting and drop ceilings were introduced—all done in the name of the liturgical reforms of Vatican II.

Yet, in reality, the church renovators of those years merely acted on their own subjective desires rather than on the authority of the Council fathers. In fact, the Council had precious little to say about the architectural reform of our churches. Rather, Vatican II was dishonestly used as the catalyst for the reformation of Catholic church architecture. Addressing this abuse, the Vatican issued Opera Artis, a circular letter on the care of the Church’s artistic heritage, in 1971. It charged: “Disregarding the warnings and legislation of the Holy See, many people have made unwarranted changes in places of worship under the pretext of carrying out the reform of the liturgy and have thus caused the disfigurement or loss of priceless works of art.” In this document the Sacred Congregation for Clergy warned bishops to “exercise unfailing vigilance to ensure that the remodeling of places of worship by reason of the reform of the liturgy is carried out with utmost caution.”

Unfortunately this instruction was little heeded by those who engineered the church renovations during the following decades. The liturgical renovation movement actually accelerated. Some years later, the same renovators could also be found remodeling church naves and vestibules, rearranging the pews, and moving or eliminating the sanctuaries of the older, traditional churches. Throughout the sixties and early seventies various theories based on architectural Modernism were promoted by the church renovators. Those theories came to be embodied in Environment and Art in Catholic Worship, the 1978 document drafted by a subcommittee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. This document seemed to ratify both the theory and the practice of the church renovation establishment. Consequently, the architectural patrimony of the Church in the United States continued to suffer dearly.

Happily, however, it now seems that a new trend is emerging. Some of the churches that were drastically altered decades ago are now being “re-renovated.” Shortly after Bishop Daniel P. Reilly was appointed Bishop of Worcester in 1994, he announced an interior restoration project that would “re- renovate” or restore the cathedral’s sanctuary. The concrete block wall was removed, and an ornate hand-carved wood reredos and a noble cathedra were erected in its place. The

Before: Worcester Cathedral, first renovation

After: Worcester Cathedral, re-renovation by Rudolph A. Rohn
tabernacle alcove was similarly adorned and a shrine to Our Lady of Guadalupe was fashioned from the leftover wood of the sanctuary project.

Numerous churches, from small rural parishes to urban cathedrals, are undergoing similar restorations. St. Patrick’s Church in Forest City, Missouri, for instance, is at present undergoing a re-renovation to bring it more in line with its original look. Following Vatican II, this 95-year-old church was “modernized” by way of a drop ceiling and wood-paneled walls. The Stations of the Cross, the old altar, several statues, and other sacred furnishings were removed from the church. In 1999, however, the new pastor, Father Joseph Hughes, initiated the re-renovation. Fortunately, some parishioners had saved items that were removed from the church during the previous renovation some thirty years ago. A sanctuary lamp, the old tabernacle, and candlesticks were refurbished and incorporated into the new design. Just as at St. Paul’s Cathedral in Worcester, a new re-eros is the highlight of the sanctuary renovation. Patterned after the church’s old altar, it sits behind the new altar and holds the altar crucifix and statuaries.

Other pastors have made simpler “re-renovation” changes, such as moving the tabernacle back to its original position in the center of the sanctuary, behind the altar. Two years ago, for instance, Father Richard Simon of St. Thomas of Canterbury Church in Chicago, announced to his parish that he planned to make such a liturgical move because he felt that the experiment of removing the tabernacle from the sanctuary had failed. “We have lost the sense of the sacred that formerly was the hallmark of Catholic worship,” he wrote to parishioners in a letter of June 24, 1997. “Thereforde, I have decided to restore the tabernacle to its former place in the middle of the sanctuary and to begin a campaign of re-education as to the sacredness of worship and the meaning of the Real Presence.” Once Fr. Simon returned the tabernacle to its former location he was surprised, he said, at the response. It was overwhelmingly positive and effective. “Some people even wept for joy when they saw the change,” he said. “I’m kicking myself and asking why I didn’t do this years ago.”

In Indianapolis, Archbishop Daniel M. Buechlein, O.S.B. is less than pleased with the renovation of his cathedral, which was carried out under his predecessor. As part of the renovation of the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul, most of the statues and the Stations of the Cross were removed and sold to an antique store in Michigan (not allowed by Opera Artis). Since being named Ordinary of the Indianapolis Archdiocese, the archbishop has already ordered a new set of Stations of the Cross, the first step in what will be a much slower process of re-renovation in Indianapolis.

Moving or extending a sanctuary into the nave has almost become customary for American church renovators when working with older, historic church buildings. This move is often justified by the liturgical theory that a more centralized sanctuary makes it easier for the congregation to “gather around” the altar. This new type of sanctuary is not without its ramifications for the church as a whole. The movement of the altar (or the entire sanctuary) often “necessitates” removing the altar rail, displacing or removing the high pulpit, and in the case of a cathedral the bishop’s throne may also be affected. These traditional furnishings are then replaced with modern furnishings that are often at odds with the original design and style of the building. Victor Hugo dubbed these innovative furnishings the “wretched gewgaws of our day.” Referring to elements of the 18th-century renovation of Notre Dame de Paris he asked, “Who has substituted the gewgaws of our own day—its stage platform, its rearranged pews, its emasculated baldachino—and so forth, all because it was felt that the altar and sanctuary needed to be brought closer to the people. The tabernacle is removed from the high altar, while the communion rail and two of the parish’s four wood confessional were cannibalized in order to make new furnishings. The altar move, apparently, was suggested as a way to appease critics of the renovation.

Ongoing Liturgical Revolution

But not everyone is “re-renovating.” The artistic heritage of many churches is still threatened by those who, in the words of Msgr. Peter J. Elliot, still cling to “a kind of ‘Maoist’ mythology of a perpetual or ongoing liturgical revolution,” one that is derived from “a dated commitment to a permanent program of planned changes rather than to organic and natural development.” It seems that the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 is now being used as the catalyst for renovation of some of the most significant parish churches, cathedrals, and basilicas in the country, many of them historic structures thus far preserved from the fashionable post-Vatican II renovations. At this writing the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption in Covington, Kentucky, the San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio, Texas, St. John Cathedral in Milwaukee, St. Andrew Cathedral in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the Cathedral of St. Mary in Colorado Springs are all in the midst of renovations, to help their respective dioceses “move into the new millennium,” but not without artistic and spiritual casualties. Each of these cathedral churches is being subjected to a similar program of interior remodeling justified by the “ongoing liturgical revolution.”

Gewgaws

Last year historic St. Martin of Tours Church in Cincinnati, an Italian Romanesque-style edifice built in the 1920s, was renovated over the overwhelming objections of parishioners. In St. Martin’s case, fashion audaciously fitted into the wounds of its Romanesque architecture wretched gewgaws of our own day—its stage platform, its rearranged pews, its emasculated baldachino, and so forth, all because it was felt that the altar and sanctuary needed to be brought closer to the people. The tabernacle was removed from the high altar, while the communion rail and two of the parish’s four wood confessionals were cannibalized in order to make new furnishings. The latter move, apparently, was suggested as a way to appease critics of the renovation.
of the new fixtures creates an awkward visual dissonance that is disturbing even to the casual observer.

Similarly, when architects presented a plan to renovate St. James Cathedral in Seattle, they said they were going to “reclaim the historical integrity of the church.” Seattle Catholics wondered for some time what exactly was meant by this unique turn-of-phrase. They were assured that the “beauty and integrity of an old and venerable structure” would be respected. According to critics of the Seattle renovation, once the project was completed they no longer had an Italian Renaissance church, but a “Reformation-era church taken over by Reformers who didn’t want any ‘popish artifacts’.” It is still a beautiful building, like a museum or the U.S. Capitol, but it is no longer easily understood as a house of God with recognizable transcendent qualities.

There are, however, some notable contemporary exceptions, such as the Cathedral of the Madeleine in Salt Lake City. The architects here obviously took great pains to choose designs for the new furnishings that would complement, rather than detract from, the magnificent hundred-year-old edifice. Overall, the Salt Lake renovation project produced a unified structure, although one which adopted a decidedly late-twentieth-century arrangement.

**Inclusivism**

Another justification for some of the modernizing elements of contemporary church renovations is by way of accessibility, flexibility, and visibility. Retrofitting church buildings for handicap accessibility is becoming ever more en vogue. While the simple premise—to make the church building accessible for those who are either wheelchair-bound or otherwise physically disabled from climbing stairs—is a noble and commendable one, “accessibility” has become more of an ideology than a helpful aid. This new ideology of “inclusivism” necessitates costly elevators rising to the choir loft or having the choir moved out of the loft, modern ambos that rise and fall powered by hydraulics, lowered sanctuaries accessible by long ramps, the removal of large sections of pews, and tabernacles that are low enough to the ground so that a wheelchair-bound minister of the Eucharist can access the sacred Hosts.

Related to the ideology of accessibility, the desire for “flexibility” is also often invoked to justify radical revision of church interiors, especially regarding the seating. The renovation of the Indianapolis cathedral, for instance, disposed of the traditional pews with kneelers to make room for portable chairs (with “kneeling pillows” tied to the back of the chair). According to Sr. Sandra Schweitzer, design consultant on the project, “flexibility” is one of the most important considerations in renovating traditional churches. In a 1999 interview with the *National Catholic Register*, Sr. Schweitzer contended, contrary to 1500 years of evidence, that the variety of liturgies—weddings, funerals, baptisms—cannot be accommodated by the “traditional church arrangement” with its unidirectional fixed pews, choir seating, etc. To replace these with movable or even stackable chairs allows for different new seating configurations for various liturgies or special feast-days... Again, often good quality seating is jettisoned, and flexibility becomes an excuse for a reordering of the nave and sanctuary into more of a theater or abbey choir configuration.

“Visibility” too is fast becoming an ideology that has produced some of the strangest solutions yet. When pews cannot be removed or rearranged on three or four sides of the altar, for example, some architects have skewed the pews in the side aisles seven to ten degrees toward the altar so that people can better face the altar and see the faces of other worshippers. This solution can be seen in several prominent churches such as the Cathedral of St. Peter in Erie, Pennsylvania. For many, it is terribly awkward to sit skewed by seven to ten degrees for the duration of a Sunday Mass. Another feature of some of these renovations, accomplished in the name of visibility, is the lowering of the sanctuary reredos or the shaving down of the ends of the pews.

**Unpopular with the laity**

All of the above-mentioned changes are significant in that they are often not popular with the average man in the pew, who is ultimately footing the bill for these projects. As a greater awareness of renovation issues grows it is becoming more common for parishioners to openly object to proposed changes to their historic church buildings.

Probably the greatest resistance ever exerted by a single parish is that of St. Francis Xavier Church in Petoskey, Michigan. Parishioners who would like to see their beautiful church protected and preserved have organized to formally oppose the renovation plans which will radically transform their Gothic-style building into a spartan “worship space.” The church still boasts numerous ornate frescoes, elaborate carvings, a marble-topped altar railing, elevated pulpit, stunning reredos with a life-size Crucifix and gilded tabernacle. Its 27 statues and 24 stained glass windows render this church one of the finest examples of neo-Gothic architecture in the Midwest. One of the most drastic of the proposed changes at St. Francis is the removal of the reredos (see photo) and the elimination of the parish’s perpetual adoration chapel.

In March of 1999 parishioners who want to preserve St. Francis for future generations formed an association called the St. Francis Xavier Historic Preservation Guild, with 12 parishioners taking the lead. The guild publishes a newsletter that is distributed to their more than 600 members, uniting them in their common cause.

In April the guild mailed a survey to all registered parishioners and more than 700 were returned. By overwhelming margins, the people opposed moving the tabernacle (720 to 10), removing the communion rail (695 to 33), removing statues or the reredos (715 to 14) and moving the altar forward (677 to 39). The majority did support minor restoration such as painting and cleaning walls, replacing old carpet, restoring statues where necessary, and making improvements to the exterior of the building.

Since parish leaders seemed to turn a deaf ear to the reasonable protest, more than 900 St. Francis parishioners signed a petition to cease renovation plans. This petition with its signatures was published as a paid advertisement in the local daily.
Parishioners at St. Edmund Church in Oak Park, Illinois, took a different tack. First they commissioned an alternative design for the church which would accomplish the majority of the stated reasons for the renovation without affecting the historical integrity of the sanctuary. After petitions to the parish and the Archdiocese of Chicago failed, the St. Edmund Preservation Society asked the Oak Park Historic Preservation Committee to grant “landmark status” to the historic Chicago-area church, arguing that the proposed renovation there will change the character of the English Gothic structure. Landmark status would require the church to seek village approval on any work altering the building. Oak Park’s elected officials, however, voted against granting the church such status.

Other parishes have even tendered appeals to the Roman Rota and the Vatican’s Congregation for Divine Worship, after appeals to the pastor and the diocese failed. The preservation group at Cincinnati’s St. Martin’s Church, for instance, assembled a three-inch-thick dossier of renovation-related materials in an effort to have the Vatican intervene on their behalf. Two separate appeals have already failed, a third is still pending.

Material costs

Many have often wondered too about the material costs of these renovations, and whether or not the money spent on the unnecessary alterations is poor stewardship and an affront to social justice. Renovation of a single structure can cost upwards to $4 million but most run anywhere between $200,000 and $1 million.

To think of the material costs in purely hypothetical terms, we could estimate (conservatively) that 75% of the 17,156 parish churches that existed in the U.S. in 1962 were renovated. If the altars and communion rails alone were removed from these churches at just $10,000 per building, that would mean that 12,867 churches were renovated at a total cost of $128,670,000. This figure, of course, does not include other changes, often unwanted and unnecessary, such as moving tabernacles to side chapels, building baptismal fonts designed for adult immersion and moving choirs and organ consoles to where sanctuaries used to be. It also does not include the 2,428 parishes created between 1962 and 1999 or older buildings that have been renovated more than once. When all this is considered the rough estimate of dollars spent on church renovations since 1962 must well exceed $200,000,000. The cost in lost art and history is, of course, incalculable.

The dawn of the new millennium provides an opportune time for architects and church renovation professionals to evaluate the untoward results of the past four decades. With hindsight we can all now better understand the Vatican’s prophetic warning issued in 1971. With the growing appreciation of traditional sacred art and architecture, especially among the some of the younger, recently appointed bishops, as well as the young priests who have been emerging from our seminaries over the past few years, more and more parishes will be open to the possibility of “re-renovation” or conservation and preservation of their architectural and artistic heritage.

Not long after Victor Hugo published his classic novel The Hunchback of Notre Dame, architect Eugene Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc spearheaded Notre Dame’s famous re-renovation in the mid-19th century. Stained glass windows were reinstalled, new statues sculpted to fill the empty niches, the white-wash scrubbed from the walls, and on and on. Let us hold out hope that the 21st century will occasion a similar restoration of the architectural patrimony of the Church, and that this restoration will lead to a greater awakening of faith and devotion, one that will lead us pilgrims to our Father’s House, the New Jerusalem. Good architects will be able to find creative solutions that preserve the old art, protect the integrity of the architecture, and maintain a sacral atmosphere.

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In the early sixties when I was being taught theology as a young Dominican Friar, St. Thomas Aquinas still reigned supreme as the universal teacher of the Catholic Church, although cracks were beginning to show in solidity of his appreciation by theologians who later saw him practically set aside at Vatican Council II. As a callow young friar I was excited by the movement to return to the Bible and the Fathers in theology, and was tired of trying to connect the Angelic Doctor’s thought with every conceivable reality or theory as if he himself had said it (ipse dixit) all first. Now older and I hope wiser, I rejoice in the modest Thomistic revival we now experience, although I don’t wish to return to the triumphalistic Thomism of the forties and fifties. It’s a bit ironic that I’m writing to explore the connection between the Angelic Doctor and architecture; not arbitrarily creating a nexus, but pleasantly surprised to find that he actually had something to say on the matter.

In the Prima Secundae of the *Summa Theologiae* where St. Thomas treats the ceremonial precepts of the Old Law, we find many insights about Jewish ritual before the time of Christ, but of great interest to us is his applying them to the Christian dispensation. The Angelic Doctor begins by pointing out that since we are composed of body and soul, exterior worship is needed as well as interior, for in our present state “we need the ray of Divine light to shine upon us under the forms of certain sensible figures . . . according to the various states of human knowledge.” So he establishes the sacramental principle here that God comes to us in sign and symbol in ways we can grasp through the senses. This is also the way we return to God for “bodily sacrifices (of the old law) denote the inner sacrifice of the heart whereby man offers his soul to God.” Clearly this principle is true of the new dispensation as well. Further on in this treatise, he discusses the human tendency to surround the priestly or the royal with “more precious garments and give them vaster and more beautiful abodes. And for this reason it behoved special times, a special abode, a special vessel, and special minister to be appointed for divine worship.” Just as the King needs a special house, so also we build one for God, not that He needs “a tabernacle or temple to be set up . . . but men who worship him are corporeal beings and for their sake, there was need for a special tabernacle or temple set up . . . (so that) coming together with the thought that the place was set aside for the worship of God they might approach with greater reverence.” St. Thomas gives many Christologically symbolic reasons why Solomon’s Temple was built as it was, but it is his application to Christian churches that is of interest to us. He points out that of old, synagogues were reserved for teaching and praise and the temple for sacrifice alone, whereas now in the Christian era “since the very sacrifice of the Church is spiritual . . . the place of sacrifice is not distinct from the place of teaching.”

With this background we approach the Tertia Pars of the *Summa*, where St. Thomas asks: Whether this Sacrament (the Eucharist) ought to be celebrated in a house and with Sacred Vessels? After listing many objections to so doing as is his wont, the Angelic Doctor sets the tone for his answer by quoting Matthew 18:20: “Wherever two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them.” So Christ is present with us when we gather in the church for the Eucharist and this is appropriate because “the house in which this sacrament is celebrated denotes the Church and is termed a church . . . to represent the holiness which the Church acquired from the Passion, as well as to denote the holiness required of them who receive this Sacrament.” Here we find again the sacramental emphasis we saw earlier; sacred signs point toward God—the Temple of old and now the church building where God dwells with his people, the Church. Further, “by the altar, Christ, Himself, is signified,” and so is seen by the Angelic Doctor as the sign of the presence of Christ in the church edifice.

This emphasis on the sacred signs we need to experience God, this broadly sacramental approach we’ve seen in St. Thomas...
in terms of church buildings, is echoed in the current Rite for the Dedication of a Church. Number 2 says:

Because a church is a visible building it stands as a special sign of the pilgrim Church on earth and reflects one Church dwelling in Heaven... it should be dignified, evincing a noble beauty and should stand as a sign of a symbol of heavenly things.

The former monk of Taize who became a Catholic priest before he died, Max Thuraian, goes further:

The church by its beautiful liturgical layout, its Tabernacle radiating Christ’s real presence, should be the beautiful house of the Lord and of his Church where the faithful love to recollect themselves in the silence of adoration.9

To build beautiful churches as a sign of Heaven on earth maybe somewhat costly, and here St. Thomas again is of help. For him magnificence is a virtue which he treats in the Secunda Secundae as a part of the virtue of fortitude. This is the virtue of doing something great... “it belongs to the magnificent man to provide himself with a suitable dwelling.”10 But more than that, “No end of human works is so great as

the honor of God... (and) for this reason magnificence is connected with holiness, since its chief effect is directed to religion or holiness.”11 And so St. Thomas argues that a magnificent man will spend money to produce a great work. It is clear from the above reasoning of the Angelic Doctor if one could spend magnificent sums on a suitable dwelling how much more so on a suitable abode directed to religion or holiness, i.e., the church building, and so our forebears were lavish in giving toward building great churches and cathedrals.

Our forebears and St. Thomas among them, knew that churches are necessary signs symbolizing the mystery of the Church; and not just the Church here, but the heavenly Church as well, since the Liturgy is a kind of Jacob’s Ladder with angels ascending and descending through one great High Priest Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Therefore I would like to conclude with the wonderful vision evoked in the document on sacred music, Musica Sacram (no. 5) which speaks of the way our Liturgy ought to be celebrated — and one could argue in settings appropriate for so great a mystery: The mystery of the Liturgy, with its hierarchical and community nature is more

openly shown. The unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved by a union of voices, minds are more easily raised to heavenly things by the beauty of the Sacred rites and the whole celebration more clearly prefigures that heavenly liturgy which is enacted in the holy city of Jerusalem.

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NOTES
1 St. Thomas, Summa Theologiae, I-II, q. 101, a. 2, corp.
2 Ibid., q. 102, a. 3, obj. 14.
3 Ibid., a. 4, corp.
4 Ibid., ad. 1.
5 Ibid., ad. 3.
6 Ibid., III, q. 83, a. 3, corp.
7 Ibid., ad. 2.
8 Ibid.
9 L’Osservatore Romano, July 21, 1996.
10 Summa Theologiae, I-II, q. 134, a. 1, ad. 3.
11 Ibid., a. 2, ad. 3.
As a moral theologian, I am sometimes asked: what does morality have to do with church architecture? One way to approach this question is to think about how the human person is engaged in the liturgy. If we take moral theology in its classic sense, then it embraces the entire spectrum of human activity, from the most primal inclinations to the most exalted movements of God’s grace within us. It involves not just the human conscience, but also the virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Those gifts are usually enumerated as wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, fortitude, piety, and fear of the Lord. From that list, I believe that the gift of fear—the fear of the Lord—has a special role to play in relation to liturgy, and specifically to liturgical architecture.

Given our modern sensibilities, we might wonder if fear of the Lord is an appropriate liturgical attitude. In one of his sermons John Henry Cardinal Newman posed the same question. He asked: Are these feelings of fear and awe Christian feelings or not? . . . I say this, then, which I think no one can reasonably dispute. They are the class of feelings we should have—yes, have to an intense degree—if we literally had the sight of Almighty God; therefore they are the class of feelings which we shall have, if we realize His presence. In proportion as we believe that He is present, we shall have them; and not to have them, is not to realize, not to believe that He is present.

For this gift of fear to work in us, then, we need a sense of being in God’s presence, a sense of the sacred. It is the proper work of liturgical architecture to help provide us with that sense. One time-honored way to indicate the presence of the sacred is what I would call “veiling the mysteries.” In the Jewish tradition, both the Tabernacle of the Desert and the Temple of Jerusalem employed veils. In the Christian dispensation, veiling has been manifested in various ways. It has taken the form of material veils surrounding the altar and tabernacle, but at other times in the history of architecture, veiling has been accomplished through the use of an iconostasis, a rood screen, or another chancel barrier, such as a communion rail.

Angelico Veils

The instinct to veil the sacred or to be veiled from it has roots planted deeply in Sacred Scripture. The Prophet Isaiah, for instance, wrote about a vision that was granted to him while he was in the Temple. There he saw “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple.” Isaiah then said, “Woe is me! . . . for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” The prophet, however, also noticed the deportment of the attendant angels, the Seraphim. These heavenly beings are a choir of fiery angels who live constantly in the presence of God and his glory, acclaiming his holiness. It is they who say “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Sabaoth, the whole earth is full of his glory,” which are the words we adapt and use as the Sanctus in Mass.

When Isaiah saw the Seraphim, he noticed that they were veiled. They had six wings, and “with two they veiled their faces, with two they veiled their feet, and with two they hovered aloft.” Since Isaiah’s vision is of the Seraphim attending the throne of the Almighty, we can infer that they were not veiled solely for Isaiah’s sake, but precisely because they were in the presence of God. The veiled Seraphim teach Isaiah that he was right to fear seeing God without a protecting veil. God’s glory is so powerful that it is only from behind a veil that creatures can behold His presence at all.

The Veil of Moses

If the Seraphim have the privilege to be in God’s presence habitually, this is not so with men. When God manifests his Presence on earth, it is recorded as a special event that should be remembered. God once manifested his Presence to Moses in the form of “a flame of fire, coming from the middle of a bush.” Moses was intrigued by this, and approached the burning bush. But then God said, “Come no nearer, . . . for the place on which you stand is holy ground.” We notice immediately that God’s Presence makes a place especially holy, and that this place is distinguished from what is less holy by a certain distance.
In addition we are told that “Moses covered his face, afraid to look at God.” We do not know whether Moses did this with his hands or with his cloak or in some other manner. In some way, however, Moses created a veil which shielded him from the Divine Presence.

Moses, however, was apparently not satisfied with this veiled encounter with God and so he asked to see the Lord’s face. God responded: “You cannot see my face, for man cannot see me and live.”

As a concession to Moses’s request, the Lord said:

Here is a place beside me. You must stand on the rock, and when my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with my hand while I pass by. Then I will take my hand away and you shall see the back of me; but my face is not to be seen.

Here the Lord used his own hand as the veil which shielded Moses from seeing his glorious face.

God granted Moses the extraordinary favor of seeing His face in this life when he went up Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. So powerful was the Glory of the Lord, that it imprinted itself on Moses’ face. Coming down from the holy mountain, Moses did not veil his face, but it so reflected the Lord’s Glory that the people were afraid to approach him. In spite of their fear, Moses told them to come closer, so that they could hear what he had to tell them. It seems that he deliberately remained unveiled as he delivered the Ten Commandments so that the people could see God’s glory reflected in his face and know that he was speaking with the very authority of God. But as soon as Moses finished speaking, “he put a veil over his face.” At this point, the veiling was not to protect Moses, but rather to protect the people from the fiery glow of God’s glory. Moses knew that even when only reflected in the face of a creature, the Glory of the Lord was so holy and so powerful that it had to be veiled.

The Veil of the Tabernacle

After Moses’s encounter with God on Mount Sinai, the Jews wandered in the desert for forty years. During that time, they built a portable Tabernacle containing the Ark of the Covenant, which served as God’s Dwelling place with his chosen people. This Tabernacle was built to the specifications given by God Himself, and it included several kinds of veils to shield the people from his Almighty Presence. Most importantly, there was a veil which screened the Ark of the Covenant from the rest of the Tabernacle. It was made of “blue and purple and scarlet stuff and fine twined linen” and was designed with figures of Cherubim, the angels who are the guardians of God’s Presence.

Restrictions about passing beyond the veil into the Holy of Holies were set out for the Jews when Aaron’s two sons died after entering that sanctuary unlawfully. Of this strange incident we are told only that Aaron’s sons “offered unholy fire before the Lord, such as He had not commanded.” In immediate consequence, “fire came forth from the presence of the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.” In explanation, the Lord told Aaron, “I will show myself holy among those who are near me, and before all the people I will be glorified.” After these deaths, the Lord instructed Moses to tell Aaron “that he must not enter the sanctuary beyond the veil . . . whenever he chooses. He may die . . .” No one, then, could pass beyond this veil, not even the Jewish priests. Only the high priest, once a year, and after a special rite of purification, could go past it for the atonement ceremonies of Yom Kippur. The holiness of the sanctuary was almost completely impenetrable. Only God could dwell there.
The Temple of Jerusalem

In the time the Jews gave up their portable Tabernacle in favor of a more permanent Temple in Jerusalem. First planned by King David, and then built by his son King Solomon, the Temple plan was very similar to the Tabernacle. Begun about 957 B.C., the Temple’s plan, dimensions, and materials are listed in 1 Kings and II Chronicles. The first account records that the entrance to the Holy of Holies had “doors of olive wood” indicating that it was demarcated by a wall. The second account, however, says that there was a “veil of blue and purple and crimson fabrics and fine linen, and worked cherubim on it.” Perhaps both of these were used, as is indicated in a fresco found in Dura Europos. In any case, either a fabric veil, or a more substantial veiling structure such as a veil, or both were used. The Temple was destroyed at the time of the Babylonian exile and was then rebuilt under the direction of Zerubbabel, being completed about the year 515 B.C. Much of the work was due to the efforts of Simon the high priest who is said to be “glorious . . . . as he came out of the inner sanctuary” — literally, “the house of the veil.” Finally, a second, much grander temple was begun by King Herod in 20 B.C. Although the Ark of the Covenant had been lost by this time, this temple also used a veil to demarcate the Holy of Holies.

Veiling in the New Testament

The New Testament makes a direct reference to the Temple Veil in some important passages. In the Gospel, for example, we read that at the death of Christ “the veil of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.” How should we understand this passage? The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us:  

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain [veil], that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart . . . .

As this passage indicates, the New Testament sometimes uses the veil as a metaphor. Here it stands for “the blood of Jesus” and “his flesh” — that is, Christ’s humanity. Since Jesus is the “high priest” who freely enters the Sanctuary, we also enter “through Him, with Him, and in Him.” How appropriate then that Christian sanctuaries have often been demarcated by a barrier which also serves as the communion rail where we receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Church design which eliminates a veiling structure around the sanctuary, then, has very important theological ramifications. If the sanctuary is that sacred place which holds in a special way the Real Presence of the Lord on the altar and in the tabernacle; and if the veil or veiling structure around the sanctuary represents the humanity of Christ, as the Epistle to the Hebrews teaches; and, further, if we can only enter into the God’s Presence through the humanity of Christ; then, that veiling structure is theologically necessary.

The rending of the Temple Veil at the time of Christ’s death, then, certainly does not indicate that Christianity has eliminated the need for veiling. It means, rather, that the Temple Veil, which was the symbol of our alienation from God, has been replaced by the veil of Christ’s humanity, which is the means of our reconciliation with Him. Some veiling structure, then, continues to be of utmost importance for a proper liturgical spirituality. Its removal would symbolically eliminate the necessity of Christ’s Humanity, as if we could enter into the presence of the Divinity without it.

Altar Veils and Chancel Veils

In the first centuries after the death of Christ, Christians were not allowed to worship publicly. Instead, they gathered together in their houses, and used some of them for liturgical purposes. These simple house-churches still manifested some elements of sacred architecture. For example, there is a Roman church dedicated to Saint John and Saint Paul, the two early martyrs who are mentioned in the Roman Canon of the Mass. Beneath this church there are the remains of an ancient Christian church which was originally a Roman villa. It consisted of two stories and was highly decorated with frescoes. Archeologists have found that at a higher level than the frescoes is a small chamber which displays, within panels enclosed by red lines, a series of paintings which seem to be of Christian inspiration. Among the images is a man, with hands extended in prayer, who stands in front of curtains drawn back to indicate the soul’s entry into Paradise. Even during the years when Christians were bitterly persecuted, and when their places of worship were rough adaptations of other sorts of buildings, they were attentive to the use of veiling to demarcate sacred space. Entering into such a sacred sanctuary was symbolic of entering into Paradise itself.

When Christians were finally able to build public churches, they continued to use veiling to separate the more holy places from the less so. Significantly, as Christian liturgical spirituality and architecture developed, the Christian altar was placed behind a veil or veiling structure. That is, in contrast to the Jewish Temple, the altar was located within a defined and closed sanctuary. Christians believed, from the beginning it seems, that there was the Real Presence of God on the altar, and that this should be veiled.

In the earliest basilican churches, the altar was built under a ciborium, a structure consisting of four pillars supporting a roof. An example of such an altar is the one given by the Emperor Constantine to the Lateran Basilica sometime before A.D. 337. The columns of these altars held cur-

Tabernacle in the Wilderness.
the iconostasis, in the sacred space that it creates. Pavel Florensky writes:

In actuality, the iconostasis is a boundary between the visible and invisible worlds, and it functions as a boundary by being an obstacle to our seeing the altar, thereby making it accessible to our consciousness by means of its unified row of saints (i.e., by its cloud of witnesses) that surround the altar where God is, the sphere where heavenly glory dwells, thus proclaiming the Mystery. Iconostasis is vision.24

In the Western rites, the parallel structure to the iconostasis is the rood screen. The rood screen is a free standing wall constructed out of wood or metal demarcating the nave and sanctuary, which can have carvings of saints and symbols and often was surmounted by a rood or cross. This element of sacred architecture is particularly helpful in understanding the interplay between the discipline of veiling and the people’s deep desire to see God’s Presence in the sacred elements at Mass. As Eamon Duffy tells us in The Stripping of the Altars, rood screens were punctured with small “peep holes.” Someone kneeling in front of the screen could just barely see through these holes to catch a quick glimpse of the elevated Host and chalice at Mass. The religious instinct at play here seems to be exactly the same as that found in the story of Moses and the Burning Bush. No one could gaze directly on the Divine Presence and live. In the Mass this Divine Presence was veiled under the appearance of bread and wine, and further veiled behind the protecting rood screen. With these sacramental and liturgical shields, the faithful could then dare to look on the elevated host and chalice and adore the Sacred Presence hidden there. Historians of church architecture tell us that until “the fifteenth or sixteenth century the cancelli were a mere barrier” and that only “after that they developed into the Communion rail.”25 As such, cancelli did not lose their former purpose; they simply gained a secondary one. Communion rails, like other forms of cancelli, deliberately and effectively separated the nave of the church from the more sacred space of the sanctuary. They thus created a veil between the more sacred and the less so.

Veiling and Vatican II

All of these elements of the veiling of the mysteries, rooted in Jewish faith and cult, were observed in Catholic liturgy until the reforms of Vatican II. The reason for veiling is “the belief that the mystery occurring on the altar had to be shielded from the eyes of men.”26 Yet such veiling is rarely observed today. In contemporary church architecture, there is no protecting veil between the congregation and the Sacred Presence of God. The altar stands in their midst and the sacred mysteries are celebrated in plain view. Instead of veiling the mysteries, we now put them on display.

How are we to understand this abandonment of such a long-standing tradition? It seems to be based on certain ambiguities in the Church’s liturgical directives. For ex-

St. Marks in Venice.
ample, the 1970 General Instruction of the Roman Missal directs that “the sanctuary should be marked off from the nave either by a higher floor level or by a distinctive structure and décor.”

Even though the “distinctive structure” of communion rails would seem to fulfill this directive very nicely, they have been removed from older churches and uniformly omitted from new church design. While a “higher floor level” may be enough to meet the letter of the present law, it does not indicate any sort of veiling as has been understood throughout the whole Judeo-Christian liturgical tradition.

Again, the 1964 document Inter Oecumenici says that “the main altar should preferably be free-standing, to permit walking around it and celebration facing the people.” Notice that this is merely a preference, and that even if it is chosen, it could easily be accomplished while maintaining a traditional sanctuary. Nevertheless, it has most often led to other arrangements in which the sense of a closed sanctuary is severely diminished.

We should not be surprised, therefore, to find that the importance of the sacred was reaffirmed in the “Third Instruction on the Correct Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” (1970) which states: “Liturgal reform is not synonymous with so-called desacralization and should not be the occasion for what is called the secularization of the world. Thus the liturgical rites must retain a dignified and sacred character.”

The difficulty is that when the sacred mysteries are unveiled, they lose their sacred character. Tradition teaches us that “a mystery — the tremendum — in order to be a mystery, needs to be hidden, so that we may long for it to be revealed.”

Conclusion

Contemporary church architecture has often led to sanctuary design which gives it a visibility and accessibility completely contrary to liturgical tradition. This unveiling of the mysteries in post-conciliar liturgical architecture has largely been a misguided even if well-intentioned effort. In its wake we sense that something of great importance has been lost, something that must be recovered. In that mission we can look for guidance to the Vatican Council’s own liturgical document Sacrosanctum Concilium. There we read that “parts [of the liturgy] which suffered loss through the accidents of history are to be restored to the vigor they had in the days of the holy Fathers, as may seem useful or necessary.”

This passage may have been used by some liturgical innovators as authorization to eliminate the time-honored structures of sanctuary and the sacred. Ironically, we might now use this very same passage to criticize their iconoclastic innovations as “accidents of history.” But however we characterize them, it is time to put them right.

Among those things which must be restored, then, are those architectural elements which reinforce the sacred nature of the liturgy. The Judeo-Christian tradition holds that God dwells on holy ground which we must not approach too closely or too boldly. It also teaches that the way to demarcate such sacred places is through some sort of veiling.
To speak of sacred architecture today in front of a Church which is crushed, humiliated and degraded by the ignorance of its symbols, by the painful alienation of the remaining iconography, drowned in the schemes of a disembodied abstraction, is equivalent to turning a knife in the wound.

Times have changed, the “humanists” of our times say; the foolish virgins of the ancient Psychomachie have rebelled against the abuse of “sanctimonious morality,” the virtues trampled by vices have lost their shield and lance. At the same time, they say, modern iconography no longer needs familiar themes. Christ can be incarnated in geometric forms, arbitrary and indefinite; the words of the priest are sufficient to remember that God made himself man.

The lack of significance substitutes for mystery, aestheticism must be refined, hermetic, while the ideal space for a modern church must be comfortable, like the foyer of a five star hotel. Nothing more need be said. We all have, in front of our eyes, the prototype of the new parish church which Sedlmayr calls “a garage for souls.”

Our subject is that of rediscovering sacred space in the light of Christian symbolism, unchangeable by definition. The architect today who agrees to design and build a house of worship has the right and the duty to belong to his historical era, and, at the same time, to the perpetual era of sacredness. Freedom of expression is not in question. Modernity is perfectly compatible with the symbolic criteria of a sacred edifice. Freedom to create new forms is unlimited, and clearly within the impartial limits of stability and functionality, and I do not mean this in the physical sense alone. In sacred architecture, in addition to the material stability of the building, there is the symbolism of its spiritual function.

The church is not a work of engineering. It is a symbol. A building of stone becomes a church only after it has been consecrated, in the same way that a child becomes a Christian in baptism. To see the church as only a building, a material structure, is like deconsecrating it, emptying it of its fundamental significance as a symbol.

The church is the body of Christ. How can one explain the body of Christ by measuring it in meters, cataloguing the material and the building techniques used in constructing an edifice? The major part of the studies which today are dedicated to Christian temples treat the symbols quite briefly, if at all. They limit themselves to classifying information concerning materials used, aesthetics and the function of the building.

How can one define the Christian temple?

The Church was born with Christ, its doors have been open to the world for about two thousand years and will remain open until the Parousia, until the Second Coming, when they will close forever and the Last Judgment will begin. For everyone: for those who will be within and those who will be left outside. After the Last Judgment, there will no longer be any reason for the temple to exist, as has been written in the Apocalypse of John of Patmos, because in the sacred City, in the heavenly Jerusalem, the Temple will be God Himself.

The terrestrial Church takes on three meanings in the time which separates Bethlehem from the Parousia: the Ark, Etimasia, and the Body of Christ. The Church is the new Ark of salvation from the deluge of evil which is rooted in history itself. When, at the end of time history ends, the living will descend from the Ark which has settled on the sacred mountain, and the dead who have remained outside the Ark will rise to judgment from the valley of mud.

The Church is at the same time Etimasia, which in Greek means preparation (Etimasia), in expectation of the Second Coming. During the entire period of waiting for the Parousia, the Church takes the place of the presence-absence of Christ, and, in this sense, is the Body of Christ.

Ark, Etimasia, divine Body: the symbol of the temple centers on this trio. It is not possible to understand the complexity of the meanings which are at the base of Christian architecture and Christian iconography, without beginning from these three fundamental symbols.

By definition, the church is the mirror which reflects the heavenly world (the Temple was an ancient instrument for observing the heavens). All of the earthly temples reflect the perfection of creation, and in it divine perfection. The Christian temple — and this is the great novelty — is no longer the reflected image of the divine, but the body itself of God made man: the abside is the head, the nave the body and the transept the open arms, the altar is the heart of Christ. (Onorio di Autun).
When Jesus chased the merchants from the temple, the Jews asked for an explanation: What sign can you show us for doing these things? Christ replied, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will rebuild it.” The Jews replied: “It took forty-six years to build this temple and you, in three days, would make it rise again?” “But He spoke of the temple of his body,” comments Saint John (Jn 2:18-21). The Christian Church is the Church of the incarnation. It can, therefore, be defined as the incarnation of the ancient Jewish temple: “The great curtain which covered the Sancta Sanctorum split in two, from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51). The mystery, hidden from the eyes of the people in the Hebrew temple, revealed itself to mankind. The spirit showed itself to reason. In the place of the God of the great priests, of the severe and vindictive God of the Old Law, there came the God of the humble, the Christian Adonai, of mercy and forgiveness. This is the essence of the temple of Christ. All of its symbolism is summed up in the meaning of the Incarnation of the Word, the image of the invisible God.

As for Noah’s Ark, for the Tabernacle of Moses, and for the Temple of Solomon, the proportions of the church are revealed by God Himself. “Behold, I have made the design for you on the palm of my hand, your walls are always before me,” says the Lord to Israel (Isaiah 49:16). Ezechiel received in a dream the measurements of the new Temple of Jerusalem, the structure of which shows a surprising analogy with the Romanesque church. The rules of construction come from God who is the real architect. The builders imitate God, carrying out His plan. For this reason the Romanesque church is not signed. The medieval anonymity renders homage to the Master Builder of the Temple, built with the living stones of mankind, a church made of souls, not of stone.

**Orientation**

Symbol of the center, the church rises in a sacred space, consecrated in times long gone by. The consecration of the sacred place begins with its separation from the profane spaces by means of a fence and its cosmic orientation. The building of every new altar reflects the cosmogony of creation.

The analogy “man-church-cosmos” helps us to understand the meaning of that which is called the cosmic orientation. The construction of new altars takes up the cosmogonic myth of creation.

This analogy helps us to understand the meaning of that which is called “orientatio.” Modern anthropology defines man as a spiritually oriented animal; his orientation acts in two directions: toward the light (eliotropism), and toward that which is higher (theotropism). Man has always been attracted by the light of the sun and the mystery of the blue skies. His double orientation, horizontal and vertical, toward the Sunrise which gives life and towards the North Star which is the center of the cosmos, indicates the two coordinates of his being in the world: survival and spirituality.

The Christian church is oriented in the same way: the longitudinal axis, called the solar axis, is oriented toward the rising sun, toward the East, (as the word itself indicates), while the vertical axis, the axis mundi (axis of the world), connects the temple to the North Star. The solar axis goes between light and darkness: in all mythology Paradise is in the East, the cradle of the sun, while Hades is in the West, in the cosmic cavern of darkness. Adam was cast out of Paradise by the western door, into a world without light. The Ascension of Christ into Heaven took place above the rising sun. The great primeval battle between the Archangel Michael and Lucifer, for the domination of creation, took place on the threshold of the kingdom of the sun and the abyss of darkness, in the deep West. Up until the fifth century, Christians prayed before the rising sun, while the Hebrews looked toward the temple. The tombs in the first Christian cemeteries were oriented, the dead looked toward the sun which overcomes the darkness.

The vertical axis, the axis mundi, oriented the church upward, bringing together the Heavens, the earth and hell — the divine and the diabolic. In ancient times, in the center of the step which separated the nave from the Holy of Holies, there was embedded a stone which marked the “cosmic center” of the church. The North Star, a fixed star in the northern hemisphere around which the constellation of Ursa Major rotates, is the sacred point of stellar cosmology; the throne of God, a star which never sets, the pivot of the universe. For Saint Gregory the Great, “the Great Dipper is the Church which rotates around the Truth,” while for Madeleine Davy, the North Star is “the key to ancient secrets lost by modern man who is cut off from the cosmos” (Initiation to the Roman Symbolism).

Oriented upwards, toward the throne of God, the church can be oriented horizontally as well towards the north, indicated by the North Star. The builder of Romanesque churches usually oriented the altar towards the East, but in some temples, like, for example, that of Santa Maria di Bominaco, near Aquila in Italy, the altar faces north. This “orientation” in relation to the North Star can be found as well in places where, in ancient times, there had been pagan or Celtic temples.

If the church is the center of the universe, the altar is the center of the church itself. The word altar comes from the Latin altus, which means a high place. The steps which normally lead to the altar bring to mind the climb to the Temple of Jerusalem, the sacred mountain on which it was built. The heart of the church is in the heart of the sacred mountain on which it was built. The Holy Mountain remains the heart of the church, the altar is the microcosm in which is concentrated the world and all of creation. The liturgy which takes place on the altar, under Christ Pantocrator, creator of the universe, reflects the heavenly liturgy of Genesis.

**Sacred Geometry**

The geometry of sacred architecture is rigorously symbolic. The plan of the building, based on a dialogue between circles...
and squares, summarizes the fundamental relationship between God and man. The circle stands for Heaven, the sacred, the spiritual world. The square, on the other hand, represents the cosmos, material things, the terrestrial condition. The concept of the Incarnation of the Word, on which all of the symbolism of the Christian temple rests, is illustrated by certain medieval images. In the evangelistary of Saint Omero, under the foot of Christ in a throne there can be seen a square drawn in a circle: a divine symbol, the circle becomes a square, spirit becomes material, God descends in flesh.

For centuries the Byzantine church was built on a cube topped by a dome. Santa Sofia in Constantinople is the prototype. In Romanesque architecture, the apse and the cupola are circular, dedicated to God, while the nave, destined for the people, is rectangular. God and man, spirit and material meet in the sacred temple and in the earthly space of the temple and the liturgy. The Cistercian apse of the twelfth century and the Templars it is always circular. The cupola, like that of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, reflects the vault of the world.

That which distinguishes the Romanesque architecture from the Gothic or Renaissance is the frequent irregularity of the plan of the building. As an analogy with the human body, Romanesque churches flee from the rigors of symmetry: life is not geometric. Romanesque column capitals are never the same, and the same ornamental motif is never repeated as it is in neoclassical temples where modular repetition is the rule. Sometimes the Romanesque apse deviates with respect to the longitudinal axis of the church, in memory of the bent head of Christ on the cross. This supremacy of the human aspect over geometric rigor will be eliminated by the rationalism of the new architecture of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the temple becomes a palace and the symbolic dies in sheer decorative pretext. The warmth of the God-man who breathes with the faithful in the Romanesque space, alive and imperfect like life itself, will disappear gradually, finally to be abandoned by the "parking garages of souls" of our time.

The deliberate geometric imperfection of the Romanesque architecture is contrasted by the symbolic rigor of numbers. The ideal relationship between the height and the length of the building must be one to ten, and one to six between width and length (we cannot insist enough here on the symbolism of numbers, essential in sacred architecture).

The Portal and the Via Salutis

If the axis mundi is the cosmic road by which the heavenly miracle descends on the temple, the earthly world can enter through the portal. “I am the Door,” says Christ (John 10:9), “if one enters through me, he shall be saved.” The portal is, first of all, “an arch of triumph and a throne of glory” (Burckhardt). But a triumphal arch which opens not in space but in time: he who enters it does not pass from one place to another place, but from one time to another time; from the time of the Old to that of the New law. The portal is the threshold which divides history from eternity: entering into the temple one enters into the mystery of creation and salvation.

The portal repeats the plan of the building; the rectangle of the double doors reproduces the nave, while the lunetta above takes on the circular form of the apse. The people pass through the square of the doors, while the semicircular tympanum above, like the apse and the cupola, portrays Christ in glory blessing the faithful.

If the form of the portal recalls the plan of the temple, in an iconographic sense it announces the themes of the apse: Christ in glory and His Blessed Mother, symbol of the Church Militant. The portal of the apse forms two poles — cosmic and mystical — of the Via Salutis (the way of Salvation), the initiatory steps of which lead from the threshold of the temple to the altar. The Christian enters the church by the western portal. From the darkness of the West he gradually draws near to the light of the Sun which shines on the altar. The western door was destined for the people while the southern door, bathed in the light of midday, was reserved for the initiated (priests, theologians, wise men), already illuminated by knowledge.

The importance of the threshold, like that of the entire portal, is immense. The entry to the Carolingian church was guarded by archangels; strong lions defended the Romanesque portals from the "spirit of the desert" and from heresy. Enemies, destroyers of the faith, false prophets and false messiahs were forbidden entry.

Once over the threshold one enters into the mystery of the temple. Just inside, the pilgrim already feels himself in the bowels of an Ark which is navigating the waters of this world, but in another time. The “Via Salutis” begins at the portal and leads toward the altar, guided by the milestones of symbols, portrayed on the capitals, frescos, windows, mosaics, etc. The entire biblical story of the world and of the life of Christ passes before the eyes of the pilgrim, reminding him of the epic of human destiny.

The first initiatory test which the Christian must face when he has just stepped over the threshold is the test of the Maze. Contrary to the mythical labyrinth of Dedalus, the Christian labyrinth does not have dead ends, misleading crossroads or deadly traps. Built into the pavement with blocks of contrasting colors, the labyrinth signifies the difficult journey of man toward the truth. Symbolically, man enters into the labyrinth at birth and during the long and tortuous course of his life advancing toward the Heavenly Jerusalem. The Faith is the thread of Arianna which will lead him to salvation.

We cannot go into detail about the vast range of subjects which accompany this re-
deeming journey. There is not enough space to do so. Can we still speak of symbols in modern architecture and iconography? What is there to say, for example, about the so-called abstract or informal windows insisted upon by different clients, with the permission of the agency for the conservation of cultural treasures, in certain Romanesque monuments in France? To encourage ourselves we turn our thoughts to the windows of the Cathedral of Chartres. In the twelfth century forty-five brotherhoods of artisans sponsored the creation of one of the most marvelous works of stained glass ever seen, up to the present time. The extraordinary history of Charlemagne, told in flaming colors, was donated by the society of drapers. How can we manage not to smile bitterly when we think of the use made of both public and private funds destined for modern “sacred” culture? Is the crisis really irreversible? History teaches us that nothing is final, neither the good nor the bad. Otherwise, why would we be meeting here in Rome, if not in the hope that a reversal of this crisis is still possible?

Let us summarize the essential characteristics which define the sacred space of a church:

The orientation (in modern architecture, dis-orientation). The dialogue between the circle and the square in the geometric and symbolic structure of the building (and not the arbitrary use of geometry according to criteria which are only aesthetic or utilitarian), then the requirement that the apse be circular and the nave rectangular. The integration of the symbolism of number in the proportions and in the rhythms of the architectonic development. The significance of the portal (which cannot be the entry to just any sort of public building, as we often see). The planning of the iconographic message is inherent in the very design of the building (too often considered of secondary importance and reduced to a minimum). All within the knowledge that the Christian temple incarnates the body of Christ, the Symbol of symbols.

It is not my task to speak about the causes which have led to the degradation of sacred space. I can only say that the study of symbols is lacking in the teaching of architecture, in the same way that theological seminaries do not offer a specific course on iconographic symbolism. It is easy to imagine the consequences of this double ignorance for the construction of churches today. We are witnessing an epidemic hybridization of architecture and iconography, that little which remains, due in the first place to the lack of a culture of symbols, substituted for by the good or bad taste of the client and the builder.

To convince Talleyrand to introduce the teaching of color, as equal to that of music, into the schools, Delacroix said that the laws of color could be learned in a quarter of an hour, and this quarter of an hour is what is lacking in many of the famous painters. It is true that the knowledge of symbols can not be learned in only fifteen minutes, but if priests and architects could agree to learn the symbolism of sacred architecture once again, sooner or later the “garage for souls” will become that which is commonly called a church.

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In his Letter to Artists of May 1999, Pope John Paul II has reminded us that “society needs artists” because art is an integral part of the education of the person and thus serves the common good. A flourishing society includes public art that perfects man; a society without such art is lame, like a man with one eye. As we live in just such a lame society, we especially need art history, which can put before us examples of past societies in which art served the common good in fruitful ways. One such society was France under the reign of St. Louis IX (1226-1270).

The age of St. Louis, of course, coincides with the height of the Gothic style. His reign saw the substantial completion of the Cathedrals of Reims and Amiens as well as the magnificent reconstruction of the Abbey of St. Denis. St. Louis’ name is more closely connected with the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris (1243-1248), which he commissioned to house the relics of the Passion of Our Lord, especially the Crown of Thorns. The Sainte-Chapelle has been much studied, and, indeed, the monograph of Jean-Michel Leniaud and Françoise Perrot (La Sainte Chapelle, Paris: Centre Nationale de Monuments Historiques, 1991) will not soon be displaced as the standard reference on the construction, restoration, and stained glass of the building. The contribution of Daniel Weiss has been to make the relations between art and politics the special subject of his monograph.

Art and Crusade in the Age of Saint Louis treats two significant objects of royal patronage: the Arsenal Old Testament, a lavish illuminated manuscript the king commissioned while on Crusade in the Holy Land, and the Sainte-Chapelle. The author’s contention is that both works are kinds of political and religious propaganda meant to justify the ideal of the Crusade. The point is much overstated at the expense of more important truths, but it is nevertheless true and worth considering. Politics, the art of serving the common good, was understood by St. Louis to include the intelligent patronage of art and architecture. St. Louis is a remarkable figure both for the goodness of his politics and for the evident quality of the art that resulted from his patronage. Many edifying themes are to be found in the iconography of the Sainte-Chapelle, which is at once beautiful and instructive. The careful reader of Daniel Weiss’ book will be able properly to situate these themes within the larger framework of Christian belief. Where the modern and (sadly) unsympathetic critic sees a “royal ideology” glorifying earthly kingship, the Catholic reader of the Sainte-Chapelle may perceive a hymn of praise—written in stone and glass—to Christ, the Eternal King.

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Reviewed by Jan Maciag

This is a book for those who ask why the art of building modern churches has vanished. Whatever the reason, many Christians attend sacred services in new buildings that have very few numinous qualities. The buildings are often bland, functional halls that were not for the cross on top, could easily be mistaken for a school hall or fire station. They seem, as if deliberately, to glorify the ordinariness of life or the whim of the designer. Why, in an age of unprecedented wealth, of sumptuous grocery stores and marble banking halls, do we have churches that are so utilitarian and aesthetically poor?

This publication consists of a series of essays followed by a catalogue of 40 new traditional Catholic churches from all over the world. The essays were presented at a symposium held in Rome on October 9, 1999, and coincided with the opening of the exhibition, featuring the catalogued work, which ran until October 22. The essays were written by distinguished historians, artists, and architects from Europe and the States.

It is the immense value of collecting the works in one publication that in reading the whole, a consensus of common opinion begins to emerge. Carlo Fabrizio Carli states that, despite its rich artistic past, church design in our age constitutes an immense and embarrassing problem. The architecture of sacred space finds itself in the midst of two unconnected but overlapping crises: that of the loss of certitude in traditional form and language created by the modernist movement, and that of the general secularization of the world.

All the authors suggest that contemporary Christians no longer live in an age continuous with the Christian heritage. The twentieth century represents a fundamental and challenging break from the past. A chain of events, started during the Enlightenment, declared that man should escape from traditional values based on a belief in God and live by reason alone. Spirituality was rejected and “reasoned” ideologies could flourish. Giampaolo Rossi, in his essay, explores this further. He states that the twentieth century is, indeed, a century of utopian ideologies that have repeatedly unleashed the disasters of evil until only nihilism is left. This nihilism is based on only fragmentary, disjointed facts and the immediate material needs. It is within this caustic cultural environment that the published works and the questions relating to the building of sacred space are discussed.

The fundamental issue of whether the Church needs or indeed should have church buildings is discussed. Christianity has and will continue to have a physical component. Christ himself took our physical form. It is completely understandable for Christians to request the material real space set aside for something distinct. Even ruins, devoid of use, have such a quality. New buildings can achieve the status of sacred space as a result of artistic involvement. We still understand that art and architecture are expressive of our need to rise above the ordinary and, in a Christian context, be intimate with God. As an artist, man reveals himself more than ever as the image of God. But, as Cristiano Rosponi argues, the artist must accept the gifts of the past as having value and a means of comparison. Modernism, in elevating revolutionary progress to the highest virtue, has abandoned that strand of creativity that, as Andrea Baciarlini puts it, “created new liturgical forms but always having roots in the furrow of the long and profitable lived tradition.”

Tradition—and with it the vast palette of form, symbol, and meaning—is the key to a new liturgical style appropriate to the “post-nihilistic” era. In his thrilling essay, Camilan Deme trescu describes some of the many ways that church architecture is imbued with meaning through the use of unchangeable Christian symbolism, orientation, geometry, and significance. He says that to regard churches as mere buildings is to effectually de-consecrate them. However, this knowledge has been banished from schools of architecture and left untouched in theological seminaries. Church design is left to the ignorant vagaries of taste and style. It is small wonder that we often get the church buildings the world wants us to have!

The designs in this book are a much needed alternative to the stripped assembly halls which have been masquerading as churches during the last decades of the twentieth century. Offering these new projects as inspiration for pastors, parishes, and architects who are involved in planning new churches, Recovering Sacred Space makes it clear that it is possible again to build buildings which are truly sacred.

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It is good that we are encountering each other for the first time in the context of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, because the Sacred Liturgy itself and all that surrounds it should provide us with a foretaste, a glimpse of our ultimate meeting in the liturgy of heaven.

In today’s Gospel, our Lord forbids us to take revenge, but I suspect our sixteenth-century ancestors in faith did not think it applied here at Chiesa Nuova, because this church is the surest and clearest revenge of the Church taken against the Protestant Reformers: Everything here conspires to proclaim in a full-throated manner the fullness of the Catholic Faith. Permit me to explore with you three Latin expressions which inspired this artistic venture.

1. *Verbum caro factum est.* (The Word became flesh.) We find this line, of course, in the Prologue to St. John’s Gospel, and the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus is God’s last and definitive Word—a word spoken in the flesh. The doctrine of the Incarnation is the central doctrine of Christianity, for our salvation began at the Annunciation when “*Verbum caro factum est.*” Indeed, the whole Christ-event is salvific: from His conception to His ascension, we are saved by the flesh, the Body of Christ. Therefore,

2. *Caro cardo salutis.* (The flesh is the hinge of salvation), as Tertullian informs us. What saved the world once continues to do so. The body is good because it was created by God and even more clearly so since the Divine Plan made it the very means of our redemption. Because of that, the body—and all material reality—takes on even greater significance. The Father made it good—indeed, very good. And Jesus His Son made it holy. Hence, all that has been redeemed—the entire universe—can be marshaled into the on-going work of redemption. A “catholic” instinct, if you will, then, explains our use of water, bread, wine, oil, and natural things to lead us to experience the supernatural. Similarly, man’s creative genius, especially in the arts, gives us access to the holy.

3. In the Creed, we profess our faith in the *communion sanctorum,* usually translated as the “communion of saints,” but that is only one meaning. The Latin phrase is deliberately “multivalent”—like any good symbol. So, it means “communion of saints,” yes, but also “communion in holy things” (that is, the sacraments). In other words, our membership in the mystical Body of Christ on earth (“communio sanctorum”) is initiated, sustained and brought to completion by that “communio sanctorum” which is a participation in the beatific vision for all eternity. That participation will still be an embodied/incarnate participation. Remember: Our Lord and Our Lady presently have bodies—glorified bodies—in heaven, and so will we. Therefore, the mystery of the Incarnation continues into eternity.

The arts, then, find themselves at the service of the Incarnation, thus making artists servants or ministers of the Incarnation. Which leads to a logical question: Can a non-believer be, for example, a church architect? Let’s back into that question with another. St. Thomas Aquinas asked if an atheist can be a theologian. To be sure, a non-believer can study theology, memorize various creedal statements, dutifully repeat them on a test, and thus earn an “A.” However, since part of the theological method involves not only the intellectual skills of research and analysis but also faith, St. Thomas concludes that only a true believer can truly do “true theology.”

*Mutatis mutandis,* the same can and must be said of the various arts and their practitioners. Your task, my dear friends, is to make the words of the Creed take on flesh. Interestingly, the Greek for “creed” is *symbolon,* derived from *syn + balleo,* meaning “to throw together,” so as to achieve harmony or unity—a symphony of truths, if you will. Its antonym is *diabolos,* meaning “one who throws into confusion or turmoil.”

Good church architecture reflects the order, beauty, harmony and unity of heaven; it anticipates those heavenly realities and gives the faithful a “sneak preview” of them. Bad church architecture, on the other hand, reflects the disorder, chaos, and angst of hell.

St. Francis advised his brethren, “Always preach; sometimes use words.” Your vocation is to preach the mystery of the Incarnation, not in words, but in stone, brick, wood, or concrete, enlisting all redeemed creation to help in the sanctification of the Church of today and tomorrow. *Verbum caro factum est.* *Caro cardo salutis.* *Communio sanctorum.* Keep those images in mind as you engage in your noble vocation.

In Chiesa Nuova—the new church. St. Philip Neri envisioned that this new church building would bring about a new Church, a renewed Church—and that this would happen most especially as all the arts came together in this place to re-evangelize Rome. Your interest and commitment to the same cause and the same plan can do the same for us in this particular moment.

As we offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice at the tomb, the altar of the man known as the “Apostle of Joy,” seek St. Philip Neri’s intercession to know that profoundest of joys which comes from the awareness that through your work, you are leading others to eternal joy.
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